When I got in my car on Wednesday morning and began driving to church I turned on the radio and I heard the last ten seconds of a song and I said to myself, “That was Perry Como.” The song ended, and immediately, I began to hear Elvis Presley singing, “I’ll have a blue Christmas without you.” I couldn’t believe it, and I said out loud, “It’s November first! You’ve got to be kidding!” Then I turned the radio off. As I continued on my way to church passing the pumpkins and decorations still on people’s lawns, I thought about what this signaled to me about our culture’s approach to holidays. Halloween, which is largely about getting candy, is promoted for weeks. As soon as it ends, the culture starts pushing its version of Christmas, which is “Buy stuff and get stuff for yourself and other people.” Lost in the rush is another holiday in the middle. Thanksgiving is like a middle child who is ignored by parents who are too focused on the kids on either side. I think Thanksgiving gets lost because it’s not about getting candy and stuff you don’t need, but about being thankful and grateful for life and all our blessings. It’s about a spiritual practice we call thanksgiving or gratitude, which is hugely important for contentment.

Our Bible book of the month for November is 1 Timothy, and all three of my sermons will be based on 1 Timothy 6. Chapter six really challenges us as American Christians, and today we start with the call to godliness and contentment versus the love of money and the desire to be materially rich. The latter two are almost universally praised and encouraged in our culture yet the Bible has a far less flattering view of the love of money and the desire to be rich. Two Beatles song titles that are true when it comes to being content are Money Can’t Buy You Love and All You Need Is Love. Paul (the Apostle, not McCartney) had something to say about all this when he was mentoring Timothy, and subsequently, all of us about living as a Christian. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 declares, “Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.”

Godliness is not a word we hear much anymore, and sadly, it’s not a quality we see much anymore either. Particularly among far too many of the richest and most powerful people in our nation, godliness seems to be the farthest thing from their behavior and their minds. From Hollywood to Washington D.C. and too many other places, men in power in particular have not used their authority and influence to serve others in a godly way that helps them live better lives, but instead to abuse women and to enrich themselves without any regard or concern for other people. It is disgraceful how greedy and lacking in decency, dignity and morality so many rich and powerful people are, but 1 Timothy says, it’s not a surprise, in fact, it’s to be expected. It’s to be expected because a life focused on getting rich is spiritually
dangerous. That’s not what many people think, nor what many people believe or are taught, but it’s what Jesus and the Bible teach and proclaim to be true. So let’s dig into what the scripture says by starting with defining a couple of terms.

Godliness is piety or reverence toward God (1 Timothy 2:2). Godliness means more than religious profession and godly conduct; it also means a vital relationship with God. It’s the sum total of religious virtues and duties that blesses us "for the present life and also for the life to come."

Contentment (Greek “autarkeia” a Stoic term meaning “self-sufficiency”) is freedom from anxiety or worry. Contentment arises from an inner disposition. Someone who is content is far less likely to be impacted by outward circumstances than someone who is discontented. 1 Timothy 6:7-8 reminds us that we brought nothing into this world, and we won’t be taking anything material with us. If we have the essentials in life: food, clothing, shelter — that should be enough. The trick is what we consider essential keeps growing exponentially. G.K. Chesterton stated, "There are two ways to get enough: One is to accumulate more and more, the other is to desire less."

Verse 9 — Temptation. Money is a motivator, a goal, a prize, the dream of so many people. We all need enough so that we can live adequately. Having money enables us to be a source of blessing and to extend and support God’s mission in the world. Money gives us freedom, power and influence. Greed, however, is arguably the most pervasive human sin. It causes people to notice and desire what they might not otherwise have paid attention to and don’t need. We could think we’re content with what we have, and then someone we know gets a new house, or a new car, or a new phone or piece of furniture, and all of sudden we’re no longer content with ours, and we want something new. This is a hard teaching for Americans because we celebrate people who get rich and are wealthy. We act like getting rich is a virtue to be pursued by everyone. The Bible says wanting to be rich is a temptation, it’s dangerous to our soul, or as Paul puts it, “Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” In the news, we learn all the time about people who sell their souls, their integrity, and even their country just to get more money. Judas didn’t betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver; that was the price he set for his own integrity. He sold himself and the Lord very cheaply.

Verse 10 The Love of Money. “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.”

How many examples could we give of people whose love for money causes them to do illegal, immoral, ungodly things? This passage like many others in the Bible is about the false security of riches, and how we shouldn’t put our trust in them. As followers of Jesus, we don’t want money ruling our life; we want our spiritual life ruling our money. We Use money without Serving money, we Own without Treasuring, we Possess without being Possessed.
Whether we are rich or poor, as followers of Christ, it's important for us to be capable of having or not having money and possessions without being possessed or corrupted by them. If we have money or an abundance of things we need not love them, trust them or serve them. Whatever our financial situation, we're to use money and possessions in ways that honor God and encourage others, and not merely for our own comfort or for self-indulgence. The Bible teaches us that money is not merely a means of exchange. Money is like a god – it offers security, it can induce guilt, give freedom and power, and it entices us. Like a god, money is out to gain our allegiance, our devotion, our love. When we let go of money, we let go of part of ourselves, and part of our security. This is scary, which is precisely why we need to do it.

Giving to God and to others frees us from the tyranny of money. That's one reason we encourage people to tithe, to give at least 10% of what God has blessed us with to the Lord's work. It frees us from the idolatry or loving money, and it has other benefits as well. Two men were shipwrecked on a remote island in the Pacific. One began screaming in anguish, "We're going to die! There's no food! There's no water! We're going to die!" "Relax," the second man said. "I make $100,000 a month, and I tithe 10% of that to my church. My pastor will find me."

In our church, when it comes to money and finances, we have people at every point on the spectrum: from those who are very well off to those who struggle to make their bills, to those who are saddled with debt. Regardless of where we are financially, it’s important that we have a Biblical view of money; that we don't love, worship, or serve it; and that we use it as much as possible for kingdom purposes.

A Christian virtue involving money that may seem quaint to many people today is frugality. Dallas Willard says, “In frugality we abstain from using money or goods at our disposal in ways that merely gratify our desires or our hunger for status, glamour, or luxury. The spiritually wise person has always known that frivolous consumption corrupts the soul away from trust in, worship of, and service to God and injures our neighbors as well. In our current world, a large part of the freedom that comes from frugality is freedom from the spiritual bondage caused by financial debt.” And more Americans are getting deeper in debt. The issues of frugality, contentment and consumption are connected. Being a good manager of our resources includes seeking to get out of debt as quickly as possible. Freedom from debt brings freedom in life.

There is nothing wrong with having money, or earning money through our God-given gifts, hard work, excellence, and diligence. People who do their work well deserve to be compensated appropriately. Having money enables us to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share. We'll talk about that more next week. We have to remain vigilant because being rich can also cause us trouble and even to wander away from the faith. Money can either help or hinder our relationship with God and with others, depending on how we use it. We don’t want to be infected by the love of money and affluenza, which causes us to squander resources.

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I would rather have financial resources in the hands of people of faith who understand giving than in the hands of those who care only about enriching themselves.

Think of the people in the Bible like Abraham, Job, David, Nicodemus, and the women who provided for Jesus and the apostles so they could carry on their ministry—all of them were well off financially. In Acts, we learn of Barnabas and others who sold land and gave the proceeds to the apostles for the ministry of the church. There are countless others through the centuries who have provided hospitality, food, lodging, and other resources so that suffering could be alleviated and the message of Jesus could be shared. All these people trusted God and used money, position, and power to the glory of God and for the good of others, and by doing so they grew closer to God and grew in godliness and contentment.

Whatever our financial situation, we are to use money and possessions in ways that honor God and encourage others. In a September 1, 2017 column titled, Does the Pursuit of Wealth Corrupt Your Soul?, Alexander Green, Chief Investment Strategist of The Oxford Club, wrote, “After all, money matters. Sure. But it doesn’t buy genuine love or friendship. It won’t solve your problems, end your worries, fix your marriage, make you “a success” or even make you more charitable. People without money often imagine it will do all these things. It won’t because money doesn’t change you. It magnifies you, making it clear to everyone who you really are. You are who you are because of the choices you make, not the size of your bank account.”

As followers of Jesus who don’t want money ruling our life, we want our spiritual life ruling our money, we Use money without Serving money, we Own without Treasuring, we Possess without being Possessed. I’ll let you in on some important investment advice. The stock market goes up and down. Fortune 500 companies rise and fall. But we'll never get a higher return on an investment than treasure invested in heaven.

The path of godliness leads to the blessing of contentment.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection
1. How would you define godliness and contentment?
2. Can you think of any time in the Bible where a person is commended for pursuing money? What about where a person is condemned for loving money too much?
3. How does the Bible say we should use money? What is its purpose?
4. Can you think of people in the Bible who use their money and resources well? Try to identify some examples
5. What does the Bible say our attitude should be towards money? Is this your attitude towards money? Why or why not?
6. What kind of sins spring from a love of money? What kind of actions are the best antidote for a love of money?
7. What steps can you take to be more content?
Proverbs 30: 7-9, “Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”

Philippians 4:11-13, “Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”