
STUDY 1:

*Simplicity:
Finding Contentment
in a Busy Life*

STUDY 2:

*How to Know
God's Will*



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YOUNG ADULTS

Leader Guide

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LifeWay | Adults

SESSION 1

A Centered Life

THE POINT

When your life is centered in Christ, you find all you need.

THE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:25-34

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

A lot of things press for our attention each week. Good things. Important things. As a result, we can often feel pulled in multiple directions, because everything is crying to be the priority and focus of our lives. Wouldn't it be great if we had only one thing to focus on? Jesus said there is—His kingdom and righteousness—and when this is our focus, everything else falls into place.

THE SETTING

A large crowd gathered on a mountainside and listened to Jesus as He taught His disciples about following Him. His instruction came to be known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). He taught His disciples about how He intended for them to live as believers. That's why He instructed them regarding how to give, pray, and fast (6:1-18). Then He instructed them on how to deal with their possessions (vv. 19-24) and how to live without worry (vv. 25-34).

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES



MATTHEW 6:25-30

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? ²⁷ Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. ³⁰ If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith?”

LEADER PACK: Focus attention on **Pack Item 1**, the “Worry” poster. Instruct members to record on the poster the kinds of things they tend to worry about. Once everyone has recorded a worry, refer them to their index card and ask them if less worry would make their lives simpler. Encourage them to pay careful attention during the session on how to deal with worry.

READ: Ask a group member to read Matthew 6:25-30 on page 15 of the PSG.

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 15): In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us a sobering reminder of where the heart and mind of the believer could end up when our focus is on the physical rather than the spiritual. A wrong focus leads to a wrong state of mind, which leads to anxiety and worry.

DISCUSS: **Question 2** on page 15 of the PSG: “What kinds of things cause people to worry?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 15): So why shouldn’t we worry when life seems overwhelming with so many unmet demands?

- ▶ Verse 26 tells us why, and the reason is tied to the great value we have in the eyes of our Father.
- ▶ Sometimes it’s truly hard to comprehend that God loves us as His children. Many can’t understand why God would love them when they are so flawed and sinful.
- ▶ Our heavenly Father is One who takes care of the birds and adorns the flowers yet loves us so much more.
- ▶ In spite of our sinfulness, God loves and values us deeply. That wonderful truth should change our perspective and, therefore, cure any worry.

TRANSITION: Not only does Jesus say that we should not worry, but in the next verses we learn that we should trust God to do what is best for us.

MATTHEW 6:25-30 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 25] As we approach this verse, we're drawn to its first word. **Therefore** catches our attention and urges us to grasp the reason Jesus wanted people to listen closely to what He was about to say. Beginning in Matthew 5:1, Jesus engaged people with His instruction about how He intends for His disciples to live as citizens of the kingdom of God. As He taught, He underscored a variety of concerns we face as we serve Him. In Matthew 6:25, He brought up our tendency to worry. Jesus showed us how Christians who struggle with worry can overcome it.

He challenged followers not to **worry**. Of course, He wasn't implying Christians have His permission to be irresponsible or not try to take care of ourselves or the people in our lives. Rather, He confronted our inclination to be obsessed with anxiety over some of the basic needs in life. Granted, we need **food** and **clothing**. However, obsessive anxiety about these needs robs us of the quality of life He intends for us to enjoy as God's people.

[VERSE 26] What's the best way to handle worry? Jesus taught us to take a long look into the sky. When we do, we'll find birds flying everywhere, and not a one of them seems concerned about what they'll eat. They don't give attention to planting seeds or harvesting grain. They're free from care because the Father cares and provides for them.

Jesus raised an important question for believers when anxiety hovers over us, overshadowing us with a sense of uneasiness and fear. God values birds. But aren't we more valuable to Him? He feeds birds because they matter to Him. He'll certainly provide for us because we matter to Him even more.

[VERSE 27] But Jesus didn't stop there. He asked another question. It's a question that gets to the heart of our fretful anxiety. With this question, Jesus connected worry with our life span. Will our worry help us to live longer? Will it give us one additional moment of life? If it doesn't, it's a gigantic waste of our time and energy.

Worry won't change anything. Who can forget the old saying that worrying is like sitting in a rocking chair. Rocking back and forth in the chair gives us something to do. But it really doesn't get us anywhere. Likewise, worrying will consume our thoughts, imprison our emotions, and take away the joy in our lives.

[VERSE 28] After addressing our essential need for food, Jesus turned our attention to **clothes**. In our day, clothes protect us when we face terribly cold or awfully hot weather. In Jesus' day, the harsh climate made the need for clothes even more critical.

Again, Jesus took us outdoors to help us to overcome obsessive worry. He encouraged us to take some time studying how God adorns a field full of **wildflowers**. However, we won't find any of the flowers working diligently to make themselves beautiful. Their beauty appears effortlessly. They obviously don't give a minute of their time to working in the meadow where they bloom.

[VERSE 29] King **Solomon** ruled over Israel with tremendous success. The Lord gave him wisdom to rule well. Because of his wisdom, his power and wealth grew exponentially. He led the kingdom to extend its reach far and wide. With his buildings alone, Solomon rendered more than enough breathtaking beauty for everyone to see. But as Jesus confirmed, what Solomon produced didn't approach the splendor provided by a field full of flowers.

[VERSE 30] Jesus led us to observe the way God adorns **the grass of the field**. At the same time, He guided us to notice how long it lasts. Beautiful flowers fade quickly. Before long, the plants start to shrivel in the heat; then they're gone. They're tossed in a furnace as food for a fire. When we reflect on their splendor that stays only for a little while, we marvel at the way God goes to so much trouble for His creation. The issue at the heart of worry isn't whether God will care for us. Rather, it's whether we will trust Him to do it.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

MATTHEW 6:31-32

³¹ “So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:31-32 on page 16 of the PSG.

SAY: Jesus said “the Gentiles” (lost people) have a tendency try to take care of their own needs, rather than trust God. Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain further who the Gentiles were.

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 16): Without Christ, our minds are consumed with living the American dream. Accumulation is the name of the game. We seek the things of this world to give us identity and value. Many of these things are not inherently bad—a nice home, a new car, a big salary—but we tend to let these things define us. Our trust is in our own ability to perform in order to get what we need or want.

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 16 of the PSG: “When has God provided for you in an unexpected way?”

SUMMARIZE: When we place our faith in Jesus, we are trusting that our greatest need was met. And since God has taken care of our biggest need, we can trust Him to take care of all our needs! [Highlight the main points from page 16 of the PSG.]

- ▶ God does not have a hearing problem. He hears our requests (Psalm 66:18-20).
- ▶ God does not have a providing problem. He owns “the cattle on a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10).
- ▶ God does not have a timing problem. He provides what we need when we need it (Proverbs 3:5-6).

If there is a problem, it’s with us. It’s a faith problem. He called us “You of little faith” (Matthew 6:30). Worry is simply a product of not trusting God. The good news is that we do not have to stay faithless!

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): See the optional idea about things that symbolize what we worry about on page 25.

TRANSITION: The next verses strongly encourage us to seek the things of God above all else.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some ways people deal with worry in their lives?

MATTHEW 6:31-32 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 31] Jesus didn't intend to shame us or punish us with His assertion about the weakness of our faith in Him. He's not interested in hurting us. Instead, He wants to shape our perspective. Gently but firmly, He works in us so we'll grow spiritually toward maturity in our relationship with Him. For that reason, we do well to interpret His statement about our small faith as an appeal instead of a reprimand. He's interested in taking us from living with worry to walking by faith.

Jesus helps us to move in that direction by teaching us about centering. He instructed us not to center our lives on what we need. When we make that mistake, we nourish the bad habit of worrying over what we haven't gotten and how we can get it. We underscore that we're not centered properly by what we keep on saying about what we lack.

As Jesus showed, the problem with worry doesn't stop with what we'll **eat**. It comes into the question regarding what we will **drink** too. Again, worry cultivates despair as we center our thoughts on what would happen if we didn't have enough. Our fear of being thirsty gives way to doubt about where we'll get water. The same problem in our thinking shows up when we ask questions about what we will **wear**. When our concerns swirl around whether we'll have enough clothing, we open the door to anxiety.

Ultimately, we come face to face with a hard reality about worrying. When we center our lives on ourselves and our needs, we prove we have lost sight of the Lord. By the same token, if we determine we're going to trust Him, we center our lives in Him and the assurance of His care. If we center on our needs, we worry. However, if we center our lives in Christ, we learn to walk by faith. We take critical steps away from futile and frustrating anxiety toward fruitful and fulfilling faith.

[VERSE 32] Jesus intended for His disciples to be characterized by faith in Him instead of anxiety over what they needed but didn't have yet. Such a character trait would make Christians distinctly

different from people with no relationship with Him. When Jesus mentioned **Gentiles**, He had in mind people who didn't know Him or how He worked. They devoted themselves fully to the pagan deities of their day, but they didn't live by faith in those idols. Rather, they lived in fear of them. They thought the idol they worshiped had to be appeased. If the deity was displeased with them, they could expect its wrath to be poured out on them. For that reason, they tried to please the idol at every juncture.

Idolaters didn't live by faith in the idol. Quite the opposite, they were terrorized by it. They had little or no hope that an idol would provide them with something to eat and drink or clothes to wear. Instead, they depended only on themselves when it came to getting what they needed to live. For that reason, they looked for ways to gather up their own food, clothes, and anything else they needed. That reflected their troublesome habit of centering their lives on what they needed to get for themselves.

When we think about the idol worshipers of Jesus' day, we understand more about His insistence that we trust Him to supply what we need. Instead of a lifeless idol, we serve a living Lord who came into our lives when we received His gift of salvation. Since the day He saved us, He's been helping us so we will grow from spiritual infancy to maturity.

Centering our lives in Christ nourishes our trust in Him. We come to rest in the certainty that He's faithful to provide us with anything and everything that will enable us to serve Him effectively. According to Jesus, our heavenly Father has a firm grasp of what's going on with us and what we need. Therefore, we can settle into the simple certainty that He'll provide. We have no need to let worry drive us to be fretful over what we need and how we'll get it. Rather, we allow our faith in Him to center us and assure us He loves us, cares for us, and provides for us because we're His children. When we center our lives in Him, we live in the confidence that everything else in our lives will fall into place.

STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

MATTHEW 6:33-34

³³ “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. ³⁴ Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:33-34 on page 18 of the PSG.

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 18): Instead of being consumed with the temporary things of this world, we are called to be consumed with a desire for God and for the things of God. It’s not that the cares of this life are unimportant; even Jesus invited us to pray for these things: “Give us today our daily bread” (v. 11). As we focus on Christ and pursue Him with obedience, He takes care of everything else.

DISCUSS: Question 4 on page 18 of the PSG: “**What does it look like to seek God’s kingdom first?**”

GUIDE: Use the commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain what it means that we are “already but not yet” and what it means to center on Christ.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 18): This does not mean that if you seek God wholeheartedly, you will have whatever you want. Consider how that idea of prosperity plays out in other parts of the world.

- ▶ There are countless believers who live in poverty. Jesus’ words do not promise American prosperity but God’s provision. He takes care of His children.
- ▶ Seeking God gives us proper perspective. Jesus promised that each day will have enough trouble of its own.
- ▶ We cannot escape the troubled day, but we can escape worry. Today, focus on Christ. Make Him first. We can think about tomorrow ... well, tomorrow.

DISCUSS: Question 5 on page 18 of the PSG: “**How can our group help one another prioritize the kingdom of God?**”

DO: Direct group members to **Engage** with “**Worthy of Trust**” on page 19 of the PSG (page 25 in this Leader Guide) to help them reflect on trusting God.

GUIDE: Refer back to “**The Point**” for this session: “**When your life is centered in Christ, you will find all you need.**”

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What does Jesus promise in these verses?

MATTHEW 6:33-34 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 33] We make the best use of our lives when we have a target. We can take aim at the target with our thoughts, words, and actions. In that way, we can make a difference each day. What's our aim in life? If it isn't worrying about what we need, then what's the center of our lives? Jesus asserted that our target is **the kingdom of God**. He directs us to seek it. In other words, it's the target we aim for each day.

Believers are "already but not yet" people. We've already given our lives to Christ and live in the absolute certainty we belong to Him. Furthermore, we readily rejoice in the confidence He will never leave us and heaven is our home. But we're not there yet. Neither have we arrived at complete spiritual maturity yet. We're making progress, but we have not finished the journey. Thus, each day finds us centering our lives in Christ so we will be useful citizens of the kingdom of God. It's a kingdom composed of people who belong to Him. Knowing Him better and serving Him more faithfully is what we seek to do each day.

As Jesus helped us identify the target of our lives, He directed us to His **righteousness**. Being righteous means being right with Him. Being right with Jesus begins by trusting in Him. That was true for Abraham (Genesis 15:6), and it's true for us (Romans 4:16-25). Accordingly, when we seek His righteousness, our thoughts turn to living by faith in Him.

When we set God's kingdom and righteousness as our daily target, we learn to place our lives in His hands in complete trust that He'll provide what we need. As our trust in Him grows stronger, we see our troubles with worry subside. Instead, we're more centered on the Lord Himself.

Jesus assured us that when we take the path He directed in this verse, everything in our lives will fall into place. We'll learn to see more clearly what we need and trust Him more completely to make it available for us. That's when we're able to live in the confidence He'll never fail us.

[VERSE 34] Once more, we're drawn to the first word in the verse: **Therefore**. It challenges us to reflect on what He has taught about centering our lives in Him. It prompts us to put into practice what we've learned. He guides us to think simply and clearly about **tomorrow**. Jesus knows we tend to get anxious about what we need today but do not have on hand. He's also fully aware we let ourselves get worried about what we'll need tomorrow too. We can become consumed with anxiety over what may or may not happen when the sun rises in the morning. Then we burden ourselves with stress as we ponder the notion of tomorrow's coming with all the uncertainties about what it's going to hold for us.

Jesus helped us put tomorrow in its proper perspective by bringing up God's wisdom that's both simple and profound at the same time. Tomorrow's trouble will meet us then. When or if we're confronted with it, the Lord will be there. He'll get us through it by supplying what we need so we can deal with it. Because we're Christians, we're citizens of the kingdom of God. As kingdom citizens, we can count on His presence. He will work in us to sustain us, strengthen us, empower us, and help us with whatever we need. While we can rest assured of His provision, we're even more grateful for the assurance of His care. With that assurance, we can rest in Him and not be anxious about what tomorrow will bring our way.

What matters is today. Yesterday has left; tomorrow might never arrive. We only have today. Trusting Him for what we need today makes good sense for growing believers. Living with simplicity means we don't allow ourselves to become victims of worry about tomorrow. Instead we take to heart the reality of His presence today and the certainty of His care for us so we can live for Him in the present.

We have no better choice than to center our lives in Christ by trusting Him today and tomorrow.

LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 20 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.

SAY: How will you actively seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?

- ▶ **Confess worry.** In order to overcome worry, confess the areas where you struggle to trust God. Admit your struggles with worry and allow God to begin working in you.
- ▶ **Remember the Word.** Hold strongly to the promises of God and memorize Matthew 6:33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.” Continually remind yourself of God’s promise to provide.
- ▶ **Get help.** Find someone you trust and share the things that cause you to worry and the areas of your life where you lack a trust in God. Invite this friend to pray with you and for you.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 20 of the PSG.

It may feel at times as if worry is inevitable and you’re drowning in anxiety. Worry may have a way of worming its ugly head into your life, but it doesn’t have to consume you. **Make a daily decision to pursue the kingdom of God and His righteousness.**

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for meeting all of our needs in His time and in His way. Ask Him for the faith to set our hearts on the kingdom of God and the faith to trust in Him daily for everything else.

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SESSION 2

A Daily Pursuit

THE POINT

Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day.

THE PASSAGE

Philippians 4:4-9

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Where does a life of simplicity start? It starts when we begin our day. It's often tempting to jump into our tasks, knowing we have a lot to accomplish. Starting each day with God gives us the singular focus we need that brings greater contentment. As we focus on God in praise and pray, dwelling on Him becomes an ongoing practice throughout the day.

THE SETTING

In Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians, he thanked them for the gift they had collected for him. Throughout the letter, he returned quite often to the theme of joy in Christ. He reinforced the call for believers to rejoice by teaching them how to experience the peace God gives. God's peace resulted from spending time with Him in prayer and shaping their thoughts and actions in keeping with their devotion to Him.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-5 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 4] Take a close look at the number of times Paul encouraged the Philippian Christians to rejoice. He urged them to join him in rejoicing even though he happened to be in prison (1:18). He challenged them to join him in rejoicing over the privilege he had been given to be an offering to the Lord (2:17-18). Later, he directed them to rejoice over the safe return of Epaphroditus to the congregation (v. 28). As he turned his attention to helping believers on the path of spiritual growth through difficult situations, he told them twice to rejoice (3:1; 4:4).

The number of references has led many Bible scholars to suggest the theme of Philippians has to do with Christian joy. Paul's conviction about rejoicing in the Lord serves as a central idea that links the issues he addressed in the letter.

In Philippians 4:4, we notice a helpful and unique aspect of Paul's encouragement to rejoice. He underscored the foundation of joy: we rejoice **in the Lord**. Paul prompted us to understand that joy wells up from inside us because of our relationship with Christ. His work in growing us to be mature disciples cultivates joy because we have come to know Him, love Him, trust Him, and obey Him.

Because people can't count on only good things happening in their lives, they can't be happy all the time. Their happiness will be periodic at best. Dark times bring sadness, and painful experiences bring frustration, disappointment, anger, or regret. But Christians can *always* rejoice in the Lord. Paul underscored that sublime certainty as he urged us to embrace joy. Believers can rejoice consistently, even when sorrow takes hold of us (2 Corinthians 6:10).

To rejoice **always** implies each day finds us living in joy. As we begin the day, we rejoice over the gift of another day the Lord has given us. Our joy becomes more focused as we reflect on His Word and the insights He gives us as we serve Him. Our joy overflows when we remember He has given us new life in Him, lives in us now, and promises eternal life

in heaven when we draw our last breath on earth. No wonder Paul told us **again** to rejoice.

[VERSE 5] When we rejoice, we are settled and secure in God, even when facing the toughest challenges. We're constantly overwhelmed by the reality that He loves us and honors us with the privilege to be His children when we place our faith in Him.

But how does rejoicing affect our relationships with others? Paul answered that question by encouraging us to think about everyone we encounter. As we go through our day, we encounter people. Some have given their lives to Christ, while others either have rejected Him or have never heard the good news about Him. When we encounter them, Paul directed us to seize the opportunities to exhibit **graciousness**. It comes out of the joy in Him that's inside us. In other words, joy is the root, and **graciousness** is the fruit.

Getting a good grip on **graciousness** can be difficult because the Greek term doesn't have a word that matches it exactly in the English language. The Greek conveys the idea of being selfless, but it also suggests the priority of being gentle and kind. The picture portrays authentic kindness that's altogether unselfish and gracious.

Paul's challenge nudges us to think about people around us. They need to see for themselves the unselfish kindness that's nurtured in our joyful hearts. It will point them to the Lord, the source of our joy. Regarding the Lord, Paul reminded us that **He is near**. His reminder helps us in two ways. First, it helps us keep in mind that the Lord will come for us. With His return in view, we think about people who have not yet given their lives to Him. Living out His joy by being gracious provides opportunities for people to hear the good news about Him and experience His grace to them. Second, it assures us He is present in our lives right now. We can count on Him to help us as we display joy in Him through our gracious actions to others.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:6-7 on page 24 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 24): "Don't worry about anything." We addressed the topic of worry in our previous session as Jesus called us to pursue His kingdom and His righteousness. The antidote for worry comes as we center our lives on Christ, and in this passage, Paul gave us a key to centering our focus on Christ with three words.

▶ **Prayer.** Prayer seems like the obvious thing to do, but it is often the most neglected spiritual discipline of the Christians life.

GUIDE: Direct attention to the quote by Jackie Hill Perry on page 27 of the PSG: "Our busy schedules aren't keeping us from prayer, our hearts are." Ask group members to weigh the truth of this quote in their hearts.

▶ **Petition.** Prayer is communion with God, and petition is a part of that. It is asking God for something specific. Paul was telling us to communicate our needs—and those things that tempt us to worry—to God.

▶ **Thanksgiving.** Every night when my family sits around the dinner table, we share the highs and lows of our day, and then we discuss one thing we can each thank God for. Those highs and lows will change, but our God never does. With God on the throne, we always have a reason to be thankful.

SAY: Peace is the result of our prayerful thanksgiving to God. (Use the commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain what it means to have the peace of God.)

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 24 of the PSG: "What are some obstacles to experiencing the peace of God?"

DO: Direct group members to **Engage** with "The Peace of God" on page 25 of the PSG (page 35 in this Leader Guide) to help group members with understanding the peace of God in their lives.

TRANSITION: After Paul taught the importance of having a life of rejoicing and praying, he directed us on the benefits of honoring God with our thoughts.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you experienced the kind of peace described in verse 7?

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 6] Paul led us to think about the positive influence our joy can have on everyone around us. Next he urged us to think about the favorable effect praying can have on us. He pointed us in that direction by bringing up our tendency to worry. Paul used the same term earlier in the book (2:20) to express genuine care that motivates action. If we're anxious about passing a test, for example, we usually study harder. However, our anxiety level can reach the stratosphere if we're not careful.

The cure for such excessive worry comes in the form of **prayer and petition**. When we pray, we have a conversation with God. In the conversation, we listen as well as talk. As we spend more time with Him in prayer, our relationship with Him grows deeper and more rewarding. Because He has given us the honor of being His children through Christ, we can make our **requests** known to Him without fear or shame. Resting in the assurance He loves us, we trust Him to know what's best for us. That same assurance enables us to rest in the confidence He listens to us.

Observe a crucial feature of effective prayer that replaces excessive worry. Paul embedded it in the middle of this verse. A heart of gratitude shapes effective prayer. Because of the value of **thanksgiving** in praying, we do well to nurture thankful hearts. If we don't, we will approach the Lord like a spoiled child. Children who never learn how to say "thank you" run the risk of being overwhelmed by frustration when they don't receive what they want. However, if we cultivate grateful hearts, the Lord will allow us to see the remarkable ways in which He blesses us each day. Furthermore, grateful hearts lead us to a clearer impression of what we actually need. As a result, our long prayer lists will usually be distilled into only one request: "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11).

[VERSE 7] When we pray, we take our concerns to the Lord and leave them. We trust Him to answer our prayers in His way and time. While we wait for answers, He gives His peace. Paul brought up the

peace that God alone can give so we will know what to expect when we bring our needs to Him.

Some believers describe the **peace of God** by painting a word picture of a little bird chirping safely in a nest that's been built on the limb of a mighty oak tree. A raging storm tugs and yanks the limbs back and forth, and the fierce wind bends the trunk almost to the breaking point. But the tree endures, and the nest doesn't move. The little bird keeps on chirping without any fear of danger.

Other Christians compare the peace of God to a well dug in the middle of a meadow. The meadow can turn into a battlefield. Though war rages around the well, it doesn't disturb the sweet, cool water inside. So it is with the peace of God. The worst battles can't disturb it; it alone satisfies a parched soul.

God's peace is more than a compromise or a truce. It's a deep and abiding sense of the Lord's comforting and sustaining presence in our lives, even during the worst storm or the most vicious battles. When we go to Him with our needs and concerns, we remain confident He will answer our prayers. While we wait for His answer, He gives us His peace, a profound sense of His presence that settles and strengthens us.

Paul affirmed that our best efforts at comprehending God's peace always fall short. The distance between what we know and what we need is filled with His peace that **surpasses** our best understanding.

Even though we can't comprehend God's peace, we can experience it. Paul assured us God's peace stands **guard** over our hearts and keeps anxiety from overwhelming us. His peace protects us from notions about our relationship with Him that doesn't conform with His Word.

Where do we go so we can embrace God's peace? Paul pointed us to Christ Jesus. Our walk with Him renders His peace in ways that allow us not to worry but to leave our concerns with Him.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

⁸ Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. ⁹ Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:8-9 on page 26 of the PSG.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): See the optional idea on page 35 to highlight Paul’s command in verse 8.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for these verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to summarize the list on which Paul encouraged believers to think and the benefits of thinking this way.

DISCUSS: Question 4 on page 26 of the PSG: **“What tools and strategies have you found helpful in placing your focus on the things of God?”**

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 26): We can’t stay focused on Christ if we let the wrong things crowd our minds. We carry around a lot of unnecessary baggage. God wants us to fill our minds with His Word. We need God’s Word to saturate our thoughts daily so that our minds may be renewed and we will be kept from grievous ways. Paul called us to think on those things that are ...

- ▶ ... true, not false.
- ▶ ... honorable, not dishonorable.
- ▶ ... just, not unfair.
- ▶ ... pure, not obscene.
- ▶ ... lovely, not unlovely.
- ▶ ... commendable, not wrong.
- ▶ ... morally excellent, not corrupt.
- ▶ ... praiseworthy, not shameful.

DISCUSS: Question 5 on page 26 of the PSG: **“Which of Paul’s commands in verses 4-9 are easier for you and which are harder?”**

GUIDE: Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day.”** Ask group members to refer to any notes they made about how a daily pursuit of God makes their lives simpler. Call for volunteers to share.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Who do you know that consistently lives out these verses?

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 8] Having shown us the importance of rejoicing and praying every day, Paul directed us to another area deserving our attention each day: our minds. When we gave our lives to Christ, He renewed us “in the spirit of your minds” (Ephesians 4:23). In other words, He transformed the way we think so we could get His perspective on the world in which we live. Such spiritual transformation begins the very moment we receive Christ, but it doesn’t stop there. On the contrary, it’s an adventure that will continue for as long as we live. For that reason, giving consideration to disciplining our minds is a wise choice. When we discipline our thoughts, we place ourselves on the path toward spiritual maturity.

Paul showed that path by directing us to qualities that deserve our focused attention as we discipline our thoughts. As we discipline ourselves in the way we think, we turn our thoughts to what’s **true**. Ultimately, the best way to think about what’s true is to direct our thoughts to the Lord. After all, He’s the truth that sets us free (John 8:32). When we think about what’s **honorable**, we have in mind whatever builds us up and prompts us to be noble and respectable Christians. By focusing on what’s **just**, we allow ourselves to consider what’s right in God’s eyes. Such thoughts help us to make an understanding of justice and righteousness a priority. Of course, **pure** thoughts direct us to God’s call for us to be holy people (1 Peter 1:15-16). **Pure** thoughts also chase away the temptation to engage in filthy, putrid thinking.

When we consider Paul’s instruction to devote ourselves to thinking that’s **lovely**, the reality of beauty comes to mind. We must fix our minds on realities the Lord considers admirable and attractive, rather than the disgusting realities of the current day. By the same token, we decide we’ll wrap our minds around what’s **commendable**. What’s **commendable** for believers? The word itself implies graciousness and kindness. When we direct our thoughts to what’s gracious and kind, we’re setting the stage for consistent renewal of our minds.

Paul summed up the qualities by bringing up **moral excellence**. He cautioned us to turn our thoughts only to what truly deserves to be praised. To dwell on such thoughts means we ponder them and direct our lives according to them.

[VERSE 9] Along with helping us think in ways that renew our minds, Paul set out to help us in another important way. He turned our attention to how we should discipline ourselves in terms of our actions. How we behave matters as much as what we think.

Earlier in his letter, Paul encouraged the Philippian Christians to follow the example he had set for them as they gave themselves fully to Christ. He added that his companions who walked with the Lord also provided a worthy pattern for them to follow (Philippians 3:17).

Paul set an example for the believers in his day. His life and ministry continue to serve as a worthy pattern of devotion to the Lord for Christians today. Similarly, we can probably add the names of spiritual siblings in Christ in our lifetimes who consistently have a positive influence on us by their examples. When we consider what we have learned from them about walking with the Lord, we affirm that they taught us by example, as well as by precept. The examples in our lives continue to inspire us each day. From the pattern they supply, we receive inspiration and determination from the way they model a Christ-centered lifestyle. Like the believers in Paul’s day, we listen carefully to what our mentors say about walking with the Lord and watch them closely as they put it into practice. Christians who set solid examples help us grow. Likewise, we do well to keep in mind that younger believers need us to set worthwhile patterns for them.

At the outset of Paul’s letter, he wrote about God’s peace by way of His grace (1:2). Now, at the end of his letter, he returned to the certainty of God’s peace. Peace is the outcome of disciplining our thoughts and actions so we can focus on the Lord.

LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 28 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.

SAY: What steps are you willing to take in order to deepen your walk with Christ?

- ▶ **Praise daily.** Begin your day—every day—with praise. Praise puts the day ahead of you into perspective.
- ▶ **Pray daily.** Set aside time every day for uninterrupted prayer where you give God your full attention. Consider using a prayer journal to help you stay focused. Prayer is a daily decision. Pray about your day, and pray for the challenges others are facing. Let the peace of God rule your heart as you leave these needs in His hands.
- ▶ **Read daily.** Get into God’s Word daily. Choose a Bible reading plan, and/or use this book as a guide for your daily focus in God’s Word. Partner with others in your group to support and encourage each other in your daily prayer and reading.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 28 of the PSG.

Make a daily choice to do these things and intimacy with Christ will follow.

Spiritual dehydration will be a thing of the past.

PRAY: Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving. Also, ask God to help group members to keep their thoughts focused on Christ and shelter them from distractions of life that would keep them from actively pursuing God through prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.



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SESSION 3

The Key to Contentment

THE POINT

True contentment comes through Christ alone.

THE PASSAGE

Philippians 4:10-20

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Life would be simpler if we didn't have to think about paying bills or taxes, right? Or at least if we had more money, we wouldn't worry or feel stressed. That seems logical, but such contentment does not come from our bank balance; it begins in our hearts. The apostle Paul knew this from experience, and he gave us the "secret" to being content regardless of our finances.

THE SETTING

The church at Philippi had sent Paul a gift to support him in his missionary work. Epaphroditus delivered the gift, but he got terribly sick in the process. Paul took care of Epaphroditus until he recovered, then sent Epaphroditus back to the Philippian Christians with a letter in which Paul expressed his joy over their gift and his contentment in Christ. We refer to the letter as the Epistle to the Philippians.

STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-14

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. ¹² I know both how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. ¹³ I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship.

SIMPLICITY: Finding Contentment in a Busy Life

- ▶ **A CENTERED LIFE**
Matthew 6:25-34
- ▶ **A DAILY PURSUIT**
Philippians 4:4-9
- ▶ **THE KEY TO CONTENTMENT**
Philippians 4:10-20
- ▶ **GODLY CONTENTMENT**
1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19
- ▶ **A SLOWER PACE**
Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17
- ▶ **UNCOMPLICATED RELATIONSHIPS**
1 Thessalonians 4:3-12

LEADER PACK: In advance, distribute index cards to each member. Direct attention to Session 3 on the **Pack Item 2**, the “Simplicity” poster. **Ask:** “What do you think contentment has to do with making life simpler?” Encourage them to write down any connection between contentment and a simple life.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:10-14 on page 31 of the PSG.

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 31): Even as Paul thanked them for their concern for him, he let them know he would be fine with or without a gift.

- ▶ The apostle Paul was no stranger to the trials of life that could have easily caused discontentment in his heart. He had been imprisoned, whipped five times with thirty-nine lashes, beaten with rods three times, and faced death and multiple dangers (2 Corinthians 11:24-27).
- ▶ Paul often went without food and knew what it was like to sleep in the cold, yet he could say, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.”
- ▶ Paul wasn't exempt from pain and the trials of this life just because he was a faithful servant; in fact, it seems that his hardships were due to his faithfulness.

DISCUSS: Question 2 on page 31 of the PSG: “What obstacles keep us from experiencing contentment?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 31): The secret to Paul's contentment? Whether he was well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need, Paul found his strength and contentment in Christ.

DO: Direct group members to **Engage** with “Choose Contentment” on page 35 of the PSG (page 45 in this Leader Guide) to help group members choose contentment.

TRANSITION: Next, Paul talked more about the support of the Philippian church.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Why is God's strength a necessary ingredient for contentment?

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-14 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 10] Joy overflowed Paul's heart because of the concern the Philippian Christians had shown for him. They had finally been able to renew their connection with him and his mission effort. The renewal came by way of a gift they had enlisted Epaphroditus to deliver (2:19-30). However, quite a bit of time had passed since the last time they had contacted him due to circumstances beyond their control. The situation had changed, and their connection with him had blossomed once more.

When the Philippian Christians reconnected with Paul, he was in Rome awaiting his opportunity to appear before Caesar (Acts 25:1-12). He lived there two years under house arrest (28:30). The church's gift turned out to be a remarkable blessing for him. His heart burst with joy because of what the money represented. It signified the church's eagerness to care for him. With the gift, he had been blessed with the assurance they were still concerned about him.

[VERSE 11] Paul's joy didn't emerge from his **need** for something money could buy. Quite the opposite, he assured them he had become quite **content**. In other words, he grown to the point he could be satisfied under any condition.

Of course, getting to that point had taken time. He had to learn how to get along with whatever he had. As a result, he didn't worry about how much money he would need. His contentment portrayed itself in the form of self-discipline. Before their gift ever arrived, he had already gained beneficial insights into the best way to handle his situation. Even though his situation changed quite often, his sense of contentment didn't waver. Such a steady dose of self-discipline had come to him over time as he dealt with his circumstances.

[VERSE 12] The situation Paul faced in Rome must have been full of changes. The changes put him in a position in which he had to adjust. He couldn't spend his days wondering how he would tackle the financial and spiritual challenges of his lengthy stay in Rome.

Through the ups and downs of his situation over the course of his ministry, he had to gain wisdom on how to adapt to all the changes happening in his life.

He described the wisdom he received as the **secret**. Paul had learned the secret about being content in changing circumstances. His contentment resulted from the secret, and he wanted to share it with the Philippian Christians. Even more, he wanted them to embrace it.

[VERSE 13] Embracing the secret didn't have anything to do with Paul's knack for elite spirituality or refined intellectual reach. It came from another source altogether. In his world filled with limitations, he came to grasp that his reliance on Christ made all the difference. Christ helped replace distress with contentment. In fact, his relationship with Christ made him grow confident. He rested in the assurance nothing he faced would get the best of him because of the presence of Christ.

How did Christ help him? Paul affirmed the Lord gave him strength to push through adversity. Jesus also kept him from getting lazy during those times he enjoyed plenty. No matter what happened, he counted on Christ to empower him.

[VERSE 14] What the Lord taught him about contentment didn't diminish his gratitude for the Philippian Christians. Quite the opposite, he appreciated what they had done for him, the selfless and sacrificial decision to send the offering. They showed their spiritual maturity when they determined to provide Paul with their support.

The Philippian church's partnership with Paul highlights the uniqueness of Christian fellowship. Because believers are spiritual siblings, we share with one another as we serve the Lord. We need the certainty of that kind of partnership, especially when we face hardship. Like Paul, we find contentment in Christ alone through the presence of other believers who help share the burdens that come with troubling circumstances.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

PHILIPPIANS 4:15-18

¹⁵ And you Philippians know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:15-18 on page 32 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to discuss how the money from the Philippian believers aided Paul in his ministry in other places.

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 32): Through Paul’s ministry, he had spread the gospel and helped start many churches, but only Philippi reciprocated and supported him when he needed it. Paul mentioned this fact without a hint of complaint. He focused on thanksgiving for what was done instead of complaining about what was not done.

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 32 of the PSG: “How can we practically support and care for one another?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 32): We are blessed to be a blessing in return. God has not only given to us so that we may be provided for, but He wants us to have the opportunity to be a provision for others.

- ▶ The American dream is to accumulate, while the gospel of Christ compels us to receive and give.
- ▶ We should all live as missionaries on this earth with a desire to spread the message of Christ, understanding that all we have is for Him and the advancement of His gospel. In the end, we will stand before our Father, and we will be held accountable for how we lived our lives (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
- ▶ We must be careful that we don’t get caught up in accumulating and forget to support the cause of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

TRANSITION: Despite Paul’s circumstances, he found contentment because he trusted God to meet his needs.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When has someone’s generosity overwhelmed you?

PHILIPPIANS 4:15-18 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 15] As Paul reflected on his relationship with the church at Philippi, he elaborated on the unselfish way the congregation supported him early in his work. Their partnership with him had quite a history. It went all the way back to the time when Paul responded to the Macedonian call and made his way to Philippi to preach the gospel of Christ there (Acts 16:1-13). When Paul determined he needed to leave the region of Macedonia, the Philippian church supplied him with resources to use as he continued to preach the good news of Christ wherever he went.

They gave because they considered themselves partners in Paul's missionary effort. By sharing with him, they demonstrated what true fellowship meant to them. True fellowship meant receiving from Paul the good news about Christ. It also meant receiving instruction in discipleship. However, it meant something else too. It meant giving as well as receiving. Believers in Philippi wanted to give to Paul's missionary work so others could have an opportunity to hear the gospel.

[VERSE 16] From Philippi, Paul traveled to Thessalonica, a city teeming with people who needed to hear about Jesus. It also turned out to be another place Paul encountered fierce and cruel opposition. Jewish leaders instigated a mob-like uproar when locals from the marketplace accused Paul and his companions of stirring up trouble. His Christian friends urged him to leave the city (17:1-10).

Sometime later, he wrote a letter to the Thessalonian Christians from Athens (where he had been taken for his safety, v. 15) or Corinth. In it, he noted he didn't ask the church for money to support him because he didn't want to be a burden to them (1 Thessalonians 2:9). In Philippians, he revealed how his needs were met while he served the Lord in Thessalonica. The church at Philippi had met his needs so he could give his attention to sharing Christ and to nurturing new-born believers toward maturity. Their partnership had been a critical link to Paul's effectiveness in the Thessalonian church.

[VERSE 17] Paul wanted to make sure his Christian friends didn't misunderstand the reason for his joy. He rejoiced over the money, but not for what he could obtain with it. He had learned the secret of contentment that came from trusting Christ completely for his needs, so he had not given himself to fretting over any lack of resources. His joy over their gift had to do with how it would be a blessing for the Christians at Philippi who gave it to him.

Paul identified the money they had sent him as a **gift**. He understood it had been given by Christian people who loved him and believed in his mission effort. For that reason, he wasn't trying to imply with his comments that he expected them to send another gift. Instead, he wanted to instruct them on how he looked upon the gift they had recently sent his way.

Financial language saturates this verse. In this verse, however, the language of loss doesn't appear. Only profit comes into view. Believers who give generously to share Christ receive an eternal profit that goes into the account of our treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

[VERSE 18] Paul assured the Philippian Christians he had plenty of resources now. In fact, he had more than enough, thanks to their generosity. In the previous verse, he referred to their gift as a spiritual profit. In this verse, he portrayed it as an offering to the Lord.

The image of a **sacrifice** enabled Paul to offer a striking affirmation about the gift he had received from the Philippian Christians. He wanted them to see it as an **acceptable** sacrifice that pleased God. Incidentally, he called attention to the sacrificial giving of the Philippian believers in his correspondence with the Corinthian church. He wrote that the Philippian church (among others) had given sacrificially out of their poverty (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). The picture of sacrifice also helped Paul as he encouraged Christians to present themselves to the Lord as "living" sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2).

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

PHILIPPIANS 4:19-20

¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): See the optional idea on page 45 to help group members rate their contentment level.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:19-20 on page 34 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verse 19 on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain what it means that God will supply all our needs, according to His riches in glory.

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 34): “And my God will supply all your needs.” What a promise! The Philippians had helped Paul in his time of need. They supported him and sacrificed much. They gave out of a heart of generosity and a love for the gospel. They could do so freely because God would take care of them. Living with simplicity rests in the truth that God takes care of us.

DISCUSS: Question 4 on page 34 of the PSG: “**How have you experienced God supplying your needs?**”

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 34): This is not the false promise often proclaimed in the “prosperity gospel.” We can’t just name whatever we want and claim it. That indeed is a false gospel.

- ▶ God is not a genie who is here to answer all our commands, flood our accounts with money, and fill our homes with every possession we desire.
- ▶ God could certainly do that, but our contentment comes through resting in Him, not in an abundance of stuff. He provides what we need.

DISCUSS: Question 5 on page 34 of the PSG: “**What do you appreciate about Paul’s attitude expressed in these verses?**”

GUIDE: Refer back to “**The Point**” for this session: “**True contentment comes through Christ alone.**” Ask group members to refer to any notes they made on their index cards about how contentment through Christ makes their lives simpler. Call for volunteers to share.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What truths about God encourage you to be generous?

PHILIPPIANS 4:19-20 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 19] In this verse, Paul underscored his intimacy with God when he referred to God in an intensely personal way. He showed that the Lord wasn't just God. Rather, Paul declared Him to be **my God**. Of course, he had an excellent reason for his declaration. Paul had learned to trust the Lord completely to be with him and to provide for him. He wanted the Philippian Christians to be assured of the same certainty for themselves.

Paul assured them God would **supply** what they would need so they could serve Him well. As they would see for themselves, the Lord would furnish them with everything necessary for their work to succeed. Thanks to the gift the Philippian church sent to him by way of Epaphroditus, Paul had been supplied with more than enough resources. They could count on God to supply them with their needed resources too.

From where would their resources be drawn? Paul affirmed the resources would not come from a source that had limits. It wouldn't be like a checking account that constantly ran the risk of being overdrawn because of a paltry account balance. Quite the opposite, these resources would come from **riches**. A descriptive term, the word called to mind a wealth of resources that would never be depleted. Paul went on to connect the riches to **glory**. Of course, glory belonged to God alone. He intended to be glorified through His people so others would give their lives to Him and grow in their walk with Him. As God's people glorified Him, they could be certain He would supply them with what they needed. Therefore, when the Philippian church gave to God by caring for Paul with their gift, they could count on God to provide what they needed in order to continue to serve Him.

[VERSE 20] Paul continued to write about the **glory** the Lord alone deserves. Shifting from theology, he moved toward doxology (praise). Writing about God's supply prompted him to give his attention to worshiping the God who supplied. As he worshiped, Paul drew his attention to two aspects of God.

First, Paul referred to God with a significant plural pronoun—**our**. In this moment of worship, he included all believers in his affirmation of praise.

By using **our** instead of "my," Paul emphasized what Jesus taught us in His Model Prayer, otherwise known as the Lord's Prayer. Jesus instructed us to speak of God using "our" and not "my" when we pray (Matthew 6:9). When we follow God's instruction, we include others in a way that prevents us from giving attention exclusively to ourselves. In the same way, Paul's affirmation of praise has a similar effect on us. We remember that we serve the Lord together.

When we glorify God, we acknowledge that He gets all the credit. When we succeed, He gets credit for the success. When we stumble and fall, He gets credit for picking us up and putting us back on the path toward growth in Him. He alone gets credit for making us into kingdom citizens who can make an eternal difference in our world. Following Paul's affirmation of praise in this verse, God gets the credit for supplying us with the resources necessary to live for Him.

Second, Paul referred to God in an intimate way by calling Him **Father**. The Philippian Christians who had grown in the Lord knew what Paul meant when he used such an affectionate title. They associated it with the love children would have for their father who loved them enough to care for them. The title nourished the confidence in God's unfailing compassion for them.

The title **Father** resonates with Jesus' instruction about how to pray. In His Model Prayer, Jesus directed us to talk with God as our Father. The Bible includes a variety of names and titles for God. Each one helps us know God better. However, the title **Father** enables us to see ourselves through His eyes. We are His children. In our relationship with God, we experience His loving presence in a way that prompts us to join Paul in testifying that all the glory belongs to God now and in the ages to come.

LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 36 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.

SAY: A life of simplicity finds contentment in Christ alone. How can you live out that truth?

- ▶ **Choose Contentment.** Evaluate your heart for signs of discontentment. Ask yourself: Am I trusting in money more than in Jesus? Do money and possessions bring me more joy than Jesus? Can I really say, “Christ is all I need?”
- ▶ **Choose to Trust.** Make a daily decision not to allow circumstances determine how content you will be in this life. Memorize Philippians 4:12-13 to remind you to simply trust Christ for all things: “In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content —whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.”
- ▶ **Choose to Give.** Give of your time, talent, or treasures. Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give to them. Let God use you as His answer to their prayers.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 36 of the PSG.

As situations in our lives change, we should be choose to be content.

Keeping our focus on Christ is the key to contentment in every circumstance.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for showing us that true contentment is not based on what we have or don't have. Ask God to help us keep our focus on Christ in every situation so we can remain content, and trust Him to meet our needs.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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SESSION 4

Godly Contentment

THE POINT

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THE PASSAGE

1 Timothy 6:6-11,17-19

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Possessions can give us a feeling of security. That sentiment, if left unchecked, can lead to hoarding. If possessions give me security, then more possessions will give me more security. This is not just a problem with hoarders. Most of us feel better off with more possessions, or at least having better possessions. But the contentment we seek from such things eludes us. God offers us a simpler approach to contentment: it grows out of our relationship with Him.

THE SETTING

The church at Ephesus had run into serious problems because of false teachers who had influenced the congregation in harmful ways. Paul appointed Timothy to lead the church so the problems could be corrected and spiritual health restored. He wrote Timothy a letter in which he gave instructions on how to proceed with the needed corrections. The letter came to be known as 1 Timothy. In the letter, Paul addressed false teachings about money and possessions.

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-8

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. ⁸ If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:6-8 on page 39 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verse 6 on the next page of this Leader Guide to define the words “godliness” and “contentment” and to discuss how to live out godliness with contentment.

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 39): Greed and godliness can never dwell in the same heart. One will be the resident, and the other will be the occasional visitor. Paul gave the antidote in verse 6: “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” True gain comes when godliness is married to contentment.

DISCUSS: Question 2 on page 39 of the PSG: “**Why does contentment seem so elusive today?**”

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verses 7-8 on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the reason Paul did not connect contentment with possessions.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 39): The word Paul used for “contentment” is *autarkeia*.

- ▶ It means to be totally satisfied with what one has. It is fully sufficient.
- ▶ Paul used the same word in 2 Corinthians 9:8: “And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having *everything you need*, you may excel in every good work” (emphasis added). In the context of 1 Timothy 6:6, then, godliness is fully sufficient to give us all we need to be satisfied.
- ▶ Paul then added this sobering statement: “For we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out.”
- ▶ We should be thankful for the simple things like food and clothing; the simple pleasures of life should satisfy us.
- ▶ When we are not content with simply having our daily needs met, we become discontent and push for more and more.
- ▶ The enemy loves the discontent heart, but contentment rests with the simple pleasures of life that come from God.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, Paul further explained that our contentment does not rest in having a lot of money either.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When has a desire for a specific possession led you to feel discontented?

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-8 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 6] False teachers had caused trouble in the church at Ephesus; that's why Paul placed Timothy in charge of the congregation. Paul wanted him to address problems created by so-called teachers who distracted believers from their growth in Christ by pointing them to useless myths and the bottomless pit of genealogies (1:3-4). Some of the false teachers had come to believe being godly could make one rich (6:5). Paul responded by making an assertion about wealth. He agreed **godliness** could be a **great gain**, but it had to be accompanied by **contentment** and wasn't particularly financial.

Two definitions will help us to understand more about Paul's assertion. First, *godliness* has to do with growing in truth about Christ. It involves putting that truth to work in everyday life. As a result, mature believers reflect the character of Christ in what they think, what they say, and how they behave. For godly believers, pleasing the Lord becomes all that matters.

Second, *contentment* carries the idea of living in a way that's independent of circumstances. Whether circumstances are favorable or unfavorable, content people exhibit a sense of confidence, certain they don't need anything. For Christians, being content doesn't mean our sufficiency comes from ourselves. Rather, our satisfaction comes from Christ. We're satisfied with Him alone.

As people watch us, they see we live out an old saying about contentment. According to the saying, there are two ways to be rich: one is to have everything; the other is to want nothing. Because of Christ's sufficiency, we have the wealth that comes from spiritual riches. Therefore, we want nothing more.

[VERSE 7] Paul gave an important reason for not connecting contentment with possessions. The reason turns out to be plain and simple, although many people overlook it as they seek to have more. As we reflect on this verse, another old saying comes to mind: When we're born, our hands are clenched;

when we die, our hands are open. In other words, we begin our lives trying to get our hands on everything. However, when we die, we let it go, all of it.

Paul's statement suggests something about a wise Christian's perspective on life itself. People tend to think about life only in terms of what happens before they die. Therefore, getting their hands on possessions so they can enjoy their lives matters most of all to them. But Christians know life doesn't end when we die. Through Christ, we have eternal life. We're blessed with the assurance we'll be in heaven where we'll be in the presence of the Lord forever. Possessions have no bearing at all on the contentment that awaits us there.

[VERSE 8] For that reason, we're wise when we take hold of Paul's perspective on what counts as profit. For Christians, contentment has nothing to do with what we possess. Therefore, money doesn't have the same influence over us.

Paul mentioned **food and clothing** as he wrote about what would make a wise Christian **content**. By mentioning only these items, he didn't imply believers had to live in poverty to experience true contentment. Instead, he affirmed that wise believers wouldn't make greed the master of their lives. In Paul's day, the necessities for life basically included something to eat and something to wear. Christians who had food and clothing didn't have to be distracted by the eagerness to get more for themselves. They didn't need anything else to enable them to serve the Lord with joy in their hearts.

Mature Christians today live by the same principle. We're content with having what's necessary to meet the basic needs of our lives. For instance, a car will help us with transportation to work, but we don't need an expensive luxury vehicle.

When we are anxious about what we need, this verse sheds light on the way out of our worry. It draws on Jesus' instruction regarding overcoming worry about what we need (Matthew 6:25-34).

STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

1 TIMOTHY 6:9-11

⁹ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:9-11 on page 40 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the commentary for verse 9 on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain how craving wealth can get us into trouble.

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 40 of the PSG: “What kinds of ‘traps’ can an unhealthy pursuit of wealth create?”

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 40): “All kinds of evil” grow out of a love for money. The most dangerous thing that this craving can cause is a wandering from the faith. At this point, people don’t necessarily deny their faith, but they no longer let it play a role in their lives. If we don’t seek our contentment in a godly life in Christ, our hearts are left open for the enemy to fill. We are susceptible to whatever the culture throws at us.

DISCUSS: Question 4 on page 40 of the PSG: “How can we recognize when money is becoming an idol?”

SAY: Paul challenged Timothy to set an example for the believers in Ephesus by resisting the temptations that were pulling them away from the Lord.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 40): Paul gave Timothy an alternate course: “flee from these things.” Sound advice for sure, but by itself, it’s not enough. It’s one thing to flee *from*; it’s equally important to consider what we run *to*. Paul called Timothy—and us—to pursue six traits:

- ▶ **Righteousness and godliness.** These two traits have to do with our personal integrity, upright conduct before others, and our relationship to God.
- ▶ **Faith and love.** These two traits speak to our trust, dependability, and actions toward both God and others.
- ▶ **Endurance and gentleness.** We need staying power in the face of difficulties, and gentleness in dealing with difficult situations.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): See optional idea about a path of life map on page 55.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, Paul encouraged Timothy to teach the believers to set their hopes in God and not on wealth.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What part of Paul’s instruction in verse 11 do you find most challenging?

1 TIMOTHY 6:9-11 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 9] Indulging ourselves with luxuries and pleasures that come from money can be harmful to us. Paul insisted that when we crave wealth, we're being led into temptation. Although we may not know it at the time, the **temptation** to have more lures us into a **trap**. The trap's set by what we desire; the temptation to have it lures us toward the snare. We deceive ourselves into thinking we're allowed to accumulate possessions for ourselves because we deserve them. Before we know it, however, we're caught in the snare.

Once we're entrapped by our obsession with being wealthy, we disappoint ourselves with our behavior. Instead of being wise, the snare of the need for possessions makes us **foolish**. Foolishness gives way to danger. The desires that entrap us can put us in harm's way. Equally devastating, our behavior hurts the people we love. As a result, we become dragged down by our obsession, drowning us spiritually and leaving us devastated.

In stark contrast to what an obsession with riches can do to us, Jesus taught that life overflowing with fulfillment comes from a relationship with Him (John 10:10). Money and possessions can never provide the joy awaiting believers who take their walk with Him seriously.

[VERSE 10] While loving Christ brings incredible joy, loving money renders something different. Notice Paul's choice of words as he continued to warn Christians about money. He didn't say money itself is **evil**. For growing Christians, money serves as one of the tools that can be used to provide us with what we need so we can serve the Lord in keeping with His kingdom plan for us.

Our problem with money has to do with the harmful way we can love it. The Lord intends for us to love Him and to use our money to express that love in worship and service. When we lose sight of this important spiritual reality, we can find ourselves loving money and using the Lord. Once we begin to

take that dangerous path, we stop thinking about anything other than getting our hands on more money.

What's so bad about craving money? When we anchor ourselves to money, we drift away from Christ. We may not set out to separate ourselves from Him, but it happens while we don't notice. Without realizing it, we've wandered away from worshiping the Lord as we give ourselves to adoring our possessions. Paul warned that such drifting leads to pain and heartache.

[VERSE 11] How do we stay on track in our walk with the Lord so money won't distract us and control us? Paul's command to Timothy answers that question.

Paul had charged Timothy with the responsibility for leading the church in Ephesus back on track toward spiritual health. Leading God's people required Timothy to set a worthy example for them to follow. Paul challenged Timothy to see himself as the example of a believer who wouldn't be distracted by anything in his walk with the Lord.

In his challenge, Paul told Timothy to run away from the temptation to be obsessed with possessions. He was quite specific with his command for Timothy to **flee**. Others in the church had obviously embraced the notion they could profit financially by practicing godliness before the church. Their example may have been tempting. Therefore, the only way Timothy could avoid it was to run away from it.

By pursuing a lifestyle of upright behavior for other believers to observe as well as a sincere eagerness to please the Lord with his life, Timothy would set the example for others in the congregation. Also, by devoting himself to **endurance**, he could go the distance necessary to handle difficult situations. At the same time, nourishing **gentleness** would enable him to work with difficult people in a way that would honor the Lord. Paul expected Timothy to serve in this way until the return of the Lord, who deserved all praise and glory (6:12-16).

STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

¹⁷ Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:17-19 on page 42 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to discuss what Timothy needed to teach the believers in Ephesus so that they could have true contentment.

RECAP THE PSG (PAGE 42): Paul’s warning about the love of money applies to all us. In verse 17, Paul issued a warning to those who are “rich in the present age.” Any riches we possess in this present age are only in this present age; they won’t transfer. Paul’s instructions were to guide the rich in how they should live with their temporary, current riches.

DISCUSS: Question 5 on page 42 of the PSG: “What would it look like to obey Paul’s commands in these verses today?”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 42): Paul’s instructions to the rich included the following:

- ▶ **Don’t be arrogant.** Riches can easily cause people to believe they are better than others because they have more.
- ▶ **Don’t place your hope in wealth (which is uncertain).** Money can give us a false sense of identity and a false sense of security.
- ▶ **Hope in God.** It’s a whole different story when our hope rests in God! We have riches in God, but a different type of riches.
- ▶ **Do what is good.** Want to be rich? Be rich in doing good works. Give. Be generous. Share. This is the cure for the craving of mere earthly riches.

DO: Direct group members to **Engage** with “**Lacking or Having**” on page 43 of the PSG (page 55 in this Leader Guide) to help group members be content whether they have riches or whether they lack riches.

GUIDE: Refer back to “**The Point**” for this session: “**Godliness with contentment is great gain.**” Ask group members to refer to any notes they made on their index cards about any connection or disconnect between material possession and a simple life. Call for volunteers to share.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What truths about God help you put your hope in Him, rather than your possessions?

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19 COMMENTARY

[VERSE 17] Another side of leadership for Timothy involved instruction. Paul wanted to make sure Timothy taught God's people in Ephesus how to handle their money wisely. Some Christians in the fellowship must have possessed plenty of money. Paul urged Timothy to set them on the path of fulfillment that would come from using their riches to serve the Lord.

Like before, Paul's instruction underscored what to avoid and what to embrace. He expected believers to avoid being **arrogant** with their wealth. Left to themselves, people with lots of resources could harbor selfish pride because of their money. Conceit could cause them to be obsessed with themselves and look at others with contempt. Instead of allowing arrogance to take root in their lives because of their confidence in their wealth, they would be wise to place their **hope** in the Lord alone. Paul reasoned that confidence in money would be risky since **wealth** would come and go. However, placing absolute confidence in God would carry no risks at all. Trusting Him with their lives would render the kind of riches that could only be measured in eternity. They would discover for themselves the contentment that comes with knowing God would supply them with more than enough.

[VERSE 18] Believers today can take to heart Paul's insistence about the sole source of resilient hope. Confidence in money alone leads to disappointment. However, hope in the Lord promises a different outcome. It leads to fulfillment. Our hope in God prompts us to embrace His perspective about our resources. That's when Paul's instruction to Timothy begins to make sense to us. Our resources give us opportunities to **do what is good**. In other epistles, Paul drove home the point about doing **good works**. It's a way for us to honor the Lord and bear witness of Him to people who watch us (Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:17). Money cannot get for us the kind of wealth that comes by devoting ourselves to good works that point people to God's love for them.

Therefore, Paul didn't hesitate to direct Christians with resources to use them for whatever is good. He was quite specific when he urged us to nourish hearts of generosity that prompt us to **share** what we have with others who need it. We're always ready to give because our hearts have been enriched by joy.

Again, Paul's insistence about sharing what we have for what is good isn't limited to his instruction to Timothy. It can be seen in other epistles (Romans 12:8-13; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:28). As we serve the Lord by pointing others to Him, we use our money as well as every other aspect of our lives.

[VERSE 19] When we take Paul's instruction seriously, we come to understand what he meant by **treasure**. The insight into how to use our resources as we devote ourselves to the Lord has a positive effect on people we help when we share with them. But something else happens when we're generous with others who need help. We find we've experienced a blessing too. The awareness we have honored the Lord and helped someone in His good name becomes a choice blessing for us. In turn, the blessing becomes a treasure we enjoy.

Paul taught that the treasure believers enjoyed would be stored up for the future. He didn't mean to imply people could earn eternal life by doing good work for others. He affirmed a spiritual reality Jesus taught believers. Jesus instructed His followers to lay up heavenly treasure for themselves (Matthew 6:19-20).

Paul went on to assure Christians the treasure they gained from sharing would provide a firm **foundation** for their future. It would enhance their lives to the point they would be able to get a firm grip on what mattered for anyone who has been given the gift of eternal life through Christ.

When we follow Paul's instruction to Timothy, we'll experience the richest blessings life has to offer. We'll experience the blessing of true life, the kind of life we'll treasure now and forever.

LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 44 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.

SAY: How will you pursue godliness with contentment?

- ▶ **Be content.** Begin your day—everyday—with a focus on Christ. Ask Him to transform your thoughts from self to living a godly life for Him. Commit to finding your contentment in the things God provides and choose to live for Him.
- ▶ **Be accountable.** If you struggle with craving and buying things to give you a sense of security and contentment, choose someone you trust to be your coach and mentor, holding you accountable for how you spend. Seek a person who will encourage you to find your contentment in God alone.
- ▶ **Be generous.** If you're not in the habit of giving, start. Give faithfully through your church. When you see a need, forego a purchase for yourself, and step in to help with the need.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 44 of the PSG.

We don't get our contentment from people or things, no matter how many things or relationships we surround ourselves with. **A more achievable approach to contentment grows out of our relationship with Christ.**

PRAY: Conclude with a prayer, thanking God for the understanding that true contentment is found in godliness. Ask Him to strengthen us to resist the temptation to love money and possessions.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra

ENGAGE

LACKING AND HAVING: Place an X on the scale where you would currently describe yourself.

Lacking Riches

Having Riches

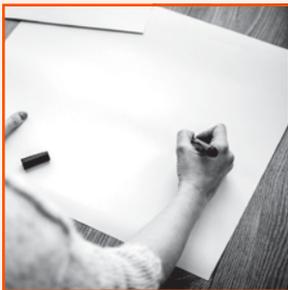


Next review 1 Timothy 6:9-11 and 17-19 and rewrite the verse in the space provided that helps you to be content, whether you lack or have riches. Rewrite your verse here.

Large empty rectangular area with dashed vertical lines on the sides, intended for rewriting the verse.

Vertical stack of horizontal lines on the right side of the page, providing space for additional notes or answers.

BONUS CONTENT



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, obtain a whiteboard or two large sheets of paper. Explain to the group that this activity requires creativity. Divide the group into two subgroups. Instruct subgroups to envision and draw a “path of life” image, taking 1 Timothy 6:6-11,17-19 into consideration. Ask one subgroup to draw an image that portrays pursuing monetary wealth in this life. Ask the other group to draw an image

that reflects the journey of pursuing God. After each group has sketched their respective image, direct them to share what they illustrated. **Ask:** “How can a believer who is caught on a path that directs them to pursue wealth change course to the path of pursuing God?”