

## I. Introduction

## II. The Secrets of a Highly Contented Life

- A. Our topic is Secrets of a Highly Contented Life. You can be content with your life and here's how.
- B. Our case study for this topic is a man in the Bible named Joseph. We've been looking at his story, one chapter at a time, seeing how each chapter is crafted by the author to teach an important secret of contentment.
- C. Let me give you the list of five secrets and a thumbnail sketch of Joseph's life so far.
  1. The first secret of contentment is having *the Heart of a Pilgrim*. You have to think, live, feel and act like this world is not your permanent home. You're just passing through. You'll never be content unless you start here.
  2. The second secret of a highly contented life is a *Personal Sense of Destiny*. A personal sense of destiny is your mental picture of the person you can only hope to become in your wildest dreams.
  3. The third secret is the practice of *Spiritual Consistency*. Consistently follow Jesus in more and more compartments of your life. Do this for hours, then days, weeks, months and years. It takes years to grow an oak and a day to grow a dandelion. You have to stay consistent in the long haul.
  4. The fourth secret is *Unwavering Loyalty*. Trusting so completely that God is loyal to you that you don't have much room for doubts, fears and pity. When you believe God is loyal to you, you look to Him more than circumstances. When you believe God is loyal to you, you reciprocate with your loyalty to Him.
  5. The fifth secret of contentment and one of the toughest of all is *Complaint-Free Waiting*. You have to know when you're waiting for your personal sense of destiny to come true, you don't sit around doing nothing. Waiting doesn't mean doing nothing. It means growing deep and strong in Christ. If waiting makes you whiny, moody and depressed, you'll never be content.
  6. The sixth secret of contentment is *Confidence in the Success of God*. You have to be so convinced God can handle your life and your world and handle it well that no matter what happens, you'll trust Him. You see life as a great adventure and not a great accident waiting to happen.

## III. Here's a little background

1. The seventh secret is *Closure for the Unfinished Business of your Past*. You cannot be content if you are haunted by past guilt or by past victimization. Some of you have lived with an inner torment over a past evil—either one you did to someone else or one done to you. One way or another, you have to gain closure. Joseph's story shows us how.
  - A. Joseph was 17 years old, the favorite son of his father, Jacob. Joseph dreamed two dreams. In them, his family bowed down before him. When he told these dreams to his brothers, they were not pleased. So one day they attacked Joseph and sold him to a band of slave-traders going to Egypt. They thought they were rid of their pesky little brother once and for all.
  - B. They're about to receive a massive shock to the system. For over 20 years, these men have stooped under the heavy weight of a secret guilt. They are stuck. They can't get past what they did, but they can't admit it either. So they keep the secret and live with the unfinished business of a tormented conscience.
  - C. But God, in his mighty providence, is about to finish their unfinished business for them.
  - D. The brothers never knew that when they sold Joseph into slavery, they triggered an incredible chain reaction of God's providence. That chain reaction put young Joseph on the throne of Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh in power, wealth and authority.
  - E. Twenty years have gone by and now there is a great famine. The only place on earth that has any food left is Egypt. Joseph's wise governing made Egypt the breadbasket of the world. Who should come shopping one day for food, but Joseph's brothers. He sent them home loaded with food and money and, sometime later, they come back for food. They're freaked out, because they don't recognize Joseph. But this time, over their father's protests, they bring their little brother, Benjamin, with them.
  - F. Now, by Joseph's plotting, Benjamin has a really bad day. Joseph's steward had been instructed to secretly place Joseph's silver cup in the mouth of the youngest brother's sack.

## IV. Sermon

- A. *"Fair enough," the man replied, "except that only the one who stole it will be a slave. The rest of you may go free." They quickly took their sacks from the backs of their donkeys and opened them. Joseph's servant began searching the oldest brother's sack, going on down the line to the youngest. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack! At this, they tore their clothing in despair, loaded the donkeys again, and returned to the city. Joseph was still at home when Judah and his brothers arrived, and they fell to the ground before him."* Genesis 44:10-14, NLT
  1. Observations
  2. First, notice the order the sacks of grain are searched, oldest to youngest. This is great storytelling. As readers, we know more than the characters know. We know the silver cup is in Benjamin's sack of grain, the youngest brother. So imagine watching as we go through the brothers in order.
  3. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah (correction from last time, when I said Judah was first born. He wasn't. He was #4), Dan, Naphthali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin.
  4. The tension mounts. Finally, there's the cup in Benjamin's bag and all the brothers tore their clothing in despair.
  5. Then, notice what they did. Joseph's steward had already said all the brothers can go free except the one with the silver cup. But, who goes back to Egypt? All the brothers.
  6. What does this say about them?
  7. It says they are not the same men they were over 20 years ago when they turned their back on their little brother's pathetic cry for help. They are not who they used to be.
  8. This was Joseph's test all along. He wanted to know what kind of men his brothers had become.

9. Some of you need to know that God lets people change. He doesn't lock you into your past reputation. He doesn't freeze frame you in the snapshot of your idiotic, youthful mistakes.
  10. God allows new beginnings. He is the Lord of Another Second Chance.
  11. But now what happens?
- B. *"What were you trying to do?" Joseph demanded. 'Didn't you know that a man such as I would know who stole it?' And Judah said, 'Oh, my lord, what can we say to you? How can we plead? How can we prove our innocence? God is punishing us for our sins. My lord, we have all returned to be your slaves—we and our brother who had your cup in his sack.' 'No,' Joseph said. 'Only the man who stole the cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go home to your father.'"* Genesis 44:15-17, NLT
1. Judah, the 4th son, asks three questions.
    - a) What can we say to you?
    - b) How can we plead?
    - c) How can we prove our innocence?
  2. He knows the answer to each question is "nothing." There's nothing we can say to you. Nothing we can plead before you. Nothing we can do to prove our innocence.
  3. Judah is at the end of his own righteousness:
    - a) The end of self-justification.
    - b) The end of rationalization and blaming.
    - c) The end of self-assurance.
  4. We're talking about contentment and the great secret of closure to our past guilt.
  5. Judah hits it right on the head when he says (verse 16), "God is punishing us for our sins." But for what sins? They didn't steal any money from Joseph. They know Benjamin didn't steal the silver cup. So why would Judah say this? He has to be feeling the guilt over what he did to Joseph years ago.
  6. Have you ever been pulled over for speeding or running a stop sign and tried to argue your innocence? I don't. Why bother? Haven't you done a thousand things that deserve a ticket, but you didn't get one? Why would you ever act innocent if a CHP officer pulls you over? Just say, "Sorry, officer. Here's my license and registration."
  7. So what if the brothers didn't steal the money or the silver cup. The older brothers sold Joseph into slavery, they betrayed their own father and they conspired to keep it silent. Maybe they weren't guilty of this infraction, but they were still guilty.
  8. That's the way it is with all guilt.
  9. Your guilt is not simply that you broke this law or harmed that person or cheated on that test. Your guilt goes way deeper.
  10. Until you can admit it, you'll never have the kind of closure you really need.
  11. So, what does God do with people who admit their deep guilt and are man or woman enough to accept the consequences?
  12. Joseph tells the brothers they can leave. Only Benjamin will become his slave (verse 17).
  13. Judah gives us a remarkable picture of God's way of atoning for guilt. He speaks up and reviews the whole history of the story of his family. Judah tells Joseph about his father's love for Joseph. He tells how that brother presumably died, and how heartbroken the father was. He tells how Benjamin, the only full-brother of Joseph (the rest of the guys were half-brothers) and the only surviving son of his beloved wife, Rachel, has become their father's favorite and that it would kill their father if Benjamin didn't come home.
  14. Then Judah adds these remarkable words:
 

C. *"My lord, I made a pledge to my father that I would take care of the boy. I told him, 'If I don't bring him back to you, I will bear the blame forever.' Please, my lord, let me stay here as a slave instead of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. For how can I return to my father if the boy is not with me? I cannot bear to see what this would do to him."* Genesis 44:32-34, NLT

    1. Judah offers to take Benjamin's place.
    2. Judah offers to give up his life that he might satisfy his brother's guilt.
    3. Now, let's press the rewind button and go back over twenty years to that fateful day when the brothers sold Joseph into slavery. Guess whose idea it was:
      - a) *"So when Joseph arrived, they pulled off his beautiful robe and threw him into the pit. This pit was normally used to store water, but it was empty at the time. Then, just as they were sitting down to eat, they noticed a caravan of camels in the distance coming toward them. It was a group of Ishmaelite traders taking spices, balm, and myrrh from Gilead to Egypt. Judah said to the others, 'What can we gain by killing our brother? That would just give us a guilty conscience. Let's sell Joseph to those Ishmaelite traders. Let's not be responsible for his death; after all, he is our brother!' And his brothers agreed. So when the traders came by, his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver, and the Ishmaelite traders took him along to Egypt."* Genesis 37:23-28, NLT
    4. Selling Joseph into slavery was Judah's idea and his goal was to make a profit.
      - a) *"So Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?'"* Genesis 37:26, NKJV
    5. Now, after 20 years of hiding, betrayal, deception, guilt, seeing his father's heart broken and not wanting to send his father to an early grave over yet another son, Judah steps up and offers to give his life as a ransom for Benjamin's life.
    6. What will it take to close the books on the past guilt of your life? It will take a full balancing of the scales of justice. Full admission on your part and full payment on somebody's part.
    7. The amazing truth God weaves into Scripture, in story after story, is that the price of guilt cannot be paid by you.

8. Judah offers to pay for Benjamin.
9. Just as Jesus offered to pay the price for you.
10. I want to zero in on one verse for a little while, because of the way Judah puts it. In verse 32, Judah uses a technical legal term.
  - a) *“For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.’”* Genesis 44:32, NASB

#### V. The Surety

##### A. What is a surety?

1. A surety is guarantee to fully deliver on a promise.
2. If you take a loan on a car, a house, a school loan, your surety is your deposit plus your signature. You guarantee you will fully deliver on your promise to repay the loan.
3. You might put up the equity in your house as surety for a business.
4. You guarantee you will fully deliver on a promise.
5. When Judah talked his father into letting Benjamin go on this trip, Judah put his own life on the line that Benjamin would return unharmed. He made himself the surety. Judah pledged his life and goods that he would fully deliver on his promise to bring Benjamin home safe and sound.
6. By the way, guess which tribe of Israel Jesus is descended from. Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

##### B. Jesus is your surety for heaven.

1. “By so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.” Hebrews 7:22, NKJV.
2. Jesus is a surety. That is, Jesus is a guarantee that God will fully deliver on His promise.
3. What promise? The promise wrapped up in the covenant called grace.
4. We’ve noticed a lot of new people coming to our church since the new year. Maybe it’s a New Year’s resolution. That’s excellent. We’re really glad you’re here and I hope you make a lot of progress on your Personal Life Map. Take the steps to grow in Jesus.
5. But, I have to be super-clear about this one point, your connection with God is not based on church attendance, your Ten Commandments batting average or on being decent, loyal, thrifty, brave or clean.
6. Your going to heaven is based on the surety of Jesus Christ.
7. How does that work?

##### C. The Transfer of Sin

1. It works by grace. It means God will do all the work and bear all the burden to close the books on your personal guilt. He does this through Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, two great transfers happened.
2. First, God transferred your sins to Christ.
  - a) The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
  - b) Jesus, carried our sins in His body on the Cross.
  - c) He was made sin for us.
  - d) He became the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
3. I think that’s why it became dark out when Jesus died on the cross. It was high noon, yet for three hours it was as dark as night. Why? Because God was transferring your sins to Christ.
4. Then God convened the Supreme Court of heaven and judged Jesus for your sins. He saw every crime, every hatred, every time you cheated, gossiped and worse. He saw it all. But, those sins were no longer on you, they were on Jesus. That is the passion—the suffering—of the Christ. He carried your sins.
5. Then the court rendered a verdict. “Guilty,” said God and the sentence was immediately pronounced. The soul that sins, it shall die (Ezekiel 18:4). And Christ cried out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken Me,” and He died.
6. For your sins—as your substitute. He said, “For the sake of my Father’s love, I will take the place of my guilty brother, my guilty sister and pay for his or her sins and pay in full.”
7. God transferred your sins to Christ and He died.
8. But He didn’t stay dead. He rose again and, on account of that, God executed the second transfer.

##### D. The Transfer of Righteousness

1. In the first transfer, God took you from -100 all the way up to zero. You went from being really bad in God’s eyes to being totally neutral, so to speak. But that’s still not enough to qualify you for heaven.
2. The first transfer subtracts your sins.
3. The second transfer adds righteousness. God transfers righteousness from His account to yours. This lifts you from being neutral to being good enough for God.
4. This whole system sets Christianity in a class by itself. There’s nothing comparable in any religion in all of world history.
5. All religions are the same. They make you pile up your own righteousness to reach God and, hopefully, you can pile up enough.
6. Maybe that describes you today. You’re working hard to be a good person and hoping you will qualify for heaven. You are on what we call the Giant Hamster Wheel of moral performance. Like the hamster, you may be running as hard as you can, but you are still going nowhere fast.
7. I don’t care what religion you pick, they all tell you to climb on the hamster wheel and burn your way to heaven.

8. Good luck.
9. Christianity throws it all in the trash and says, "Quit running. Righteousness is not something you attain through trying hard, it is a gift you receive through faith."
10. Let me show you some verses that say this so you don't think I'm making it up.
  - a) "Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference." Romans 3:22, NKJV
  - b) "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Romans 1:17, NKJV
  - c) "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous." Romans 5:19, NKJV
11. Over and over again, the Bible teaches the righteousness that qualifies a person for heaven is NOT one that we produce. It is one we receive from God as a gift. It is top-quality, too. The very righteousness of Jesus Christ.
  - a) "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1, NKJV
12. Do you want peace with God? Do you want to get off the hamster wheel? You can today. I will give you the chance to do that in a couple minutes. Be ready.

#### **E. Jesus as your Surety**

1. So, two transfers happen. Your sins get transferred to Jesus and He pays for them.
2. His righteousness gets transferred to you, as if you did the good things He did.
3. In all of this, God never compromises His standards. He completely satisfies justice and He completely satisfies love. He does it all without one little bit of help from you.
4. That is grace. Grace is God doing for you what you could never do for yourself.
5. Judah pledged his own life as a guarantee to deliver Benjamin safe and sound for his father. Judah was surety for Benjamin.
6. Jesus Christ pledged His life and He paid with His life to guarantee He would deliver you safe and sound to your Father, too.
7. He guarantees it. An iron clad guarantee and do you know what? When you receive Jesus Christ, your eternal destiny is out of your hands forever. You had your say, you received Jesus. Now shut up, because He takes over.
8. He becomes your surety. He guarantees delivery of you to heaven and you can bank on it.
9. But what is your part? What must you do?

#### **F. Your part is humble acceptance and faith**

1. You have to come to the end of your self-justifying ways, the end of your rationalizations, the end of your claims that you are innocent and deserving from God.
2. The way to close the books on the guilt of your life is by bringing your broken-down self to the Cross and claiming, by faith, everything Jesus did for you there.
3. By faith. Not works. Not religion. Not ritual. Not baptism, confirmation, communion or confession. Faith, trust, confidence. Leaning on Jesus so heavily the devil can't stick in a guilt trip edgewise.
4. Do you want to talk about closure?
  - a) "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1, NKJV
5. You can have peace with God. That's closure. You can be right with God. You can have your own surety, your own personal guarantee from Jesus Christ, that you will go to heaven, have your sins forgiven and be one with God in this life here and now. You can have a new start. You can have your slate wiped clean.
6. How about this for closure?
  - a) "*Come now, and let us reason together,*" Says the LORD, "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*" Isaiah 1:18, NKJV
7. Last time, I said that sooner or later you have to stop fighting God. You have to come to God and say, "Lord, you got me. I have it coming."
8. You'll never be content until you do.
9. The brothers were the perpetrators and they're starting to get closure.
10. Joseph was the victim. He gets closure too, but that won't happen till next time.