
The Lord bless you
And keep you
Make His face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn His face toward you
And give you peace

May His favor be upon you
And a thousand generations
And your family
And your children
And their children
And their children

What is God's favor? What is the Lord's blessing? Is it money? Is it wealth? Is it an easy life? Let's think about that now. Think about the life of Jesus. Was He blessed by His Father? Yes, of course. But, Jesus wasn't rich on this earth. He wasn't wealthy...and He certainly did NOT have an easy life. He died nailed to a wooden cross with spikes. Is that God's favor? Think about the life of the Apostles. Think about what we've been reading about the Apostle Paul and all the troubles in his life. He was beaten on so many occasions and near death, not to mention the mental and emotional anguish he was facing in Corinth. All the lies...accusations, inuendoes. Was that God's favor...God's blessing?

So just what is God's favor and blessing? Oh...wait a minute...we just need to keep reading the lyrics to the song.

**May His presence go before you
And behind you
And beside you
All around you
And within you
He is with you**

His presence is His blessing! Let that resonate a moment! **His presence is His blessing!** The Apostle Paul knew that. Remember the first chapter of this letter...

2 Corinthians 1:9

⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

God's presence is the greatest experience of life. Do you agree? God's presence is better than money, power, prestige, sex, drugs, popularity or wealth. God's presence is the best this life has to offer. And we can all say: AMEN! But, are we content with that? Don't we still want more...an easier life? Just a little more, Lord...and I'll be satisfied...because I don't want to run out... Certainly, we all feel that way from time to time... Let's see what the Word of God says about **"God's Sufficiency in All Things."**

2 Corinthians 9:6-10

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully^[a] will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not

reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency^[b] in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

Church, the key to this passage is verse 8. We just read that we’ll have “**all** sufficiency in **all** things at **all** times.” What does the word “all” mean? It means ALL...100% of the time. God will take care of us ALL the time...He never takes a second off. In fact, there’s a little letter beside the word “sufficiency” in my Bible and as I look down to the bottom of the page, it says “contentment.” And Church, that’s why we can be CONTENT, because we know that the Lord provides for us at ALL TIMES. Therefore, verse 8 could be said like this, “having all contentment in all things at all times.”

So, are you content today? Really? Content? Tough question, isn’t it? You know it’s interesting, as we think about our sermon series:



Giving Ourselves First to the Lord...we’ve learned that we will never be able to trust the Lord with our money until we have given ourselves FIRST to the Lord. It’s hard to give money. Money is so important to our lives. In fact, I did a little research and found that experts tell us that we spend around 50% of our time thinking about how to get money, how to keep it, how to save it, how to spend it, how to find it, how to get more of it. That’s means we’re tremendously occupied thinking about money and thinking that if we can JUST HAVE MORE MONEY, then we’ll be blessed in our lives. But, that’s not true. And we know it. Again, it’s GOD’S PRESENCE that’s our greatest blessing!

Remember, Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” So, where is your heart today? That’s where our treasure is? It’s really simple: Is your heart seeking the presence of God or the possession of money? We can’t serve God and Money. Listen: “Show me where your money is and I’ll show you where your affections lie.” And THAT BEING TRUE...then according to Jesus, a person’s spiritual life hinges proportionately on how we think about money.

Remember Jesus’ encounter with the Rich Young Ruler... See the artist’s depiction:



This young man was rich. He was a synagogue ruler and unfortunately, he chose money over the Lord and he walked away from Jesus. You know, unless something changed...he's in Hades today and his money is not doing him a lick of good. What shall it profit a man...

Sadly, so many people choose money over Jesus in their lives because they think it will make them happy. As believers, we know money can NOT and will NOT bring us happiness (look at Hollywood), because when you're pursuing money, you'll never have enough. The **thing** about pursuing money, is: it's like a bucket with holes in it, we'll never have enough and we'll never be content as long as money drives our lives. We know this, but it's so easy to fall into the trap of thinking money will solve all of our problems and because of that we live such discontented lives.

You know, Christians can be some of the most discontented people in the world; because we know better and that's what's maddening. We know the pursuit of the American Dream and the pursuit of possessions won't make us happy, but it's so engrained in us that it's hard to adjust our minds and hearts. You see, it's a strange dichotomy, but, you can have a whole lot of money and NOT love it, and conversely, you can have very little money and be totally consumed by it. It's all about what we value.

Listen, I know some people who have a tremendous amount of money and don't love it. They don't flaunt what they have or what they possess. They're not consumed with the pursuit of money; instead, they're consumed with the pursuit of God, and they seek to spend their life trying to do their best to glorify God; and because of that, they use money as a tool for His kingdom, not their own personal selfishness. But then, there are others who are so consumed with money, that they can't turn loose of it. They live in fear of not having enough and so they aren't content.

And this is the category where I'm convinced the Corinthian church fell. Why? Because they said they were going to help in a relief offering for their struggling brothers and sisters in Christ in Jerusalem and they hadn't followed through AND IT'S BEEN OVER A YEAR. Obviously, they're struggling to trust the Lord! Again, if you've been with us, you know this was a more affluent church, because they were getting bleed-over from the wealth of Athens, which was only 50 miles away.

Yes, I'm convinced they were afraid of not having enough for the future. You say, "How do you know?" Well look at what Paul said... See verse 6.

2 Corinthians 9:6

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully^[a] will also reap bountifully.

Think about it...if you plant JUST a handful of corn, you get just a little bit of corn, but if you plant a bunch of corn seed...



you have the opportunity to get a lot of corn. That's verse 6, if you sow sparingly, you reap sparingly, if you so bountifully, you reap bountifully...and any good farmer knows this. It's the "Law of the Harvest." And it's this principle that God uses to bless us. Remember what Jesus said:

Luke 6:38

³⁸give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

And this is more than just money. If you GIVE forgiveness, you get forgiveness. If you GIVE mercy, you get mercy. If you GIVE kindness, you get kindness. Hey, but it's also true...if you GIVE bitterness, that's what you'll get...because that's what you are sowing. It's the law of the harvest!

Listen, I've watched something happen over and over in my life...I've watched people who need money in their lives...but, they won't give it, or sow it. They'll say, "Well, I'll give my time to the Lord. Why won't He bless me?" Well, He does. He gives you back what you sow: **TIME**. You sowed time; therefore; you reap time, because you reap what you sow.

You say, "The problem is: I don't have any money to give." Yes, you do. You've got some money...it might not be much, but you have a few bucks somewhere... So, trust God with that little bit that you do have, and watch what He does. Do you remember the account of the Prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, who was down to her last meal? Here's an artist's depiction of that...



She's a widow. Her husband is dead and she and her son are down to their last meal...they're going to die...but, Elijah says... "Take your last bit of oil and meal and make me a cake of bread." She trusted the prophet and did just that...and the Bible records God blessed her and her oil and meal never ran out. But, she had to GIVE FIRST! It's the law of the harvest...you have to sow FIRST to reap later!

Listen, God is not trying to make you broke to get you to give. He doesn't need your money. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and all the gold in the hills. He wants your heart...(and you see), there's an invisible string attached to your heart and your wallet... your money goes where your heart goes. Watch verse 7:

2 Corinthians 9:7

⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The word "cheerful" means "hilarious!" It means your heart is giggling when you give. Listen...this may shock you to hear this...but, if you can't give what you give with a cheerful heart then keep the money. God doesn't want you to give your money while you are begrudgingly doing so. But, here's the thing, (don't miss this)...the cheerfulness comes after you've turned loose of your money. What?

Church family, we've got every reason in the world NOT TO GIVE... Satan will try to bring anxiety and fear, to cripple us from trusting the Lord. But, if you and I turn loose of that money and sow it...then that's when the peace of God comes. Watch...



The cheerfulness comes AFTER we turn loose of the money. It's letting go of the balloon and watching it float up! And you see, it's when we've opened up our hands to the Lord and sow, then He sees our trust and opens up His hands and gives back/provides. That's verse 8 again...

2 Corinthians 9:8

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency^[b] in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

What's the goal in giving? That we MAY ABOUND IN EVERY GOOD WORK! What kind of work? The Kingdom work of Jesus! Listen, we can't take our money with us...we're just stewards of it for a brief period of time on this earth. So, how are we using His resources? Are we selfish with them and using them all for ourselves, or for His kingdom?

You see we're back to that word "sufficiency" or "contentment." **Turn to 1 Timothy 6.** I want to show you how Paul described money and contentment to young Timothy. Timothy was in Ephesus and it wasn't easy for him or the people there.

1 Timothy 6:2b-7

Teach and urge these things. **3** If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound^[b] words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, **4** he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, **5** and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. **6** But godliness with contentment is great gain, **7** for we brought nothing into the world, and^[c] we cannot take anything out of the world.

Can I ask you a question? Do you see contentment as great gain in your life or just as something you must settle for? Does that frustrate you? Do you say, "YEAH Humpfh!! I'll be content! It's not what I wanted, but I guess it'll have to do."

Contentment is not something to be dreaded? It's gain! But you say, "I want more...I want to accumulate and amass more!" But, listen, if your desire for money is never quenched and you're

never satisfied...then you haven't healthy desires that are likely leading you to greed. And if that's you, you'll never be content. And that's Paul's point! Somehow, we seem to continually define contentment as having a bunch of stuff **and we don't see contentment as the blessing of God's presence**. You see, for many, I believe we've sacrificed God's presence for the stuff of this world? We've let Satan sell us a bill of goods. And for many, maybe you, you're allowing what you have or don't have to define you?

Oh, it's so easy to assign value to ourselves and to one another based on what we have or don't have. What kind of car we drive, clothes we wear, purse we carry, style of shoes we wear... It's so much about image, isn't it? Keeping up with the Joneses... Paul told the Philippian church in Philippians 4...

Philippians 4:11-13

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

We can be content, (that's the all things), through Jesus at all times! True contentment is tied to our trust in the sufficiency of God...to the confidence we have in Him to say I'll be content in whatever condition that life may bring. That means in little or much, I can do it...I can be okay...content...because of Christ who strengthens me in that circumstance.

Thinking about this passage in Philippians, I was reminded of the song, "It Is Well With My Soul." Do you know the backstory of this song? Watch the lyrics...

**Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well with my soul**

Unbelievably, the man who wrote that, Horatio Spafford, was living with the fact that just a few days earlier, all four of his daughters had died. Here's their pictures...



The Spafford children from left to right: Annie, 1862-1873; Margaret (Maggie), 1863-1873; Elizabeth (Bessie), 1866-1873; Tanetta, 1871-1873

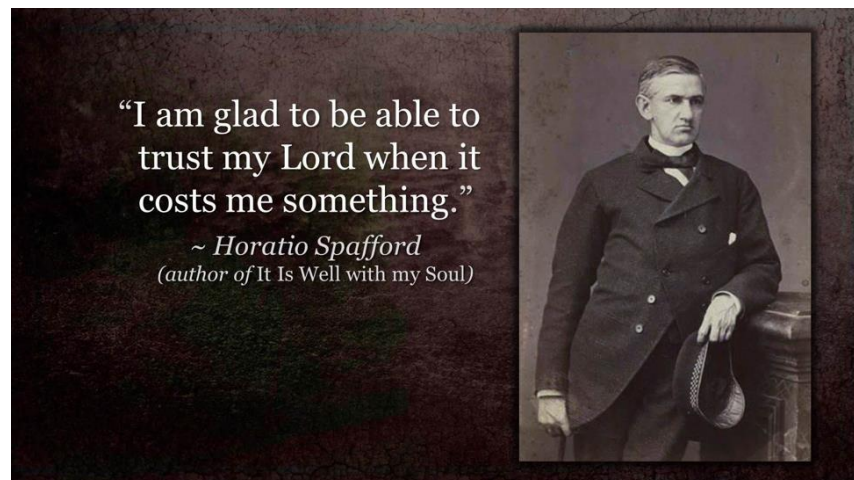
Annie, age 12; Maggie, 7; Bessie, 4; and an 18-month-old, Tanetta. Spafford was a Chicago lawyer and friend of evangelist, Dwight L. Moody. Moody who was going to be speaking in England, and so, Spafford and his wife...Anna...here's her picture...



They decided that the family would travel to England to hear Moody speak and take some vacation time. Unfortunately, late business demands kept Mr. Spafford from joining his wife and their four daughters on the ship that would cross the Atlantic. On November 22, 1873, the steamship that Anna and the four girls were on was struck by an iron sailing vessel killing 226 people on board, including all four of the girls. But Anna was one of the few who survived. Upon arriving in England, Anna sent a telegram to her husband that said two words:

Saved alone

As Spafford sailed to England to join his wife, he wrote *It Is Well with My Soul*. Spafford would later say:



"I am glad to be able to trust my Lord when it costs me something." Wow! He would also say, "I want to live within His sovereign, providential will and seek to be like Him and let the things of this life and this existence be under His control and not mine. 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'"

You see, it's true, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." True riches are not related to **HOW MUCH we have**, true riches are ALL ABOUT being content with **WHAT we have**. The person who is rich, is the person who doesn't need anything else to make him happy.

Are you content today? Listen, as we think about money, remember: "Money is like sea water, the more you drink the thirstier you get." The Greek philosopher Epicurus said "The secret of contentment is not to add to a man's possessions, but to take away from his desires." It's true: He who is most rich is he who desires least. Do you understand? You are rich when you are content, and if you're content with what God gives you, then you're rich!

John D. Rockefeller, the founder of Standard Oil Company, was one of the richest men who ever lived and he said, "I have made many millions and they have all brought me no happiness. The poorest man I know is the man who has nothing but money." **Cornelius Vanderbilt**, of whom Vanderbilt University is named said: "The care of millions is too great a load, there is no pleasure in it." **Henry Ford**, the founder of Ford Motor Company said, "I was happier when I was doing the job of a mechanic."

Get this now, church family, the only thing that TRULY makes you rich is contentment, and the only thing that makes you content is godliness, and the only thing that makes you godly is living for Jesus. So, if you want to be content, live for JESUS!

This is exactly Paul's point to the Corinthians. **Go back to 2 Corinthians 9**. Paul's point all along has been...trust in the Lord...give and help your brothers and sisters in Jerusalem in their time of need and God will take care of you and he quotes Psalm 112 to make his point...watch verse 9.

2 Corinthians 9:9

⁹As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

I want to show you that verse from Psalm 112 in context starting with verse 7.

Psalm 112:7-9

⁷He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. ⁸His heart is steady;^[b] he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries. ⁹He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.

We can trust the Lord in good and bad times and even in bad times, we can keep on living and keep on giving and God will provide and we will be blessed. That was Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians in verse. Watch it...

2 Corinthians 9:10

¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

This so good... What does that mean? It means, the Lord uses US to HELP ONE ANOTHER! And as He does so, in supplying the seed we need so we can sow and reap to help others, He'll bless us in the harvest so sow again...and reap again and then sow again...and watch this fantastic cycle of blessing continue as we're used by the Lord...and that was Paul's desire for the Corinthians...use what you have to bless others and watch how the Lord will bless.

So, are you content? Really? If you aren't...if you are pursuing the stuff of this world, I want to encourage you not to be duped into thinking it will bring you joy...would you stop and say, "Lord, deliver

me from this discontentment and help me to see that it's not money that will provide me with your contented blessing, but is instead your presence." See it:

May His presence go before you

And behind you

And beside you

All around you

And within you

He is with you

His presence is the greatest blessing of life!