Living The Contented Life

By Kim Butts

"…for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:11-13).

I have been noticing lately that so many Christians do not smile, or do not appear outwardly joyful to reflect an inward delight in the Lord. As I look around at people who are singing praise to God in churches all across the nation, I see very few faces that reflect the joy of the Lord. Many sit unmoved through sermons and times of worship and the Lord's Supper, their minds distracted by selfish thoughts, without fully considering the love that redeemed them from sin. Many of their lives are compartmentalized so that their Sunday behavior is compromised at work, home, or school on Monday. Their physical, emotional and spiritual circumstances dictate their level of contentment in Christ, even when God, through the Apostle Paul, has given us specific instructions to be content in whatever condition we find ourselves.

How is it that a believer can be filled with joy and display an outward countenance that is reflective of the contentment he or she feels on the inside one moment, and then have an entirely different expression and mood when things are not going as expected or hoped? There are many I know who do indeed wear the condition of their feelings and circumstances on their faces and display it in their moods and words. Very young children are especially good at this until they are taught through the example of their parents how to be content in the Lord. However, if their example is found in parents who are continually dissatisfied, this important shift never takes place and another generation is raised knowing Jesus but not experiencing the contentment that lies in fully believing His Word.

Holy Discontent

At this point I need to differentiate between the discontented believer and those Christians who experience a kind of "holy discontent." Because there is always more of God to be discovered and experienced, those who desire to journey to the very depths of the heart of God are often dissatisfied with their current state, even when they live contented lives. Why? They are unwilling to settle for a good life, because they want the *best* life God has to offer. Therefore, these believers desire deeper intimacy in the very Presence of God and are willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to daily be transformed into the image of Jesus in every aspect of life. Shouldn't this description be true of every Christian? Absolutely! Yet, until we are content with the life God has entrusted to us, we are generally not able to hear the call to engage in deeper commitment to the life of Jesus.

A Pitfall of Contentment

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There is also a danger inherent in contentment. We can become satisfied too easily, and settle for less than what God has for us. Some believers find the challenge to live lives that are holy and pleasing to the Father less compelling than simply being happy to know that they are going to heaven. I believe this is the point where God becomes dissatisfied and even displeased with His people. He desires us to fulfill our full potential in Jesus Christ. God wants His people to be fully engaged in the activity of His kingdom on earth.

If our hearts have truly been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, we should have a desire within us to fulfill the two great commandments: to love God and to love others. This is not a love that rests inertly upon the knowledge of heaven, but rather, it is a love that engages in heartfelt worship and service to those for whom Jesus came. It is not "works" but obedience born out of the love of Christ, who made it possible through His sacrifice on the cross for us to be in this world but not of it.

The Truly Content Have a Testimony

It is not difficult to recognize believers who are truly content because they trust fully in God, and are able to demonstrate that contentment no matter what disruptions, disappointments or dissatisfactions are occurring in or around them. They live out the words of Psalm 23.

For example, I have a friend who has been battling leukemia for years, experiencing the most excruciating procedures and enduring endless treatments, conventional and experimental. She has been journaling her experiences for family and friends, and as a testimony to the powerful God she loves and serves, she continually says day after day, "Yet, will I trust Him."

I know another woman who has been involved in abusive relationships, drugs, and has been in prison. However, one night she fell on her face sobbing in desperation, and Jesus met her in her jail cell. She was not even seeking Him, and yet He found her heart prepared to receive Him as Lord and Savior. Despite her circumstances (she has multiple health issues and lives in a dangerous neighborhood) she is now in school and reads to the elderly in nursing homes. Most of all, she has learned how to be content and joyful in the midst of less than perfect situations because she knows without a doubt that God is trustworthy. These women have placed their hope in the Lord, and have found the peace that contentment brings to those who will say to Him, *"My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You"* (Psa. 63:5).

Are Your Children Content?

Your family is being taught to be discontented by the culture in which we live. God is able to help you stand firm against the enemy’s attempts to draw you into lives that are never appreciative and hearts that are not able to be content in the midst of whatever the circumstance in which you find yourselves. Your children are being attacked from every angle at school, through the internet, television (especially commercials) and movies. They are being systematically taught that they should always get what they want, that they are entitled to always be happy, and that they are more important than anyone else.

Their language and behavior is in danger of being compromised, and their hearts are little by

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little being set upon this brand or that style of clothing, cell phone or having just the right girlfriend or boyfriend. The temptations to sin threaten to seduce them away from the Word of God and a Jesus-focused life.

The main question is: Are you the example they need to stand strong in the face of temptation? Are you helping them establish a firm foundation upon Christ? Can you and will you help them to withstand the struggle to maintain integrity in the midst of the barrage of messages that tell our children they can only be happy *if*…? Our children need godly parents who will train them through their example to love the Lord and to walk in His ways only. They need to be taught how to love their neighbor as themselves. This will lead them to ministry that connects them to something far greater and more compelling than the seductive pull of materialism. When this foundation is strong, contentment will not be compromised by the lies of the deceiver.

How to Seek Contentment as a Family

Standing upon the foundation of the Word, and praying together as a family, will draw your hearts close to the embrace of the Father. His pleasure with you will fill you with love for one another, and your desires will only be for Him. Here are some Scriptures to help you on your way. Pray through them one by one, asking God to make His Word living and active in your lives:

Teach your children to be in awe of God, for this promise is powerful: *"The fear of the Lord leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble"* (Prov. 19:23).

Teach your children that they will gain much by simply being content to be holy lovers of God, who *"rewards those who earnestly seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6). *"But godliness with contentment is great gain"* (1 Tim. 6:6).

Teach your children to be completely satisfied and help them to learn how to be thankful for everything they have because they are blessings from the Lord. When they complain about not liking certain food, remind them that God has provided them with food to keep them healthy for doing His work in the kingdom. Designer labels mean nothing to the Lord, for He is only impressed with the character of your hearts: "*For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that"* (1 Tim. 6:7-8).

Loving money is probably the main trap believers fall into. Train your children how to be good givers so that they will not hoard money in order to spend it on worthless things. Teach them the wonderful promise that God will never leave them if they find themselves in a situation where they lack money. *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'"* (Heb. 13:5).

Teach your children to be satisfied with their money, whether it is allowance, or from a job. If they are always trying to get more and more, they will never be content: *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income…"* (Eccl. 5:10).

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Train your children to know that many Christians who begin to love money more than God will eventually walk away from Him. God will not honor those who love money and put it ahead of Him: *"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"* (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

Teach children to praise God, because it is more satisfying than anything the world has to offer: *"I will praise You as long as I live, and in Your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You"* (Psa. 63:4-5).

If you teach your children to behold the face of God every morning by praising Him and communing with Him through prayer, they will begin each day contented: *"And I – in righteousness I will see Your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing Your likeness"* (Psa. 17:15).

Train children to be content no matter what is going on in their lives – in good times or bad, healthy or sick, in trouble or safety, hungry or well fed, etc. God's strength is all they need: *"…for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength"* (Phil. 4:11-13).

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