

Season 3 | Episode 26

Pursuing Contentment

Ginny Owens

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating, and this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week we're bringing you real conversations about disability and finding hope through hardship and sharing practical ways that you can include people living with disability in your church and community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts or find us at joniandfriends.org/podcast.

When faced with circumstances outside of our control, we may start to feel lost and hopeless. And on today's episode of the podcast, I'm joined by singer and songwriter, Ginny Owens, who has been blind since the age of three. Ginny's approach to music and books on darkness, life, and faith have had a way of helping others see their own lives more clearly, so as to find hope in the midst of suffering. And she's joining us on the podcast today to talk about living by faith and not by sight and finding deep contentment throughout life's circumstances. Welcome to the podcast, Ginny. It's so great to be able to speak with you today.

Ginny Owens:

Oh, thank you, Crystal. It's so great to speak with you as well.

Crystal Keating:

Well, I look forward to just hearing more about you and your story, especially in the area of contentment. And so I'd love if you could begin maybe by introducing yourself a little bit more to our listeners and sharing with us a bit of your story.

Ginny Owens:

Sure. So I was born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi. I fell in love with the piano and with music about the same time that I was in the process of losing my eyesight. So I was born with minimal eyesight but enough to learn my colors and my favorite was purple. And then when I was three, I went in for an eye surgery that the doctors hoped would actually at least stabilize my vision for a bit, but instead it took it all away. But my parents were wonderful about just saying, "Go and do what all the other kids do." And so, since I had already been on that path, I just continued to climb trees and ride my bike and dig for gold with the neighbor kids and scare our poor neighbors half to death because they were like, "What are you letting this child do?"

So I really found that growing up without sight was not something that really was an obstacle until I got to school. I learned though early on also to just go to music and go to the piano for solace and comfort. And I began writing songs very early on as a way of expressing not only my love for Jesus, but I think writing through some of my very hard times, his love for me. And then I moved to Nashville, Tennessee to go to college and thought I was going to be a music teacher and ended up instead making music for a living. And so I always tell people, I'm probably the

only person that was hoping for a teaching job in Nashville and actually got a record deal instead.

Crystal Keating:

Oh, that must be an envious dream of so many. Wow. Oh, and I love your parents. I mean, how wonderful that they just encouraged you to be Ginny, to find your passion and your dreams and to pursue the gifts that God has given you. And I was just saying before we started recording how much I enjoy your music and how your songs really resonate with me. And in fact, you've joined Joni and Friends as a worship leader at our [Family Retreats](#) for families living with disability, which I just think is so much fun. And you're also an author. You wrote a book called *Singing in the Dark* and just on the subject of contentment. I love how you began with the idea of finding contentment. And I have to say, I was pretty convicted by what you brought to light.

And I want to read a little portion of your book. You wrote, "My life would be perfect if I just had this one thing. Most of us have in our minds one thing we think would make everything better; one thing that would satisfy us. Many of us have grown up hearing that God alone is the one who brings peace and fulfills our every need, yet we aren't convinced. We're pretty sure in fact that what we need from God is not God himself but the things he can give us if he just would." Wow, that just hit me. So Ginny, I'm wondering for you, what circumstances led you on this journey to pursue contentment and find deep rest in the Lord?

Ginny Owens:

Well, part of it was, I began to realize that there was always a thing I was longing for more than God. I mean, certainly he has given us the gifts of this world to give us his joy and experience him in the different things that we are given in our lives. However, I began to realize there were so many things that I was chasing after that were not him. And you will never find contentment in chasing after those things and in loving things more than him. And so, as I began to realize this, I was like, "Okay, there's something in my Christian walk that I am missing. There's something that I don't understand." And during this time my mom had been diagnosed with advanced stage breast cancer. And being that I was the kid with the job that could be done from anywhere where there was an airport, I moved home to take care of her during this time. And I just remember feeling deep concern, of course, and just feeling sad and anxious and worried all the time. And it was like all of the years of worrying and longing for different things were piling up. And I remember during that time, finding some words that the apostle Paul wrote from his prison cell to the Philippian church and he's talking to them about being content and rejoicing, no matter what they're facing and being thankful in even the most difficult circumstances. And I just thought, okay, this is something I want to learn because if Paul can speak this from jail, then there are definitely some things about contentment that I can learn from my own life when I'm not in jail.

And so that was where it began for me. And I began to just really live in that chapter, Philippians 4, which I would highly recommend for anyone that is searching for contentment to read Philippians 4 and meditate on it; hang out with it. Because the thing that you start to learn, there's a quote Elizabeth Elliot says, which I think is so beautiful that "the secret to contentment is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances." And I think that's what Paul teaches us so beautifully that the bigger our vision of Jesus is, the more we have confidence in who he is, the more our circumstances pale in comparison. And the more that we can realize that he actually can give us peace. So that was the starting place for me.

Crystal Keating:

That is so good. That's so beautiful. I find myself praying, "Lord, help me to see how great you are. Jesus help me to really know you." Because I think you're so right. When the Lord is so real to us and we see him in all of his beauty, all of his mercy, all of his perfection, the things of this earth, they do fade away. They're not as prominent. They don't pull on our hearts the way that he does. So I love that you brought that up. That is key. Well, Ginny, you mentioned that you've been blind since you were a little girl. And so darkness is quite literal for you. And while darkness may be seen for others as a season of grief or a difficult time, for you, how do we find the light, the hope, the healing, the joy during the dark times of life?

Ginny Owens:

I think there's a very simple truth that is at the center of finding hope. And it is that we must believe that Jesus is our best friend; that knowing him changes everything about our lives. I remember, one time in middle school, being bullied and just going through some really dark pain as I was dealing with mean girls, which we all have probably had that experience in middle school. And I remember just after a particularly hard day of just kids stealing my lunch and doing mean things and putting their fingers in my face and asking how many they were holding up. I went home and my mom, she asked me about it. I didn't want to talk much about it, but she said, "Ginny, there are going to be some days when it feels like Jesus is your only friend. You know he's always your best friend, but some days it's going to feel like he's your only friend and you can trust him because he has been there always with you. And he has walked through the deepest darkness for you."

And I think as a kid, you're like, "Oh, that's great, mom. I just want people to like me again." But those words have resonated so deeply with me because I think what we forget, we look at God and we go, "Okay, there's a list of things I'm supposed to do to please him." But when we walk with him as our best friend, it changes the dynamic of our relationship. Because any best friend that you have, any dear friend that you have, you want to know what's important to them. And so in the case of our relationship with Jesus, it means that we go to the Bible and we find out what's important to him but you also tell them your secrets.

You tell them what you're failing at. You ask them for their insights and advice. And so how much more for your heavenly father and your dear brother Christ, how much more are you going to go to them and pour out your heart before them and receive, expecting to receive. And so I think that that is where for so many of us, we don't cultivate the friendship that is available to us with Christ. We're trying so hard to please him to get it right. We're not cultivating but when we're showing up every day, listening to him and then also praying and crying out to him with everything that's going on in our lives.

I think that begins to help us. Not only to can have confidence in who he is, but to trust that even our hardest moments are part of his good plan. And we're promised in Romans 8, that he is going to work everything for good that we're experiencing. So when we can start to see that he's not going to allow suffering, that he isn't going to work for good, then I think it really does change the way that we look at our relationship with him.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah, Ginny, that is so encouraging to think about friendship with Jesus. When I think about friends who love me, it's such a joy to walk with them and it's not burdensome. And I think that's a lost identity of Christ. He said, "You're not my servants. I don't keep you at a distance.

"You're my friends." What an empowering and comforting relationship to have with the Lord. I'm just liking your mom and your parents, even more and more. What a great influence they've had on you. Well, I don't know about others, but I feel like I want to avoid darkness and hardships at all costs. Ginny, for you, what lessons have you learned from actually walking into the darkness rather than running away from it?

Ginny Owens:

Well, the truth of it is, it is in the darkness that we learn who we are. And most importantly, that we learn who God is and it's a lot harder to do that without darkness. It is in the darkness that we come to him empty and needing him to fill us. It is in the darkness that we realize our weakness and that we can't do life alone and that we need him, and we also need others to help us. We're not meant to be islands; we're not meant to do this life alone. And so I do think it's in the dark that our character is cultivated. So that is the beautiful and the hard news about darkness. But the truth of it is that it is in the darkness that we experience true light that we learn what the light of Jesus looks like, that we learn that even in that darkness, we can have joy and hope because of who he is.

Crystal Keating:

That is so true. Let's talk about music a little bit, specifically the songs and stories in scripture. How have they brought you hope throughout your life? I don't think we really talk so much about the songs of scripture. We talk about the Psalms which are songs but many of our traditions, maybe we don't sing them.

Ginny Owens:

Yeah. I mean, one of the beautiful things that I learned as I was working on writing this book is that we are commanded to sing so often in scripture. When you think about that, it's not just an invitation but often the Bible says sing to God. And then you notice people singing to God all the time in scripture when you look at it through that lens. So yeah, I think one of the things that has happened as I have just dived into scripture over the years is that the stories have come alive. I've learned to see myself in those stories. There are so many things, there are so many elements of these stories that we can absolutely compare to our own. Just even the longing for more. I mean, we see that all the time, just a longing for something that people, like a longing for satisfaction, a longing for something that other people can't give us.

And when we see this all the time and we hear people singing songs about it in the Bible, so when we realize that it really, I think can change our view of scripture. And for me, that has happened. Over the past couple of years in fact, I've been in seminary, completing a Master of Biblical Studies and just the scriptures have come alive even more because I just see, not only do I find God in his healing and his powerful hand in these stories, but I see how I can really even resonate more deeply with the stories of scripture and how we all can because their lives were very much like ours.

Crystal Keating:

It's good to have very imperfect and needy examples where God has met people of faith throughout the years. So that's exciting. That's really encouraging. I think I'm going to try to pay more attention as I read through the scriptures. Joni always says, what's the one mark of a spirit-filled Christian? Among many things they sing songs actually to one another. And how

encouraging that is. Maybe we don't practice that directly one-on-one but there is something very powerful about being on a Sunday in church and singing next to someone singing loudly about the Lord and that does something to my soul.

Ginny Owens:

Well and that also makes me think that one of the things that we can see as we look through the pages of scripture is the saints of history, singing to us and singing their stories to us and how God has delivered them out of so many different situations. One of the things I love in the stories from the Old Testament and in the stories of Israel is how often it was the singers who were on the front lines of the battle. It was the singers who were going out first proclaiming God's praise as they went into this really terrifying dark situation, but they were praising God for what he was going to do, praising God for his faithfulness in the past. So when I think of that and I think, wow, those singers in a certain way are singing to us. Even now as we read their stories and their songs and the pages of scripture.

Crystal Keating:

Well, Ginny, what would you say is the key to living daily moment by moment in God's strength and not our own?

Ginny Owens:

I would say it is learning to sing a new song. We all have a song that's on repeat in our minds. And a lot of times those songs are born out of our pain, out of our darkness. Maybe it's a song of, as a blind person, one of those songs for me is, "Gosh, you're not good enough, you've got to find ways to be useful. You've got to validate yourself by what you do." And no, that is not the song that the Lord is singing over me. That is just a big, bad lie. But in order to know a different song, I've got to learn one. The scriptures are full of songs that we can learn to sing to ourselves. And maybe you're the sort of person that says, "Wow, I really can't carry a tune."

But it's okay. You can memorize these words. They can bring truth into your life. What I find as I memorize scripture that I repeat to myself throughout the day is that the meaning just grows deeper down into my soul as I'm meditate on it, as I speak it over myself. As we talked about earlier, I would say it's so important to see Jesus as our dearest and best friend and to operate in a relationship with him like that. And then also learning the songs that have been sung over us, that he sung over us. And the words of scripture, I think is, is key to trusting that friendship.

Crystal Keating:

That is really good, good advice. Well, we all want to belong somewhere, and we were created for relationship. I mean, that has been so evident to me, especially as we think about this last year and almost a half of being under coronavirus restrictions and just the longing to be connected to one another. So as we close our time together, how can we have gratitude for where God has us and learn to lean on him for that belonging?

Ginny Owens:

Oh man. Well, I think there are a couple of simple things that we can do. And I think that the gratitude will grow from here. I think first of all, we ask him, we go to him and say, "Holy Spirit, come and help me to have eyes to see the blessings." Especially in a difficult time, I think we have to ask for that, help me to see how you are providing for me today. And then a really

practical step that I love to do every day, is to make a little gratitude list. Sometimes I do it in the morning. Often I'll do it at night and just write down the ways that I have seen the Lord work throughout the day. And maybe I'll start with one or two ways, as I write, more come to me.

Crystal Keating:

That is a beautiful thing. Well, Ginny, it's been so encouraging speaking to you, and I just appreciate even the encouragement to draw close to Jesus as your very best friend, sometimes your only friend, but your dearest friend. And to ask the Lord for a new song that we don't have to keep singing the songs that actually speak despair and death into us, but ones of life and hope and a future. And just to really think about the ways that the Lord is giving us grace throughout the day. To meditate and be grateful for all that he's done. It's been such a great time speaking to you, Ginny. Thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today.

Ginny Owens:

Oh, thank you for having me.

Crystal Keating:

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