

September 27, 2015

Living the Word: Learn to Be Content

9-10 Commandments

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Kevin and Walter are neighbors. They get along great, and they're good friends. They talk sports and politics over the fence all the time. Kevin and Walter loan each other tools, help each other with home and garden projects, and watch each other's homes when the other is on vacation.

On the outside, everything is great. On the inside, there's a problem. You see, Kevin has two things that Walter covets. Kevin drives a Lexus, and Kevin owns a beach house. Walter's never said anything about it, and he doesn't let it show on the outside; but, deep down, it really bugs him when he climbs into his beat-up old Honda Civic, while his friend hops into his shiny, turbo-charged Lexus. And every summer weekend, it drives Walter crazy to putter around his hot, humid back yard, knowing that Kevin and his family are hanging out at the beach.

Walter covets Kevin's Lexus, and he covets that beach house. On the inside, he has a strong desire for those two things. And that itching, burning desire is an unholy desire, because it makes Walter jealous, envious, and resentful.

And Walter's wife doesn't help! She knows how he feels about the Lexus and the beach house. She just smiles and says to him, over and over again, "Walter, you have to learn to be content. Sweetie, you have to learn to be content. Honey, you have to learn to be content."

So one day, as he stands in his driveway watching Kevin and his family drive off in their Lexus to the beach house, instead of simmering in his discontent, Walter decides to go

talk to his pastor. He pours out his heart. He tells his pastor about the Lexus, and how tired he is of his Honda. He rants about the beach house, and how sick he is of sitting at home all summer. Walter tells the truth: while he's thankful and appreciative for the things he has in life, secretly he desires two things that belong to his neighbor.

It nearly kills him to say it, but Walter admits to his pastor, "My wife is right. I have to learn to be content, instead of always desiring what I don't have. How can I learn to be content?" Walter's pastor smiles, and says, "Well, actually, Walter, we're starting a new small group at the church. It's called "Men Who Covet Their Neighbor's House, Wife, Manservant, Maidservant, Ox, Donkey, Lexus, or Beach House." "Really?" asks Walter. "Just kidding," says the pastor. "But, look, there are plenty of us who struggle, just like you, with coveting."

The pastor hands Walter a Bible. "Let's see what God's Word has to say about this," says the pastor. "Your wife is right. Christians like us can learn to be content, but we need God's help and direction. Let's read together."

They open first to Philippians 4:11, where Paul writes, "*Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.*" Next they look at Hebrews 13:5, "*Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for God has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'*" The pastor looks up at Walter and says, "Clearly, God wants for us to learn to be content, right?" Walter nods.

Then the pastor takes out a piece of paper, and writes down two short sentences. "Here's how this works, Walter. The Bible teaches us to learn to be content by doing these two

things,” he says. “First, beware of unholy desires. Second, be careful to aim your desires at God.”

Then they look at a few Bible verses that say “Beware!” First, Romans 7:8, where Paul admits, *“But sin ... produced in me all kinds of covetous desire.”* Next, Micah 2:1-2, *“Woe to those who devise wickedness ... They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away.”* And 1 Timothy 6:8-10, *“If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many pangs.”*

“Is that maybe what’s happening to you, Walter?” asks the pastor. Walter nods, feeling ashamed of himself. “You’re not alone,” says the pastor gently. “Remember King David? He coveted his neighbor’s wife, and slept with her. He fell into a horrible sin because of his desires, and brought a lot of turmoil to his family and his land. God held David accountable for his sin, but he also forgave his sin when David repented. And he’ll forgive you, too, Walter.” Walter smiles, relieved; and they talk for a while about repentance, and the forgiveness Jesus won for sinners on the cross.

“You know,” says the pastor, “It’s OK for Christians like us to have ambitions, and to admire things other people have. But when we covet those things, it often leads to greater sins and deeper troubles. So beware of your unholy desires. And here’s the real key. Be careful, Walter, to aim your desires toward God.” “What do you mean by that?” Walter asks.

They read together from Psalm 37:4, *“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* And

Psalm 119:35-36, *“Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!”* The pastor says, “The Word encourages us here to make God our greatest desire. When God is the thing we love and long for most, above all else in the world, then all the rest tends to fall into place. God starts to shape our inner desires, and to get them in line with his. So we have to consciously aim our desires toward the Lord, toward his Word, toward his grace. Contentment comes in your life, Walter, when there’s more of him, and less of you and your desires.”

They read one more verse together: Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*

“Aim your desires toward God!” says the pastor. “It’s not going to happen all at once, but God’s Word can really help. And you can learn to be content.” Then they closed their conversation with a prayer.

Will you pray with me? Lord, we are all just like Walter. We don’t like to admit it, but all too often we want what we don’t have, and we let our unholy desires control us. Help us to beware of coveting, and be mindful of how it can lead us to deeper trouble. And, Lord, help us aim our desires toward you today, right now! Help us crave your Word, and delight in the loving forgiveness you share with us through Jesus Christ. In his precious name we pray and live. Amen.