

Write Upon My Heart

Contentment

Published by Keepers of the Faith

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CHARACTER—WHAT IS IT?

What is character? Why do we say that one person has good character and another poor character, or that someone has character and someone else does not? What is being measured? It is not really a person's actions, for people often make mistakes acting in good faith, and we do not consider that bad character. No, it has to do with who a person is—or has become—by the *habits* that he or she has formed.

Good habits become good character, and bad habits become bad character; and yet character is not just the sum of one's habits. In many cases it has taken only a single bad habit to destroy a life. In other cases, just one outstanding good habit has prevented an otherwise mediocre life from totally crumbling. We cannot know which habit might be our most powerful support, or which might cause our complete downfall. So, the safest venture is to develop as many good habits or traits as we can, especially in areas displacing any habits that we have which may not be good.

It takes work to form habits, but the good news is that once they are formed they are a snap to keep, for then they come naturally to us! How nice it is to be so used to doing the right thing that we actually prefer to do it! *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,”* —Galatians 6:7. Develop good habits when you are young, and you will reap the benefits for all of your life.

Where can we look to find the best essence of good character? How about God's Word? It has the essence of everything good. Jesus was an example of perfect character. *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps,”* —1 Peter 2:21. As we study His life and God's Word, they will give us the guidelines by which to form our own habits and lives.

HABITS—WHAT ARE THEY?

Habits are those things that we do most naturally or instinctively—without having to make a decision, because the decision has been made enough times that we do not have to think about it any more. Things said and done by habit are

sometimes done without thinking.

For example, you do not contemplate whether or not to dress in the morning. You do it out of habit. If you brush your teeth every morning, you do not ask yourself if you should each day. You do it out of habit. Each good habit that we build—diligently—doing the best thing in an oft-repeated situation—is like a fence that we build between ourselves and some sort of heartbreak. However, it requires no effort to develop bad habits, and bad character is exactly what lack of effort becomes. So, a little work early in life can do much to prevent the manifold grief and loss encountered as a poorly formed character limps on through the years of life.

HABITS—THEY BEGIN IN THE HEART

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he,” —Proverbs 23:7a. That means that we are what we think. We say what we think, and we do what we think. What determines what we think? We do. Why do we think the way that we do? We taught ourselves to think that way. Often when people say, “I really didn’t think about it,” they had already taught themselves exactly what to think about “it.”

Each thought makes a tiny connection in the brain like a thread. Each similar thought strengthens that connection by adding another thread. Eventually, the threads become great enough in number that they become a rope. Often a mind becomes bound by such a rope, whether it is a good rope or a bad rope. Habit begins to affect our thinking. We begin to do things almost automatically because what we think is what we will do.

It is important to form good habits *now*. Later may be too late. We are becoming *right now* what we are going to be. We are going to become what we are thinking *now*, because *“as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”* Our thoughts are very powerful. We cannot touch them or see them, but nevertheless, they are very real. They are more powerful than our actions because they control our actions. However, we can decide what we think! We can make our thoughts subject to our will and the will of God. We have access to a power stronger than our thoughts—the power of God. He tells how to control our thoughts. *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and*

every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ,” —2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

So, why is it so important to form good habits early? Is not God powerful enough to break bad habits? Yes, He has the power to break any habit, but there are very many that He never breaks. The reason is that people grow to like their habits. They begin to hate the thought of breaking them—even the bad ones. People do not like change. The ropes that bind their minds are of their own making, and they are loath to give them up. How many drug addicts live absolutely horrid lives, bound to drugs from which they wish they were free, yet who will lie, cheat, steal, fight, and even kill to continue taking the drugs causing them so much misery? People grow to like their bad habits so much that they often will not let them go for what they wish they could have.

How do we learn not to like our bad habits? By learning to like new ones. Do what is right, and soon you will like doing it. There is a saying, “Your actions will determine your emotions.” We become comfortable with something only after we do it for a while. Another saying says, “Eat olives nine times and you will like them.” Proverbs 16:3 teaches, “*Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.*” Do you want to think rightly? Do you want to feel good doing right even if you do not like it right now? Just do it anyway! See how much it changes the way you think and feel. Replace bad habits and have good character by simply making new habits in place of the old ones!

Lastly, it is not enough to have good character. We can have the very best character, and yet become lost for eternity, for there are none who have not sinned. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the price for our debt of sin. Only by trusting Him will we see the Celestial City.

It is said that “character has its own reward,” and so it does. People with good character instinctively feel much better about themselves than people without it. This is a far better and happier way to live. However, this reward pales at the prospect of eternal reward. It is great to have character. But, remember, it is infinitely more rewarding to belong to Jesus, and have character for His glory.

Contentment

*If I am often dissatisfied or yearning,
If I am complaining or unhappy,
If I am always looking to see what others have,
I know nothing yet of contentment.*

For most people contentment is an elusive quality for which they search and search, and many never find it. They think that if they just had this or that, they would be content. Or if just this certain thing was different, or if they just lived in the country instead of the city, or if they had just a few friends, or if they could take a vacation once in a while, or . . . They often spend their resources—time and money—looking for the things or situations that will finally bring contentment to them. However long they search in this manner, contentment will evade them. Why is this so? Because contentment is not something you can buy or hold in your hand. It is not even something that you can seek. Situations do not bring contentment. Contentment is a state of mind. It is an attitude of the heart. It can be had in *any* situation. It is a spirit of being at peace with everyone and everything. That is a satisfied spirit. A satisfied spirit is content. In simple terms, contentment is being happy and satisfied with whatever we have, whatever our situation is, and whatever we are required to do.

God created us and gave us life. Jesus gave His life to pay for our sins, and gives us eternal life in Heaven. It is the least we can do to be content with the awesome blessings that He has given us, and to be content with whatever He may ask us to do in obedience to Him. This is an important study! Do your best!



LEARNING THE TRAIT

The word “contentment” means to be satisfied with what you have; to be thankful for what you are given, and to be happy where you are. The Bible tells us that contentment is “great gain.” Think about that for a moment. We can have great gain by *gaining*

nothing—but being happy with what we have. The Lord wants us to be happy with what He has given us. He knows best what we need, and He has given each and every one of us so much more than we can ever deserve. Look up the definitions of the following words using a dictionary, and write them in the space provided.

Gladness _____

Happiness _____

Peace _____

Pleasure _____

Satisfaction _____

Thankfulness _____

A Motto for Contentment

Some years ago, the writer knew a Christian stonemason in one of our large towns, who, though intelligent and industrious, had often found himself in great straits. Still, he was a happy man, and came at last out of his difficulties.

The secret of his contentment was contained in the words, which he had molded in plaster of Paris and placed over his fireplace, “Jehovah Jireh”—“The Lord will provide.”

Let that be our motto, and we shall find it true. Only let us seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the other things He knows we need shall be added unto us.—*Selected*



SCRIPTURE STUDY

Copy the following verse.
Hebrews 13:5

What does this verse mean?

How can this verse be applied to your life?

BIBLE EXAMPLE

1. Numbers 11:1-35—Read the passage.
2. Answer the following questions.

(1) Why were the children of Israel murmuring?



- (2) List as many miracles as you can showing God's loving protection since the Israelites left Egypt.

- (3) Explain how the Israelites were blaspheming God when they murmured against Moses.

- (4) Explain how our complaining about others might blaspheme God.

- (5) What does our murmuring do to us and the contentment of others?

- (6) In which two ways did God show His displeasure with complaining?

- (7) What can we learn from this passage of Scripture?



SCRIPTURE STUDY

Copy the following verse.

Luke 3:14

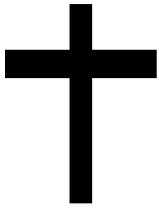
What does this verse mean?

How can this verse be applied to your own life?

*Oh, what a happy soul I am!
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I will be.*

*How many blessings I enjoy,
That other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot, and I won't.
—Fanny Crosby*

MORE ABOUT JESUS



“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—Philippians 2:5-8

It is incredible, almost impossible, for us to believe that Christ Jesus was God in the flesh! He was God and was in Heaven; and He left Heaven to become one of mankind for our sakes. He didn't just become a man; He became a poor man, a man of sorrows the Bible says. He took upon Himself, not the form of a great leader, not the head of a popular movement, but the form of a servant, a servant of no reputation. He served others day and night. He had little time for rest. He seldom found time to be alone except in the night watches. He didn't have time for fun and games or vacations. He had few clothes. He had no home to call His own. He was called a liar and blasphemer. He was rejected by His own people and family. He was beaten and crucified. Yet we see Him a contented man. We see Him going about His Father's business. We see Him working with people, teaching them, helping them to understand what salvation really is, and healing them of their diseases. We see Him walking through His days peacefully until the end of His time on earth when He laid His life down for them and for us.

There is no record of Him complaining that it was too hot or too cold, or that there was not enough to eat, or that people were not treating Him nicely, or that they were saying bad things about Him. No, our Saviour was, and is, a perfect example to follow. He said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him,”*—John 13:16. So if Jesus could be content with His life—and He was—and He is our Lord, should not we be content with our lives? Yes, we know that He was God and returned to Heaven, but will we not also, if we are His, go to Heaven one day and be with Him? If we could only but see our lives through the eyes of eternity, what a blessing it would be to us! We are here on earth for such a short time! It is nothing compared to spending eternity with Jesus! Let us follow in His steps! Won't you join those who are walking after Him?

1. If Jesus had wanted to be discontent, what are a few things about which He might have complained?

2. Why do you think Jesus refused to ever be discontented?

3. Jesus had a busy, full life, and yet Jesus was peaceful, not striving, and not demanding to have His own way. Why do you think this was so?

4. Do you think it is possible for you to be like Jesus and have a certain contentment about life? Explain your answer.

*"For even Christ pleased not himself,"
—Romans 15:3.*

A STORY ABOUT CONTENTMENT—

THE LITTLE SISTERS

—Selected



“You were not here yesterday,” said the gentle teacher of the little village school, as she placed her hand kindly on the curly head of one of her pupils. It was recess time, but the little girl addressed had not gone to frolic away the ten minutes. She had not even left her seat, but sat absorbed in what seemed a fruitless attempt to make herself mistress of an example in long division.

Her face and neck crimsoned at the remark of her teacher, but looking up, she seemed somewhat reassured by the kind glance that met her, and answered, “No, ma’am, I was not, but sister Nellie was.”

“I remember, a little girl who called herself Nellie Gray came in yesterday, but I did not know she was your sister. But why did you not come? You seem to like to study very much.”

“It was not because I didn’t want to,” was the earnest answer; and then she paused and the deep flush again tinged her fair brow. “But,” she continued after a moment of painful embarrassment, “Mother cannot spare both of us conveniently, and so we are going to take turns. I’m going to school one day, and sister the next, and tonight I’m to teach Nellie all I have learned today, and tomorrow night she will teach me all that she learns while here. It’s the only way we can think of getting along, and we want to study very much, so as to sometime keep school ourselves, and take care of Mother, because she has to work very hard to take care of us.”

With a smile of kindness Miss M— sat down beside her, and in a moment explained the rule over which she was puzzling her young brain, so that the hard example was easily finished.

“You had better go out and take the air a few moments, as you have studied very hard today,” said the teacher, as the little girl put aside the slate.

“I had rather not—I might tear my dress—I will stand by the window and watch the rest.”

There was such a peculiar tone in the voice of her pupil as she said, "I might tear my dress," that the teacher was led instinctively to notice it. It was nothing but a nine-penny calico, but it was neatly made and had never been washed. And while looking at it, she remembered that during the whole previous fortnight when Mary Gray had attended school regularly, she had never seen her wear but that one dress. "She is a thoughtful little girl," said the teacher to herself, "and does not want to make her mother any trouble. I wish I had more such scholars."

The next morning Mary was absent, but her sister occupied her seat. There was something so interesting in the two little sisters, the one eleven, and the other eighteen months younger, agreeing to attend school by turns, that Miss M— could not forbear observing them very closely. They were pretty faced children, of delicate forms, the elder with dark eyes and chestnut curls, the other with orbs like the sky of June, her white neck veiled by a wealth of golden ringlets. She observed in both the same close attention to their studies; and as Mary tarried within during playtime, so did Nellie, and upon speaking to her as she had to her sister she received the same answer: "I might tear my dress."

The reply caused Miss M— to notice the garb of her sister. She saw at once that it was of the same piece as Mary's, and upon scrutinizing it very closely, she became certain that it was the same dress. It did not fit quite so nicely on Nellie, and was too long for her, and she was evidently ill at ease when she noticed her teacher looking at the bright pink flowers that were so thickly set on the white ground.

The discovery was one that could not but interest the village school teacher. She ascertained the residence of their mother, and though sorely shortened herself by a narrow purse, having found at the only store in the place a few yards of the same material, she purchased a dress for little Nellie that same night, and made arrangements to send it to her in such a way that the donor could not be detected.

Very bright and happy looked Mary Gray on Friday morning, as she entered the school at an early hour. She waited only to place her books in neat order in her desk, before she approached the teacher, and whispering in a voice that laughed in spite of her efforts to make it low and deferential—"After this week sister Nellie is coming to school every day, and oh, I am so glad!"

"That is very good news," replied the teacher kindly. "Nellie is fond of her books, I see, and I am happy to know that she can have an opportunity to study every

day.” Then she continued, a little good-natured mischief encircling her eyes and dimpling her sweet lips—“But can your mother spare you both conveniently?”

“Oh, yes, ma’am, she can now. Something happened that she didn’t expect, and she is as glad to have us come as we are to do so.” She hesitated a moment, but her young heart was filled to the brim with joy, and when a child is happy, it is as natural to tell the cause as it is for a bird to warble when the sun shines. So out of the fullness of her heart she spoke and told her teacher this little story.

She and her sister were the only children of a very poor widow, whose health was so delicate that it was almost impossible to support herself and daughters. She was obliged to keep them out of school all winter, as they had not suitable clothes to wear, but she told them that, if they could earn enough by doing odd chores for the neighbors to buy each of them a new dress, they might go in the spring. Very earnestly had the little girls improved their stray chances, and very carefully hoarded the copper coins, which usually repaid them. They had saved nearly enough to buy a dress when Nellie was taken sick, and, as the mother had no other money put by, Nellie’s own treasure had to be expended.

“Oh, I did feel so bad when school opened and Nellie could not go, because she had no dress,” said Mary. “I told Mother I wouldn’t go either, but she said I had better, for I could teach sister some, and it would be better than no schooling. I stood it for a fortnight, but I could think of nothing but Nellie’s sweet little face seemed all the way to school each day. I couldn’t be happy a bit, so I finally thought of a way by which we could both go. I told Mother I would come one day, and the next I would lend Nellie my dress that she might come, and that is the way we have done it this week. But last night, don’t you think, somebody sent sister a dress just like mine, and now she can come too. Oh, if I only knew who it was, I would get down on my knees and thank them, and so would Nellie. But we don’t know, and so we’ve done all we could for them—we’ve prayed for them—and oh, Miss M—



we are all so glad now, aren't you too?"

"Indeed I am," was the emphatic answer. And on the following Monday, little Nellie, in the new pink dress, entered the schoolroom, her face radiant as a rose in sunshine, and approached the teacher's table, exclaiming in tones as musical as those of a freed fountain, "I'm coming to school every day, and oh, I am so glad!" The teacher felt as she had never done before, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. No millionaire, when he saw his name in public prints, lauded for his thousand-dollar charities, was ever so happy as the poor school teacher who gave up that new pair of gloves, and saved enough to buy that little fatherless girl a calico dress.

Answer the following questions regarding the story.

1. How did Mary and Nellie show contentment about going to school?

2. How did the girls show contentment about their poverty?

3. Do you think the mother's heart was gladdened by her daughters' cheerful and contented spirits? Explain.

4. What might a murmuring spirit have meant to the mother's delicate health?

5. Explain how their contented spirit caused the teacher to take notice of them.

6. How did their teacher display the attitude of contentment?



SCRIPTURE STUDY

Copy the following verses.

1 Timothy 6:7-8

What do these verses mean?

How can these verses be applied to your life?

DIAGNOSE THE PROBLEM

Read the following example and answer the questions.

It's Not Fair!



Penny had just arrived at her friend May's house to spend the afternoon working on their science project together. May's mother answered the door and told Penny that she could go right up to May's room, as she was cleaning it and would be finished in just a few minutes. As Penny entered the room, May said, "Oh! Hi, Penny! I am so glad that you could come today. I will be finished folding these clothes in just a minute. Are you ready to start on our project?"

"Yes!" said Penny. "I am really looking forward to getting started so that we can finish in plenty of time before the fair."

As Penny sat down on the bed she began to notice the pretty clothes that May was folding and putting away. She looked down at her own clothes, which were handed down from her sister, Sarah. She began to think to herself, "I sure wish I could have some new clothes. I cannot remember the last time my mom bought me a new dress. She always just mends Sarah's dresses for me. I sure wish I could have what May has."

"Penny!" May startled her out of her thoughts.

"Yes?" answered Penny.

"Are you ready to get started?" asked May. "We can go down to the basement and work there, if you would like."

"I suppose," said Penny, unhappily. "You know what May?" said Penny.

"No, what?" asked May.

"Life is just not fair," grumbled Penny.

Answer the following questions regarding the story.

1. What happened to Penny when she went up to May's room?

2. How did her attitude change?

3. What do you think Jesus would say about her thoughts?

4. How did Penny's thoughts make her feel about May?

5. How might Penny's thoughts have changed her attitude toward her mother and sister?

6. We can see that thoughts matter. What should Penny's thoughts have been if she had wanted to please Jesus?



SCRIPTURE STUDY

Copy the following verse.

1 Timothy 6:6

What does this verse mean?

How can this verse be applied to your life?

DIAGNOSE THE PROBLEM

Read the following example and answer the questions.

Doing Our Part

It was a beautiful autumn day, and nine-year-old Jack was helping his dad change the oil in the family car.



“Hand me that wrench please, Jack,” his dad said.

Jack found the wrench and handed it to his dad. He peered under the car at him.

“This sure is boring,” Jack sighed to himself. “I’d much rather be under the car helping than just standing here handing Dad his tools. It sure looks like it would be a lot more fun.”

“Why can’t I help you under the car, Dad?” asked Jack, impatiently. “I know I could do it,” he said. “It sure would be better than just standing here with these tools!”

“I need you to do your part by handing me the tools, Jack,” answered Dad. “Besides, some parts are still quite hot. I feel safer with you not under the car.”

“Aw, come on Dad, it looks safe enough to me,” said Jack.

“Hand me that crescent wrench, Jack; I am almost finished.”

Jack handed his dad the wrench, and Dad finished tightening the drain plug on the oil pan, and slid out from under the car.

“All finished, Son,” said Dad as he slowly rolled out from under the car. “Now I’ll show you why I did not want you under the car with me, but would rather have you up here doing your part.” Dad held up his hand for Jack to see. There was a

bright red spot on the back of his hand. Jack looked at the burn in surprise. He was not sure what to say. Dad looked at him and said, "I hope that you will learn to be content with your job. I would not like to see something like that happen to you if you had been under the car."

Answer the questions regarding the story.

1. Why was Jack not content?

2. What did Jack want?

3. What did Jack's dad want?

4. Why did Jack's dad give him the job that he did?

5. What did Jack not know about the job that he wanted?

6. If Jesus always knows what is best for us, how should we feel about what we have now?



SCRIPTURE STUDY

Copy the following verse.
Proverbs 14:30

What does this verse mean?

How can this verse be applied to your life?

A STORY ABOUT CONTENTMENT—

JOAN'S VISIT TO LONDON

—Selected

Such a contented, happy soul was Joan Macpherson! She seemed to want no other amusement than her daily duties and the simple pleasures which, as a small farmer's daughter, fell to her share. Whether she milked the cows in the upland meadow, or churned the butter, or sat at her mending, or knitted, or gathered flowers for market bunches, she was always bright and blithe, singing over her work like a bird.

"I wonder at you, I do!" said Joan's cousin, Helen Lovett, one day when the girls were walking out together. Helen lived in London, but had come to spend a month

in the Highlands on account of her health. Her parents were well-to-do tradespeople, but the girl had grown up with some very foolish and unwholesome ideas.

“Why do you wonder at me, Helen?” asked Joan, stooping to pick a wildflower at her feet.

“Why? Oh! because you seem so happy with this life, and never want anything different.”

“I don’t know why I should want anything different,” said Joan quietly.

“Well,” replied Helen, “it’s all very well for a few weeks; even *I* can stand that! But to *live* here? No, thank you!” And Helen turned up her nose, and held her frizzled head very high.

“If only you would come back to London with me, Joan,” she went on, “you’d soon see the difference. Only, mind you never tell *my* friends that you’re used to tramping about the fields in the morning without shoes or stockings.”

Joan did not reply. It had never occurred to her that this was anything to be ashamed of, or that the simple country life she had led could be looked down upon. But now the thought rankled in her mind. She began to compare her cousin’s dress and manner with her own; to be dissatisfied with the lot which had hitherto been so sweet and peaceful, and to hanker after a visit to London.

“Let her go, Molly,” said Sandy Macpherson to his wife; “let the bairn go. If I’m not much mistaken, she’ll soon be wanting to come back to us.”

So it was settled that Joan was to return with her cousin; and in another fortnight our little Highland lassie found herself in the great city, which afar off had seemed such a paradise of delights, but now that she was really in it, was just a world of noisy dirty streets, where she dared not go out alone for fear of losing her way, and where she felt as little at home as a fish out of water.

So, after a little while, Joan began to feel as if she were an intruder, especially as her cousin had her own friends—friends who wore smart dresses and many colored flowers in their hats, and who sneered or laughed at little dowdy Joan, as they called her.



But Joan would hardly have minded, if Helen herself had taken her part; but Helen, instead of standing up for her, often joined in the rude fun at the girl's expense, and this wounded her heart, and took away all confidence and affection.

Altogether, such of the wonders of London as Joan was taken to see, by no means recompensed her for the loss of the peace and happiness that had been hers all her life until now.

"Tomorrow is my birthday, Joan," said Helen one evening, "and some of my friends are coming to tea. They'll all be finely dressed. What do you think of wearing?"

"Why, you know I have only two frocks, Helen," replied Joan. "I shall have to wear my dark blue Sunday dress, I suppose."

"You can't do that," said Helen. "It isn't half smart enough. As you haven't anything pretty to put on you'll have to stay upstairs in your own room, for I should be ashamed for you to be seen by my friends."

Joan did not reply, though she was disappointed to miss the birthday party, and sorely hurt by her companion's words. But she knew that all the talking in the world would do no good.

In the course of the evening of the birthday some of the girls came up into Helen's bedroom, which adjoined that of Joan's room. There was much whispering and laughter, and presently the Scotch girl heard her name spoken in Helen's voice. "But who is this Joan Macpherson?" asked one of Helen's visitors.

"Oh, she's my cousin, I'm ashamed to say," replied Helen. "But I shouldn't care for everyone to know it, for these country cousins are no credit to one. I'm sick of her, I am, and I wish she'd go back to the North, where she came from. But I daresay her parents were glad to get rid of her, and we may have to keep her longer than we want to."

But just then Helen was startled by the sudden opening of the door between her room and Joan's. There stood the Scotch lassie, her eyes ablaze with indignant protest.

"I couldn't help hearing every word, Helen," she said; "and after what has passed, I wold not remain here for anything. My parents did not want me to come at all; but I was silly, and fancied that life would be happier than at home. I know better now. Tonight I'll write to Father to come and fetch me away."

Two days after, Joan, with a very pale face and eyes red with crying, burst into

the little parlor of the farmhouse, where her mother was sitting.

“Oh, Mother,” she cried, throwing herself into the arms that opened to receive her, “how good it is to get back! I’ve been so very miserable all the time, and just longing for you and Father, and the peace and quiet, the fields and flowers, the cows and chickens, and all I’ve been used to from a baby.”

“I fear you’ve had a hard lesson, my dear,” said Mrs. Macpherson; “but it won’t have been thrown away, lassie, if it teaches you that God knows just what sort of life is best for us, and that to be content with His choosing is the only happiness for God’s children.”

Answer the following questions regarding the story.

1. Joan was contented until her cousin came. How did Helen’s attitude and words steal away Joan’s contentment?

2. Joan thought she might find happiness in London, but how did her trip and her time with her cousin turn out?

3. What valuable lesson did Joan learn?

4. From reading this story, what lesson did you learn about contentment?

It Is Well with My Soul

H. G. SPAFFORD

PHILIPP BLISS



1. When peace, like a riv-er, at-tend-eth my way, When sorrows like
2. Though Sa-tan should buf-fet, tho tri-als should come, Let this blest as-
3. My sin— oh, the bliss of this glo-ri-ous tho't— My sin— not in
4. And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight, The clouds be rolled



sea-bil-lows roll; What - ev - er my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
sur-ance con - trol, That Christ has re - gard - ed my help - less es - tate,
part, but the whole—Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
back as a scroll, The trump shall re - sound and the Lord shall de - scend,



It is well, it is well with my soul. It is well with my
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.
"E - ven so"— it is well with my soul. It is well



soul, It is well, it is well with my soul.
with my soul,



The Sameness of Things

People often complain about the monotony of everyday life. Even the young, in the midst of health and strength, get weary of the round of confinement at labor, and eagerly wish for release.

This desire is natural, and yet we must remember that life is made up of sameness. There are things which cannot be done without, which go on the same, day after day, year after year, and age after age. The seasons come and go according to law. Spring comes with its bloom and brightness; summer with its golden sunlight; autumn with its fruitage and ripened grain; and winter with its snowy crown. The glare of the day is followed by the shade of night. The generous earth yields its harvests to hungry toilers. Nature is the same, year after year.

Many things connected with human life need to remain the same. We love the quiet spirit, not subject to the unpleasant changeable moods of caprice and passion. We love to see the same gentle smile, the same tender love-light upon the face, and to hear the same earnest words of greeting. "Always the same" is a trait of character that we admire in a friend.

Then, there is the same tiresome duty, over and over, that leads to the shining goal. Deeds of love performed again and again make the life beautiful. There is the same long pathway to the shining mountaintop of success, and the same shadowy valley to be passed through before the tired one finds the rest of Heaven.

Jesus Christ, our great Example, is "*the same yesterday, to day, and for ever,*" so His children should walk patiently in the old paths, until they reach the home where contentment reigns and the people desire no change.

—M. A. Holt

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



Contentment

Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me;
And the changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see;
I ask Thee for a patient mind,
Intent on pleasing Thee.

I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad and joyful smiles,
And wipe the weeping eyes,
And a heart, at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathize.

I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking some great thing to do,

Or secret thing to know;
I would be treated as a child,
And guided where I go.

Whatever in this world I am,
In whatsoever estate,
I have fellowship with hearts
To keep and cultivate,
And a work of lowly love to do
For the Lord on Whom I wait.

So I ask Thee for the daily strength—
To none that ask denied—
And a mind to blend with outward life,
While keeping at Thy side,
Content to fill a little space,
If Thou be glorified.

by Anna Lititia Waring



—If you cannot do what you like to do,
try to like what you have to do.—*Anonymous*

INSTRUCTIONS IN CONTENTMENT

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.”

—1 Timothy 6:7-8

How *do* we become contented? How *do* we stop complaining, frowning, and being miserable? Well, let’s begin with three steps—or shall we call them “stops,” and also add three complementary “starts”? We can begin doing them immediately.

THREE EASY STOPS

1. **Stop** complaining words. Anytime you find yourself complaining, stop immediately! Find something positive to say instead. Look for the good in the matter or situation. That is it! Never complain again. Just don’t do it! It is a matter of self-control. Control your tongue.
2. **Stop** complaining thoughts. Before complaining words can come out of our mouths, we first think them. When you find yourself thinking negative thoughts, thoughts of self-pity (you know, “poor me”), or whining and complaining thoughts, change your thoughts. Just quit it! Think of something good. Think about all you do have, and all God has done for you.
3. **Stop** frowning and pouting. Just don’t do it!

THREE EASY STARTS

1. **Start** being thankful for everything you have. Verbalize it. Start being grateful for everything everyone does for you. Verbalize it. Say, “I am so happy about this. I am so thankful for this. I am grateful to you for doing this for me.”
2. **Start** being satisfied with everything. Verbalize it. Say, “This is good. This is nice. I like this. I am happy about this.”
3. **Start** smiling at everyone and over everything. Just do it!

Good character habits take us a long way down the road to contentment. There is a saying: “Actions determine emotions,” which tells us that actions will often determine how we feel. If we frown all the time, we will most likely be unhappy. If we smile all the time, we will most likely be happy.

Now, contentment is more than a feeling of happiness. It is a state of being. It is a position we take. The Bible tells us that man is as a blade of grass. *“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away,”*—1 Peter 1:24. Man is here on earth for a season. We think it is a long time, but it is very short. Generations of men come and go. They are here but for a moment. The things of this earth shall pass away, and in the light of eternity, what do the things here really mean anyway?

Is anything worth fighting over? Is anything worth being glum and sad? Do we really need to have the most, or the best, or even just have our way in things? Do we need to become famous or be the winner? Who will remember when our lives are over? Who will care?

“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever,”—1 Peter 1:25. Only our God is eternal and everlasting, and His Word alone endures forever! Why not stop striving to have what you want, and be content with what you have? It is but for a short time. We can relax and enjoy, and know that God will take care of us and provide for all our needs. We need not be miserable because we want *more* when we can decide to be happy or content.

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth,”—Colossians 3:2. That is a command! “Set your affection.” Set it! Do it! Our state of being is in Christ, and we shall dwell with Him forever! We can be content with that! We can! Can you? You can!

The Secret of Contentment

Lord, I am willing,
To receive what You give,
To lack what You withhold,
To relinquish what You take,
To suffer what You inflict,
To be what You require.
And, Lord, if others are to be
Your messengers to me,
I am willing to hear and heed
What they have to say.
—Selected.

SEARCHING YOUR HEART

Answer the following questions.



1. Are you always content? Explain.

2. Can you think of some times or situations when you have a hard time being content? What are they? Explain why.

3. What effect does your attitude of “contentment” or “discontentment” have on those around you?

4. Can you think of any ways to change your thoughts about these times?

5. How can you help others who are discontent or dissatisfied?

6. Talk these things over with your parents. Ask them to help you begin changing. They will be happy to pray for you and remind you.

DECISIONS TO MAKE

Decisions are choices that we make. We are responsible for them. We can blame no one else but ourselves when we make wrong decisions. Our aim or goal should be to make good, godly decisions. Won't you now decide to—



1. Accept things cheerfully, no matter how large or small they may be.
2. Do your chores happily because you are content to be able to do them.
3. Be happy for others who receive more than you.
4. Be content and happy for the opportunity to be a servant and to make someone else happy.

“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”—1 Thessalonians 5:18

A STORY ABOUT CONTENTMENT—

THE CONTENTED FARMER

—Selected

Once upon a time, Frederick the Great, when taking a ride, noticed an old farmer plowing by the roadside, and singing at his work.

“You seem to be quite happy, old man,” said the king. “Does this large field belong to you?”

“No, sir,” replied the farmer, who did not know it was the king that spoke to him. “I am not rich enough to own this ground. I plow for wages.”

“How much do you get a day?” asked the king.

“Eight groschen [about twenty-three cents],” said the farmer.

“That is not much,” said the king. “Can you live on that?”

“Yes, sir, and have something left.”

“How is that?” asked the king.

The farmer smiled and said, “Well, if I must tell you—two groschen are for myself and my wife; with two I pay my old debts; two I lend out; and two I give away for the Lord’s sake.”

“This is a mystery which I cannot understand,” said the king.

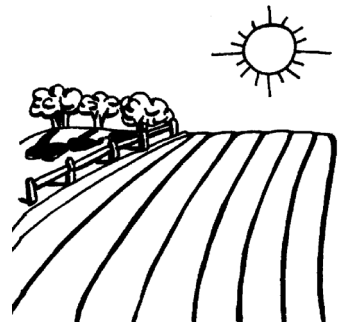
“Then I will explain it,” replied the farmer. “I have two old parents at home, who kept me when I was young and needed help; and now, when they are old, I keep them. This is the debt I pay with two groschen a day.

“The two groschen which I lend out, I plow for my children, that they may receive instruction. They will pay it back in the comfort they will be to me and my wife when we become old. With the last two groschen I support two sisters, who are unable to take care of themselves. This is what I give for the Lord’s sake.”

The king, well pleased, said, “Nobly spoken, old man. Now it is my turn to give you something to guess. Have you ever seen me before?”

“Never,” said the farmer.

“In less than five minutes, you shall see me fifty times, and carry in your pocket



fifty of my likenesses.”

“It is your turn to explain, for I cannot understand you,” said the farmer.

“Then I will enlighten you,” replied the king.

Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he brought forth fifty new gold pieces, stamped with his own likeness. Giving them to the farmer, he said, “The coin is genuine, for it comes from your king. I bid you adieu.”

Answer the following questions regarding the story.

1. Why do you think the farmer did not complain about his hard lot in life?

2. How do you think that the poor farmer could be content with so little?

3. Even with having so little, how was he able to help others?

4. Do you think you could be content as the old farmer was? Explain.

5. How are you able to help others with what you have?

6. What effect did the farmer’s contented spirit have on the king?

STORY ABOUT CONTENTMENT—

I Wish I Were Rich

—A.L.O.E.

“And some fell among thorns: and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.”
—Luke 8:7.

“I should like to be rich!” cried Louie. “I should like to be as rich as the King!”

“Perhaps riches would neither make you better nor happier,” quietly observed his uncle, who was busy at his employment as a watchmaker beside him.

“But they would, Uncle. I am quite sure that they would.”

“You forget the words that we read last night from the Bible, *‘They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts.’*”

“I cannot see how that should be.”

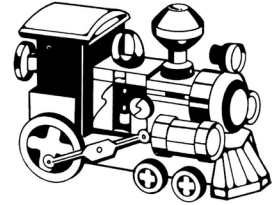
“The pleasures and cares of this life, and the deceitfulness of riches, are apt to draw our hearts from God. In the parable, they are described as the thorns which spring up and choke the good seed. We are too much inclined to forget the Giver while enjoying His gifts: this is not the case with all, but it is the case with many.”

“I would never forget the Lord, because He loaded me with comforts,” replied Louie. “The more I received, the more grateful I would feel. How much good I would do; how many I would make happy! I would build a church one year, and a schoolhouse another, and—why—there—can it be?—yes—there is Mother herself coming along the lane! Oh, I never thought that she would be back from London till Monday!” With a cry of delight, the boy sprang to the door to meet and to welcome his mother.

The fond parent had hurried back from London, whither she had been obliged to go upon business. There had been much for her to see—much to enjoy. Friends had urged her to stay. She was weary and needed rest, but the thought of her son whom she had left at home, drew her, like a magnet, back to Berkshire. She had never before been separated from Louie, and her dear child had scarcely ever been absent from her thoughts. All that the tender mother saw that was wonderful or beautiful was stored up in her memory to amuse her son. In the bright shops, nothing had tempted the kind parent so much as what she thought might give pleasure to her

child. And now she felt the dear arms clasped round her neck, she could press her little one close to her heart—it was enough for her to see her darling—and she thought of nothing else till Louie eagerly cried, “And what have you brought me from London, dear Mother?”

When the large traveling bag was produced and opened, a number of books, a packet of clothes, and a few other things were hastily pulled out by Louie, impatient to find something more interesting to himself. It must have been a weary business to have carried that great bag from the station, three miles distant! Louie’s search was soon successful. With repeated exclamations of delight he drew forth a small toy train, with its brightly-painted cars and a shining black engine, a lemon—a nest of boxes, box within box—a book full of pictures; and two shining fish, with a magnet to attract them when floating in water.



“Oh! look!” cried Louie, turning from one thing to another, while his weary mother stood patiently looking on. “Another lemon! I think these funny little boxes never will end—and oh, I must fetch water for my fish to swim in. Look, Uncle, look! They will turn any way. Just see—I am sure that it will please you.”

“I do see something, Louie, that does *not* please me. I see a mother tired from a long hot journey—no one has even helped her off with her cloak—no one has set her chair in its place. A cup of tea would refresh her—no kettle is on the fire. Her child has scarcely a word or a look to give her!”

“Oh, Mamma!” said Louie, coloring at the reproof, “I was wrong, very wrong, but the truth is, that I was so much taken up—so much engaged with—”

“The gifts, that the giver was forgotten!” interrupted his uncle gravely. “This is the case with but too many in this world—children of wealthier parents, playing with grander toys. We should know ourselves well before we dare to affirm that there would be no danger to hearts such as ours in *the pleasures of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.*”

Answer the following questions regarding the story.

1. What did Louie wish for?

2. What did his uncle warn him of?

3. What occurred when Louie's mother returned home?

4. What does it mean to know ourselves well?

5. What is meant by the pleasures of this world?

6. How can riches be deceitful?

7. How does contentment protect us from the snare of riches?

Christ's Example

*Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour,
Once became a child like me;
Oh, that in my whole behavior,
He my pattern still might be.*

THINGS TO DO

It's one thing to study a character trait, learn definitions, and ponder Scriptures. It is another thing to put those ideas into action and make them a part of your life. Following is a list of things which you can do to build the habit of contentment into your life. Complete as many items as you can (no fewer than four) from the following list.

1. Memorize Philippians 4:11.
2. Memorize Hebrews 13:5.
3. Write an essay on a biblical example of contentment.
4. Practice showing contentment.
5. Learn the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul," and sing it each day. It will help you remember to be content.
6. What are two things with which you could be more content?

7. What are two things that you could do to make someone else happy by being content?

Remember . . .

- ✓ **Never** say, "I wish . . ." Jesus never said "I wish . . ." He was always content and thankful for what God the Father had given Him.
- ✓ **Never** say, "I know I would do better at this if . . ." We should always do our best with what we have. We should never try to be better than others, but simply do our best for God.
- ✓ **Never** say, "Susie has it." What God has given us is more than we deserve to have. We should never look at others and think we deserve what they have. We deserve nothing. We should always be content and thankful for what God has given us.

Do say . . .

- ✓ What can I give to others?
- ✓ I am thankful because . . .
- ✓ I am grateful because . . .
- ✓ I am happy because . . .
- ✓ I am content because . . .

Can you find these words in the puzzle?

content

contented

contentedly

contentedness

contentment

happiness

happy

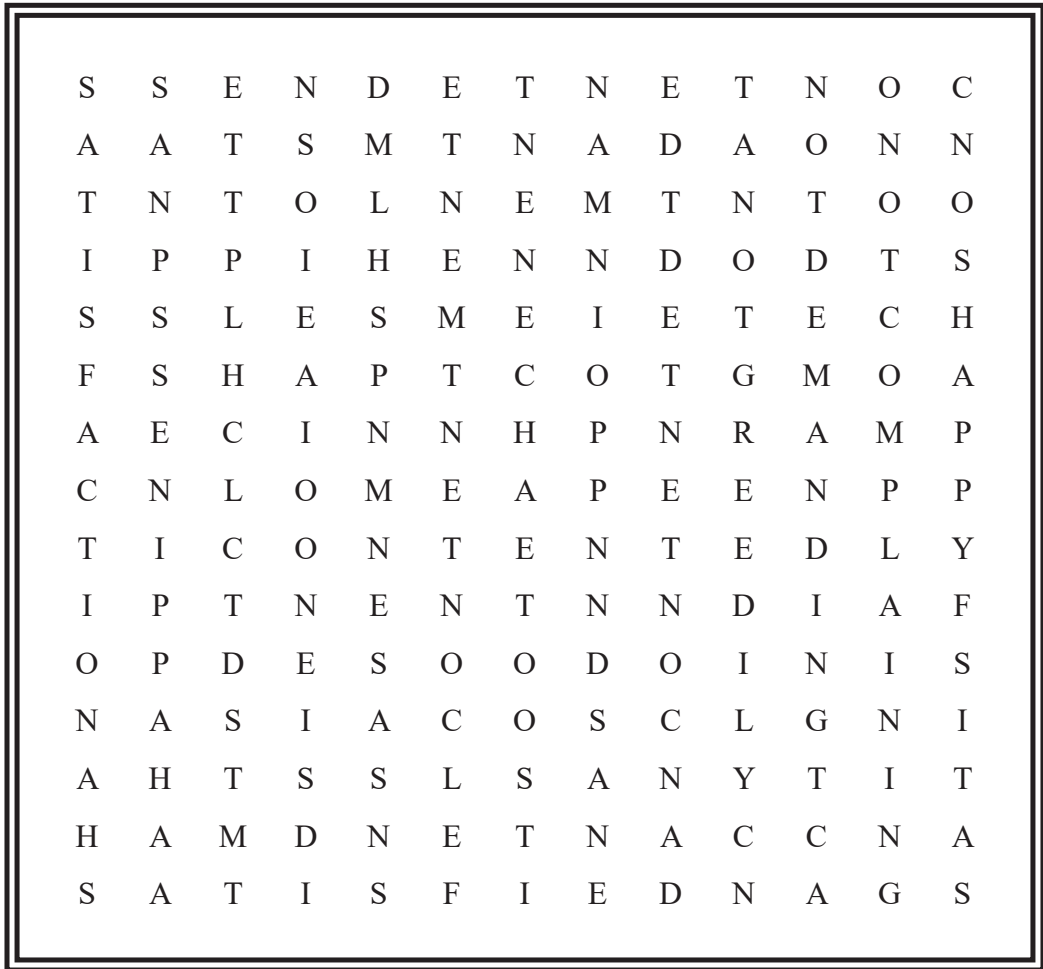
not complaining

not demanding

not greedily

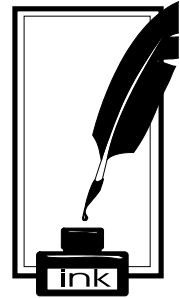
satisfaction

satisfied



KEEPING A JOURNAL

Many people say that it takes thirty days to create a habit, and that is just what we are trying to do—create the habit of contentment! The next thirty pages will be set aside to record your progress in making the character trait “Contentment” an integral part of *your* character. At the end of each day ask yourself the following questions, and write down the answers, and anything additional concerning your “contentment” trait.



Following are a few *reminders* or *goals* to help you begin focusing on contentment each day.

1. Take a sheet of paper and write the word “contentment” in large letters, and place it where you will see it the first thing in the morning when you awake.
2. Upon awakening and seeing the word “contentment,” say a prayer asking God to help you have contentment that day.
3. Purpose in your heart to have contentment all day.
4. Purpose in your heart to have contentment no matter what happens that day.
5. Using index cards or small sheets of paper, write the word “contentment” on them, and put them in places in the house where you will see them.
6. Place one of the cards in your Bible; place others in your schoolbooks or reading books.
7. At noon or lunchtime, go to your room, and kneel down and pray and ask God to continue to help you to be truly content.
8. At dinnertime, have another private prayer time with God and ask for continued help in establishing the habit of contentment.



Day 1 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 2 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 3 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 4 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 5 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 6 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 7 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 8 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 9 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 10 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 11 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 12 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 13 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 14 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 15 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 16 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 17 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 18 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 19 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 20 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 21 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 22 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 23 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 24 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 25 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 26 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 27 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 28 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 29 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?

Day 30 Date _____

1. Was I content today? _____
2. Was there anything about which I complained? What was it, and why was I not content?

3. What sins kept me from having contentment all day today?

4. How did my contentment and/or discontentment affect others today?

5. What more could I have done to be content today?
