

FAITH at

Slide # 01

WORK!

Finding
God
in the
9 to 5
Part TWO



Full Credit given to: Faith at WORK – Edited by Don Mathieson
Castle Publishing Ltd. Auckland N.Z. 2001. ISBN: 0-9582124-8-1

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April 2008

Contentedness

When you go out to a fancy restaurant for a meal, who prefers a *buffet* or a *fixed menu*?

Slide # 2

You see, today's Bible Workshop is like a *buffet* meal.

You get to *choose* what to eat, to *receive* and to *accept* what is *relevant* and *clear* to your life.



You possibly won't be able to accept, or even understand *all* of it.

Some of what we hear might be *far too deep* and go straight over our heads.

While other insights and truths will impact us at a very deep and life changing level.

Today we will receive a good variety of milk and meat.

To him who has ears to hear, let him listen.

I do know that God wants to speak to you this morning – to encourage, comfort and challenge us.

God wants to speak to you – but you must choose to listen and receive.

Let's turn in our Bibles to Genesis chapter 4 verses 1 to 10

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."

2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

3 ¶ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,

4 and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,

5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

6 ¶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?"

7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

8 ¶ Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

9 ¶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

10 And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

Let's dig a bit deeper into this passage – and in doing so – we will discover this chapter is like an Aladdin's Treasure Trove –

...full of nuggets of truth, wisdom and insight that have the ability – as Jesus said – *to set us free* and guide our lives in the paths of righteousness!

Here we have two brothers, two men – engaged in two very *different* types of industry and business.

Slide # 3 – Both photos

Able was a *shepherd*, and Cain a *farmer*.

Now – have you ever wondered *why* God accepted Abel's offering of an animal, and *not* Cain's offering of grain?

You see, without going too deep, we need to understand that the book of Genesis was *not written* as the events happened and unfolded.

This book was written hundreds of years *after* the events they describe.

Did Moses write it? (He may have written some of it – but not all of it – or how else did he write about his own death?)

So, Genesis was written *in hindsight* – *after* all the laws of sacrifice and the 10 Commandments were received and written.



Did the events of Adam and Eve, of Cain and Able *actually* happen?

Can we take them as *literal* events?

Yes – without a doubt.

But they were also written to teach us, and in the case of Cain and Able, to *introduce* important themes throughout the rest of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and also Deuteronomy.

Especially the *laws* regarding sacrifice and worship.

We learn in these first five books of the Bible, that the sacrifices God prefers are the ‘pure and spotless lambs – the first-fruits and best choice of the herd’

Animal sacrifices were to atone for a sinful life, while grain and food offerings were to supply the needs of the priesthood that serviced the temple.

History and culture teach us that the animals Able would have shepherded – were sheep.

And sheep are a for-shadow of the Lord Jesus Christ – as John the cousin of Jesus proclaimed’ ‘Behold – the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!’

So – on one hand, God is introducing the need of atonement, of forgiveness and of the sacrifice needed for sin.

Therefore the animal sacrifice was more acceptable than the food offering.

But it also goes a lot deeper than that.

Maybe God *already* knew what was in the *hearts* of Cain and Abel – *before* the events of jealousy and murder took place.

Maybe God knew beforehand, and therefore simply provided an *opportunity* for the real state of Cain's heart to be seen by all?

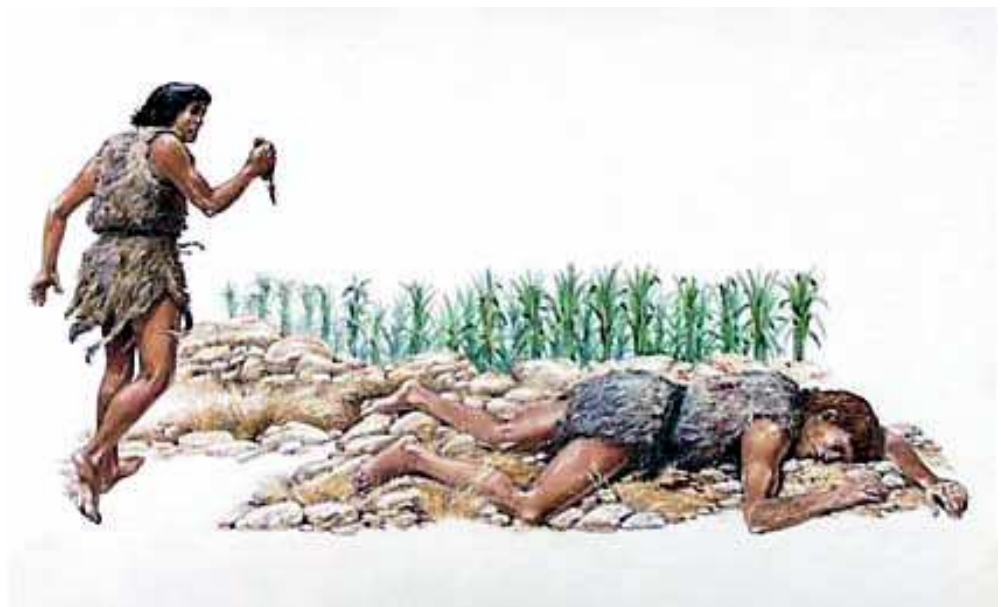
And beside all this speculation – what on earth does this story and these events have to do with *you* and with *me*???

You see – it's all about *jealousy* and *contentedness*.

And if we are not careful – this is an area that can affect us all.

Slide # 4

That's why chapter 4 verses 6 & 7 are so important:



Why are you angry?

Why is your face so dark with rage?

It can be bright with joy if you will do what you should.

But if you refuse to obey, watch out – for sin is waiting, crouching ready to attack you – longing to destroy you.

But – you can conquer it!

Let's talk about *contentedness* for a minute.

You know the story, you're happy at work, happy with your pay – but then you find out that the new guy is on the same hourly rate as you are!

Or you see a job advertised the same as yours, and it has a higher salary.

Slide # 5

What about when your friend buys the latest computer, car or boat?

Suddenly your one seems old and outdated!



You see, I am having to work through this very issue at the moment.

My small engineering business can pay around \$100 per hour.

That's a lot different to the hourly rate of a pastor!

Suddenly I begin thinking about how much better off I could be.

Think of all the things I could buy, all the toys, trips and luxuries!

I mean, I could buy a boat, another motorbike, a new lounge suit!

Suddenly my contentedness is replaced *with desire and ambition*.

I am no longer happy and contented.

I want *more* than I currently have.

Suddenly what I have, is not enough.

I *want* what I don't *have*.

No different that the motivation behind buying Lotto tickets really :-)

Of course we all bargain with God by assuring Him we would tithe 10% of our winnings :-) (If only He would help us choose the right numbers)

I know this all sounds rather bizarre and extreme.

But I wonder if these are the same *forces* that are operating in chapter four of the book of Genesis?

And maybe the story is recorded because God wants to show us the *deadly* effects of jealousy and envy (lack of contentedness) can have upon our hearts and lives.

Can I make a very powerful statement that has the ability to set you free and bring contentedness into your heart and life?

Stop comparing yourself with those who have more than you.

It's as simple and as hard as that:

Stop comparing yourself with those who have more than you.

I want to give you some tools to help you do it.

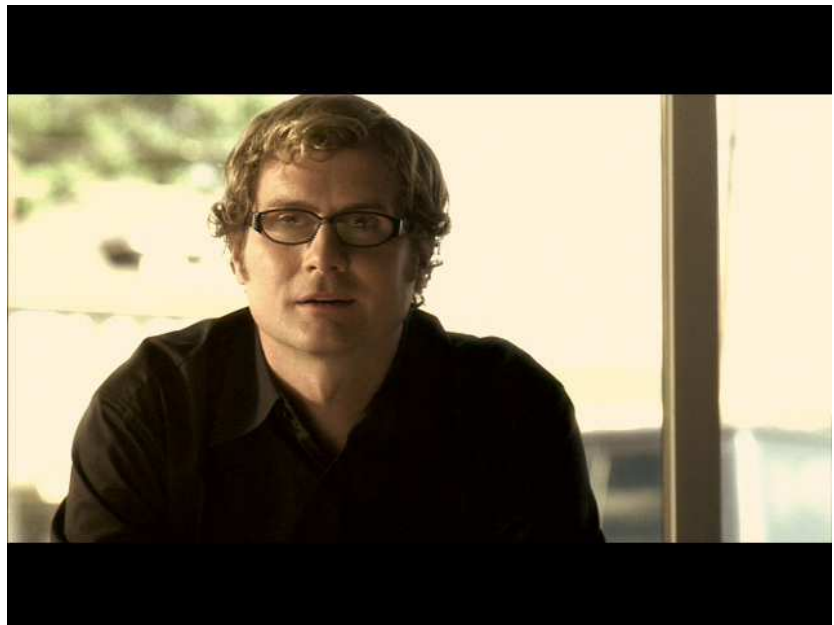
This morning I want to give you a *gift*, the gift of *contentedness*.

I think the best way I can do this, is to let somebody *else* teach you.

I want to show you a video from the Nooma series, called – Rich.

Slide # 6 – VIDEO – NOOMA 13
RICH

Now, please understand that Rob Bell, the author and speaker, is American – and this video is published primarily for the American market.



So in the introduction, when Rob talks about America – you can easily replace this with New Zealand, or any other country you want.

I keep seeing this bumper sticker that's popular where I live.

It says, 'God bless America!'

Every time I see one, I think 'God has!'

God *has* blessed America.

America has around 6% of the world's population, while we consume over 40% of its resources.

The point isn't 'How can God bless America more' the point is – how can America bless others.

In the Bible, when God bless somebody, when God gives to them, it's so that they will bless and give to others.

There's this verse in the Bible, in the letter from 1st Timothy that says, 'Command those who are rich in this present world – not to be arrogant or to put their hope in wealth.'

Now I always assumed this verse was for somebody else – specifically somebody rich!

But I have a car.

80% of the people in the world don't have a car.

92% of the people around the world see you and I driving in our cars, and I don't care what kind of a car you have!

92% of the people in this world would see us driving our car, and they think; 'Rich!'

Do you have access to clean drinking water?

Somewhere around one billion people in this world don't even have clean water.

You and I – we go to the sink – take out a glass – we get something to drink.

But for hundreds of millions of people in the world would watch us doing that – and they'd probably say to themselves, 'Man – that must be nice!'

You eaten today?

Because somewhere like around 800 million people won't eat today.

300 million of them are kids.

Every couple of seconds, somebody dies from hunger.

How much money do you have you?

In your wallet or in your purse.

How much money do you have on you right now?

Around a billion people in the world live on less than \$1 a day!
Experts say that if we were to provide water, basic health care and nutrition for everyone in the world – they estimate it would cost somewhere around \$20 billion dollars.

Which is how much Americans spend in one year on ice-cream.

We are so rich.

Or maybe you have this sense, because you look around and you have this sense that you don't have that much - because you see people who have even more.

But it's a dangerous things when we start to think that our world is *the* world.

We're like – bombarded with all these images of the *newest* models and the *latest* styles – and after a while our stuff starts to seem kinda average or outdated, or not good enough.

But for the rest of the world, our life *is* the commercial.

Our stuff *is* the catalogue.

We're the picture in the advertisement.

What isn't good enough for us, for the rest of the world would be *more* than enough.

So the verse in 1st Timothy says to ‘Command those who are rich – *not* to put their hope in wealth.’

And then it goes on – it continues, ‘But to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.’

That phrase that ‘God richly provides all we need for everything.’

All that we have is a gift.

Food – it’s a gift.

Clothes.

Gift.

Roof. Gift.

That breath that you just took.

It’s a gift.

There some that still don’t understand – that say, ‘I work for what I have!’

I deserve it!

It’s mine!

But like it says in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 8, ‘You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands has produced this wealth for me’, but remember the Lord your God because it is God who gives you the ability to produce wealth!’

Cause there’s nothing wrong with wealth or possessions in themselves.

God never condemns people simply for having things, because they are gifts from God.

It's just that God made us for so much more than just enjoying our stuff.

God gives *for a reason*.

So the verse, the command begins, for those who are rich to *not* put your hope in wealth, but in God.

Then it continues, it says, 'Command them to do good – to be rich in good deeds. To be generous and willing to share.'

And when the writer uses the phrase 'good deeds' he's referring to this ancient Hebrew concept called the Mitzvoth.

The word mitzvoth means to command, and the ancient rabbis taught that when we do the commands of God, when we do good deeds, we're helping to repair and restore the world.

So the first Christians who picked up on this in letter called Ephesians, one of them wrote, 'If we are saved by the grace of God, through faith in Christ, let us go on to do Mitzvoth – good deeds.'

We're saved – to do good works.

And so we're commanded to do mitzvoth, and to be generous and willing to share.

And then the verse wraps up, it says, 'and in this way' and 'this way' means the rich – that's us – becoming generous and willing to share.

‘In this way they lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age. And in doing this, they take hold of the life that is truly life.’

Now, when some hear the phrase, ‘laying up treasures’, they start to think about money and wealth and mansions.

But Jesus never even used the word Mansion, no where in His teaching is it about, or is the point about getting more stuff.

It’s not the gold here on earth, and it’s not the gold someday in heaven.

For Jesus – it’s about being content.

It’s about taking hold of the life that’s truly life.

It’s about realising that the kinds of people we’re becoming *matters*.

It has eternal implications.

It’s about our future.

It’s about our forever.

Now, if you’re like me at this point, you’re looking for the pitch.

Okay – just tell me where I’m supposed to give money and then I’ll give the money and I’ll be off the hook.

But this is about something much, much bigger than just giving to the latest cause.

This isn’t some transaction where we write a cheque or put some cash in an envelope and we’re off the hook.

This is about how we view the world.

And how we view our stuff.

This is about you and I truly believe about what we have.

Do I really believe that everything I have is a gift, that I have this divine responsibly to give, to share it around – to spread it around.

Do I really believe that the way we have been commanded to live – is the best possible way to live?

Let's be honest.

It's easy to go to a church service, it's easy to read the Bible, it's easy to discuss who believes what, and who's right and wrong.

It's easy.

But when Jesus talks about His followers, the talks about people who are generous.

People who clothe the naked, take food to the hungry, take water to the thirsty, who visit the prisoner, who invite the stranger in, people who give their time, people who give their energy, people who give their *money*.

Jesus said the way is narrow, it is difficult for the rich to enter the way of God.

Putting others first, it isn't so easy.

Jesus said He came to serve.

Serving takes sacrifice, It costs.

It's hard to ask difficult questions about how we spend our money, and what we spend our money on.

You and I are told, every day in a thousand ways, that we need bigger better and more, and that what we have isn't good enough.

You know, we're told buy this, consume this, get this and then we'll be happy.

Do you sometimes feel like you're on a treadmill.

You're working harder and harder, and more and more – and spending more and more – more and more stress – yet less and less content.

The best question isn't 'What can I get?'

To take the way of Jesus seriously is to realise that the best question is; 'What can I give?'

Because all of us can give something, here and now, today and then tomorrow and the next day.

What can you do to be more generous?

What is the next step for you?

You have been blessed.

What can you give?

Who are you going to bless?

So may you come to see you're rich!

And your possessions, they're luxuries that most people in the world don't have.

May you do what Jesus says.

May you step into your divine responsibility to give, and may you take hold of the life that is truly life.!



Appendix:

Here's just a few ideas about how to find fulfilment and contentedness in your heart and life.

1. Surrender and commit your whole life and being into the loving hands of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Read your Bible, pray and attend a vibrant – healthy church regularly.
3. Start giving of your time, money or/and resources freely.
4. Experience a different / 3rd world / developing nation and culture – go on a short term mission – make it a goal to help your children or grand-children to do the same!
5. Discover what your spiritual gifts are – and begin to outwork them
6. Immerse yourself in Scriptures that have the breath and life of God upon them – that can help you trust Him more, and can give you that ‘peace that is not determined by your circumstances’.

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