



Riding the Waves

By Gayle Roper

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Chapter 1

One long ago summer day our eight-year-old Chip did something long forgotten for which I felt compelled to discipline him.

"To your room," I said. "And don't come out until I say you can."

"But, Mom, the guys are waiting!"

And indeed they were, standing around like a small herd of young buffalo in the front yard.

"Then they'll just have to wait."

"But we've got plans!"

"Tough," I said, ever the understanding mother.

To hurry Chip on his way to the bedroom, I took him by the nape of the neck and escorted him down the hall to his bedroom. Naturally he resisted my gentle touch.

It was summer, and we were both in our bare feet, a fact I never considered when I began escort duty. It was a great surprise when I slammed my right foot into the back of his left heel. Children have very sturdy heels.

I'm not certain which Chip enjoyed most, his delay in getting to his room or my impromptu dance on one foot as I held the other. It was humiliating to find I'd broken my little toe in our collision.

Several years later I referred to this incident and was absolutely amazed when Chip said, "Oh, yeah. That's the time you kicked me."

"What? I never kicked you!"

"Sure you did. You broke your toe."

"I know I broke my toe, but not because I kicked you. I walked into the back of your heel."

"Sure, Mom. If that's what you say." Smirk, smirk.

"Don't you think that if I were going to kick you -- which I'd NEVER do -- I'd be smart enough to aim for a more padded part of your anatomy?"

"Right, Mom. Right."

It's quite common for two people to see things differently, and for each to think he or she has the right version. Ask any cop who has tried to get witnesses to agree on anything.

"The guy had long, dark hair," says Witness One.

"No, he didn't. He had short dark hair," says Witness Two.

"What? Are you two blind?" says Witness Three. "He had blond hair cut just below his ears."

"Well, I know his shirt was blue plaid," says Witness One.

"Really?" says Witness Two. "I remember red."

"Come on," says Witness Three. "He was wearing a tan jacket."

Disagreement between individuals is also evident to any biographer trying to fit the conflicting memories of his subjects into an accurate whole.

"Then Joe said we should sue the pants off the doctors, so we did," says the biography's subject.

"Wait a minute," says Joe. "I never said anything of the sort. It was Uncle Louie who said that."

"Uncle Louie? Are you crazy? Uncle Louie was already dead by the time I had that accident. You told me to sue."

"Not me," says Joe. "I'd never say anything like that."

"Well, you said it, believe me."

"Did not."

"Did so."

"Well," says the biographer in a soothing voice. "We'll just say you chose to sue and forget where the idea came from, okay?"

Disagreeing with each other is a fact of life.

Sometimes we even disagree with ourselves. Opinions long held are abruptly open to internal debate because something has happened to cause us to look at a situation differently.

We may have read something that raised questions we hadn't previously considered. Or someone may have challenged us about a long held belief or a seemingly invulnerable position like our stand on eternal security or the appropriateness of corporal punishment or the right of a mother to say, "Because I said so! That's why!".

As a result, we find ourselves questioning what we had thought was a fixed conviction. Am I as naïve as he says because I believe in *sola fide*? Is voting a straight party ticket really the sign of a stiff-necked, ill-informed individual? Am I old-fashioned and narrow-minded because I insist my kids dress up on Sundays?

Sometimes it's a trauma or a triumph that forces us to re-evaluate our goals, ideals and faith. We may begin struggling with how an adult's loss of a job or a child's serious learning disability fits into "all things work together for good" (Rom.8:28). Or we may wrestle with how the blessing of a substantial raise or the fact that our unbelieving neighbors genuinely like us fits in with "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (II Tim.3:12).

I wrote the following piece because I suddenly felt uncertain about something as mundane as one of my favorite times of the year.

It's raining leaves, masses of them, and I'm feeling melancholy.

I often delight in the tumble of leaves from tree to ground, their spinning free fall seeming so alive, so invigorating.

Brisk fall days usually make me long to hold my face to the wind and feel its freedom blowing through my hair.

But today as I watch the yellow leaves whirl from the beech across the street, I don't see the beauty of the golden rain but the starkness of the tree left behind.

As our dogwoods shed their crimson foliage, I don't see the ruby deluge. I see the empty, lonely limbs, bare and ugly against the sky. I don't see the glory of autumn; I see only its death.

The brown leaves chasing each other down the street, falling over each other in their enthusiasm, depress me rather than delight me. The lone leaves struggling to remain on their branches seem engaged not in a valiant effort but a vain one.

I guess it's my perspective. I've heard some sad news today. A friend's husband is leaving her and their two babies. Another friend's child is rebelling dangerously. I see their fear in the empty reaching branches outside my window, their uncertainty in the passing of the warmth and sureness of summer.

Yet interestingly, the very passage of the season is a guarantee to my friends, to me, of God's constancy. The change is random happenstance. "Oh, dear, this year the leaves are falling." No, it's purpose, it's plan, it's the Creator in control.

And He's controlling our individual situations too. He's keeping watch over the number of hairs on our heads and the accumulation of hurts in our hearts. Through husbands leaving, kids rebelling, and leaves falling, He's there, comforting, encouraging and loving.

"...and God has said

'Never will I leave you,

never will I forsake you.'

So we say with confidence,

'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

What can man do to me?'"

-Heb.13:5,6

Sometimes we find ourselves disagreeing not only with others or with ourselves but with God Himself. We find ourselves screaming, "Wait a minute, God. Something's not right here! This isn't what I signed on for!"

When I was 26, I had a total hysterectomy for various health reasons. The surgery meant that I'd not only never menstruate again, not necessarily a bad thing. It also meant I'd never have children, definitely a bad thing.

"God, what are you doing her?" I asked. "This can't be right! You've made a terrible mistake! Chuck and I could make a wonderful baby. It would have his long legs and intelligence and my smile. I know the Bible says I should trust, and I do on one level. And I'm truly grateful that you've spared my life. But come on! This isn't fair!"

Now a man came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

"Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself."

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, and follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. -Matt.19:16-22

If disagreeing with people can get sticky and disagreeing with ourselves can get confusing, disagreeing with God can be downright dangerous to our spiritual and emotional development. And when we disagree with God, we invariably walk away sad, as did the young man.

I think I know what would have happened to the young man in the Bible if he had given away all his money and followed Jesus. It's the same thing that will happen to us when we agree with God and do as he says.

He (and we) would learn that all he (and we) need is found in God Himself.

He (and we) would experience that wonderful certainty that God is more than adequate to care for him (and us).

He (and we) would realize that God would give him (and us) all that he (and we) need to survive the situation.

He (and we) would come to the point of *agreeing with God that He and what He has provided for us are sufficient for His purposes for us.*

We would find contentment.

Instead the young man fell prey to the enemies of contentment, and they are many. Perhaps for the young man, the problem was fear or maybe greed. Other enemies of contentment are envy and an ungrateful heart, regret and loneliness, disappointment and depression.

When hard things happen to us and we wonder what God's doing, its not wrong to ask Him what's going on. The danger is when we tell Him it doesn't matter what He has planned; we want it our way and we want it now!

"God, give me my job back! I've got kids to feed."

"God, how could You let my marriage crumble! I've done everything right. You know I have."

"God, how could You let my hands become so ugly with arthritis? You can't give me such pain! I'm the church organist, for Pete's sake."

"God, how come they have enough money to build that wonderful addition, and I can't even afford a coat of paint for my small, hated and incredibly ugly living room? Where's fair here?"

"God, how come my kids have to commute to the local community college while hers go to that elite, prestigious school? We both know mine are smarter and more deserving."

"God, You can't take away my ability to have children! I want the experience of being pregnant, of bearing a child."

In our disagreements with God, we stand in danger of being like the sad young man who walked away from the very Help he needed.

In this book we'll look at some of the ways disagreeing with God can show itself. We'll also consider our spiritual anchors -- the character of God Himself, obedience, godly choices, and spiritual commitment -- so that we can ride, contented, on top of life's waves instead of drowning in chaos.

The goal of this book is to make our fuzzy and nebulous concepts of contentment practical and understandable. I want all of us to grasp the realities and ramifications of agreeing with God that He and what He has provided for us are sufficient for His purposes for us.

I want us all, by the grace of God, to find contentment.

Questions, Questions:

1. When you were growing up, how did your family define contentment, either out loud or by example?
 2. Is there an area in your life where you find yourself disagreeing with God about His provision for you? Or His provision for someone else?
 3. Webster's New World Dictionary defines contentment as being satisfied. From a natural, human point of view, is contentment possible? How does a Christian understanding of contentment differ from the world's?
 4. Read Pro.19:23. What is necessary to rest content?
 5. Does contentment produce passivity? Can contentment and ambition co-exist? Contentment and progress? Contentment and dreams and goals?
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