



# Raising Contentment

TODAY WE'RE BOMBARDED with messages telling us that we need to buy newer, better, and more perfect things. These messages leave us unhappy with our looks, our clothes, our home, our car, and everything we own.

Jesus taught us not to worry about all these things because God knows our needs (Matthew 6:28, 29). As a missionary, Paul faced hardships and lived without many things, but he learned to be content in all circumstances. Philippians 4 contains some of his secrets for peace: gratitude for what he had;

asking God for what he needed; experiencing the peace of God in his heart; and focusing on the positive things around him. These values can help our families find joy in a society that continually whines for more.

## MODEL CONTENTMENT

We need to reflect prayerfully on our own attitudes if we want to develop anti-materialistic attitudes in our children. So, how contented am I with my car, home, furniture, clothes, technological devices, and even my appearance? Do I believe that everything I have has to be just perfect, or have I learned the joy of "good enough"?

And how am I verbalizing my contentment to my children? We can talk intentionally about our blessings, peace, and joy. We can express gratitude for what we have. We can limit our own purchases and take care of our possessions. We can teach our children how to “make do and mend” in creative ways and share our own delight in giving things away to make others happy.

### **ANTI-WANTING**

Advertising creates a desire for things we never knew we “needed.” Describe advertising to your children as a sneaky little thief who is trying to steal their money and their peace of mind. Help children to spot some of advertising’s nasty little tricks.

When your school-age child wants something very badly, try the anti-wanting debate. Pretend that you are your child, and have your child pretend to be you. You present the case for buying the object, and they have to come up with 5 to 10 reasons, depending on their age, for why it’s not worth buying.

When children want something new, encourage them to write it on a wish list with today’s date, and then see if they still want it in a month. Help them to develop delayed gratification by earning money and saving up for bigger items. This is an important life skill that will protect them from getting into debt later.

### **ENOUGH**

Most of us have enough in our homes already. When tempted to buy something new, be creative and wonder if you already have something you could adapt, repaint, renovate, or reuse. Choose simple, timeless decorating styles, and add color or accessories with budget-friendly items. Challenge your children to have fun making a spaceship out of an appliance box or to find new ways to play with old toys. Explore the Internet for free printable Lego challenge cards, which help children to use this versatile toy in fresh and creative ways.

### **BUYING AFFECTS THE WORLD**

Encourage your child to care for the environment. Most toys are made from plastics and synthetic materials from nonrenewable sources. Encourage older children to explore the environmental effect of using disposable plastics. Learn about fair trade and choose to buy items that show care for the workers who made them and for the creatures and beautiful world God created.

### **BETTER SPENDING**

If children have pocket money to spend, take them to thrift stores and yard sales. Teach them to save money by choosing good, pre-loved toys and clothes. It can be loads of fun discovering interesting toys that you can’t buy in stores today. Show them how to check secondhand items to make sure that all the pieces are there and nothing is broken. Being willing to buy pre-loved items and knowing how to do it wisely and well could save them thousands of dollars in the future.





### ENCOURAGE GENEROSITY

Work together as a family to raise money for a caring project. Try to find a project your children can be actively involved with and where they can see the difference that their generosity makes to others. Provide them the opportunity to give some of their own savings to the project.

Linda's family has decided not to buy anything new unless they can afford to buy two. They wait for half-price sales and two-for-one deals so they can give away the second item or an equivalent-value gift voucher. "We now spend much less, we choose more carefully, and we're more generous," Linda says. "It has changed the way our children think about buying and giving."

When you go to a store with children, give them some money to buy food for a food bank or a gift for a homeless child instead of buying something for themselves.

Celebrate your birthday by taking your children with you to do 10 acts of kindness in the community, and encourage them to do the same on their birthdays. Planning acts of generosity can help to focus your child on the needs of others at a time when they might otherwise be focused on their own wants.

### MAKE GIVING FUN

Researchers have discovered that the happiest people are not those who have the most but those who regularly give things away. Help your children to experience the joy of giving by showing them how to make simple gifts. Download printable playdough playmats, laminate them, and make little pots of colored dough to share with friends. Bake bread and cookies together, decorate planters, grow bulbs, then share them with neighbors and friends. Learn how to make a giant-bubble mixture and wands using dowels, string, screw eyes, and washers (<https://happyhooligans.ca/homemade-giant-bubbles/>) and share with others at the park. Or make kindness rocks by painting smooth garden stones and decorating them with encouraging messages, Bible verses, and cheerful designs. Brush a layer of clear sealant over each rock to protect the design. Have fun leaving the rocks where they will bring joy. (See [www.thekindnessrock-project.com/home](http://www.thekindnessrock-project.com/home) for more information and project guides.)

It's challenging to help your children swim against the tide of materialism, but they'll develop positive Christian values for a lifetime of contentment and joy. J

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