



Cultivating Contentment

A PW Renewal "Dance Lesson" - Leader Guide



Far too often, life falls short of happiness, especially with all the challenges that come our way. It doesn't take long before a nagging sense of dissatisfaction works its way into our hearts. We find the reality of things is very distant from what we want.

Our health disappoints us. "Now I have to see another specialist." "I'm sick of feeling tired all the time." "This diet isn't working; I'm not losing any weight."

Our possessions disappoint us. "Everything is breaking at our house!" "We can't afford that."

Certain stages in life disappoint us. "I can't bend over to put on pantyhose anymore." "I didn't think this Call would be like THIS!"

The thoughts take root and grow. "It just isn't fair! I don't get paid enough for the hours I put in." "I've helped my son so much but his grades still aren't improving."

People disappoint us. "It's almost impossible to work with her." "I wish my husband paid more attention to us."

So what do we do? We complain.

*Don't I have a right to complain? Wild donkeys bray when they find no green grass,
and oxen low when they have no food. Job 6:5 NLT*

1. What kind of complaints do you often hear? From members?
2. Why do we complain about such things? Does it serve any purpose?
*They don't meet our expectations.
Vent grievances, problems, discontent, bitterness, frustration...
Some people like to complain...make them feel better*
3. Job was an amazing complainer. He's really quite famous for his sometimes-whiney monologues. Much of the Book of Job records the outpouring of his heart in the face of personal tragedy. What does he say in Job 10:1? Have you ever felt this way?

Job 10:1 ¹ "I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.

He hates his life. Feels it is justifiable to be bitter - what he's feeling deep inside.

4. *Have you ever caught yourself complaining over something truly petty, and wondered why in the world it even matters? In times like that, we are complaining more because it feels better to be venomous than to have an actual grievance to air.*

We call our favorite gripes our “pet peeves.”

What are some of your pet peeves as a pastor’s wife?

Not having my husband home during weeknights

Raising the kids “alone.”

Feeling alone, apart from everyone...left out

Break out Groups: *Discuss questions 5-7 in groups of 3.*

10 minutes

(Use Bibles for these passages)

5. Are there different kinds of complaining? Is some complaining socially acceptable – like a form of small talk? Does acceptability make it okay?
6. Let’s compare a couple of complaints.
- First, consider the parable of Jesus in Matthew 20:1-16. What was the response of the workers to the owner of the field in Matthew 20:11?
Grumbling about the injustice to the “boss” ...they felt they weren’t getting paid fairly for their work. It’s not fair!
 - All right. Now take a look at a complainer in 1 Samuel 1:12-17. Why is this woman upset?
She is deeply troubled, grieving, she wants a son so badly...
7. What is the difference between complaining about your troubles to God and complaining about those same things to the people around you?
One is direct to God & doesn’t “bring down” others around you. Both types of complaining are heard by God but the people around you may or may not be able to do anything about it.

What I’d really like to do when the plane is late or the luggage is lost is get upset – start whining and moaning. Or I want to be mad – raise my voice, harden my heart, tighten up my face, and unload a sharp tongue – lashing to any unfortunate soul who happens to cross my path. But frankly, I’ve tried those choices, and neither one is satisfying. As quickly as I vent my frustration I regret my thoughtless words and hard remarks.

Barbara Johnson

Back Together

A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day.

Proverbs 27:15

Whiners neither enjoy nor give joy. But grace-filled people are reputable, sought after, and deeply loved.

Patsy Clairmont

8. Complainers really can be tiresome people! Are you making yourself as tiresome as the woman found in Proverbs 27:15? To whom? Your husband? Other church members? Friends? Co-workers? Your children?
9. How does a woman set the temperature in her home? How can she affect the moods of those around her? Affect her husband's ministry?

10. What does Solomon pass along as wise advice for his son.

- **Proverbs 21:9** ⁹ *Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.*
- **Proverbs 21:19** ¹⁹ *Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.*

11. Rhetorical Question: Would you say Proverbs 21:9 or 19 might occasionally apply to you?

12. Women who choose their friends unwisely can find themselves feeding off each other's urge to complain. In Proverbs 13:20, what does Solomon say about the care needed in choosing your companions?

Proverbs 13:20 ²⁰ *He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.*

13. Why does James say we should avoid complaining about one another? **We will be judged.**

(Does gossip – grumbling against one another – fall under this category?)

James 5:9 ⁹ *Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*

14. A woman in the role of Pastor's wife holds within her the God-given ability to influence the people around her. She has the ability to smooth things over and the ability to stir things up. In 2 Timothy 1:5, how did two women in the N.T. use their feminine abilities in their home? **To pass on their sincere faith to their children.**

Paul writes to Timothy...

2 Timothy 1:5 ⁵ *I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

Personal Reflection

Think of those closest to you – what kind of mood are you creating among your friends? What are they creating in you? Are you joining in with the complaining? Are people looking for reasons to avoid you – to get away from you? Or are you pleasant company, rain or shine?

15. When you gripe about petty things, did you know you are complaining against God Himself?
What does all our complaining really say to God?
We are unhappy with what he's given us in life...it's not good enough!

16. Are there times when we should simply curb our tongues?

- What does Solomon say in Proverbs 29:11?

Proverbs 29:11 *¹¹ A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.*

- What does David urge in Psalm 4:4?

Psalm 4:4 *⁴ In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.*

Paraphrase this. What's he saying? Don't speak in the midst of your emotion...you'll say something you'll regret.

- When do our frustrated feelings become sin?

Proverbs 21:23 *²³ He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.*

17. Nagging, complaining, and other signs of a lack of contentment can wear a person down. Let's take a look at the flip side now. What does the Bible have to say about taking a cheerful approach to life?

- **Proverbs 12:25** *²⁵ An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.*
- **Proverbs 15:13, 15** *¹³ A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.
¹⁵ All the days of the oppressed are wretched, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast.*
- **Proverbs 15:30** *³⁰ Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones.*
- **1 Thessalonians 5:16** *¹⁶ Be joyful always;*

Any thoughts? Highlights?

18. Does this mean we should pretend to be happy all the time, putting on a false smile no matter what is going on in our heart?

- As pastors' wives, do we tend to pretend? When do we do that?

- "Some of us are suspicious of the word *happy* because we think pursuing happiness means being frivolous and lacking maturity and spiritual depth. But the kind of

happiness I am talking about goes far deeper than a surface type of giggly exuberance or even a sense of well-being based on positive circumstances... And is more than a superficial appearance of peace and contentment. When I think of being happy, I imagine the Proverbs 31 woman who “can laugh at the days to come” (vs. 25). This woman has something substantive hidden within her heart that causes her to smile and gives her strength. She faces life with joy and looks forward, happily and without fear, to her future.” (pp 6-7 *A Life Embraced: A Hopeful Guide for the Pastor’s Wife* by Gayle Haggard)

- What “something substantive” is in her heart to cause her such joy?

The Holy Spirit

The knowledge of the grace and mercy she has in a Savior who gave his life for her. (Matthew 11:30, John 8:36, Galatians 5:1, Ephesians 1:18-19)

19. Contentment involves teachability and gratitude! What is essential to contentment in these two qualities?

- We need to be teachable. Why?
- We need to have gratitude. Why?

The ability to learn where we’re “off course,” accept criticism (from the Lord and others) and grow toward contentment... To be thankful for all the blessings and joy we do have in this life...

Learning to be content is an educational process, as is all learning. It takes time, and I’m sure over time at least some measure of contentment would come. It would start with the acceptance of present reality and hopefully move toward genuine contentment.

Luci Swindoll

20. How did Paul “get” contentment, according to Philippians 4:11?

- **Philippians 4:11** ¹¹*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.*

He knew he had all he really needed...God had supplied what was truly needful...

21. Quick Review: *Moses lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, out of slavery, they’ve seen wondrous miracles, witnessed the plagues, walked through the Red Sea on dry ground and seen God’s power. The pillars of flame and cloud are continually before them. And yet, what was characteristic of the next 14 months on their way to the Promised Land? And why is their discontent so unbelievable to us?*

- **Exodus 15:22-24** ²²*Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water.* ²³*When they came to*

- Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.)* ²⁴ So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"
- **Exodus 16:1-3** ¹ The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."
 - **Exodus 17:1-3** ¹ The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

³ But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"
 - **Exodus 32:1** ¹ When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods ^[a] who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."
 - **Numbers 11:1-2** ¹ Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. ² When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the LORD and the fire died down.
 - **Numbers 11:4-6** ⁴ The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶ But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

22. Are we in the same boat? How often do we complain, revealing a forgetful, childish, selfish heart? Take a few moments and list some of the things God has done in your life, leaving you with *nothing* to complain about. (2 minutes)

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



Contentment doesn't come naturally, and isn't always learned quickly. But it can be learned. There are pitfalls along the way, bad habits have been formed, and thoughtless attitudes have taken hold. And we always seem to be searching, searching for something new, something fulfilling, something more. We get restless so easily. Even when we've found a peace in our Lord and Savior, it's still difficult for the heart to "give up the hunt." What are you "hunting" for?

23. What kinds of things do we do/look for to satisfy the restlessness in our hearts.

New things, new schedules and activities to keep busy, new projects and hobbies...

Changes of scenery...new job, new house, re-decorate...

Make-overs! Re-invent ourselves...

24. There is so much in this world that cannot satisfy us. In spite of this sinful world, in spite of our nagging discontentment, why do we hang on to our belief in the "fairy tale ending"? Don't we still hope things will work out happily ever after somehow?

- What does Romans 5:5 say about the hope to which we cling?

Romans 5:5 *5And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

It doesn't disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts.

25. The reality is this earthly life will never completely satisfy. We weren't made to find complete contentment here. *It's not found in "perfect ministries" either.* How is this state of affairs described in 2 Corinthians 5:4-5?

2 Corinthians 5:4-5 *4For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

It's temporary – filled with burdens. We wish to be in bliss in our heavenly home.

26. Your way of seeing life hinges on a couple of foundational facts.

- First of all, do you believe God has a purpose for you? What does Jeremiah 29:11 say?

Jeremiah 29:11 *11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

God has a purpose for you, too, not just for your husband.

- Secondly, your perspective on life is sharpened when you remember that even your trials have a purpose in your spiritual growth. How does Jesus' younger brother describe their usefulness in James 1:2-4?

James 1:2-4 *2Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

27. Contentment depends largely on how much you trust God. Seeing life from His perspective. Do you recall all the disappointments and tragedies that filled the life of Joseph? If anyone could have raised the cry of “unfair!” it was he. But what perspective did he hold on to in Genesis 50:20?

Genesis 50:20 ²⁰ *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

28. Contentment depends on how you approach life, and how you react to what life brings your way. At times, life is good. How does Solomon describe the gift of a good life in Ecclesiastes 5:19-20?

Ecclesiastes 5:19-20 ¹⁹ *Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God. ²⁰ He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because **God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.***

Ponder a moment. What is a good life?

29. At other times, life is hard. What had become of Job’s life, and what was he determined to do?

- **Job 2:7-10** ⁷ *So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. ⁸ Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. ⁹ His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" ¹⁰ He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. **Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"** In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.*

30. Though everything else in life may fail, where is our source of contentment – our source of joy?

- **Psalm 119:114** ¹¹⁴ ***You are my refuge and my shield;** I have put my hope in your word.*
- **Habakkuk 3:17-19** ¹⁷ *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ **yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.** ¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.*

31. The reality of life is that hard days do come. Holding onto contentment can be easier when you admit this to yourself. It’s not as if Jesus didn’t warn us it would be so.

- **John 16:33** ³³ *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*
Have peace! Trouble is nothing to be afraid of. Jesus has been there, he knows what it is like, and he’s overcome it for us...

32. Contentment is an attitude that shouldn’t be ruffled by circumstances. What kind of perspective should we always have, according to Solomon:

- **Ecclesiastes 7:14** ¹⁴ *When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: **God has made the one as well as the other.** Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.*

33. How should we react when trials come?

- **1 Peter 4:12-13** ¹²*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*
- **James 1:2** ²*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds*

All those trials I have to go through serve His purposes in making me grow into the person He wants me to become.

34. How can this new way of viewing things be a blessing to those around us? If you look at **Romans 12:10-18**, you can make a list! How does Paul urge us to reach out to those we see all around us?

Be devoted in brotherly love Honor others above ourselves

Have zeal

Be joyful in hope

Patient in Affliction

Hospitality

Faithful in Prayer

Share

Leader Example pp 43-44 – pw visit

Your contentment in Christ can be a source of encouragement to others as well.

I can't say I loved being a pastor's wife when Ted and I were first married.

But I've learned a few things since those early days. I am no longer afraid of my role or of whether I can do it.

Instead, I have learned that being a pastor's wife boils down to these two things: growing up in God and helping others do the same. As I've learned to lean heavily on the Word of God and the counsel of the Holy Spirit, I have gained confidence and freedom because I know that all God requires of any of us is a sincere heart, a teachable spirit, and of course, obedience.

Gayle Haggard p. 3-4 A Life Embraced



Small Group LEMON-AID EXERCISE

This exercise is a way to practice being positive and guiding other people to seeing things in a more God-trusting way. Looking for possible blessings. Something we should all do in our ministries.

Challenge your way of seeing things in a more positive light...like a lemon, for example. To some, it may mean the car you own or a sour bite of the juicy fruit itself. But there are those of us who love lemons because we know how to deal with them. We can take the lemons of life and make

lemonade! Let your friends help you find a new way of loving lemons.

In groups of 3, explain one circumstance in your life right now that is a hardship, causing frustration, complaining, or even some anger (a.k.a. the lemon). It may be about the ministry, a person, work, your family....

The other 2 ladies will listen, and then challenge themselves to help her see the real frustration in another way, thereby change her perspective to realize the possible blessings (a.k.a. the lemonade).

It's easy to be distracted by what other women wear, do, have, and say. We want to fit in so badly. In order to recognize contentment, we need to find God's niche for us, no matter what everyone else is doing.

Personal Reflection

If you could change anything in your life – your spiritual life – what would it be?

35. Sometimes we are intimidated by those around us. We think one woman has it all together; her family and career. Or some other woman is being used more greatly by God. While others seem to exude grace, poise, wisdom, and contentment, we are struggling to cover the basics at times.

Of what does the Bible remind us in Job 33:6?

- **Job 33:6** ⁶*I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay.*

Many times, people are actually shocked to learn that they are not the only people who are experiencing a certain trouble or feeling certain way...there are others "in the same boat."

36. If we aren't supposed to be distracted by those around us, then where should our focus be?

- **Hebrews 12:2-3** ²*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

37. Jesus is our pattern – that is where our focus should stay while he is shaping our lives.

- **1 Timothy 1:16** ¹⁶*But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*

38. How do we maintain that focus?

- **1 Timothy 4:13** ¹³*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.*

39. Cultivating contentment means being satisfied with your niche in life, trusting that God has everything under control, and focusing your attention on Jesus instead of others. But it also means learning to be grateful for what you have.

- There is only one thing that should be coming out of the mouth of a contented woman according to Ephesians 5:4. What is it?

Ephesians 5:4 ⁴*Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.*

- What does Paul urge us to do in Colossians 3:15?

Colossians 3:15 ¹⁵*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

40. Paul thanks God for his fellow believers, “making mention of you always in my prayers” (Philemon 1:4).

- According to 1 Thessalonians 2:13, why was he so grateful?

1 Thessalonians 2:13 ¹³And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

- Why is this an especially good reminder for us in our role as the pastor’s wife?
Be thankful for the believers in the church – appreciate them, their faith & trust in God. He is working in all of us. We should appreciate these fellow Christians and the world of the Holy Spirit.

41. Read **Romans 12:2** ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- To become the woman God wants you to be, willpower isn’t enough. Gumption won’t carry you through. In order to cultivate contentment, you must be changed. How does that change come about according to the passage above?

It’s a process to be transformed – not a single event – leading to spiritual and moral growth according to God’s will. And we can’t improve on God’s will.

42. Our transformation into a new and beautiful creature doesn’t happen all at once. How does Paul describe the process in 2 Corinthians 3:18?

- **2 Corinthians 3:18** ¹⁸And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Christians “shine” with the glory of the Lord and are his representatives in this world as we grow toward a greater likeness of Christ in our sanctified lives.

43. We are being changed, day by day, often in miraculous ways. What is our end goal, according to Philippians 2:5?

- **Philippians 2:5** ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

*Leader's Conclusion – Cultivating Contentment Foreword
pp iv-v*

If you learn to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, you will be able to carry a sense of God’s presence with you throughout the day. As He becomes your guide and comforts you, any anxiety you may feel about your role as a pastor’s wife will slowly dissipate, and you will find freedom and happiness. Learn to walk with Him, and you will smile at your future.

Gayle Haggard
p. 14 *A Life Embraced*

Closing

Cultivating Contentment takes work.

It goes against our very nature. But with the Lord's help, we can strive for the amazing joy and peace found in a contented life. So how do we keep the "weeds" of discontentment and complaining out of our lives? We can depend on God as our only source of satisfaction, have an attitude of thankfulness, and trust that the LORD is working for our good.

Closing Prayer

Dearest Heavenly Father, gracious Savior, gentle Spirit,

We long for contentment. We long for a peace that fills our lives and allows us to live each day free of complaining, worry, and unnecessary stress. We know that the only peace that can truly satisfy is found in you, but we need your help oh Lord. Please send your Spirit to guide us and help us achieve the amazing joy and peace found in a contented life. Thank you precious Jesus for the grace we do not deserve and help us to trust in your love. Give us confidence in the knowledge that everything that happens in our lives is for our good and for the Glory of your kingdom. Give us an attitude of thankfulness and let us be encouragers rather than complainers. Help us to remember that our trials are a reason to rejoice! They build us up and give us opportunities to be your shining examples in this world. And thank you as well for giving us so many "reasons to dance." Continually remind us of the joys of family, friends, ministry and You.

In Peace and Contentment, we pray to you Loving Father,

Amen