

December 16, 2018  
Rick Myatt

## BECOMING MACGYVER Proverbs 27:20

One day when Laurie and I were on vacation recently we did a little snorkeling. We swam out off the beach and almost immediately encountered a lot of fish. Maybe only 25 yards off the sand we saw a couple of sea turtles that we got up close and personal with. We went farther out and saw beautiful fish, formations of coral of all kinds. It was beautiful, but it was all familiar. We loved it, but we've seen it and done it before. When we'd seen what there was to see we headed back to the beach. We got to where the water was shallow enough to easily take off our fins and snorkel masks. As I was taking off my equipment a couple of kids, maybe 9 or 10 years old were just coming into the water a few feet from me, following their dads. One of the boys got his fins on, put his mask and snorkel on, then rather tentatively ducked his head under the water, clearly a bit nervous and unsure what to expect. Seconds later he exploded out of the water and in an excited voice shouted to his dad, "Fish, fish!" He went back under, and shortly again blew of the water and yelled, "Fish! Look, Dad, fish!"

I knew the fish he was seeing were just an appetizer. They weren't some of the most colorful ones. But just seeing those were a huge thrill for him. Obviously it was his first time to attempt snorkeling in the ocean. I think he was a bit dubious about the whole adventure, and figured all the talk about seeing fish was going to be beyond his range of ability. The thing is, when you are standing there in the water looking at it you typically don't see the fish. So when he put his head under the water and was confronted with fish only feet away from him he could not contain his excitement.

It hit me that I should have been just as excited about what I had seen. I enjoyed it, but I didn't come flying out of the water yelling, "Look, Laurie, turtles." We get used to things, and somehow it can feel like they are not amazing any more, not exciting, life gets a little more dull, and we find ourselves thinking we need more. And that can become a problem. I want to talk about that problem today. The problem is discontentment, and we will get a glimpse of it in Proverbs 27:20.

### HUMAN NATURE TENDS TOWARD DISCONTENTMENT

Proverbs 27:20 makes a profound statement about the human condition. "Death and destruction are never satisfied, and neither are human eyes." We all know

death is relentless. It stalks every single one of us and it never gives up. There never has been or will be a time when death says, “Okay, I’m good. I’ve got enough dead people so I’m done. You’re free to move about the world without fear.” Death is always there, always on the prowl and never quits.

This Proverb says that human eyes are also relentless. We are always looking for more or better. We are never satisfied. We never say, “Okay, I’m good. I don’t need anything else ever again.” On the contrary, this Proverb insists that we are never truly content, never really satisfied. It astounds me that people still listen to the Rolling Stones. But they have a tour scheduled for next year. Those guys are older than me. They’re in their mid 70’s. I think they should change their name to the Molding Bones. Scheduling a tour next year seems to be an act of either great faith or great hubris. But they became famous for one of their earliest hit songs that said, “I can’t get no satisfaction.” Probably they were so unsatisfied because their grammar was bad. That’s an ugly double negative. Who could be satisfied with bad grammar like that? Kidding, of course, but what a sad statement about a life. I’ve tried and I’ve tried, but I’m never satisfied. No matter what I do, no matter what I get, it’s not enough. That’s a very human statement. It’s true of us all.

We are like Toby and Anna’s dog, Banjo. I like Banjo. His sidekick, Doc, drives me crazy, but aside from his penchant for barking, Banjo is a pretty cool dog. But he has a very human trait. When we have bought identical chew toys for Doc and Banjo we give them each one. Banjo is good with that until he realizes Doc has one. He immediately drops his toy and tries to get the one Doc has. He usually succeeds then Doc will go pick up the chew toy that Banjo has abandoned. You know what happens next. Banjo sees him with that other chew toy, then drops the one he has to go get the other one away from Doc. He can’t get no satisfaction. If Doc has it, he wants it. We humans have the same problem.

Paul tells us about his experience with this in Romans 7. Paul at one time was a Pharisee, in his words, a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was Mr. By The Book. He turned following rules into an art form that he practiced at the highest imaginable level. Talk about a Goody-goody, he did everything right, and never, ever broke a rule. He lived by the Law of Moses every moment of every day, and he did it perfectly...almost. In his own words he said in Philippians 3:6 when it came to keeping all the Old Testament rules he believed he was faultless. He was error free. Except in the back of his mind there was something that bothered him. You can almost hear him thinking, “Have no other gods before God, check. Keep the Sabbath, check. Honor Mom and Dad, check. Never murder anyone, check. Never

commit adultery, check. Never steal, check. Never eat bacon, check.” He went right through the list and there was not even one single blemish. And then he got to the tenth commandment, which said he must not covet anything that belongs to his neighbor. In other words, not so fast there, Dudley Do Right. In Romans 7:7-8 he wrote, “I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting.” He means if there had never been a rule about coveting he would not have even known he wasn’t supposed to do it. But now he knew that God gave a big thumbs down to coveting, and the thing that tripped him up was he could not stop coveting. He could discipline himself to keep all the Sabbath and food laws. He could discipline himself to tithe, to worship God appropriately, offer the sacrifices, never steal or lie. But he could not discipline himself to stop coveting. He could determine he would not covet, and then without consciously choosing to do so he would be thinking he needed what someone else had. Note that he said he had every kind of coveting. He coveted all over the map and couldn’t stop. He wanted things other people had. In other words, he was not content with what God had given him. Like Banjo, as soon as he saw the success someone else had, he wanted it. He was no longer content with what he had.

In his book, *Authentic Faith*, Gary Thomas identifies the problem. He points out that substance abusers become addicted to their drug of choice, but their bodies eventually begin to adapt to that substance. This makes withdrawal from it difficult, but it also means they need more and more of it to satisfy their need. Brain researchers have begun to observe that this happens in other aspects of life. Once we adapt to a certain way of living it is no longer enough. Thomas says, “Our brain becomes accustomed to a certain standard of living, and once we become accustomed to something, it’s only a matter of time until we become bored with it.” We grow discontent. Give us even a hint of something better and we start thinking we need it.

Laurie and I bought our home in 1990. The house is around 1940 square feet in size. I just noticed some interesting facts from an article in *The Atlantic* magazine. In 1998 the average size of a single family home in America was 1972 feet. That means our home when we bought it was almost exactly the average size of a home. Today the average size of a single family home is 2426 square feet! Our home is now small, only 80% the size of the average home. What has happened? Are people bigger? Are families bigger? No, actually the number of people in the average home has decreased measurably and people are the same size. So what has

happened? People got discontent with their homes. Another interesting statistic is that in 1998 there were 26,000 self storage facilities in this country. Today there are 52,000! Possibly our homes have to be bigger just to hold the stuff we buy, and even the big homes aren't enough so we have to rent storage units. If you can't get satisfaction it may never end.

Unfortunately we are hardwired for discontentment. Is this God's fault? We didn't choose it, so if we're hardwired for it he must have done the hardwiring, right? Actually that's not quite right. You know where this started. It was in a beautiful place called Eden. The people who lived there had everything they needed. It was abundant, lush, peaceful, beautiful. Then a shyster salesman showed up and told Eve, "there's more. Don't you want more?" She decided she did. She wasn't satisfied even though she had all she needed. When she made that choice things changed dramatically. Part of that change had to do with human nature. It was re-wired, and the new wiring included that natural bent toward discontentment.

#### DISCONTENTMENT IS DESTRUCTIVE

Wait a minute, Rick. You talk like discontentment is a bad thing. But can't it be a good thing? In fact, don't we need it? Isn't it what drives improvement? Laurie and I recently watched a television show that was about the first penal colony the British established in Australia. It made me think about how life used to be. They lived in crude buildings that offered some protection against the elements, but not much. The only cooling they had was shade from the sun and the only heat in cold weather was walls and a fire inside the building. They had to grow, hunt or catch all their food. They were continually dirty and they were subject to dangerous diseases for which there was little protection and often no cure. The daily tasks of cooking were arduous and time consuming. Somewhere along the way someone was not content with those conditions. Driven by discontentment, people came up with central heating and air conditioning and insulation. They figured out ways to grow food in massive amounts and deliver it to stores so we don't have to hunt for it. We just go buy it at the store. They invented ovens and stoves for cooking. They came up with one of the great blessings of the human race, indoor plumbing. All these things, things that made life much better, happened because someone wasn't content with the way things are. So isn't discontentment a good thing?

It seems that way, but Proverbs 27:20 implies that our dissatisfaction is a bad thing. Proverbs 14:30 states it outright. "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." A heart at peace is one that is content. It is happy with where it is. But envy at its core is discontentment. And this Proverb insists that it rots our

bones. In other words, it eats us up. Where contentment gives life, discontentment actually destroys life. It saps our strength and joy and fills us with restlessness, unhappiness and resentment.

How can it say that when being discontent has been the very reason for improving life in so many ways? There is an important distinction we need to make. If we see something in life that we don't like and we seek to do something about it, that's not necessarily bad. It is fine to *desire* something better. The problem occurs when we decide that we *need* that better thing. The trouble begins when we believe we must have this thing for our lives to be full, peaceful and joyful. When we decide there is no way on earth we could ever be satisfied and fulfilled unless we get this thing we must have, then we have fallen prey to true discontentment. And it is this discontentment that rots the bones.

It is destructive for several reasons. The first is that it draws us away from God. This is illustrated by what happened in Eden. Adam and Eve had it so good. They had it all, beginning with a tight relationship with God. But then came the suggestion that what God had given them was not enough. They needed more, with the implication that God was deceitful and unkind in denying them that more. Eve quit believing that God was good, that what he gave was more than enough for her to have life to the fullest, and that she needed something else. The results were cataclysmic. It produced nothing but loss, pain and death. When we start believing that what God has given us is not enough and that we absolutely must have something he has not given us, we make the same choice Eve made. We should hardly be surprised if we get the same results.

The second problem with this kind of discontentment is it means we will never be truly at rest. Because we are hardwired for discontentment we will be in constant pursuit of something. We will just go from one thing to another chasing the next promise of satisfaction. Many years ago our kids as a sort of joke gave a relative, one who does not like animals, a hamster as a Christmas present. Guess who ended up with the hamster. The same people who ended up with a dog when their kids insisted they wanted a dog and would always take care of it. Good old Mom and Dad ended up with the hamster. The kids named him Bob. They had a cage for Bob that included a hamster wheel. Until I got used to it when we first had Bob I would wake up at night and hear this odd noise coming from out in the hall. I would investigate. Bob was just outside our bedroom door in his cage, and in the middle of the night he would often get on his wheel. He would be on that thing running for

all he was worth, but of course he was going nowhere. The sight of him sprinting away on the wheel with all his might sparked two thoughts for me. The first was he reminded me of me on a treadmill or an exercise bike. Blasting away, but going nowhere. But more important, it reminded me of all of us. We get on the treadmill chasing after all kinds of things that we have decided we must have and it's exhausting. If you are never content you can never stop. You can never rest. As the Proverb said, you can never be at peace.

Here's the killer about discontentment. It is based on a lie. The Bible says that God is the author of life. He is the God of peace. He is the source of all good. If we want to have life, peace and goodness, where are we going to get it? From God. But discontentment tells us that life, peace and goodness, real fulfillment and satisfaction, come from somewhere else. It comes from some thing we have decided we absolutely must have to be at peace, to be satisfied. And that's a lie.

Jesus talked about the problem in Matthew 16 when he asked what good is it if you gain the whole world, but lose your soul? All those things we chase because we are not content, can never save our souls. They can never heal our souls. They are just like drinking saltwater when you feel like you are dying of thirst. It will feel good for a moment, but it will leave you thirstier than ever.

John Ortberg, the pastor and author, wrote about this in his book, *Dangers, Toils and Snares*. He wrote about taking his children to McDonald's. He said, "They always lust for the meal that comes with a cheap little prize, a combination christened, in a moment of marketing genius, the Happy Meal. You're not just buying fries, McNuggets, and a dinosaur stamp, you're buying happiness." He says they, "have convinced my children they have a little McDonald's shaped vacuum in their souls: 'Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in a Happy Meal.'" He says he tries to tell them he'll order them the food and give them a quarter to buy a little toy on their own. "But the cry goes up, 'I want a Happy Meal.' All over the restaurant people crane their necks to look at the tight fisted, penny pinching cheapskate of a parent who would deny a child the meal of great joy." But of course the happy meal wears off and they need a new fix. No child discovers lasting happiness in just one meal. "Remember that Happy Meal? What great joy I found there." He concludes. "Happy Meals bring happiness only to McDonald's. You ever wonder why Ronald McDonald wears that grin? Twenty billion Happy Meals. That's why. When you get older, you don't get any smarter. Your happy meals just get more expensive."

## CONTENTMENT MUST BE LEARNED

In Philippians 4:11-12 Paul wrote, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

Paul was not naturally content. That’s because he was human. He had to learn to be content. It was a developed trait. He had been through having plenty and through not having enough. He had learned that he could be at peace no matter what the circumstance. That’s a significant lesson for us. Sometimes God gives us exactly what we think we want so that we will discover that while it might be nice and feel good, it somehow doesn’t finally satisfy us. It’s like that Happy Meal. We ate it, but now we want something else. And sometimes God keeps the thing we think we want from us so that we can find out we can be joyful and peaceful without it.

Many years ago when our kids were little we all went to visit some dear friends who lived in Jacksonville, Florida. We spent Thanksgiving with them. They had just moved into a house that was right on the beach. They had bought an older, somewhat small home. But the wife’s dad was in construction. He had totally remodeled the home for them and added on to make it quite a bit larger. It was beautiful and roomy. We got there just as a tropical storm was moving in. Our first night there was a lot of wind and massive rain. The next morning I felt sad for them, for there were a number of places where there was a lot of water leaking into their newly remodeled house. Their brand new beach home had some obvious problems. I thought they must be disappointed, and figured it might make for an awkward situation when Angie, the wife, had to talk to her dad about the problems. But she was totally calm and matter of fact. She said, “When you do as extensive a remodel as this was there will always be some problems. You just expect that. This was the first big storm we’ve had since we moved into the house. It takes a big storm to show you where the problems are. Now that we know where they are Dad will just send a crew over to fix them.” Sometimes God has to send the storms our way to show us where the problems are, what it is we are depending on to give us life and satisfaction. Sometimes not getting what we think we want or need is a crucial and necessary part of learning to be content.

The great writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn experienced some of the worst storms of life. He was unfairly sent to a Soviet era gulag, a horrible prison camp. He was subjected to terrible deprivation and brutality there. But he turned to God in the situation. His reaction to the horrific trials of that labor camp was to bless it. He

said he did so because it was through that experience that he discovered that “the meaning of earthly existence lies not, as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but in the development of the soul.”

### APPLICATION

What can help us learn to become more content? Here are a few suggestions.

#### EXPECT NOTHING

The late Elisabeth Elliott, widow of martyred missionary Jim Elliott, in discussing how to be content, said one of the hardest yet most important steps to becoming content is recognizing one truth. That truth is that ***we are entitled to nothing.***

No one likes to be around people who have a sense of entitlement. Young people who have an entitled attitude are insufferable. One of our leaders was just telling me about his experience in a different country where he encountered people at the upper crust of their culture who are entitled. He found them distasteful and difficult. So we all know that entitlement is not a good thing. But we don't see our own sense of entitlement. Somewhere inside we think, “Don't I have the right...?” You can fill in the blank.

To have the right to something means we are entitled to it. So let's think about what we are entitled to. Romans 3:10-11 says of the human race, “There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God.” Verse 12 says, “there is no one who does good, not even one.” Note the repetition of the phrase, “not even one.” If you are human, you are included in that indictment. No one is innocent. We are all guilty. According to those verses, which are only a sample of many in the Bible that say the same thing, just what are we entitled to from God? What do we have a right to expect?

We have a right to expect to be condemned. We don't have a right to live. God gave us the gift of life, and we have abused it. We are not entitled to anything. So no, we don't have a right. The fact that we are alive today, that we have the ability to move and see and talk and live at all are nothing but 100% pure grace.

Our kids were never entitled. However, there were some things they sort of took for granted because they were always a part of their life. It was interesting to observe the change in them both the first time they came home from college. After



being away, living in a dorm, eating the dining hall food, when they came home for a few days and they ate meals made by mom, who also did their laundry for them to help them out, they were so grateful. Previously that had just been how life was at home. But now, wow, what a great meal. Thank you, so much, Mom, for doing my laundry. They suddenly realized what a gift their mother had been giving them their entire lives.

When we are entitled, we think we have a right to certain things in life, we demand them, and if we don't get them we are offended, we feel we are being treated unfairly. We are discontent. But when we get to the place where we see every good thing, including life itself, as a precious gift that we do not deserve, we become way less demanding. We can be content with whatever we have today, because anything other than death and judgment is pure kindness and grace.

#### DRAW FROM THE SOURCE OF LIFE

Who is the author of life? It is God himself. Who is the source of all good? It is God. Who is the Prince of Peace? It is Jesus. Then if what you seek is peace, life and goodness, where must you go to find it? You can only get it from God! In John 6:35 Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Jesus claimed he was the bread we must eat in order to have life. Whatever other bread you try to eat, it will never give you life. Only Jesus is the bread of life.

We become convinced that a better job, more money, more success, more approval from other people, more acclaim, more friends, a better house, a better car will finally give us what we need to be content. It will be the good, the fulfilling thing we need. I mentioned a few weeks ago while on vacation we encountered a very loquacious server in a restaurant. He talked a lot about himself. The biggest thing in his life, the thing he was filled with excitement about, was that he was going to buy his dream car the next week. For him this was the pinnacle. Nothing could be better. I found it slightly humorous because the car, in my mind, was nothing special. But even if it were something unique, could it give him life? Could it fill his life with good? It was a Happy Meal, nothing more.

I've used this illustration before, but it was so graphic I want to remind you of it. Years ago I was working out in the garage with the garage door open. Our garage door opener has a short rope on it that you can pull to disconnect the opener in an emergency so you can open the door manually. On the end of the rope is a red

plastic knob. That afternoon a hummingbird flew into the garage and went to the red knob and began hitting it with its beak. He kept doing it. He'd poke it and the knob would bounce away a bit then come back, and he'd hit it again. I decided this had to be the dumbest hummingbird in the world. He was trying to get nectar out of this big red flower he'd found. I watched him peck at that thing for a good two minutes before he finally gave up and flew away. The idiot bird seemed not to realize this was not a flower at all and no matter how many times he pecked at it he would never get what he was seeking. The knob could never provide it. He needed to go find an actual flower. He was looking for nectar in all the wrong places.

That day it hit me that I was seeing a picture of the human condition. We are discontented because we have determined that life can be found in these things in this world that we want. We need to remind ourselves that life and good come from God. Our insistence that some position, some possession, some pleasure or situation in this life provide us with life and good is as idiotic as a hummingbird pecking at a plastic knob.

#### TRUST GOD'S PROVISION

One source of conflict for any parent or grandparent when dealing with little children is their kids' certainty that at times those parental figures are intent upon making their lives miserable. A classic example is bed time. The child often resists it with all their might and cleverness, sometimes with histrionic bouts of tears. We've seen it with Ella especially when she gets overly tired. Suddenly nothing can make her happy. The thing the little child only sees is she's not getting what she thinks she wants. She is unhappy with what is being foisted on her. It doesn't seem to occur to her that these people love her more than life itself and only want good for her. They want her to experience life and health, and that is why they are making her go to bed.

We have the same problem with God. We only know at times we don't like what he seems to be allowing to happen in our lives. We fail to think it through. Does God love me? Yes, he gave his Son for me. Does God want good for me? No question, for that is what love means. Does God have the ability to give me what is best for me today? Yes he does. Jesus said nothing is impossible with God. Nothing is too hard for him. So even if I don't like what is happening today I need to remember that God is pursuing goodness for me. I need to accept it and believe he is at work.

Instead of throwing a tantrum, we need to give thanks. We need to be grateful for the good that we experience, even if it feels like the only good is that we are alive today. Have you ever heard of Buck O'Neill? He was a tremendous baseball player, possibly one of the best ever to play. Unfortunately for him, he was a black man living and playing in the 1930's and 1940's. He played in the Negro leagues during their heyday, because he was not allowed to play in the Major Leagues due to racial prejudice. By the time Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947 O'Neill was considered too old. He had missed his chance. He wrote an autobiography titled *I Was Right On Time*. Many of his fellow players were deeply bitter about how they missed the opportunity at fame and fortune due to blatant racism. But in his book O'Neill wrote this, "At a reunion of Negro league players in Ashland, Kentucky, a reporter from *Sports Illustrated* asked me if I had any regrets, coming along as I did before Jackie Robinson integrated the major leagues. And this is what I told him... "Waste no tears for me. I didn't come along too early. I was right on time...I don't have a bitter story. I truly believe I have been blessed."

O'Neill savored and gave thanks for the blessings God had given him. He did not think God had made a mistake or been unfair to him. As a result he was content, joyful and thankful rather than bitter. Which would you rather be?

### LEARN TO MACGYVER IT

There is a danger that when we emphasize contentment we can become passive. We can decide we are supposed to be content so all we need to do is sit around contemplating life and waiting for God to work his will, whatever it may be. Just accept whatever happens. But remember the distinction about contentment. It doesn't mean passivity. God calls on us to be active and alive and to make a difference in this world. We just have to be wary of starting to believe that there is some thing, some change, that is essential to us experiencing true life. We can be very active, can work for improvement or change, but we need to always believe what God provides this day is enough. We need to always believe life, true life, comes from him, not from some circumstance. So even as we are active we can be at peace with where we are today.

Laurie's dad's favorite television show was MacGyver. Even today he watches reruns of the old shows. I don't know if he watches the new one. But he has always been a loyal fan of the show. MacGyver, of course, is the hero of the show, a government agent who every week finds himself in some impossible situation. Often he ends up locked in a room someplace with no tools or weapons

whatsoever. Then he figures out how to make a bomb out of some stereo parts and some toothpaste or some crazy thing and blasts his way out of the room. Somehow he makes do with whatever he has to overcome the situation.

Psalm 118:24, the NASB translation, says, “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it.” Do you see any room in those words for discontentment? I don’t. God made this day. He made it the way it is on purpose. You’ve heard it here many times. What God supplies is enough. God thinks you have what you need this day.

This is the only day you can count on. We don’t know for a fact that we will have even one more day. So be thankful for this day. Be thankful for what you have today. Maybe you wish you had something more, but this is what God has given you. Rejoice in this day. Make the most of it. Like MacGyver, turn it into something beautiful, and if necessary make something out of nothing.