

Chris Murphy

March 16, 2025

Scripture: Isaiah 55: 1-13

Sermon Title: Slow to Grasp: An Invitation to Contentment

Prayer...

Introduction:

I hope you are enjoying the season of Lent and for those of you who are reading along with our book study on An Invitation to Slow, I trust you are enjoying the wisdom of Lisa and Mark McMinn. By the way, I have confirmed that Lisa and Mark will be joining us on April 6th and one or both of them will also be preaching on that day and will share more deeply about their book at that time.

This morning, we are on chapter 2 from An Invitation to Slow, which focuses on being Slow to Grasp: An invitation to contentment.

Contentment is an interesting topic. Do you think of yourself as content? In our society, we are invited to consume daily. We are bombarded with invitations to spend more money on everything

from entertainment to medication. We are encouraged to also pursue greater achievements, whether related to vocational goals, financial wealth, or physical appearance. Clearly, trying to pursue some goals towards growth may be valuable, but how often are we inspired to pursue contentment. That almost sounds un-American. Contentment feels like something one might find on a Greek island or maybe in Italy as people enjoy pasta, wine, and romance. In American society, who do you know who really is content? Frankly, Mark and Lisa McMinn are probably the most content people I know, which is why we are reading their book. As I read this chapter, I felt the freedom to say, maybe we are enough just the way we are. Maybe, God loves us unconditionally and does not ask us to be anything more than we are. Maybe, it is okay when we are sometimes not okay, and feel sad. Could it be that we might learn to be content even when our lives are not perfect and the world is not perfect? I mean on the one hand we of course wish to change our lives and the world to make them better, but on the other hand

would it not be wonderful to live a life of more contentment with our current lives even as we seek to make the world a better place.

The prophet Isaiah shares an invitation to contentment.

55 Hear, everyone who thirsts;

come to the waters;

and you who have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without price.

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread

and your earnings for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,

and delight yourselves in rich food.

3 Incline your ear, and come to me;

listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

Friends, the prophet Isaiah is encouraging us to find contentment in the gifts of life. We are to enjoy all that is good in life, rich food, wine, milk, bread, and we are to incline our ear and come to God.

The reality is that there is much to be grateful for in this life. For most of us, we probably do not need more stuff. I mean some of us could benefit from more resources to help make life easier. Students benefit from more money for education. Some of us could use a newer car or some money to pay off our bills, but generally speaking compared to many people in our world, our church community is doing okay. My point is that the invitation to contentment is really an opportunity to look at our lives from the focus of not what we are missing, but instead from what we are blessed to have in this life.

I like the invitation because like many people in American society I find it too easy to want more. It is easy to want more stuff and more security.

What if we found contentment most deeply in our relationship with God? What if we also could find contentment in a simple life that was not so attached to material things?

In chapter 2 of *An Invitation to Slow*, we are invited to be slow to grasp that which does not help us and to grasp instead the things that bring us a deeply meaningful life with God, one another, and the whole of creation.

Mark and Lisa McMinn are Quakers and they tell the story of a well-known Historic Quaker named John Woolman. Woolman is known for his journals, but during his lifetime, his journals were not published. He chose to live a simple life as a tailor, which was a step-down socio-economically from his family of origin. He supported himself from being a tailor and growing fruit from 11

acres of land. He lived in a small house and Woolman once wrote in his journal, “My mind through the power of Truth was in a good degree weaned from the desire of outward greatness.” Woolman realized that grasping for fame, money, and power would hinder him from growing in virtue and would hinder his devotion to God as well. Woolman also was known for working for peace with Native Americans and being an abolitionist who fought to end the slave trade. I am interested especially in the simplicity and wisdom of John Woolman, also because on my dad’s side, the Murphy family is a direct descendent of John Woolman’s sister, Patience Woolman. As I have shared below it feels a bit providential that I, a Presbyterian pastor, find myself serving in Newberg, a historic Quaker community.

One of my favorite parts of this chapter on being slow to grasp is the portion that provides some practices to foster contentment.

1. Pay attention. First, we are encouraged to pay attention to the ordinary. We are to be mindful of the normal moments of the day, like eating breakfast. Instead of rushing through breakfast, while running out the door, instead we can sit down at a table and chew our food slowly, while remembering all the hands that helped grow and prepare the food. We can even pray as we eat and give thanks for the gift of the new day and the food and drink we often take for granted. Another option for paying attention is to be conscious of the sights and sounds as you walk into your place of work. You might also wish to be more consciously present as you watch the sunrise or the sunset. Be aware of your emotions and your internal reflection.

2. Remember. Quoting from the book, “Set aside five minutes to ‘sink into your heart space,’ Sit comfortably, eyes closed and remind yourself. “I belong—heart, soul, and body—to God.” Repeat this several times until you feel settled. Once settled, recall a time you felt peace and contentment. Walk through it,

reexperience the details. Notice where you were, what you were doing, perhaps why you were doing it.” See what bubble up as you reflect and see if God is inviting you to be aware of something through this practice.

3. Let go. For example, let go of that which does not serve you. Let go of your attachment to your phone. Try walking more and driving less. Consider reading rather than watching TV. Be content with conversation with a family member or friend rather than looking for entertainment to provide comfort every night. Consider prayer to God when you feel bored. Letting go of some of our normal attachments might help us feel more connected to God, others, and ourselves.

These are just a few suggestions from our book about how to foster contentment. It is normal for contentment to come and go, but we can learn to be more open to finding our contentment in our belonging to God.

Isaiah 55

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

An Invitation to Abundant Life

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3 Incline your ear, and come to me;

 listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

 my steadfast, sure love for David.

4 See, I made him a witness to the peoples,

 a leader and commander for the peoples.

5 Now you shall call nations that you do not know,

and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

6 Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;

7 let the wicked forsake their way
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose

and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

12 For you shall go out in joy

and be led back in peace;

the mountains and the hills before you

shall burst into song,

and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;

instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle,

and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,

for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.