

Hello again. My name is Afshin Ziafat, your token Iranian Texan fill-in preacher. You're stuck with me one more week. I love having the whole Iranian and Texan side to my life. It always spices things up when you go places. I travel around the world, and when I'm in Europe or the Middle East I love throwing around the fact that I'm from Texas. It's so funny the kind of looks you get. I'll go, "I'm from Texas," and they'll look at you and go, "Ugh...Bush!" And I'm like, "We're not all related to Barbara." And then when I'm in this country and I travel around, a lot of the time I'll say I'm from Iran and they'll say, "Hey, are you guys going nuclear?" When I say I'm from Iran, they hear "I grew up with President Ahmadinejad of Iran. In fact, I had dinner with him last night, and he told me all about the nuclear plant." I usually react with, "I'm about to go nuclear on you because you're asking me these questions."

So I get that whole thing, and you never know what you're going to get. So last week I shared a story about me getting engaged. If you missed that story it was amazing, so you've just got to podcast it or something. I want to start today with sharing another story about being in Alaska and the whole culture thing with the whole Iranian/American thing, which is always fun. I went to Alaska and spoke at a conference five years ago. And after the conference I went to lunch with a pastor who was hosting the conference, and I had two extra days. So I asked him, "What should I do? What do you recommend?" He says to me, "The best thing in that short amount of time is to get in an airplane and just see the scenery and see the landscape. It's just breathtaking." Well that would be great if I knew a pilot. And he was like, "Well, I've got four in my church." So he makes a few phone calls, and next thing you know I'm at the airstrip waiting for this pilot to show up. His name is Joe. He shows up and we're getting in the airplane. He's in the pilot's chair and I'm in the copilot's chair, and then my friend and his wife are in the back. And we take off and it's like right out of a movie. It's just breathtaking. You can see Mt. McKinley, you can see glaciers. We're going through some of the passes in the mountains. It was unbelievable. And then all of a sudden we get to a clearing and Joe the pilot goes, "Hey Afshin, do you want to fly the plane?" I asked him, "Are you serious?" He assured me that I wouldn't be completely flying by myself and that he'd be with me. He had his feet on the rudder pedals and I had the stick in front of me. So he goes, "Just grab the stick, and I'll guide you through this thing." So I grab it and he goes, "Now push forward gently." I push forward gently and sure enough it starts to descend. My heart's racing and I'm like, "I did that! I did that right there." He tells me to pull back and I pull back and the plane starts to go up. And then he has me turn the plane a couple of times. Now I'm not doing loops or anything. I didn't turn into "Top Gun" or anything, but for about five minutes I'm flying this thing. And then it starts to get kind of rocky and he goes, "Hey, I'm going to need the plane back. It's getting kind of rocky." So I gave it back to him. And then it was just too much of a set up, I couldn't resist. Sure enough I said it and he starts laughing so hard I think he about crashed the plane. I couldn't help it but to go, "You know what Joe? That may be the first time in all recored history that an American turned to an Iranian and said, 'Hey, do you want to fly the plane now?'" I mean that will never happen again. That was historical. So I just thought that story would bless you.

So you may be saying, "Where's the connection?" Let me think. It's just a funny story, I just wanted you to hear it. Actually I do want to talk to you about the whole idea of passing on to one who's fully qualified. You want to be careful to whom you pass on. And so last week, we talked about Paul writing a letter to Timothy. Five months when I was here last, I did a two week series on Abraham, and so I just decided it would be a good idea to do a two week series on Timothy. So what we talked about last week was Paul was in Rome, in prison, and after his first Roman imprisonment he goes back to Ephesus where he had started a church and he left his disciple Timothy there to lead the church. Then he goes off to Macedonia and writes this letter of 1 Timothy back to Ephesus to instruct his young disciple how to be a

qualified leader, how to go out and lead by example, and how to lead the church. He talks about order and several other things. It's just a fascinating book. And last week we talked about godliness with contentment. And today I want you to turn with me to 1 Timothy 6.

I'd like to start off with a word of prayer first. So bow your head really quickly and close your eyes. I want you to just pray and say, "God, speak to my heart. We don't stop worship because singing is done. God, speak to my heart as I get into Your word. Instruct me." "Father, we just love You, and we thank You for this church. We thank You for Your word. We thank You that Your word does not return void, that it accomplished the purpose for which it was sent. And Lord, we open our heart and say, 'God, may Your purpose, may Your will be done in us.' By Your will open our eyes, God. Rebuke us, mold us, stir our hearts God. And Lord, I just pray that we would see the bigger picture of what You're doing. We love You. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen."

Last week we talked about godliness with contentment. We said that God wants from us a godly contentment. So in 1 Timothy 6:11 it says this, "But you, O man of God, flee these things..." And we said last week that we're first to flee some things. And the things that we are to flee are basically the riches of the world. And he said that some people are running after godliness as a means of gain, as a means of what they're going to get out of it. And so some of these false teachers were specifically running after godliness as a means of financial gain. And so we talked about not running after those things and being content. We said to be content where you are. We looked at the servants with the masters. Be content with the stage of life you're in. Don't try to get to the next stage to fulfill you. You need to be content where you are. If you're not content where you are now, you probably won't be content in the next stage of life. We talked about being content with what you have. And if you understand what you have in Christ, a restored relationship with God and you understand the richness of that, you should be willing to lose anything else for that. We said that Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a man who finds a treasure hidden in a field and he buries it, and he sells all his possessions to purchase that field. He is all in because he has found his fulfillment in Christ. And then we said you're content by what you know. We said the truth is that life isn't about you and you becoming great. When you come to Christ, you no longer live for yourself but for Him who rose and died again, 2 Corinthians 5. And so when your life is used to make much of His name and make His name great, there's just a peace and contentment that comes, because you are no longer fighting for you and keeping up with the Joneses and getting to the next level. Because it's not about you, and there's a contentment there. And so we talked about godly contentment, but here's where I want to go this week. I want to talk to you about a godly discontentment this week. Because when we talk about godly contentment, I don't believe that Paul and the word of God is telling us to be complacent. Godly contentment doesn't mean complacency. It doesn't strive after nothing and just be lazy. In fact, he's going to say, "Flee some things, but run after some things. Don't be satisfied where you are. Don't be content." Let's look at verse 11. "Flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." There is this incredible pressing forward language. The word pursue is an athletic term meaning to strain or strive forward. So he's saying, "Flee these things, but don't be satisfied. Run after these things." Godly discontentment, which is a good thing, not being satisfied where you are spiritually comes from God. And even before you accept Jesus Christ, the longing for the things of God comes from God. God has placed that innately in us. If you remember in Acts when Paul goes to Athens, he sees these people who are very religious and given over to idols, and he sees an inscription that says, "To the unknown god." He says to them, "He whom you worship without knowing, I'm going to proclaim to you. God who created everything, He created men and nations and gave them their boundaries so that they might grope after Him and find Him." God has innately put in us this longing for something more than what this world has to offer. And so we should have this godly discontentment. It's innately in us. However, when you come to Christ you ought to have a godly discontentment when you understand what the goal of life is." He says "pursue." The very word pursue implies an object to be pursued. It implies a goal. You're not just aimlessly running, you're running after something. There is a mark, there is an aim, there is a direction. And so when

we have a goal in life, that's when we are passionate and that's when we are discontent and that's when we pursue. But when there's no goal, passion fades away and complacency sits in, doesn't it?

I think as Christians we somehow muddy this and forget what the true goal of the Christian life is. And I'm going to say it to you by talking about a man and wife. Since I'm getting married pretty soon, a lot of my thinking is man and wife. A man will pursue a woman. He will pursue her sometimes for months and sometimes for years. He will send her flowers, he will date her, he will romance her, he'll do the cheesiest things ever. He is in full-on pursuit, and sadly enough he wins her heart and they say "I do" and they stop pursuing. We see that in so many marriages, where men just stop pursuing. They stop romancing, they stop dating, they stop sending the flowers. Why? Because they've attained the goal. So they make the goal of marriage to be married, when that's not the goal of marriage. The goal of marriage is you becoming one in Christ. So let me put it this way. I'm going to get married on November 15th, 2008. Meredith and I will be married. And about 11:30AM, when the minister pronounces us man and wife, at that moment positionally in the eyes of God, we will be one. But will we have experienced the fullness of that oneness at that moment? No, that's just the beginning. That's not the finish line, not the goal. That's just the starting line. Now Meredith and I start fleeing some things and pursuing some things to pursue oneness. My goal for marrying Meredith is not just to be married. My goal for marrying Meredith is not November 15th. But it's, Lord willing, 50 years from now sitting with her on a porch drinking coffee and being one. That's my goal. So when you put your eyes on that, you won't get complacent. You'll have this discontentment. You won't settle for where your marriage is. In the same way, when you accept Christ, when you receive the work of Christ on the cross, at that moment you are justified. In the eyes of God positionally you're saved the moment you turn and surrender your life to Christ. At that moment you're saved, but have you experienced the fullness of that oneness with Christ? No, the rest of life is that journey. So the goal of life is to as Paul says, "Lay hold of eternal life." The goal of life is how 1 John 3 puts it. He says, "We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him." He goes on to say, "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself." Now you can't purify yourself, you need the Holy Spirit's work. But what the language means is that you put your eyes on that, on you becoming more like Christ. That's your goal, and you won't settle for less. So when you understand that the goal of life is to become like Christ, there ought to be a godly discontentment, not being satisfied where you are spiritually and longing for a deeper walk with God. It's like David who says, "One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. I keep pressing forward to that."

It was so funny, here I am working on this message and Meredith is with me, and I go, "Meredith, I got this incredible picture" as if no one else has thought of this. So I'm like, "Listen, when you have a goal, then you won't be complacent. Isn't that cool? When you have a goal, you'll press forward." And I'm not kidding you, Meredith goes, "Isn't that Paul in Philippians 3?" And I went, "Oh." So turn with me to Philippians 3. Starting in verse 12, "Not that I have already attained,..." Look at that. If you think you're there, if you make the goal of the Christian life just to be saved, just to be in heaven, if you think you've attained, you're going to quit pressing forward. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected;..." The goal is to be perfected, to be like Christ. The goal isn't just making it to heaven. "...but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." Church, Christ called you out of the world to press towards being holy. You're not fully perfected when you accept Christ; you're just saved. It's the whole, "Already but not yet" mystery of salvation. You're saved, but it hasn't been fulfilled yet until you in heaven. And so you should press forward. Look at verse 13. "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." He's saying, "Keep going, stay in line. Where you've come is not enough. Don't be content." Godly discontentment.

The last thing you see about godly discontentment, it comes from God, it comes from knowing the goal and when you understand who Christ is and what He's called you to, there ought to be a godly discontentment with the dark world that surrounds you. You ought to be in that place where you're saying, "It's not enough for just me to know this salvation. There ought to be a discontentment there. You ought to be saying, "I want others to know Him." There is a godly discontentment when you want others to walk with God. You're saying, "I'm not satisfied with just my salvation. I want my family to know Him, I want my neighbors to know Him and I'm going to press forward to that." Michael Bleecker has this CD, which I think is hilarious. He knows a producer in Nashville who's had all these Christian music artists send him CD's, and he's compiled the "Best of," in other words, the funniest things he's ever gotten. It is just a treasure CD. We just listen to it and laugh. One of the things in there is this little girl, and she's so sweet. I'm sorry I'm about to tear her up. She sends in this CD that starts off, "To live is Christ. To die is Gain..." We're listening to this going, "Wow, she's quoting Paul. This little girl is saying to live is Christ, to die is gain." And I'm not making this up. The goes, "To die is gain...So kill me. Kill me. Kill me." And we're like, "What?!?" And she finishes with, "Now I'm dead." Now why do I bring that up? Because sometimes we think, "Oh, it's so spiritual to long for heaven." And so here's what we think, "God, just take me. I'm so spiritual. I want to be with You." Listen, when you long for heaven, it shouldn't be "Take me out." It should be, "I long for that, and I want more people to know it." So he says, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I live on, there's fruit for my labor." He's saying, "To live is Christ. To die is the best thing because I'm with Him and that's what I long for. But it doesn't mean take me out. It means I'm discontent with the world around me." It's like when Paul went into Athens in Acts 17 and the Bible says, "the Spirit provoked him because he saw that the city was given over to idols." He saw the darkness of the world, and he wasn't content. And he said, "I want to do something about it."

So how do you get that godly discontentment How do you run after this righteousness? Go back with me to 1 Timothy 4. I think Paul really hits this with his disciple here. The first way is to be nourished in the word of God. Godly discontentment comes from time spent in God's word. Godliness and righteousness and a deeper walk with God come with time spent in God's word. 1 Timothy 4, starting in verse 6, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed." You need to be nourished in the word and of the good doctrine, and I'm going to talk about that here in a second. There is an active/passive side to sanctification. Justification is when you accept Christ, and sanctification is the process in which you're becoming like Christ for the rest of your life. There is an active/passive sense in that. What I mean by that is this. It's a passive deal in that you can't do that. You can't be sanctified by your own strength. Only the Holy Spirit of God can do that in you. But there's an active side. You just don't sit on your hands and be complacent, you've got to pursue it. Jesus says it this way. "You are My disciples if you abide in My word." There's the active side, "Then you will know the truth..." and there's the passive side, "and the truth will make you free." The truth is Christ. Paul says it this way in Philippians. He says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." There's the active side. "...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." There's an active/passive side. In John 15 Jesus says this, "Abide in Me. I'm the vine, you're the branches. Abide in Me and you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing." It's pretty blatant there. If you want to live for God and become more godly, there's an active side to it. It's not just passive. You're to pursue and you're to be in God's word. And he says it over and over again in 1 Timothy. In this letter he's going to say, "Be diligent to present yourself a worker who does not need to be ashamed, who rightly divides the word of truth." I love the podcast culture that we're in. I love that you can just go online and listen to any preacher you want. Go ahead and keep doing that, but that had better not be your sole source of nourishment. We all have our favorite preachers that we listen to, but you've got to dig in with your knife and fork and get into the word and feed on God's word.

That's the word, now that is doctrine? He says you need to be nourished of the word and of the good doctrine. Doctrine is just a big word for a system of beliefs, a body of preaching that Timothy is teaching but also that he has believed in. All of us have a doctrine that we see the world through, a system of beliefs. Now either that doctrine is informed by the word of God or it's informed by culture and pop psychology and just your opinion. But you have a doctrine. He's saying here

to be nourished in the word. Why? Because the word will inform your doctrine. And that's 2 Timothy 3:16 where he says this, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine." He's saying to Timothy, "The word of God ought to instruct your doctrine." Now why is your system of beliefs so important? The word informs your doctrine, and your doctrine will inform the way you live. And that's what he says in verse 1 Timothy 4:16. "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." Again, it's not about losing or earning your salvation, it's about that process of sanctification. It happens when you continue in that doctrine. We know bad doctrine affects people. Let's look at the most blatant one. Hitler's bad doctrine about his hatred of the Jews and of their being inferior led to the Holocaust. It was a bad doctrine. We can do something less violent than that. But let's just say for instance if you have a faulty doctrine on grace and you look at grace as being cheap grace and you think you can just go do whatever you want because you're already forgiven. Well faulty doctrine led them to some very faulty living. So what you pour into yourself is so important.

Then look again in 1 Timothy 4 and see what he says after being nourished by the word. Look at verse 7, "But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness." He's saying, "Be nourished in the word of God if you want to grow in godliness, be nourished in the word of God if you're discontent and then put it into practice. Exercise. It's not enough to just have the workout manual, you've got to exercise or you're not going to grow." So he's saying you've got to start exercising yourself towards godliness. And I think the big disconnect for some of us is this. It's not that we don't sit under good teaching and it's not because we don't spend time in God's word, but we're not putting it into practice. Here's why Paul makes this so important to Timothy. Look back in verse 2 of 1 Timothy 4. The teachers of false doctrine are "speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron." They have had a pattern of not following the truth of God's word so much that they've seared or dulled their conscience, their ability to discern good from evil. And that's what Hebrews 5:14 says, "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." "By reason of use," that means you've put it into practice and you've sharpened your ability to discern good from evil. So godliness comes from time spent in God's word and putting it into practice. Now remember, why am I striving for Christ-likeness? I'm discontent where I am, I want to press in to God and be more like Him. Why? It's not for me and so people will pat me and applaud me in a holier than thou thing, it's because I'm discontent with the world around me and I want others to know Christ. That's your driving motive. And I want you to see it in verse 8, "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." I strive for more Christ-likeness because it's going to profit for the eternal. I heard this from my youth pastor, and I'll never forget it. There are three things that are eternal: God, His word and the souls of men and women. When you run after godliness, my prayer is that it wouldn't just be about me but that it would affect others and others would know Christ. I want you to see this idea in 1 Timothy 4:12. "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Now what does the word example mean there? That word means to be so impressed by something that you have become a mold by which you are shaping other lives. It's the idea of 1 Corinthians 11:1 where Paul says, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." He's saying, "I am so running after Christ and pursuing Him so that if anyone were to follow me they would essentially be following Christ. Because I am running after this." But that's the key. You had better be running after God, you had better be running after godliness so that when people follow you, you'll be an example, you'll make a difference.

Look what he says here in verse 15 of 1 Timothy. "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all." The word progress there is a military term referring to pioneer advance. Those are the people who would go out front and clear out obstacles to the army could then come in behind them. That means you go out ahead. He's saying this to them, "Timothy, you are not of age to demand respect just by your age. You're too young." A person in his 30's at that time didn't demand respect in that culture. So he says, "Earn your respect by your example. Don't wait for the adults to do it, you go out ahead." That reminds me of when my family and I left Iran in 1978,

the Ayatollah, who overthrew the Shah of Iran, was so paranoid that the Shah's army would revolt back against him that he killed all the generals, all the colonels and he disbanded the Iranian army. So Saddam Hussein sitting in Iraq said, "Hmm, I've got an open door," and he attacks. In 1980 or so Saddam attacked Iran and took over a lot of northwest Iran. And a lot of people don't know this but long before America and Iraq were engaged in a war, Iran and Iraq were in an 8 year bloody war, probably one of the bloodiest wars in my lifetime. So the Ayatollah made a call for a volunteer army. And he enlisted teenage boys and some even younger whose job was to run out into northwest Iran where the Iraqi mine fields were and set off those mines so that the Iranian army could then come in behind them in the name of Allah. And it worked. They pushed Saddam back out. And I remember that picture when I was reading this, that we are so discontent with the world around us that we would not wait for someone else to run after godliness but instead run out ahead and even throw our lives down because we want something bigger than just our lives, we want the glory of God to go out over us. That is the picture. You progress, you go forward.

And I don't have the time to go through all those lists, but let me just address a couple more. "Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct..." Here's the idea, that I am running after godliness because it's going to make a difference in eternity. Here's the idea in 1 Peter 2, "[Let] your conduct [be] honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation." The day of visitation is a very weird term for when God's spirit comes to touch them, to draw them, that in that moment they might remember your conduct, your godliness and they might glorify your God. There was a pastor in Iran who has been martyred now. His name is Hussein Soodmand. He was a pastor in Mashhad, which is a very religious Islamic town in Iran. Hussein grew up as a Muslim, and he lived next to a Christian village. There are some Christians in Iran, and they're seen as second class. They're spat upon and yelled at. So when he was a kid, he tells his testimony that he would go to this neighboring village and hurl insults at the Christians. All these Muslim boys would get these rocks, and whenever the Christian women would come out with their clay pots of water, they would throw these rocks in order to bust their pots of water. So one day he went out with a rock and he hurled it at one of these Christian ladies and it hit the pot and busted the pot of water. He was so startled that he actually hit it that he turned around to start running away. He saw the woman coming towards him. And as he turned to run away he tripped and fell and scraped up his entire leg. He heard the lady approaching and he embraced himself for a whopping. He said that the woman instead knelt down and pulled out a rag and started wiping off his blood and cleaning his wound. He was just blown away. "Here I am insulting and attacking and she's loving me." And years later that same pastor would be in this war that I just referred to and get injured. He was put in a hospital and of course a Christian nurse was taking care of him. So she starts sharing the truth of God and he remembered that Christian lady, how she bound his wounds. And he became a Christian. He became one of the leaders of the house church in Iran. And they found out about him and ordered him to leave Mashhad. And he said, "I won't leave my sheep alone." He had 50 in his church and he wouldn't leave them alone. And so they hung him in the square in Mashhad. He was forever changed because someone loved him. So I'm pursuing godliness not for me, but because I'm discontent from this dark world around me.

A godly discontentment where you are spiritually mixed with a godly discontentment about the situation of the world around you, when you combine those two things, it ought to produce a bold witness, someone who is unashamed and will stand up for the truth. So I want to close by going back to 1 Timothy 6, and I want you to see the closing charge in this passage. He tells him to flee certain things, to pursue certain things, and then in verse 12 he says to, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." He's saying, "Remember the confession you made when you were baptized." Now look in verse 13. "I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate,..." That's referring to John 18 where Jesus confesses the truth, "I am the king of the Jews. I am the Christ" in front of Pilate even though He knew Pilate was going to crucify Him. He stood up for truth because His eyes were on the eternal and He was discontent with the world around Him. Back to 1 Timothy 6 Paul says,

have that in mind and “keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing.” In verse 20 he’ll say, “Guard what was committed to your trust.” When you have that kind of godly discontentment, you will guard the truth of Christ in this dark world and you will make that bold of a confession and not care what anyone thinks about you anymore because your eyes are on eternity, and you’re not content where you are. Your life isn’t just about you being in heaven, your life is about the message of God going out. So Jesus says in Matthew 10, “What you hear in the ear, preach from the rooftop and do not fear the people who can kill your body, but instead fear him who can kill your body and your soul. You only fear God, and you make that confession.” You know, when these terrorists leave these terrorist camps, they make a video. They make a video and say, “This is what I want done with my body, this is what I want done at my funeral, this is what I want done with my family...” So when they leave that terrorist camp to come into the West to be a sleeper cell, they have already reckoned themselves dead. And a dead man walking is dangerous. He’ll throw his life down for something that he thinks is a greater cause. And we know that’s evil. He’s throwing his life down to kill. But I want to take that beginning concept and not make it evil but make it Christian. Look at what Paul says in Galatians 2:20. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live. I’m already dead. To live is Christ. If I keep living the message is going to go out. To die is gain.” That kind of person is a bold witness. He’s got nothing to lose. So he would be willing to lay himself down and make that confession. Timothy heard that charge from Paul and years later he stood up and defended the gospel against the pagan worshipers. And Timothy was dragged through the streets and stoned and martyred for his faith. Did you know that’s what the word witness means? The word martyr comes from the word witness. He was a witness for Christ.

And so in closing I want to read to you. I want to share a story about a new spiritual hero that I want to share with you. His name is Mehdi Dibaj. Mehdi grew up a Muslim, converted to Christianity, was imprisoned for ten years when they found out about him. Then at the end of his ten years, they issued a death sentence for him. There was another pastor, Haik Hovsepian, who found out about Mehdi’s death sentence and decided that he’s going to throw himself out there. He started making a stir and he brought it before the international community, before the UN. And because of pressure from the outside world, the Iranian government was forced to release Mehdi Dibaj. Three days later, there was a price to pay. They found pastor Haik and they abducted him and killed him for doing that. I saw a video of Mehdi Dibaj at pastor Haik’s funeral service in tears saying, “I know how Barabbas feels now, because I was set free, because someone died in my place.” Five months later they found Mehdi, abducted him and he was martyred for his faith. Mehdi Dibaj, one of the greatest leaders in the Iranian underground church. I want you to hear his confession a before an Islamic judge who called him to renounce Christ. Talk about being content in Christ vs. the riches of the world, and talk about being discontent where you are spiritually. Even in prison he was discontent. Here is his confession:

With all humility I express my gratitude to the Judge of all heaven and earth for this precious opportunity. . . I am a Christian. As a sinner I believe Jesus has died for my sins on the cross and by His resurrection and victory over death, has made me righteous in the presence of the Holy God. The true God speaks about this fact in His Holy Word, the Gospel (Injil). Jesus means Savior “because He will save His people from their sins.” . . In response to this kindness, He has asked me to deny myself and be His fully surrendered follower, and not to fear people even if they kill my body, but rather rely on the creator of life who has crowned me with the crown of mercy and compassion. He is the great protector of His beloved ones as well as their great reward. I have been charged with “apostasy!”. . . They say “You were a Muslim and you have become a Christian.” This is not so. . . People choose their religion but a Christian is chosen by Christ. He says, “You have not chosen me but I have chosen you.” Since when did He choose me? He chose me before the foundation of the world. People say, “You were a Muslim from your birth.” God says, “You were a Christian from the beginning.” He states that He chose us thousands of years ago, even before the creation of the universe. . . The eternal God who sees the end from the beginning and who has chosen me to belong to Him, knew from the beginning those whose heart would be drawn to Him and also those who would be willing to sell their faith and eternity for a pot of porridge. I would rather have the whole world against me, but know that the Almighty God is with me. I would rather be called an apostate, but know that I have the approval of the God of glory, because man

looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart. . .They tell me, "Return!" But to whom can I return from the arms of my God? Is it right to accept what people are saying instead of obeying the Word of God? It is now 45 years that I am walking with the God of miracles, and His kindness upon me is like a shadow. . .This test of faith is a clear example. The good and kind God reproveth and punishes all those whom He loves. He tests them in preparation for heaven. . .The God of Job has tested my faith and commitment in order to increase my patience and faithfulness. During these nine years he has freed me from all my responsibilities so that under the protection of His blessed Name, I would spend my time in prayer and study of His Word, with a searching heart and with brokenness, and grow in the knowledge of my Lord. I praise the lord for this unique opportunity. God gave me space in my confinement, brought healing in my difficult hardships and His kindness revived me. . .They object to my evangelizing. But if one finds a blind person who is about to fall in a well and keeps silent then one has sinned. . .Jesus Christ says "I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved." . .He is our Savior and He is the (spiritual) Son of God. To know Him means to know eternal life. . .I have committed my life into His hands. Life for me is an opportunity to serve Him, and death is a better opportunity to be with Christ. Therefore I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honor of His Holy Name, but am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus, my Lord, and enter His kingdom sooner, the place where the elect of God enter everlasting life. . .May the shadow of God's kindness and His hand of blessing and healing be and remain upon you for ever. Amen.

*With Respect,
Your Christian prisoner,
Mehdi Dibaj*

He died for his faith, and I have seen with my own eyes the underground church, the leaders of it, and it is thriving in Iran. And people are hungry for the gospel in Iran like never before. Here is a guy who was discontent with where he was spiritually. He was still striving for more of God in prison. And he was discontent with the world around him. You've got a limited amount of time on this earth. What are you going to live it for? I challenge you in the name of Jesus, invest it in eternity. You lead out, don't wait for someone else. You go ahead and be that example. I challenge you if you don't know Jesus Christ, you will never be fulfilled in life, because that longing in your heart can only be met by a relationship with God. It can only be fulfilled by that. He pursued you, He loves you and He pursued you to the point of His death. That's how much He loves you. He said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." And if you don't know Christ, I challenge you in the name of Jesus, surrender your life to Him. Surrender your life to Him and be part of something bigger than you.

Let's pray. "Father we come to You now. We just thank You, Lord, for Your word. God, we just pray that You would stir in our hearts a godly discontentment. Lord, we ask to be content with You alone, over and against the world. We pray, God, to be discontent where we are spiritually, to know more of You. Lord, there's someone here who doesn't know you. I pray that you would stir in them now. Draw them to You, God. Touch them with Your spirit. May this be the day of visitation for them. Lord God, I just pray that we would be discontent with just us being in heaven and just run after the American Dream. God, I pray that we would put our lives down, to boldly confess and to be used for others to know what we have. Don't let us settle, God. Don't let us be satisfied. Let us pursue. We love You. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen."