

FREEDOM  
Hebrews 13:5-6

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In my mind, I have had – now for a number of years – a short story that is just waiting to be written. It is about a society, likely in some distant future time, in which the ownership of property not only does not exist but the very idea of such ownership is frowned upon. Things as we know them are no longer needed nor wanted. That being the case people are freed up to spend their time in other pursuits than in busying themselves with food, clothing and shelter. It is this future society that, in my mind, is utopian.

Theft would no longer take place. Covetousness would also cease to exist. The burden of debt would be gone. Maybe this is how we should understand heaven for in speaking of that place John the Revelator wrote, "(God) will wipe away every tear from their eyes, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the **former things** have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

**Today** we still live in a place and time in which THINGS have hardly passed away. Indeed, it is THINGS, and the acquiring of those things, that has produced more than its share of tears, mourning, crying and pain. Why just think of what we go through for these things...

We get it in our minds that we NEED things that we really do not need. And so we work, and we work hard to gain these things. If married this often means that both of us will need to work...and work full time. This means we will need not just one but two dependable cars. That may mean car loans. So a mortgage for the house, car loans for the cars, education loans for what it took for us to get those jobs we thought we would need in order to buy the house that we thought we would want and need...and to buy the two cars. And then, if children come along, the tension brought on by their needs makes life all that more of a challenge. We're conflicted: turning the children over to others to raise while we work longer and harder to earn the money so that we can turn the children over to others. It is a vicious and seemingly never ending cycle.

And we hardly have the time along the way to even ask, "Is it worth it?" "Is this what we really WANT to do?"

For before you know it life will be over, the kids will be gone, the house will be empty, the cars will have been turned in for replacements. Was it worth it?

This is the issue that the writer of Hebrews is addressing, and the writer does it not by merely challenging his (or her) readers to **avoid** the love of money (as does Paul in 1 Timothy 6:10), but his challenge is to **come and ENJOY FREEDOM from the love of money**.

Freedom. Doesn't that sound good?

If you are one of those who feels **trapped by a job** that you hate but which you keep because you have bills to pay for things that are as much a burden as they are a blessing, then doesn't the word FREEDOM sound especially inviting to you?

So what is one to do?

Well, the author here gives us some advice. So let's consider that advice before looking at other Biblical advice...

## 1. **Don't fall in love with money.**

One of the requirements for a church leader, as given to us in 1 Timothy 3, is that the church leader is to not be a lover of money.

I personally have struggled with that requirement in that I'm not exactly sure what Paul had in mind when he laid down that requirement. For as you all know, even the poorest among us is wealthy by global standards. We may marvel at the top 1% of those in America (owning an INCREDIBLY DISPROPORTIONATE amount of this world's goods), but **even we** who are in the mid-fifty percentile of those in America (not sure where any of us exactly fit in), compared to the world, we have **so much**. And because we have SO MUCH, does that make us lovers of money? That's where I have wrestled.

Now to make it even more troubling for me: I grew up in a collector's home. And the mentality of my collector father was enough to teach me, early on, **that I did not want to be a collector**. I had no interest in amassing more and more of the same thing: be it carriages, cars...or as I have run across through the years, everything from salt and pepper shakers to fishing lures. (A fellow I went to high school with owns over 1,000 transistor radios - the largest private collection of transistor radios of anyone in the world. That wasn't his original plan but, as with anything, there always seemed to be another that was bigger, better, cleaner, rarer, or more desirable. And so his collection just grew and grew and grew.)

The world of collecting things is an interesting world.

If you get into that world, it is (to those in it) almost as if nothing else is as important.

Some years ago I made the mistake of agreeing to accompany my son to a restaurant where he was going to meet up with other boys from his high school wrestling team. And so there I sat: the only adult with 7 boys. For two hours I listened as these boys discussed NOTHING BUT WRESTLING.

Well, that's similar to the life of the collector: living, acting, and talking as if those things are the only thing that matters.

But what did Jesus teach us?

### Luke 12:13-21

Some time ago Bob Good lent me a book he had read. It is entitled The Labryinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart by John Comenius. It is similar to The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, but predates Bunyan's book by about 40 years. Indeed, reading Comenius' book about a pilgrim's wanderings makes me wonder if Bunyan didn't get his idea for Pilgrim's Progress straight from Comenius.

But in a section where the Pilgrim observes the Lifestyle of the Rich, hear what the pilgrim observes...

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We may think money is a great blessing, but the love or longing for wealth is a chain of incredible weight.

I began by telling you of a short story I have meditated upon for many years – a story of a society free of things.

But another story I have thought needs to be written is based upon a real man and my visit to him now many years ago. He had begun attending the church I pastored in Lititz along with his son. No wife ever came with him. Upon meeting him I sensed that he was a **very plain man**. He was not a doctor or a lawyer. He had likely spent his life working as a laborer. But anyway, as has always been my practice, after several visits of him to the church I set up an appointment to go visit him in his home. My initial impression of him was verified upon coming to his VERY MODEST home. He graciously invited me in. It was, I dare say, **probably the poorest home I had ever been in** – at least among those that attended that church. We sat down. As I sat there I looked around. There were no beautifully framed paintings or limited edition prints on the walls. Indeed, there was **nothing on any of the walls** save one thing: a license plate, and that was not hung square but somewhat crooked. And so it was that during the visit I asked the man about the license plate on the wall. He then began to tell me of his daughter – his only daughter. He told me how she had, even from the time she was quite young, spoken of her desire to own a car. Upon reaching the age that she had learned to drive she got a job so as to buy a car. Her buying a car of her own was a great accomplishment in her life. That license plate had been on her car – the same car that was involved in the auto accident that took her life. The license plate was this man's daily reminder of his daughter.

I thought as I left that house that a framed original painting by Monet or Picasso would have not better adorned the wall of that man's house.

## 2. **Be content with what you have.**

Now to the son of a collector, we again have here a very troubling passage.

For whereas I grew up in a home where my dad was always **on the hunt** for that carriage or sleigh that was a bit better, or rarer (and, again, there is no end to finding such things, and so there is no end to collecting), I can well recall thinking to myself,

"Why buy **so many** to try and find the best. Why not just research what IS the best and then go and find that and buy that?"

And so there came to be, in my mind, a mentality of **trying to have the BEST** of whatever it was. It has been a long time since I have even thought on this subject but I can recall, many decades ago now, lying in bed and thinking about opening a store entitled "Only the Best." It would be sort of a Consumer's Report kind of store wherein if, for example, there were reviews of 60 push lawnmowers and the conclusion was that the Snapper HI VAC P2185020 with the 190cc Briggs and Stratton engine was **the BEST** push mower for the money, then that would be the only push lawnmower one could find at our store.

But the problem with this kind of thinking is that it sets the buyer (in this case myself) up for **a life of constant dissatisfaction** for there is almost ALWAYS something better...something NEW and IMPROVED. Other than in the manufacturing of mousetraps, there always seems to be something better.

And so instead of spending a time **ENJOYING LIFE**, one's time is spent **EXAMINING LIFE**. And that is not a pleasurable experience.

So instead of becoming obsessed with finding MORE or finding BETTER (or BEST) instead, as Hebrews 13:5 teaches, **learn to BE CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE**.

This is, of course, not the kind of advice that the Detroit auto makers, or for Levi Jeans, or Nike shoes want to hear. For their marketing is based upon sowing seeds of discontent with what we already have. But how far are we to take this challenge to be content with what we have?

- To truly be content with whatever we have...well, that would seem to imply that you don't go grocery shopping until that last can of beans that has been sitting in the cupboard for the past three years actually gets eaten, along with that can of tomato sauce that has been there even longer.
- To truly be content with what one has would seem to imply that whatever car you have, you just stay with it. And what if it breaks down, should one be content to have a broken down car or is it okay to fix it?
- When does one replace a toothbrush? If the brush comes with 200 bristles, is it to be replaced only when it is down to 50 bristles? Or should you wait until there is not a single bristle left?

You may think I'm joking but I am not. Just **what is implied** by being content with what one has?

- Is there ever a time or place for buying a new coat? New underwear? New anything?

I understand that "being content with what one has" can put the kabash on becoming a collector or trying to obtain and possess "the best." And that is now fine with me. But to what degree are we to take this?

Philippians 4:11b-12

1 Timothy 6:6-11

The fact that Paul would say that he had existed in both estates: having plenty or having basically nothing suggests that his time of having plenty was not necessarily wrong. It would SEEM that Paul's challenge is not that we get to the point where our clothes are threadbare and our toothbrushes have no more bristles. Rather, his point is that **we should not be occupied with or obsessing over the CRAVING for more**.

And if that is the case then fewer trips to the mall, or looking at on-line catalogues, or going to estate sales might be the best ticket to finding a freedom from the love of things. For if there is any truth to the saying "out of sight, out of mind" then the less that we are putting these THINGS before us the less time we are likely to spend thinking about and planning about obtaining such things.

3. **"For he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'"**

On the surface this almost looks like a quote that is somewhat out of place...as though the author wanted to slip in this promise that God gave to Joshua in Joshua 1:5 SOMEWHERE. And this seemed as good a place as any!

But the placing of this quote where it is seems quite purposeful.

The answer to this CRAVING after things is BEING CONTENT with what we have. Right? I mean that has been the point of verse 5. But will our contentment with what we have prove to be foolish or destructive to us in the end? And it is here that the author says, "No. You'll be taken care of. You'll be safe. You'll be fine. Because God has promised to never leave you or forsake you. And **he is not about to see you come to some fruitless, pointless end.** So don't worry about it.

After graduating from high school in Phoenix, Arizona I headed off to Chicago and the Moody Bible Institute. I was rather surprised, my first week of being at school in Chicago, of there seeing a fellow I had known back in Junior High when I had still lived in Michigan. His name was Steve. Steve was a pleasant enough overweight fellow who had a beautiful tenor voice but who spoke with a terrible stutter. If you were to ask him, "Where did you grow up?" it would be a major feat for Steve to tell you that he grew up near Pontiac, Michigan, northwest of Detroit. But if you were to put a piece of music in front of him to read, he had no problems at all. And the same for reading a book. His stuttering took place **only when he had to speak extemporaneously.**

And so it was that Steve and I were both in the Moody Chorale.

Early on, that first year, Steve was asked to give his testimony in front of the 60 or so members of the Chorale. He came prepared and so was able to read what he had to say. All of us knew, by this time, of his terrible stuttering problem. But he was fine that day. At the end of telling us his story he recited a short poem that he said had helped him get through life. It was just two lines. I heard it only that one time on that one day but I have never forgotten it. It went like this,

"You would not have taught me to trust in your name,  
And brought me this far just to put me to shame."

What it meant was that we can trust God. He is a faithful God and no matter what we are going through – whether it is a time of plenty or a time of want – He will carry us through. For he has promised us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

This coming July, I will be absent for one week when I meet up with my dad (age 91) and two sisters to go on a REMEMBRANCE TOUR of those places where he pastored and where we children were born. It will start in Illinois (where my older sister was born) with a visit to the Moody Bible Institute. We will then head up to Pembine, Wisconsin (where my mother was born) before heading over into the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (where both my younger sister and I were born). After that it is down to Waterford, Michigan where we 3 children spent the bulk of our younger years. From there we will finally head back to Illinois and then I will fly home. It should be a great trip.

While in Pembine, Wisconsin we hope to visit with my aunt (nearly 100 years old) and her son. They live on a farm that is now over 800 acres in size. The farm is the result of my uncle's very slow but methodical planning. It started as a 100-acre farm that he inherited from his dad, my grandfather on my mother's side. But slowly he added more and more acreage. He was a very reserved sort of fellow...the very opposite of my collector father. But, it was he who ended up with an 800-acre farm,

complete with outbuildings, a private hanger and an airplane runway. It was while visiting him some 30 years ago that he took Ruth and me up (separately) in his Piper Cub. Flying over the area he pointed out to me an estate below: a nice home with a large lake in front of the house. He said, "You see that house with the lake?" I said I did. He continued, "It's owned by a doctor. When he bought the house there was no lake. But there was a small creek that ran by the house. He got to figuring that if he engineered it correctly, he could damn up that creek and in time he would have a lake. So that's what he did. It wasn't that he was so rich. He was just patient."

I never forgot that story.

If we would but be patient, learning to "wait on the Lord," often the very things that we have wanted or felt we needed, may very well come to us **WITHOUT US FRETTING AND WORRYING** about any of it. For the Lord knows our needs and He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He's watching out for us. We need to learn to wait on him to show us the way to go.