

## I Have Learned to be Content

A Devotional by Hannah Nesher

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It all started with an iPod. I have nothing against iPods. I think they can be great; but this thing was getting totally out of hand. First, Liat happened to mention to her Dad in Canada that she would like an iPod of her own. And since she is 'Daddy's little girl', he of course bought her one – which set off a whole chain reaction in our family – none of it good. Because when Liat's older, teenage brother, Timothy, heard that Liat was getting a brand new top-of-the-line, generation 4, touch screen iPod WITH camera, he exclaimed, *"Why is SHE, an 11 year old girl, getting this great iPod, which she will probably lose within 2 weeks, when I have so much more use for it in high school?"* To which Avi, my youngest son at 8, chimed in with his own heart's desire for an iPod. "All my friends at school have an iPod!", he proclaimed. And much to my surprise, I found out that this is actually true. So Avi's grade 2 friends began coming over after school to check out the Israeli website for second hand products to search for an iPod 4 Touch for Avi. Every time anyone even mentioned the word iPod in our household, someone would go ballistic. I was experiencing, in my family, exactly the situation that James, Yeshua's brother, described centuries ago, **"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight."** (James 4:1-3) Which goes to show that 'some things never change'. They may not have had iPods in Yeshua's time, but they still had to deal with the same sinful human nature that we struggle with today. It shocked and dismayed me to see the amount of strife, bickering and jealousy that this one gift of an iPod had provoked in the other children. And it got me thinking about the whole issue of contentment versus covetousness.



After all, is there anything wrong with wanting things? Certainly God is not displeased with us desiring material things or else Yeshua would never have told us to ask for them! He taught, **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."** (Mathew 7:7-8) In fact, James wrote, **"You have not because you ask not..."** (James 4:2) Yeshua reassures us that God is a good Father who will give good gifts to

those who ask Him. <sup>1</sup> This is one way that our joy can increase – is by seeing God answer our petitions by meeting our needs and granting us the desires of our heart. “**Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.**” <sup>2</sup> Yeshua came to give us life and life more abundantly – and I believe that means abundance in every sense of the word, not just materially. It is not just ‘stuff’ that we can ask God for, but more love, peace and harmony in our relationships, better health, greater wisdom and understanding, patience and the ability to walk in the fruit of the Spirit; we can ask for guidance and direction, the knowledge of God’s will, and even just a deeper revelation of Him - to see God’s glory. Yeshua told a parable about a persistent widow and an unrighteous judge who gives in to her request just because she wouldn’t stop pestering him, to teach us to also be persistent in asking and not to give up if we don’t receive immediately. It seems to me that Avi has this perfected to an art-form. When he wants something (especially something electronic), I am sure that he must remind me of his request every few minutes throughout the day! It is the first thing on his lips when he wakes up (even before his eyes are open – honestly!) and it is the last thing he mentions at night before falling off to sleep (probably dreaming about his heart’s desire too I’m quite sure!).

### Thou Shalt Not Covet

And yet, God also commands us, “**Thou shalt not covet!**” The Word of God contains several warnings against greed and covetousness. “**Let your conduct be without covetousness, be content with such things as you have.**” <sup>3</sup> Greed can lead us into a path of destruction. “**So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of His owners.**” <sup>4</sup> So when does this ‘asking’ or ‘wanting’ cross the line into greed, lust, and covetousness? We discussed this as a family and came up with a collective distinction, “*Covetousness is wanting the thing that is not yours to have*”. Something can obviously be ‘not ours to have’ as written in God’s word, as in not coveting your neighbor’s wife. She is legally and morally not yours to have. However, something may be completely lawful, and yet not be God’s perfect will for us to have because it is not for our highest good or the time may not yet be right for us to have it. Paul had wisdom in knowing that, “**Everything is permissible for me but not everything is beneficial.**”<sup>5</sup> If we persist in begging for something that is not God’s will for us to have, or stubbornly pursue something that God has said ‘no’ to, it can bring disaster into our lives; because finally God may regretfully give in to our greed and lust, even knowing the distress and anguish it will cause. “**Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand**

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<sup>1</sup> V. 11

<sup>2</sup> John 16:24

<sup>3</sup> Heb 13:5

<sup>4</sup> Prov. 1:19

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 6:12

**and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your terror comes, ...and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you...**<sup>6</sup>

We Israelites can be a stubborn, greedy bunch! In the wilderness, the children of Israel lusted after quail, despising God's provision of manna, so that God sent the quail until it came out their mouth and nostrils; **"and while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague."** (Numbers 11:33) Just because God gives in to us and fills us with whatever our flesh fancies, this doesn't mean that it will bring us life. **"...they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own ways and be filled to the full with their own fancies..."**<sup>7</sup> Like the Israelites in the wilderness, God may give us what we 'lust exceedingly' for, but it may bring a 'leanness to our soul'. **"They did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness...and He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."**<sup>8</sup> Sometimes we get what we asked for but it only leaves us dissatisfied and still hungering for something else to fill the void in our soul.

#### The King You Have Chosen for Yourself

Israel asked for a king; all the other nations had a king and they wanted one too. God wanted to be their only King, but they wanted to be like the other nations, even though God had made Israel to be a 'peculiar people', not like the nations around them. The elders of Israel approached the Prophet Samuel and demanded, **"Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."** (1 Samuel 8:15). Isn't this just like us at times - like a kid that says, *"All the other kids have one, so I want one too!"* But God may have a particular, unique plan for our lives that may not include some of the things that others have. God perceived the people's incessant demands for an earthly king as a rejection of His authority, **"that I should not reign over them."** God tried to warn them that they were better off with Him as King. He instructed Samuel to forewarn the people of Israel about how their chosen king would behave; how he would oppress and exploit them. This king, chosen by flesh and not by the Spirit of God, would use his position to take, take, take, rather than behaving as a true King like Yeshua, a servant-leader. David, chosen by God, also demonstrated this kind of leadership; but Saul was in it for whatever he could get. (For a full study of this issue, see Two Kings and their Three Wives, [www.voiceforisrael.net](http://www.voiceforisrael.net))

Samuel warned that if the people refused to heed the rebuke of the Lord and receive His counsel, then they would **'cry out in that day because of your king WHOM YOU HAVE CHOSEN**

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<sup>6</sup> (Prov. 1:24-27)

<sup>7</sup> Prov. 1:31

<sup>8</sup> Psalms 106:13-15

**FOR YOURSELVES, and the Lord will not hear you in that day.”** (1 Samuel 8:18) Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel and insisted on having a king over them, **“that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”** (v. 19-20) And we know the end of the story. Ironically, King Saul did not obey God; he did not lead Israel into victory but through one bitter failure after another; and in the end, he died in a final, bloody defeat along with his son Jonathan, on Mount Gilboa. Isn't this too much like us when we look to 'man' to meet our needs and fight our battles for us instead of the Lord? Before I came to faith in Yeshua, I continually looked to man to be my savior, something which got me into heaps of trouble! Once I began to read the little book of Psalms, Proverbs and New Testament that a precious counselor gave me at a Crisis Pregnancy Center, one of the first verses that really spoke to me was this, **“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.”** (Psalm 118: 8-9) As a new Believer, God wanted me to come to know Him as my provider, protector, and 'all in all'; but I was stubborn (and afraid to truly trust God). So I married a 'husband of my own choosing', a man from the church I began attending. This little decision cost me my dignity, my self-respect, and almost my life, as this man proved to be physically abusive. After less than a year, I fled with my children to a woman's emergency shelter and obtained a divorce, but I found out the hard way that putting our confidence in an unfaithful man rather than the Lord can be a very costly mistake indeed!

It may very well be God's will for us to marry, but only He knows a man or woman's heart, therefore we need to diligently seek listen for God's voice in specific matters. To do anything out of God's will, pursuing the desires of our flesh and refusing to listen to the voice of God's spirit can result in a lifetime of grief and suffering. It is absolutely imperative that we submit our desires to the Lord, seek His counsel and even receive His correction if we are to walk in security. **“Whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil.”**

### That One Thing

Have you ever noticed that it is sometimes that ONE THING we can't have that we want the most? The Arabs have more than 99% of the land in the Middle East, but they still want this one tiny area called Israel that God says they cannot have. It doesn't belong to them; it is not theirs to have. God spoke in burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom (descendants of Esau), **“who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country...”** (Ezekiel 36:5). God promised the Land of Israel to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) by Divine Covenant; it is not the Arabs' to have; but they will murder innocent Jewish men, women and children to possess it. The blood of the children of Jacob cries out to God from the ground.

## HEBREW WORD STUDY

The rabbis give a fascinating correlation between Haman, the Amalekite anti-Semite in the book of Esther, and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They each wanted that one thing that was not there's to have. God had given Adam and Eve (Chava) liberty to eat of every tree in the garden except for one – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But of course, this is the one that the serpent tempted them with – and they succumbed to the temptation to eat what was not theirs to eat - to have what was not theirs to have. When God saw that Adam now possessed the knowledge of his nakedness and was ashamed, He said, **“Who told you that you were naked? And have you eaten from the kind of tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”** (Gen. 3:11) In Hebrew, the word used here for the kind are: “hamin םַמִּן These are the same Hebrew letters, hey, mem, nun, ׁמִן for the name ‘Haman’. Haman also wanted the one thing he could not have. All people bowed to him, except for one man – the Jew Mordechai. Haman had the homage of every person except one – but he wanted that one too – and was willing to kill all the Jewish people of Persia if he couldn't have it!

Some people may have everything - but they want this one thing so desperately that they would do anything to possess it – even kill for it! Ahab, King of Samaria, experienced this level of covetousness. He wanted a certain vineyard which was already owned by another man, Navot, the Jezreelite. When Navot refused to sell his vineyard, his inheritance from his fathers, to King Ahab for a vegetable garden, Ahab turned sullen. He lay on his bed, turned his face away, and refused to eat, pouting like a spoiled little brat. His wife, Jezebel, arranged for Navot to be murdered in order that Ahab could take over his field. They may have thought that they ‘got away with murder’ but God sees. Through the prophet Elijah, the Lord said to Ahab, **“In the place where dogs licked the blood of Navot, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.”**<sup>9</sup>

I don't think we are doing our kids any favors by giving in to all the iPods and ‘stuff’ they want, no matter how much they pout, whine, and get angry. Children used to getting everything they want can grow up into selfish, spoiled brat adults that will use every destructive and manipulative tactic in their arsenal to get what their sinful nature wants, no matter who gets hurt in the process. Their motto is, *“I know what I want and I'm going to have it and nobody better get in my way!”*

We need to be willing not only to be content with the material things we have, but also with our position in life. Korach and the rebels, Datan and Aviram, allowed selfish ambition to blind their common sense. By stirring up the hearts of the people of Israel to be discontented with Moses' leadership, they initiated a full scale mutiny! Moses' words reveal the root cause of their rebellion – discontentment with their position in life! Korach, Datan and Aviram were

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 21:19

Levites, separated from the rest of the Israelite community to serve the Lord by doing the word of the tabernacle. “...and are you seeking the priesthood also?”<sup>10</sup> There is sometimes a fine line between goals and selfish ambition. We need to respect the authorities God has placed over us and, while striving to be the best we can be, accept our God-appointed position in life. It has been said that often people rise to their level of incompetence. Sometimes we may be coveting a position that we just wouldn't have the grace to handle. Perhaps if we're working in a position where we feel incredibly pressured and are even developing stress related sicknesses, we need to ask ourselves whether it is God who has really promoted us to this high position or if, in fact, we have simply 'exalted ourselves' into a place that God never intended for us to function.

Oh, Lord, may we learn to be contented people.

We need to learn to hear and accept a no. Paul says he LEARNED to be content whether abasing or abounding. (Phil. 4:11) Being content, while there may still be things that we are hoping to see manifested in our lives, is a quality that can be learned. We can want... and we can ask...while still being content as is. I believe that when we are thankful for what God has already blessed us with, He is happy to give us our hearts' desires that are in line with His will. **“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of Your heart.”** (Psalm 37:3) If we are complaining about what He has already given us, then He knows that we will just complain about the next thing. The key is to focus on how much we have already been blessed; how much we already have received, and not all whatever we feel is missing. The Lord is our Shepherd; nothing is missing (translation from the Hebrew). No good thing does He withhold from them that walk uprightly, from those who seek Him. If we will submit our every desire to the Lord, being willing to wait for His counsel, patiently waiting for the right way and right time for it to come to pass, always saying, “If it be Thy will, O God...” we can be content as we 'wait upon the Lord' to see our heart's desire come to pass. We can trust that God is good, and that His heart is to give us good gifts, even abundant life – if we will only obey His voice and keep Him first place in our lives. **“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things you desire will be added unto you.”** (Matt. 6:23)

Closing Prayer: Oh God, help us to be people who are willing to hear 'no' and receive it with grace and a good attitude not pouting and plotting. Give us the wisdom when to give in to our children's requests and when to hold firm against their demands. Transform us into a grateful, humble, people who model contentment and thankfulness for all Your many blessings that You bestow upon us daily, by Your grace. And in all of our wanting and asking, help us to discern which desires are from You, and which originate in our selfish, sinful nature. Deliver us from greed, lust and covetousness in all of its' destructive forms. Help us to look to You to meet all

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<sup>10</sup> Numbers 16:10

of our material, emotional, and spiritual needs, to be our King, and to go ahead of us to fight our battles for us. Help us not to put our confidence in man, the arm of the flesh, not even in princes, but always lifting our eyes to the mountains from where our help comes from – from You, Creator of Heaven and Earth. We trust in Your mercy, love and goodness, to give us the desires of our heart, if it be Thy will, in Your perfect way and perfect time. And Lord, we want only that which You want for us, only the blessings that come from You, for Your word promises,

**“The blessing of the Lord makes one rich and He adds no sorrow to it.”<sup>11</sup> Amen.**

About the Author:

Hannah Neshher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching Christians about the Jewish roots of their faith. [www.voiceforisrael.net](http://www.voiceforisrael.net)



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<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 10:22