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Learning the Secret of Contentment

Day 5 of 5

Guest: Kent and Barbara Hughes

From the series: Spiritual Disciplines for Men and Women
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Bob: Have you learned to be content in your marriage? Here's Barbara Hughes.

Barbara: You know, the pastor's wife, time and time and time again, I would have Christian women come to me and complain about their discontent and, interestingly enough, when I would sit down and point them to what the Scriptures say, the response generally was, "Yes, I know that, but" – they take for granted the blessings of the Gospel. In the Gospel, He has given us everything we need for life in godliness – everything we need. If we have everything we need, why are discontent? It's because, frankly, we are not satisfied with God. It is the condition of the heart.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, February 28th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. Are you satisfied with God? Is Jesus your all in all? Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us on the Friday edition. You know, I'm actually feeling better – feeling healthier, feeling a little more spiritually buff, as a result of this week.

Dennis: After all the cod liver oil …

Bob: … the cod liver oil that we've been taking here this week.

Dennis: Bob has been drinking it like a beverage.

Bob: I have been disciplining myself for the purpose of godliness just by spending time here on FamilyLife Today and, in fact, that's all you need to do, ladies and gentlemen, if you want to grow into godliness, just spend 30 minutes a day with FamilyLife Today, and it's the perfect cure for what ails you. What do you think? No, probably no, okay. I gave it a shot, though.

Dennis: Well, anyway, we tried.

Bob: It helps, it does help.

Dennis: It does help, and we receive letters from folks, and I just say thanks for writing us, telling us how FamilyLife Today does remind you a little bit like a spiritual wheel alignment on a daily basis, and we enjoy getting letters from you. If you haven't written us in a while, pull out a sheet of paper, jot us a note, send us an e-mail and …

Bob: … tell us what you think of our cod liver oil.

Dennis: That's right.

Bob: We dish it out every day here on FamilyLife.

Dennis: We do, we do. We've been talking to Kent and Barbara Hughes all this week and, Kent, Barbara, I want to thank you for sharing about spiritual disciplines. You guys have written a pair of great books – "Disciplines of a Godly Man," "Disciplines of a Godly Woman." Kent, Barbara, thanks for all your work.

Kent: We're grateful to be here.

Barbara: Thank you so much.

Dennis: We have talked this week about a number of spiritual disciplines. We've talked about relationships, we've talked about the Gospel, we've talked about marriage being a spiritual discipline.

Bob: We've talked about the mind and renewing our minds and being in the Word of God and studying and knowing God better, and we've really only scratched the surface on different disciplines you talk about in your book. We talked about modesty this week and, Dennis, we don't have time to kind of unearth them and unpack them all, but I look around at the Christian community today, and I think what the two of you have addressed are areas where we're stumbling often.

In fact, Barbara, in your book one of the disciplines you talk about is the discipline of contentment.

Barbara: Contentment is definitely a discipline. It is something you have to work at in the Christian life. It doesn't come easy. My chapter on "The Discipline of Contentment," I subtitled "Submissions Rest,"

because it is a rest, a place of quiet rest when you have conquered the demon of discontent.

The verse I start out with is Psalm 38:9 – "All my longings lie open before you, O Lord," and the thing I discovered in the course of writing this chapter and in my study about contentment is that there are different kinds of longings. There are godly longings, but there are also ungodly longings. The worst thing that can happen to a Christian that is longing for something outside the will of God is for God to allow him to have it, because in the Old Testament, when Israel constantly …

Bob: … when they wanted to change …

Barbara: … yes. And God said because of their stubborn and stiff necks, He wasn't going to have it, but …

Bob: … he let them have it all right.

Barbara: Yeah, that's exactly right.

Dennis: Yeah, they got sick and tired of the quail meat. They complained about bread – they didn't like manna, and so He said, "Okay, here's some quail for you."

Bob: They didn't like, either.

Dennis: They didn't like that, either. Kent, one of the more interesting passages around this subject of the spiritual discipline of contentment is found over in 1 Timothy, chapter 6. In fact, this passage has been one that I've spiritually chewed on for a number of years. It says, "For godliness is actually a means of great gain when accompanied with contentment." Now, that's a curious statement, because it's saying that godliness without contentment is not great gain.

Kent: That's right, absolutely, and I think that people strive after this and because we live in a world that is constantly moving us to discontent, that we have a tendency to seek God but not everything in God as we ought to, and God has to be the locus, and He has to be the motivation, and He has to be the destiny and goal of our contentment, and that's where we'll ultimately all be and is, right now, in Him.

Bob: The Apostle Paul also talks about having learned the secret of contentment. That's in Philippians, chapter 4, when he says I've

had some tough circumstances, I've had some great circumstances. I've been hungry, and I've been well fed; I've been in a place where I didn't have a roof over my head, and I've been in palaces. He says, "I've learned that my circumstances are not the key to my contentment.

So let me ask you guys – if the circumstances are not the key to our contentment, we're talking to a lot of listeners right now who would say, "My circumstances are not good. I have a godly longing for a godly husband, and I don't have one. I have a godly longing for my children to obey, and they don't. I may have some ungodly longings for some stuff that I shouldn't long for, but I do." If my circumstances are not the key to contentment, what is?

Barbara: God is. Let me just put it this way – I wrote this chapter because I, as a pastor's wife, time and time and time again, I would have Christian women come to me and complain about something in their life, something they were discontent with, and they usually came in one of these categories – their reputation; that is, they desired other people to think they're beautiful, intelligent, or successful. Or their marital status – they desired to be married or married to someone else or …

Bob: … single again …

Barbara: … yeah, or change something about their husband, something – money. That's a big one – discontent with their status and what they have or don't have. Children – wish they could change something about the ones they have; wish they had some; wish they didn't have them; wish they could get rid of the ones they have, basically – I'm joking, of course, but almost. Those areas – they're discontent.

Interestingly enough, when I would sit down to point them to what the Scriptures say in regard to something like that, their response generally was or is, "Yes, I know that, but" – they take for granted the blessings of the Gospel. In the Gospel – when I said in the beginning chapter of my book, "The Discipline of the Gospel" that the Gospel satisfies us, I said that because it says clearly in Scripture that He has given us everything we need for life in godliness – everything we need. If we have everything we need, why are we discontent? How can that possibly be? It's because, frankly, we are not satisfied with God. It is the condition of the heart.

When I talked about godly longings and ungodly longings, a godly longing is a longing for God. You know, the psalmist says, "My soul pants for thee, O God." A woman in our church tells this lovely story of she found herself driving around town looking at homes, and she just longed to – she'd see a little house and think, "Oh, I'd love to live there," and she had a perfectly good home, so she couldn't understand this longing. What was the deal? But she finally went and started looking at the Scriptures and looking at longing, and she realized that she was longing for home and not a particular home, but a home, and we will never be – our hearts will never be satisfied in this world until we are ultimately home with God. And so that's a godly longing, and that's one that will be met, but we've got to wait. We've got to have patience.

But there are ungodly longings. They are the ones that come to us, like another young woman in our church – she had been raised in a godly home. She was happy, she was a perfectly happy girl, but then she moved to the city, and I'm talking about the city of Chicago, and when she moved there, she suddenly was – oh, my goodness, her sights were raised. It was, like, what a boring life I have, and she began to believe the lie that Christians have dull lives, and all those folks out there doing all those radical things were having fun. That is a lie right out of the pit. Those people living lives that look exciting that are apart from God and motivated by anything but love for others are full of relational dysfunction.

Bob: You're talking about folks who are getting drunk regularly, who are engaging in immoral sexual behavior – you're talking about the way the world lives.

Barbara: Yeah, but I'm talking about the cool people, I'm talking about the cool people that just make it look like you guys are so boring, and we have it together. You are so uncool.

Dennis: And you're really talking about there a comparison, and we always compare from a distance. We don't really see what the other people are truly feeling and experiencing, and that kind of discontentment is the source of all kinds of sin.

Kent: Right, and I was just going to say, Barbara, in addition to that is that Malcolm Muggeridge talks about this when he says that evil portrayed, say, on the screen, or a lifestyle that looks like the rich and the famous, always looks great and exciting, but in reality it's the most boring thing in the world, and so we see it from the outside, as you were saying, Dennis, but it's not the way it looks, either.

Barbara: Well, and in that same study from Muggeridge, he also said that they always portray – talking about those who portray goodness on the screen – it's always boring. Goodness is boring. I mean, you see it over and over, you know, ad nauseum, in film and television, you know, goodness is boring. But that is not true, and if you believe the lie, you're not content, and that's what happened to this young woman in church.

Dennis: I believe it was Malcolm Muggeridge who told the story on himself that he was about to leave his faith, and he was down near a river and saw what appeared to be a beautiful woman swimming in the stream, and she was quite a distance away, and he could tell she didn't have any clothes on, and so, in his depravity, and in his longings to leave his faith, he got in the stream and began to swim downstream to where she was, and her back was facing him, and he couldn't see her as he got closer until, finally, she turned around, startled, when he got closer and, all of a sudden, he realized she was a leper. And he said "My depravity and selfishness of my human heart was exposed," but he said, "equally important was that sin was exposed for what it was." It may, from a distance, look good, but the closer you get and the more reality you see, the more it represents death and not life.

Bob: I want to take you back to the question – and you answered it – I said, "What's the secret of contentment?" And you said "God is," and you said, "It may sound simplistic," and you sit down with these women, Barbara, and they say, "I'm not content with my husband," or "I'm not content with my kids," or "I'm not content with my house" or my money or my job or those things," and you say, "Well, you'll only find real contentment in God," and they go, "But how do I – I know God. I come to church, but I'm not finding contentment there. Where am I missing it?"

Barbara: Okay, well, one of the things – we've talked a lot this week about getting to know God through the Scriptures, studying the Bible, reading the Bible. We talked about how you could read it five pages a day and read it through in a year, et cetera, et cetera. The fact is, you can do all that, and it doesn't do a thing for you unless you apply it.

Knowledge without application is deadly, because you think, then, that you know it. One of the things about the Jews in the Old Testament is they could never say that they knew – that you weren't allowed to say – the way they expressed themselves – they couldn't say they knew. If you knew something, then you had

applied it. So you couldn't say, "I know that," unless you had actually put it to work in your life. So the mistake that Christians make and the mistakes that so many I know when they come to me and they say, "Oh, yes, I know that," but what they mean is they have it up here. They know the facts about God, but they have never trusted Him. They are not trusting that He has their best interest at heart, that when He builds hedges around them, when He says, "Don't dress like this," when He says "Don't do that, do this" – that they can trust.

See, that's what Eve didn't do in the Garden, and that's where it all began – this lack of trust that God had her best interest at heart. She didn't believe that. He's denying me some good thing here.

Bob: That's discontentment.

Barbara: That is discontent, and that was the first discontent recorded in the Bible – Eve's discontent with what God had denied her.

Bob: I've got one tree I can't eat from …

Barbara: … I can't eat from that tree …

Bob: … and I can't be happy …

Barbara: … so He can't have my best interest at heart. She believed the lie. We cannot do that. If you want to be content, apply what you know about God to your circumstances. Is it easier to be content with little or with much? Because Paul says he had learned both – both are hard. One woman has said, "To be content with little is hard; to be content with much is impossible," because the more we have, the more we want. We're insatiable. I mean, we are – I mean – I know it. I love dishes. You know what? I've got a lot of dishes now, and I still want more dishes, because I just crave stuff.

Dennis: We can give you some dishes.

Barbara: Pretty dishes.

Dennis: Barbara and I have some dishes we can give you. You know, as you're talking about achieving contentment, I think about where you begin here, and you've accurately stated it – I think it must begin with God. One of the most practical ways you can express contentment, regardless of your circumstances – now, this is going to sound absurd, but I believe it is one of the most basic and fundamental expressions of faith a believer can express to God,

and it's one of the first things I learned, and one of the things I have to re-learn repeatedly. It's over in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5 – "Give thanks in everything" – all things, and in the original language that meant everything.

Think about giving thanks when you don't have much and then giving thanks when you have much. God didn't change. He is still the same God in your poverty, of your circumstances, of the trials you're facing. We want to constantly change our surroundings. We want to improve them so that we can draw life from them, and He's wanting us to come to Him.

Barbara: Exactly right.

Dennis: He's wanting us to draw our satisfaction from Him, and that has to be the definition of contentment. I don't know how you would get to …

Kent: … amen …

Dennis: … I don't know how you'd get to another definition of it.

Bob: So, again, let me bring this home – somebody who is listening – the bill collectors called yesterday again and said, "Where's the money?" And she'd like to know where the money is, too, because her husband hasn't been depositing it the way he should, and now the bill collectors are calling, and they may get their power turned off, and here's Dennis on the radio saying, "Give thanks in all things." She's going, "Yeah, you said it would sound absurd, it does sound absurd. I'm to give thanks for the circumstances I'm in today and think that God is working these things together for my good?"

Barbara: We give thanks to God for the fact that even in our difficulties we can trust that He will make good come out of every circumstance. We can trust Him when we are alone raising children, as was my mother-in-law, living on a pittance, really, trying to raise two boys without a father. We can trust God that He will be faithful to us in the hardships of life. Remember, I said at one point I wondered, "Why is it God leaves us here?" Because God is at work in us – He has work to do in us, preparing us for the next world. He is sanctifying us, and He uses the difficulties of life to hone us and turn us into the people fit to run the kingdom of God.

Dennis: You know, as we've talked about contentment, I again reflect back on a story that you, Barbara, told earlier in the week about your

mom. Lula Triggs, who lives in Beaumont, California, and how this dear woman, in the midst of a number of trials and tough circumstances with her husband, Wilfred, who was married to your dad for 46 years – a woman who has six children, tons of grandchildren, and at least 30 great-grandchildren, who is still alive today – she demonstrated contentment with a very simple but profound faith in God and, as a result, has become a source of strength to you today as her model.

Barbara: She has.

Dennis: And do you know what I'm going to do here at the end of the program? In just a few moments, I'm going to ask you to come back and I'm going to ask you to give a tribute to your mom on the air.

Barbara: Okay.

Dennis: And I'm going to ask you to speak directly to Lula and to bless her and, first, I want Bob to share with our listeners how they can get a copy of your book.

Bob: I'll do that. We have copies of both Barbara's book and Kent's book available at our FamilyLife Resource Center. Barbara's book is called "The Disciplines of a Godly Woman," and Kent's book, "The Disciplines of Godly Man." You can get either book or both books available from us here at FamilyLife at 1-800-FLTODAY. There is also information online about these books. Again, our Web address is FamilyLife.com, and our toll-free number is 1-800-F-as-in-family, L-as-in-life, and then the word TODAY. Ask about the books, "The Disciplines of a Godly Woman," and "The Disciplines of a Godly Man," by Barbara and Kent Hughes, respectively, when you do get in touch with us.

And, by the way, when you get in touch with us, someone is likely to ask you if you'd like to make a donation to FamilyLife, and here's what I want you to keep in mind – your first priority in terms of any giving ought to be to your local church. They come number-one on the list. So if you're not giving regularly to your local church, that's where you need to start. Beyond that, as you are able to help us with our financial needs, we depend on that in order to keep this ministry going. So when somebody says, "Can you help us with a donation?" I hope you'll be able to say yes, and I hope you will say yes, no matter what the amount of the donation. Every contribution is appreciated and needed, and we do thank those of you who

stand with us regularly as Legacy Partners for your ongoing participation in this ministry.

You can donate online at FamilyLife.com. You can call 1-800-FLTODAY to make a donation, or you can write a check and mail it. Our mailing address is FamilyLife Today at Box 8220, Little Rock, Arkansas. The zip code is 72221. Once again, it's FamilyLife Today at Box 8220, Little Rock, Arkansas, and the zip code is 72221. Dennis?

Dennis: Well, it's been a privilege. I'm look at Bob and how buffed up he is from all the cod liver oil that he's had – how much growth, all the spiritual disciplines. Mary Ann called me and said, "What did you do to Bob? He's a spiritually disciplined man." And I think it's all a result of Kent Hughes prayer for you, Bob. He just wrote a "D" out beside your name and prayed – that's an inside joke. You had to listen to Monday's broadcast to know what that meant. Kent prayed for his wife, Barbara, that she would become disciplined, and now her name is on a book with the same title and, Kent and Barbara, I want to thank you for being on FamilyLife Today.

I gave you an assignment, though, Barbara – in fact, a great honor and a privilege to honor a woman who lived out a very profound yet simple faith in Christ – your mom. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to seat your mom across the table from you, and all three of us men are going to leave, and you're just going to address your mom, Lula.

Barbara: Okay. Okay, Mom, I have a word to say to you with thanks. I suppose my name may be on a book. My name may be on several books. I may speak in public and do all those things, but my dear mom, you, mother, you marked my life, because you're like the widow with the mite who, though she gave only a penny, she gave everything she had, and God found great favor with her, and I think, over the years, constantly, as I grow older, think back to your example to me in being faithful with the little you had to raise us and the little you had to provide in many ways, and yet you never thought of yourself. You cared for us. You lovingly cared for Dad, and it cost you a lot, and I am so thankful for your example, and I hope, I know, that I will never be equal to that, because I've had so much, and I'm so spoiled. You gave me a great example to follow in your humble and simple faith and all that you gave. Thank you, I love you.

Bob: FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ.

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