

# Passing on the Pearl of Contentment

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## Introduction:

It seems like every time the Lord asks me to speak, it strikes a need or struggle that I'm facing in my own life.

## Passing on the Pearl of Contentment

This subject especially has been extremely interesting and, I think, life-changing for me. Not only in the area of contentment, but it seems like it extends into other areas that I wouldn't have connected with contentment.

I don't know why they chose the word "pearl" for the gem of contentment, but it has become significant to me in my studies, and we'll talk more about that at the end of the session.

What is contentment?

Is it trying to bear up under things and not complain?

Is it resigning ourselves and just trying to stand it?

Is it a big smile when we are with others?

Is it complacency?

Is it happiness?

Recently in National Geographic, there was an article on World Happiness. Did you know there was such a thing? I didn't. There was a global survey taken that ranked the happiness level of 156 countries, using such criteria as wealth, health, freedom to make life choices, having someone to count on in times of trouble, freedom from corruption, and the generosity of fellow citizens.

Denmark is said to be the happiest country in the world and the U.S. came in as number 17, just behind Mexico.

Costa Rica came in as number 12...So it must be a pretty happy place. Costa Rica is sometimes called "The land of eternal spring", or the "Switzerland of the Americas". It really is a lovely place.

We also have a national slogan that can be heard wherever you go in Costa Rica—"Pura Vida." Literally translated it means "Pure Life", or the essence of life. It is used in many ways. It can mean how are you? how's it going? It can be the answer to a lot of questions, like, how's your health? How's your mother? How was your day? Or it can be the way we greet each other, Pura vida? Pura vida.

But lest I start a stampede to Costa Rica, there's another side to the story. Recently in our leading newspaper there was an article called "Behind the Pura Vida". The article explains that behind all the pura vida, there is a Costa Rican full of stress and depression. It says that most Costa Ricans live behind a facade of success, happiness and well-being, but behind the scenes, there is an increase in mental illness, panic attacks, depression and suicide.

So, global happiness? Number 12? Riches, health, freedom, pura vida? It really doesn't mean much, and it boils down to the fact that happiness, or contentment doesn't come from things, but is actually a condition of the heart.

What is contentment? The dictionary says, "Pleased and satisfied; not needing more".  
So what does contentment mean for us as Christians? The world thinks contentment comes from

things—from having what we want. Is it so for us?

What are the things that make us content? Maybe we can identify them better by looking at what makes us discontented. There are so many things that can make us unhappy.

If only I would be taller...

If only I wouldn't be so overweight...

If only my face were prettier...

If I would just have a nicer kitchen...

If we'd have more money I could...

If only, if only,...I could be content.

But you know this can carry over into other, deeper things?

If my husband would just...

If my children...

If my pastor would be more...

If my church would reach out more...

If, if, if.

You know what it feels like, things just aren't quite the way we want them to be, and we chafe. We're just not happy because the church, my brother or sister, my husband, my house...and it goes on and on.

So what brings discontent is when things aren't the way I want them to be or think they should be.

What "things" does the Bible say that we need, in order to be content?

- Food and clothes...
- Whatever things that we have...
- Whatever situation we are in...

Paul says that he has learned to be content. So be not dismayed, being content is a process—probably of a life time.

So, here we are, we all have food and raiment, so why are we not content?

What are we going to do with our discontent? How can we change? How can we learn to be content?

Recently I saw a book title that went something like this: Stop focusing on the person you ought to be, and concentrate on who you are". That really struck me. So often I'm thinking about the way things should be, the way I should be, the way my church should be, that I am not able to live the way I should.

But I need to stop focusing on what I should be and look at what I am and **DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

Sometimes we feel so guilty about what we are not...but you know, guilt can be one of our best friends. Call it guilt, or conscience or the Holy Spirit, whatever it is, it can be our way out, our solution—if we do something about it. Instead of chafing and becoming discouraged, we can face it and seek God's face to help us change. So that brings me to the first step in finding contentment. If we are not content, let's find out how we can change and learn contentment.

### 1. Acceptance

There cannot be contentment without acceptance. One of the first things to do, if we really want to be content, is to face the issue that is making us discontent and accept that it is there and causing a problem. Whatever the situation may be, I need to accept it.

Example: I wish we had a different car. The van we have is so uncomfortable. The air conditioning doesn't work, it rides so roughly, my seat isn't adjustable, so my neck gets stiff from sitting too straight, it rattles, it's loud, so we can't visit comfortably...etc., etc.

I have two options: I can chafe and complain, or I can accept that this is what God has given us and enjoy the ride. No matter how much I chafe or complain, I can't change the van—it's what we have now. So I accept and relax.

The same goes for whatever else we may be facing, church, house or face. We can chafe or we can accept it as from God and relax.

### 2. Surrender

I am discovering that there cannot be change or transformation in my life—without surrender. In order for me to be able to change who I am, I need to give up what I want. Does that make sense? God cannot change my heart, until I am willing to give up what I am. In order to find contentment, I need to surrender what I think would make me happy.

Example: When we went to buy our van, I had pictured in my mind the kind of van I wanted. Something that didn't rattle, something that would glide over the bumps, (if you've been to Costa Rica, you know what I mean) I wanted a van that was quiet enough so we could visit with the ones in the back seat, so I could hear what's going on, something easy to get into...

Well, my husband wanted a van that would last. He wasn't so worried about gliding over the bumps as something that would handle the bumps without falling apart. So...we bought a van. It didn't have even one of the things I was wanting...Now I have a choice. I can chafe, or I can surrender. To my husband, to God, to my circumstances—and be content.

So we cannot find contentment, until we are willing to surrender what we want, what we think should be, what we think we can't do without, to the will of God.

### 3. Trust

In order to find contentment we also need to be willing to trust. God knows what we need. He knows what we want, too, but He knows what we really need to make us happy. He understands what we feel, but we need to trust Him to be able to be content.

Example: Back to the van, I needed to trust my husband that he knew what was best. That in our situation, the quality of the van was more important than comfort. He could have listened to me and looked for a comfortable vehicle, but it would have been against his better judgment. He knew we'd be better off with something durable. So I need to trust.

The same in whatever other situation you might be facing...contentment can be found only in trusting. Be it your church situation, your family, your house or your body, in trusting that God knows best, we find contentment.

In all of this, I am not talking about complacency. I'm not saying that contentment is sitting down and twiddling my thumbs, saying, "I can't do anything about it, so I'll just let the world go by." Contentment is taking our troubles to God and stepping aside with all our wants and wishes, so that God can do His will.

Passing on contentment to our children

The title that was given me was passing on contentment. How do we do that?

We all know that the best way to do this is by example. Does that make you wince like it does me? Hopefully not, but it might be one of our biggest struggles. Our example. The verse in 1 Timothy 6.6 has really stood out to me in this study.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain".

In the context here, Paul is talking about Christian living, how we should live with each other. About false teachers, about church life, about holiness. Then he says, "but godliness WITH CONTENTMENT is what really counts.

We've probably all seen people like this, people that seem to have everything together. They know how church should be, they know how others should be, what everybody should do, etc., etc., but they are always complaining that things are not as they should be and they chafe and cause discontent and division. Godliness without contentment really is quite repulsive. It turns people away.

We want to teach our children godliness, to live holy lives, to love God with all their hearts. And we want to do that by our example, and we can be ever so holy, ever so godly, but if we are chafing, discontented and complaining we are erasing what we are trying to teach.

I don't know what would be the most important way to pass contentment on to our children, but I'm going to share two ideas that I have seen in the example of others.

Yes, Mama principle

This is something I saw in a family we know that really struck me.

When the children are asked to do something or not to do something and they start whining or complaining, instead of just scolding or spanking, the parents ask, "Can you say, 'yes, mama'?" and I have seen these children stop crying, swallow, and say, "yes, mama", and the next moment they are happy and content. What's the secret here? Learning to surrender. Learning to give up and say "yes, mama".

In this way the children can be taught that surrender is the way to happiness.

Be Happy principle

Another family we know uses this method. When the children are disciplined or corrected, the father says, "now be happy". At first this seemed strange to me, to command a child to be happy. But I've seen it again and again, the child is crying and the father deals with it, then says "now be happy", and the child wipes his eyes and is soon running around and...is happy!

I'm sure this is over-simplified, but in this way the child learns that no matter what happens, he can be happy if he tries.

These are just two ways that I thought we can help our children to learn contentment. By learning to surrender, and by learning to accept and be happy.

Even for us grownups, these principles also stand. In what I am facing right now, whatever I wish would change, can I look up and say, "Yes, mama" "Yes, Lord"? Can I wipe my tears and say to myself "now be happy"?

One last point I want to make is in reference to the title of this session—the pearl of contentment. I suppose most of us are familiar with the way pearls are formed, and I thought it was significant

in this subject.

*The birth of a pearl is truly a miraculous event. Unlike gemstones or precious metals that must be mined from the earth, pearls are grown by live oysters far below the surface of the sea. Gemstones must be cut and polished to bring out their beauty. But pearls need no such treatment to reveal their loveliness. They are born from oysters complete -- with a shimmering iridescence, lustre and soft inner glow unlike any other gem on earth.*

*A natural pearl begins its life as a foreign object, such as a parasite or piece of shell that accidentally lodges itself in an oyster's soft inner body where it cannot be expelled. To ease this irritant, the oyster's body takes defensive action. The oyster begins to secrete a smooth, hard crystalline substance around the irritant in order to protect itself. This substance is called "nacre." As long as the irritant remains within its body, the oyster will continue to secrete nacre around it, layer upon layer. Over time, the irritant will be completely encased by the silky crystalline coatings. And the result, ultimately, is the lovely and lustrous gem called a pearl.*

*How something so wondrous emerges from an oyster's way of protecting itself is one of nature's loveliest surprises. For the nacre is not just a soothing substance. It is composed of microscopic crystals of calcium carbonate, aligned perfectly with one another, so that light passing along the axis of one crystal is reflected and refracted by another to produce a rainbow of light and color.*

So a pearl is born from irritation. How significant to what we are looking at today! Our lives are full of irritations that want to cause discontent in our lives. We have a choice as to what these irritations will produce in us.

We can chafe and let these irritants cause wounds that make us so miserable that it can even make us cause wounds in others.

Or, we can take these irritants and encase them in layers of nacre that will produce pearls in our lives that reflect and refract the light of Jesus in our lives. Our irritations can be transformed to produce a rainbow of color, a shimmering iridescence with a luster that gives a soft inner glow.

We have a daily choice to make:

What will it be, a wound or a pearl?

Php 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

1Ti 6:8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

Heb 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

1Ti 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.