

A Contentment Concerto
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Sometimes God seems like the conductor of the grandest orchestra in the universe. During my journey as an aspiring novelist, I learned this truth in an amazing way.

Back in July of 2004, AMG publishers featured my first two books, *The Image of a Father* and *Raising Dragons*, at the Christian Booksellers Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. They had big plans for my signing event there, with giveaways for kids and much fanfare, so, excited about beginning this great adventure, I arrived early at AMG's booth.

Only two people were there, an elderly man in a wheelchair and a woman standing next to him. As they perused some of the books on display, I heard the man say, "I don't have much to do with the company anymore, so I'm not sure why God has called me to this convention. It will be interesting to see what He has in store."

Later in the day, my editor introduced me to this man, Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, the president of AMG, a biblical languages scholar. Dr. Zodhiates said, "I heard about you. You write books for young people. You quit your job to pursue a writing career, and you didn't know where your next paycheck was coming from."

At that point, he suddenly stopped talking. His eyes grew wide, and he began clapping his hands. "Oh, my brother!" he continued. "Now I know why God has called me to this convention. He wants me to give you a word."

"A word?" I replied. "What word is that?"

His eyes still wide and his smile growing, he said, "The word is *autarkeia*. It's a Greek word. It means 'sufficiency' or 'contentment.' God is your sufficiency. He will provide for all your needs, so you need not be concerned."

The old man seemed like a prophet. It felt as if he was fitting me with a suit of armor. I listened with all my heart.

"Not only that," he continued, "God wants you to use the theme of contentment in your next book. You see, all the problems young people have, whether it's depression, drug or alcohol abuse, promiscuity, or suicidal thoughts, all stem from a lack of contentment. If only they would be content with what they have, who they are, or even whose they are, none of these problems would occur."

As I pondered these words, I realized how true they were. Indeed, contentment would be the prevention and the cure for all these ills in youth culture. I promised to do my best to include that theme in a future book, and I fulfilled that promise in *Circles of Seven*, the third book in *Dragons in our Midst*, which has proven to be the most popular in that series.

Two weeks later, I went to a homeschool convention in Montgomery, Alabama. Since I am a homeschooling father, I wanted to introduce my books to homeschoolers. They tend to buy lots of books. They network well, so I thought this would be a good opportunity to make my books known.

Now, I can say this because I'm a homeschooler. We Christian homeschoolers are suspicious of just about everything. We want our kids to receive input that is trustworthy and pure. We check everything to make sure it is in keeping with biblical truth and world view.

It seemed that Alabama homeschoolers took this principle to heart. Some peered at these strange dragons books and made a wide berth around my table. Why would anyone be selling such merchandise at a convention like this? Of course, I explained the reasons, and some people bought the books, but the rate of sales seemed slower than what I hoped.

Since I wanted to be a good steward of God's money, this slow rate concerned me. I had kept close track of my expenses—gas for travel, lodging, rental for the exhibit space, etc. My daughter Amanda went with me, so I also included food costs for both of us. Would I make a profit? Would I at least break even and make this a worthwhile venture? It seemed important to me that I at least bring in as much as I spent. That would be a sign that this kind of promotion would be a good idea, an effort that God approved.

Amanda kept a careful tally of book sales. After the first hour, I looked at the count. Since I knew how much money I made for each book sold, as well as the number of hours I would be at the convention, I was able to calculate how much money I would make, assuming the rate of sales remained constant. Since I have a good math mind, such a calculation was pretty easy for me. So, I did the computation and came up with a startling conclusion. If everything stayed the same, I would end up fifty dollars short of breaking even.

That's not good. This promotion idea would be a losing effort. I couldn't afford to go out on the road and lose money. I didn't have another job to fall back on.

I had to try harder. I had to persuade more people that my books weren't what they might appear to be. They were God-honoring and would make a positive spiritual impact on readers.

After the second hour, I did my computation again. The rate of sales had stayed the same, so I came up with the same bottom line. I would be fifty dollars short of breaking even.

This couldn't go on. I had to do something to convince more buyers, but nothing came to mind.

During these hours of sales and calculations, two girls, Danielle and Masha, frequently came by my table. Danielle was wheelchair bound, a severely handicapped little girl with

bent limbs and back. Masha, somewhat challenged by deformed feet and hands, happily pushed Danielle around in her chair. They would stop by my table and talk to me about my books. “We’re best friends,” they told me, “and we’re both going to be ten years old this month.”

To me they seemed like little angels. What a refreshing distraction they brought to my slow sales and dismal calculations. When I saw Danielle sitting in that wheelchair, she reminded me of Dr. Zodiates in his wheelchair as he said, “Autarkeia.” And its meaning again flashed in my mind.

This little girl likely had suffered through many surgeries. How many times had she longed to run and play with other children? Had she been mocked or ridiculed for how she looked? Yet, there she sat with a smile that would melt any heart. She was the living picture of contentment, an illustration of the Greek lesson the other wheelchair-bound prophet had dispensed not long ago.

As I gazed into her bright eyes, I knew God had sent her to show me what autarkeia looked like. This was a new lesson I needed to study and learn. But what did it all mean? How would this new chapter in the contentment lesson book be applied in practice? I had to pay attention. God was teaching me something.

After the girls left my table, I continued with my sales and my calculations. Every hour I computed once again, and every hour I came up with the same bottom line—I would be fifty dollars short of breaking even. It seemed now that I was just filling time. I would finish this convention, go home, and make a new plan. This idea was obviously not going to work.

Soon, Masha’s father came to my table. He wanted to buy *Raising Dragons* for her. We had a nice chat, and it seemed clear why Masha had such a bright and cheery disposition. Her father had one, as well.

During our conversation, he learned that I had come from Florida, and he revealed that he, too, once lived in Florida.

“Where in Florida?” I asked.

“Avon Park, a little town in the middle of the state.”

“I know it well,” I replied. “I lived there for years. My father was the superintendent of schools for the county.”

“He was?” He looked at me curiously. “Is your father Dan Davis?”

“Yes. Do you know him?”

“Know him? He hired me as the band director for the middle school!”

Some people say that such “coincidences” can be attributed to this being a “small world,” that everyone has connections of some kind, but this seemed to stretch that theory way beyond its limits. Immediately a thought came to mind. Band director. God seemed to be the ultimate band director, or perhaps an orchestra conductor, waving His baton to meld the spiritual melodies and harmonies to bring about His purposes. He brought this man to me to demonstrate that He was orchestrating a cosmic concerto, a lesson in divine arrangements that I wouldn’t soon forget.

At the end of the second day of the convention, the final minutes ticked away. Amanda and I were packing our books, but we couldn’t leave yet. A man stood at the end of my table, flipping through the pages of *The Image of a Father*. He took his time, apparently very interested in the content. Soon, he closed the book and said, “This would be good for my men’s ministry. I’ll buy it.”

When he paid me, I gave the bills a long stare. This would be the last money I collected, so I did a final calculation, and the same total raised its ugly head. I would, indeed, be fifty dollars short.

I laid the bills in my money box. Obviously this convention wasn’t the best idea. I would have to pursue other promotion avenues.

The man walked away from my table, then stopped. He stared at the book’s cover, as if reading it for the first time. “Bryan Davis wrote this book,” he said.

“Yes,” I replied, wondering at this strange proclamation.

He turned back to me and read the sign on the wall over my head—“Bryan Davis – Author.”

“Are you Bryan Davis?”

“Yes. Yes, I am.”

His face suddenly flushed. His hands began to tremble. He walked closer and said, “You’re going to think this is really weird.”

He seemed so frightened, so timid. I wanted to comfort him. “It’s all right. What is it?”

His voice now shaking, he leaned close and pulled out his wallet again. “On my way over here, God told me to find a man named Bryan ... and to give him fifty dollars.” He extended two twenties and a ten to me.

I stared at the money. This was the exact amount I had calculated for the past two days! I was so astonished, I began to shake and stammer. “I ... I don’t know what to do.”

He extended the money further. “God commanded me to give this to you. Will you take it?”

What could I do? God had called this man to find me by name and give me the total that had tormented me for hours on end. So, I took it.

When I got home, I had to see what God had wrought. I calculated my expenses and income. When I added the fifty dollars, I found that I had broken even exactly to the dollar.

What did all this mean? What was this divine arrangement, this cosmic concerto of events that showed me the sufficiency of God and His intimate, personal love and care?

First, God gave me an academic lesson, providing an old man in a wheelchair who obeyed God’s composition and spoke the word that will echo in my mind forever. Autarkeia. God’s sufficiency. Contentment. God will supply all your needs. What a grand melody!

Then, God showed me what autarkeia looked like. Two angelic girls, one confined to a wheelchair, sang the harmony, an illustration of an academic truth. Here was contentment in the flesh, being lived out in the smiles of two lovers of Jesus.

Finally, another man followed the conductor’s baton and sought out a man who had not yet figured out how to dance to the music that flowed through the air. With simple obedience and a generous gift, he brought the symphony to a crescendo, and God showed me what autarkeia felt like.

Likely blended with a fatherly laugh, God sang His provision to me. What a wonderful lesson! This was like a fantasy story come true! I was trying my best to be a good steward, and, through these divine arrangements, God taught me another way, the path of contentment. As long as I am walking in the light, in the way of godliness, I don’t have to be concerned with money. If I need fifty dollars, God will bring a man in from the street to give it to me. Such is His love.

Now I understand what autarkeia is all about, and I will never forget the lesson. The apostle Paul’s meaning has become clear. “But godliness is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment.” (1 Timothy 6:6)

Godliness is a choice, a life we can lead from the moment God regenerates us by the power of His Holy Spirit. Contentment is something we learn. As we see God’s provision in our lives, we come to understand that our loving Father will always give us what we need and never forsake us. We learn that every good thing comes by His hand. Even our ability to live in godliness has its source in Him.

These two truths walk hand in hand. Without godliness, we will walk in darkness. Without contentment, our walk in the light will be a struggle up the hills of everyday

strife. When the two come together, we walk in the harmony of light and the freedom of knowing that every step is guided by the greatest conductor in the universe.