

I enjoy going to the zoo, and when my children were young, I took them often to the St. Louis Zoo. Recently I visited the South Bend Zoo, and of all the animals I saw, I most enjoyed watching the monkeys. Some were playfully exploring their surroundings, while others sat and observed their little ones. I recently read a story about someone who made an interesting observation while also watching monkeys:

During a three-week stay in Africa, we spent one afternoon in a game park near Nairobi. There we heard how monkeys are captured for zoos in the United States.

A shining metallic object is placed in a long-necked jar tied to a tree. As monkeys swing through the trees, their eyes catch the reflection of the sun on the shining object. Reaching into the jar poses no problem to them, but when they try to bring their closed fists through the narrow openings, they can't make it. To gain freedom, all the monkeys need to do is to let go of the worthless object. Instead, the monkeys sit by the jar holding onto the object until their captors come to take them away.<sup>1</sup>

I chuckled when I read this story, thinking about those silly monkeys stuck in a tree holding a shiny

object with their hand in a jar. All they had to do was let go.

Well...that's not easy, is it, even for us? How many times do we hold onto something that drags us down? Have you ever walked into a house so full of stuff that you can't get around? Or have you ever held onto anger that keeps you from enjoying life? When has holding onto a grudge ruined a friendship?

Sometimes our holding onto something becomes an addiction. We become so used to holding onto it that we don't know what life looks like without it, as Sam Polk confessed in the *Wall Street Journal* eight years ago in an article titled, "For the Love of Money." He wrote:

In my last year on Wall Street my bonus was \$3.6 million — and I was angry because it wasn't big enough. I was 30 years old, had no children to raise, no debts to pay, no philanthropic goal in mind. I wanted more money for exactly the same reason an alcoholic needs another drink: I was addicted.<sup>2</sup>

Sam was never satisfied, no matter how many trades he made or how much money he collected. At one point he began to recognize his inability to be

satisfied while observing all the angry, wealthy people around him. His boss was so afraid of losing money that he insulted Sam for offering an idea that could benefit more people than just the company. He wrote, “I felt as if I’d been punched in the gut... From that moment on, I started to see Wall Street with new eyes.”

His clearer vision helped him recognize that life had more value than just money, and he began to let go, discovering how to be satisfied without the addiction to extravagant wealth.

The writer of Psalm 107 may not have observed moneys stuck in a tree or angry Wall Street traders, and yet, he seemed to recognize our common desire to be satisfied. Although we only read the first portion of the psalm this morning, if you read the entire psalm you may discover that it mentions several scenarios when we might feel insecure: times of trouble, those who are lost without food or water, those sitting in darkness in prison, those who were ill, and those facing stormy waters.

In each case, those in distress cried out to God, even the rebellious ones, and God brought them out of

their troubles. For those who were hungry and thirsty, the psalmist proclaimed that God, “satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.”

When the Hebrew Bible used the word **שָׂבַע** (saw·bah), it meant to fill to satisfaction, have enough, have plenty of, and is most often used when referring to food.

We look for satisfaction in so many areas of our lives. Sometimes we claim it, but other times we long for something we don’t have. We may feel dissatisfied, hoping for something else.

Last month as I listened to speakers in Washington DC at the Poor People’s Campaign, I realized that even when you and I may feel satisfied, we must continue to listen to the voices of those who are not satisfied.<sup>3</sup> Since we are all connected together in this wonderful nation, when some are not satisfied due to mistreatment and unfairness, none of us can really be satisfied.

- When systems of racism continue to benefit some of us and leave out others, we cannot be satisfied.

- When 140 million poor and low-income people can barely survive, we cannot be satisfied.
- When some are denied health care, we cannot be satisfied.
- When some continue to abuse our environment, we cannot be satisfied.
- When war and militarism drain resources from those in need, we cannot be satisfied.
- When some political narratives strive to use religion to condemn certain groups of people and tell them to leave our country, we cannot be satisfied.

In Psalm 107, God heard every voice that cried out. God listened to those who were not satisfied, and God responded—even listening to those who had rebelled against God. No one was left out of God’s care, so why do we continue to try and leave out certain people

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #572.

<sup>2</sup> Sam Polk, “For the Love of Money,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> [www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/join-us-as-we-build-the-third-reconstruction/](http://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/join-us-as-we-build-the-third-reconstruction/)

today? Can we strive to create peace for everyone? That may seem idealistic, as one person noted while having a conversation about peace and being satisfied.

Ramsey MacDonald, one-time prime minister of England, was discussing with another government official the possibility of lasting peace. The [government official was] an expert on foreign affairs, [and he] was unimpressed by the prime minister’s idealistic viewpoint. He remarked cynically, “The desire for peace does not necessarily ensure it.” This, MacDonald admitted, saying, “Quite true. But neither does the desire for food satisfy your hunger, but at least it gets you started toward a restaurant.”<sup>4</sup>

May we all strive for satisfaction, not only for ourselves, but for all those who desire peace in their lives and the world.

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<sup>4</sup> Hodgin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #481.