

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE®

## ADULTS

### Daily Discipleship Guide

FALL 2019 | CSB

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#### STUDY 1:

*Simplicity:  
Finding Contentment  
in a Busy Life*

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#### STUDY 2:

*How to Know  
God's Will*



# 1 | A Centered Life



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Worry. Can you relate to that word? A lot of us can. Two out of five Americans admit to worrying.<sup>1</sup> And I'm in that group.

I worry a lot. I worry about church, family, health, my future, and lost people in my city. The list goes on and on. I've let worry consume me and even spiritually paralyze me for years. I play the "what-if" game a lot. *What if I make the wrong decision? What if the desires of my heart never come to pass? What if my father never comes to know Christ?*

Do you ever wish you could just stop worrying and fixating on things you can't control? I do. Jesus gave us the key, and it all has to do with our focus. When our focus is on the world, worry is usually the result, but when we focus on Christ ... well, that changes everything.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called us to seek His kingdom and His righteousness first. After that, everything else falls into place.



# GROUP TIME

**THE POINT:** When your life is \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ,  
you \_\_\_\_\_ all you need.

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 anxiety and worry.

**Matthew 6:25-30** <sup>25</sup> “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? <sup>26</sup> 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? <sup>27</sup> Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. <sup>30</sup> 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?

**Don’t \_\_\_\_\_ .**

Jesus’ words are unmistakable: “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life” (v. 25). Easier said than done, right? But it’s an important word from Jesus, and His use of “I tell you” is to get us to pay close attention to what He was saying.

God loves and cares for each one of us. Jesus illustrated this truth by focusing on two of our most basic needs: food and clothing. The birds in the sky are fed and provided for and the wildflowers are clothed. The birds and the flowers have no concern, and since we’re loved so much more deeply, why should we have *any* concern? Jesus was clear: don’t worry about things we shouldn’t be worrying about. Worry saps our energy. Worry steals hours from our day—and days from our lives. Worry reveals a lack of faith and trust in God.

**Matthew 6:31-32** <sup>31</sup> So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

## Trust God to do what is \_\_\_\_\_ for you.

A lack of trust produces a life of worry. According to Jesus, worry is a “Gentile” mindset. While we may sometimes equate “Gentile” with anyone who isn’t a Jew, in other contexts—like this one—it refers to those who are outside the family of God. Those without Christ have every reason to worry about the essentials of life. They express no trust in God, who is the Source of all we need. Their trust is in their own ability to provide for themselves.

ENGAGE

### GOD IS ABLE

**What are some ways God has proven Himself worthy of your trust? Use the prompts below to record your answers in the spaces provided.**

How has God provided for you financially? \_\_\_\_\_

How has God provided for your security? \_\_\_\_\_

How has God provided for you relationally? \_\_\_\_\_

**Matthew 6:33-34** <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. <sup>34</sup> Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

**Seek the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ above all else.**

“Seek first” (v. 33). The word Jesus used for “seek” is “zeteo,” which means to desire and pursue. We aren’t seeking something that’s hidden; instead we’re pursuing the things of God with a passion wherein it’s our highest priority.

- ▶ Verse 33 takes us back to Jesus’ earlier words in this chapter: “Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (vv. 19-21).
- ▶ Instead of being consumed with the temporary things of this world, we’re called to be consumed with a desire for God and 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.

## LIVE IT OUT

How will you actively seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Consider the following suggestions.

- ▶ **Confess.** 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.
- ▶ **Memorize.** 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 promises to provide.
- ▶ **Share.** 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.

## TALK IT OUT

**Take your discipleship a step further. Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Matthew 6:25-34, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.**

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 out 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.

*Does Jesus’ command in verse 25 feel easy or difficult to obey? Explain.*

*Is there someone or something (a spouse, a child, a house, a job, and so forth) that you’re currently worried God will never provide for you?*

*What are some ways you currently seek after God and His righteousness?*

## DAY 1: We can trust God because He's our Creator who holds all authority.

Read Matthew 6:25.

Jesus' words in this verse are powerful, but let's not lose sight of the fact that we're hearing these words from the mouth of the Creator. The Creator of the universe, the One who put the stars in place, the One who controls the oceans, the One who holds the world in the palm of His hand is telling us, "Don't worry!" You would think that would be enough to cure us of worry, but it often isn't. The phrase "to worry" refers to a state of mind we choose. When we worry, it's because we've allowed our mind to focus on and live in disbelief.

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. But it won't do anything to solve the problems in life that's pressing down on us. No, worry won't change anything because it can't. But God can.

*In the space below, draw a symbol that represents an area of your life that generates significant worry. Confess to God ways that your worry reflects a lack of trust in Him, then place this area of your life fully in His hands.*

*"A lack of trust produces a life of worry."*

NOE GARCIA

## DAY 2: We can trust God because He loves us.

### Read Matthew 6:26-30.

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. Neither do they appear to be interested in gathering and storing food just in case of an emergency. They're free from care because the Father cares and provides for them.

So why shouldn't we worry when life seems overwhelming with so many unmet demands? The reason is tied to the great value we have in the eyes of our Father. Sometimes it's hard to truly comprehend that God loves us as His children. Some of us haven't had the greatest father figures, and some of us have had no fathers at all. Others can't understand why God would love them when they're so flawed and sinful. But Jesus painted a wholly different picture of our heavenly Father—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. We can confidently place our trust in God because of His unconditional love for us.

*When you step outside today, pause to notice the birds and wildflowers in your community. Thank God for these visible reminders of the depth of His love for us.*

## DAY 3: We can trust God because He alone gives meaning and lasting peace.

### Read Matthew 6:31-32.

Without Christ, it's easy for our minds to be 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 aren't 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 ability to perform in order to get what we need or want.

But what do we actually achieve if we attain all these things? Sitting right next to us in our nice homes is a void, a hopelessness, and a lack of peace. None of these things truly satisfy; we're left hungry and thirsty for more. It boils down to a matter of trust: without Christ, our trust is in the wrong place. Trust should be placed in God who does what is best for us.

*In your Bible, underline the phrase “your heavenly father knows that you need them” (v. 32) as a reminder that God knows and provides for all your needs.*

## **DAY 4: We can trust God because He has already provided for our greatest need: a Savior.**

### **Read Philippians 4:19.**

Consider how God provided for our greatest need. We're sinners in need of a Savior. God saw that need and sent His Son, His greatest possession. We were separated from God, so Jesus lived the sinless life we couldn't live, only to be crucified on a cross as atonement for our sin. When we place our faith in Jesus, the Son of God, we're trusting that our greatest need will be met. And since God has taken care of our biggest need, we can fully trust Him to take care of all other needs!

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

*Re-write Philippians 4:19 in your own words in the space below.*





## DAY 5: We can trust God to help us grow in spiritual maturity.

### Read Matthew 6:33-34.

Believers are “already but not yet” people. We’ve already come 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 haven’t 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 God better and serving Him more faithfully is what we seek to do each day.

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 and being obedient to what He calls us to do. Being in His company and enjoying His presence matters to us more than anything else and His kingdom becomes our priority.

*Consider your plans for the future (both immediate and long-term). Ask God to reveal any areas where you’re putting your personal “kingdom” above His kingdom. Be ready to make adjustments to seek His kingdom first.*

*“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.”*

MATTHEW 6:33

## 2 | A Daily Pursuit



### THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We need water. Every day. Water makes up 50-65 percent of a man's body weight and 45-60 percent for women. To keep our bodies in this optimal range, we need to drink a half a gallon of water a day. All this water protects our tissues, joints, and spinal cord. It aids our digestions and helps remove the waste. Every part of our bodies needs water.<sup>2</sup>

Without water, dehydration kicks in—and that's not good for a body so dependent on water! Dry mouth, headaches, dry skin, dizziness, muscle cramps, and tiredness are all signs we need water. We can get by for several weeks without food, but water is a different matter. At best, we can survive only three to four days without it.

Too many of us experience spiritual dehydration. We need daily contact with our heavenly Father. Dry souls, irritability, and difficulty in our spiritual walk are a few of the signs we need to be replenished through time with God. The cure is as simple as a time of prayer and praise to the One who keeps us going.

We need Jesus. Every day.

# GROUP TIME

**THE POINT:** Deepen your \_\_\_\_\_ with God by spending \_\_\_\_\_ with Him every day.

The apostle Paul wasn't writing this letter to the Philippians from a comfortable back porch swing. He was in prison. Some of the Philippians surely remembered when, right there in their own city, Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned, yet the two evangelists spent the night praying and singing hymns of praise (Acts 16:11-12,22-25). Where did Paul's joy come from? It came from Jesus Christ.

**Philippians 4:4-5** <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

**Begin your day with \_\_\_\_\_ .**

Paul didn't tell us once to rejoice; he told us twice. He intentionally repeated himself. He viewed a spirit of rejoicing as critical in the Christian's life. The word Paul used was "chairō," an action verb. The fact that it's a verb is telling. Rejoicing isn't something that happens by accident or through osmosis. It's a daily decision to choose to find our joy in Christ—regardless of our circumstances.

**Philippians 4:6-7** <sup>6</sup> Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

**Pray and \_\_\_\_\_ your concerns in the hands of God.**

"Don't worry about anything" (v. 6). 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. 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's often the most neglected spiritual discipline of the Christian's life. Through Christ, we have access to the Creator of the universe who hears our prayers. That truth alone should drive us immediately to His throne in prayer. Instead, we often find ourselves starving for time to pray. It sometimes seems like we're just too busy and have too much to do. How can we stop long enough to pray?

- ▶ **Petition.** Prayer is communion with God, and petition is a part of that. It's 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. I want my kids to see that life will always have highs and lows, but we can always be thankful to God. Those highs and lows will change, but our God never does. With God on the throne, we always have a reason to be thankful.

**Philippians 4:8-9** <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

**Fill your mind with the \_\_\_\_\_ .**

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; and praiseworthy, not shameful.

When we focus on and trust in Christ, we have peace. Peace is the natural by-product of a mind that spends time with God every day. Dwelling on His Word and the things of God draws our hearts closer to Him, and intimacy with Christ takes on a new meaning when we saturate our daily thoughts with the things of God.

## PURSUE PEACE

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Rarely" and 5 being "Always," how often do you begin each day with prayer and God's Word? Place a mark on the scale below.



What's one thing you'd like to begin doing to strengthen your daily time with God?



## LIVE IT OUT

What steps are you willing to take in order to deepen your walk with Christ? Consider the following suggestions.

- ▶ **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. 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.

## TALK IT OUT

**Take your discipleship a step further. Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Philippians 4:4-9, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.**

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 prayer, dwelling on Him becomes an ongoing practice throughout the day.

*Paul challenged believers to rejoice. For what can you rejoice right now?*

*What current prayer request do you need to leave in God's hands?*

*What adjustments do you need to make to start your day with God?*

# DAILY STUDY

## DAY 1: How we begin our prayer time matters.

### Read Philippians 4:4-5.

Early in my walk with Christ, I outlined my prayers with wants, needs, and complaints. I ended my prayer time by reminding God what I wanted just in case He forgot. The entire prayer time was about me, myself, and I. Rarely did I pray for others or praise God for who He is or thank Him for what He had done. When I made a choice to change that, my prayer life was enriched and my walk with Christ was strengthened. I chose to always start my prayer time with praise—even when I was feeling depressed or discouraged. Regardless of my state of mind or state of life, God never changes and for that I have a reason to praise.

- ▶ Rejoice because the King is still on His throne!
- ▶ Rejoice because death has lost its sting!
- ▶ Rejoice because we don't fight to gain victory; we fight because the victory has been won in Christ!

Rejoice! What a way to start our day, rejoicing in who God is and what He has done.

*Create a playlist of praise songs to listen to each morning while you get ready, eat breakfast, and travel to work or school.*

*“Our busy schedules aren’t keeping us  
from prayer, our hearts are.”*

JACKIE HILL PERRY

## DAY 2: In prayer, we can take all our needs to God.

### Read Philippians 4:6.

Paul told us to run everything through prayer, petition, and thanksgiving. *Everything*. Not just the big things. Everything is to be filtered through prayer. Bring it all to God, who can handle it.

Once we pray and give our burden to God, we can have peace in the midst of the problem. One reason God's peace is so extraordinary is that we can have it when it makes no sense to have it! How could Paul have peace when he was in a Roman prison? God's peace flooded his soul through prayer. This peace transcends understanding.

Peace comes when we lay our requests and worries before God and leave them there! Too often we place our requests at His feet only to pick them back up the next day. Faith leaves them at the throne. God may not always answer our prayers on our own time schedule or with the exact answer we think is best. Faith trusts that God will answer at the right time. Faith trusts that God will give us the best answer—one that may even go beyond what we thought was best. Faith trusts and leaves the matter in the hands of our sovereign Lord.

*Reach out to others today and ask how you can pray for them. Then, purposefully pray through these requests.*

## DAY 3: God offers us His peace in Christ Jesus.

### Read Philippians 4:7.

Paul affirmed that our best efforts at comprehending God's peace always fall short. When God gives us peace in response to our prayer, we find ourselves comforted and filled with the confidence He has heard our need and He'll respond. The distance between what we know and what we need is filled with His peace that "surpasses" our best attempt to understand it.

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 out the anxiety that may overwhelm us. Our hearts can be filled with worry when we allow feelings of guilt, anger, regret, or apprehension to control us. Likewise, His peace guards our minds and halts anxious thoughts from creeping in and paralyzing us with worry. Where do we go so we can embrace God's peace? Paul pointed us to Christ Jesus.

*Set a goal to increase the amount of time you spend daily in prayer. Offer God a specific and scheduled block of time. After several days, share with someone how this change has impacted your perspective and stress level.*

## DAY 4: Daily prayer and praise focus our attention.

### Read Philippians 4:8.

My family recently went to a family camp that included a host of recreational activities, theme nights, date nights, and so forth. With a family of six you can imagine how much luggage we had. Flying with five bags was going to be expensive enough, but if the bags were heavier than fifty pounds, we would have to pay an additional fee. All the bags cleared the scales—except one. We had to toss the extra weight.

In the same way, we have got to lose the baggage that crowds out the things of God. We can't stay focused on Christ if we let the wrong things crowd our minds. God calls us to place our thoughts and our focus on good and godly things like His Word, what He is doing in the world, and more. A life of daily praise and prayer puts our focus where it needs to be: on Jesus Christ, the One who replenishes us with the living water. Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him" (John 7:37b-38).

*Go to BibleGateway.com and listen to the CSB audio version of the Book of Philippians. It takes less than fifteen minutes and your focus will be drawn to Christ.*





## DAY 5: Follow the godly example of other believers.

### Read Philippians 4:9.

When we consider *how* we're to accomplish the instruction in Philippians 4:8 to place our focus on what is good and honorable, it's helpful to remember that we can "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Determine to surrender your thought life to Jesus. Take real steps to prevent it from drifting into the gutter. The wrong thoughts will still want to invade your mind, but be aggressive and take them captive! Ask God to help you think in a Christ-centered, Christ-exalting way about *all* things.

In addition to thinking praiseworthy thoughts, Paul called us to follow godly examples. "Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me" (Philippians 4:9). Imitate believers who set their minds on our Creator and Redeemer. Watch them. Pay attention to their lives, what they read, topics of their conversations, and what they value. As a result of striving to be like other Christ-like believers, Paul said that each follower would know more of God's peace.

*Invite a trusted Christian friend to be your prayer partner. Commit to pray for each other and check in often to see how God has answered your requests.*

*"Do what you have learned and received  
and heard from me, and seen in me, and  
the God of peace will be with you."*

PHILIPPIANS 4:9

## 3 | The Key to Contentment



### THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Life is filled with stages—and no matter the stage we’re in, we seem eager to jump to the next one. We couldn’t wait to get to high school, but once we were there, we couldn’t wait to graduate. We couldn’t wait to get to college, but it didn’t take long before we were eager to move to a career in the real world. We couldn’t wait to get married, but once we arrived, we began looking toward a family. We landed the job we wanted, but before long, we set our sights on another job or a better position.

For most of us, each stage offers some degree of contentment, but we still have a yearning. Our hearts are hungry for more. If we’re not careful, our hearts can live in discontentment.

The apostle Paul knew what it was like to live a life of highs and lows, to have much and to be in need. As situations in his life changed, his contentment didn’t. In *Philippians 4*, Paul gave us the “secret” to being content regardless of our current situation.

# GROUP TIME

**THE POINT:** True \_\_\_\_\_ comes through Christ alone.

It's a great boost to our faith when God takes care of us in a way that can only be explained by the work of God. We aren't the same when we see Him provide and no one else can get the credit. The apostle Paul knew well what it meant to move forward in faith and see God provide through a community of believers. In this passage, Paul wrote to express his appreciation for the financial support he received from the Philippians.

**Philippians 4:10-14** <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship.

**Acknowledge the strength and provision of \_\_\_\_\_ .**

Although this gift came from the Philippians, Paul knew very well that they were only the deliverers of God's provision. He knew the mighty hand of God was behind this offering.

- ▶ Paul "rejoiced in the Lord" (v. 10). His gratitude was to the One who was behind the gift and Who moved the church to care and provide.
- ▶ Even as Paul thanked the Philippians 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.
- ▶ Paul 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" (Philippians 4:11).
- ▶ It's important to note that Paul wasn't exempt from pain and the trials of this life just because he was a faithful servant; in fact, it seems his hardships were due to his faithfulness.

**Philippians 4:15-18** <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account. <sup>18</sup> 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.

\_\_\_\_\_ generously from God’s provision.

Paul had some hard days in Macedonia. He suffered physically in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24). In Thessalonica the spreading of the gospel met opposition and ultimately led to his departure (17:1-10). No wonder he was so grateful for a church that stood by him during these times. Although it was from a distance, Paul felt the Philippians’ support. If it wasn’t for the generosity of the church in Philippi, he could have been discouraged.

**Philippians 4:19-20** <sup>19</sup> And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Trust God to supply your** \_\_\_\_\_ .

“And my God will supply all your needs” (v. 19). 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. Trusting God means trusting Him to provide, and trusting Him to provide in His timing and in the way that is best for us.

**HE IS GOOD**

Philippians 4:19 offers a promise that God will supply our needs. Use the lists below to record needs that God has provided for you and your family, and needs you’re still waiting for Him to provide.

**Needs Provided**

**Current Needs**

ENGAGE



## LIVE IT OUT

A life of simplicity finds contentment in Christ alone. How can you live out that truth? Consider the following suggestions.

- ▶ **Choose contentment.** Evaluate your heart for signs of discontentment. Ask yourself: Am I trusting in wealth more than I trust 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 4:12b-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.** Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give of your time, talent, or treasures.

## TALK IT OUT

**Take your discipleship a step further. Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Philippians 4:10-20, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.**

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 doesn’t 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.

*How have you experienced the truth of Philippians 4:13?*

*Do Christ-followers still carry an obligation to support and care for one another? Explain.*

*How does our contentment provide glory to God?*

## DAY 1: When we place our trust in Jesus, we can be content in any circumstance.

### Read Philippians 4:10-12.

The Philippian Christians had supported Paul earlier in his ministry (2 Corinthians 8:1-6; Philippi is in Macedonia). However, quite a bit of time had passed since the last time they had contacted him due to circumstances beyond their control. Now, they renewed their connection with him and even enlisted Epaphroditus to deliver a gift (Philippians 2:19-30).

At this point, Paul was in Rome awaiting his opportunity to appear before Caesar (Acts 25:1-12). He had been living there two years under house arrest (28:30). The church's gift turned out to be a remarkable blessing for him, but not because of what the money provided. He rejoiced because it signified the church's eagerness to care for him.

Just to make sure the Philippian church didn't get the impression Paul rejoiced over the money itself, he made a crystal-clear assertion—his 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.

*In what areas of life do you struggle with discontentment? Pray for a fresh perspective like the one Paul had so you can claim contentment regardless of your circumstances.*

*“In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.”*

PHILIPPIANS 4:12B

## DAY 2: Christ is the Source of our strength.

### Read Philippians 4:13-14.

So, what was the secret to Paul's contentment? His answer comes in verse 13: "I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me." Whether he was well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need, Paul found his strength in Christ. The ability to rest in God and be fully satisfied came from Him.

We should be careful not to take this passage out of context. Athletes like to quote verse 13 as if it was written to help them make a free throw in basketball or a triple play in baseball. People like to quote it before job interviews or daunting tasks. While we should certainly seek God and depend on Him in all circumstances, the point of this verse is that, however our circumstances turn out, we can be content because of Christ. Since Christ is the Source of our peace, we can rest fully in the knowledge that our circumstances, whether good or bad, don't have to determine our level of joy or peace. Christ is our firm foundation.

*Place Philippians 4:13 someplace you will see it often. Let it be a reminder to you that God will give you all you need to thrive.*



## DAY 3: God uses us to support His kingdom work.

### Read Philippians 4:15-18.

Paul expressed gratitude for the way the Philippian church supported him. Through Paul's ministry, he had spread the gospel and helped start many churches, but only the Philippian church reciprocated and supported him when he needed it. Paul mentioned this fact without a hint of complaint. Through the Philippian believers, God had provided for his needs.

As Christians, we should be leading the charge in supporting missionaries and church planters who are daily working for the sake of the gospel. Each church planter and missionary should be able to echo the words Paul wrote: "You sent gifts for my need several times" (v. 16). Financial and emotional support provides fuel for ministers, enabling them to serve and minister beyond what they might otherwise be equipped for. Prayer support is invaluable to the spiritual fruit they will see. Paul was aware of these truths and wanted the believers at Philippi to know of his appreciation.

*Pray for a missionary, church planter, or pastor today and send that person a note of encouragement to assure him or her of your support.*

## DAY 4: Our God has unlimited resources and riches.

### Read Philippians 4:19.

The wonderful promise found in verse 19 gets even more powerful when we see that God supplies what we need "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (v. 19). Sometimes we might approach the throne of God and forget Whom we're approaching: the Creator of the universe. The One who owns it all. The One who lacks absolutely nothing. Our God isn't poor, in debt, or low on resources. His resources are unlimited—so we can rest in the truth that, when God provides, He provides abundantly!

It's important to remember that verse 19 isn't the false promise often proclaimed in the "prosperity gospel." We can't just name whatever we want and claim it. God isn't 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 with His unlimited resources, but our contentment comes through resting in Him, not in an abundance of stuff.

Living a life of simplicity rests in this truth: God, in His power, is able to provide what we need.

*In your Bible, highlight the phrase "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" as a reminder of God's abundance.*



## DAY 5: Recognizing God's provision leads us to worship.

### Read Philippians 4:20.

Writing about God's supply prompted Paul to worship the God who supplied his needs. As Paul worshiped, he drew his attention to two aspects of God. First, he referred to God with a significant plural pronoun—our. Earlier, Paul assured the Philippian church *his* God would supply their needs. In this moment of worship, he included all believers in his affirmation of praise.

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.

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. Our spiritual maturity isn't the result of our tremendous devotion or tenacious diligence. God 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.

*In the space below, record a word or phrase that signifies something God has provided for you recently. Be ready to share about God's personal supply when you encounter someone who is struggling to trust Him to provide.*

*"Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."*

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *CONFESSIONS*

## 4 | Godly Contentment



### THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

For many of us, collecting is a hobby. We collected comic books or action figures as kids. As adults, many of us still enjoy collecting a certain item. It's a hobby that includes the thrill of the hunt, organizing, displaying, and trading with others.

Unfortunately, collecting isn't a hobby for some people; it's an obsession. Psychologists have identified a common trait among hoarders—those who compulsively collect anything and everything. That common trait is anxiety.<sup>3</sup>

We've all experienced a feeling of security from something we've possessed, even if that sense of security was short-lived. But seeking security and contentment from inanimate objects is elusive. Even trying to find security and contentment in people is ultimately unachievable because people will let us down at one time or another.

God offers us a simpler approach—an achievable approach to contentment—that grows out of our relationship with Him. A life of simplicity is a life of contentment, and we find that in Christ.

# GROUP TIME

**THE POINT:** Godliness with \_\_\_\_\_ is great \_\_\_\_\_ .

Earlier in 1 Timothy 6, Paul spoke against false doctrine and human greed. False teachers were twisting God's truth to mislead people into believing that godliness would result in material gain. They weren't motivated by a desire to please God; instead they were motivated by a desire to gain the riches of this world. This isn't godliness; it's greed. Paul encouraged his readers to be aware of the pitfalls of our desires and to pursue godliness and righteousness first.

**1 Timothy 6:6-8** <sup>6</sup> But godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. <sup>8</sup> If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

**Godly contentment doesn't depend on \_\_\_\_\_ .**

In verse 6, the word Paul used for "contentment" is "autarkeia." It means to be totally satisfied with what one has. 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 the world, and we can take nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7).
- ▶ When we're not content with simply having our daily needs met, we become discontent and push for more and more. We may even think: *Perhaps a new job will fix the discontentment. If this old car doesn't make me content, perhaps a new car will. Or maybe it's a new wardrobe, or even worse, a new spouse.*
- ▶ The enemy loves the discontent heart, but contentment rests with the simple pleasures of life that come from God.

**1 Timothy 6:9-11** <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> But you, man of God, flee from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

## Craving more possessions only leads to \_\_\_\_\_ .

We've all experienced a craving for a specific snack. Paul warned about another craving: the craving of riches. The difference in the craving for a snack and the craving of riches is that the latter will lead to ruin and destruction. Craving riches isn't just foolish; it's harmful. It's not the mere presence of riches that brings harm; it's the desire for those riches that is so dangerous. Such desires are traps set to capture our hearts and guide us away from finding contentment in the things of God. Our flesh—our sinful human nature—will always crave the things of this world that never satisfy. If Satan can capture our hearts, then he can set us in motion on the path to destruction.

Scripture says “all kinds of evil” (v. 10) 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're susceptible to whatever the culture throws at us.

### FREE TEMPTATION, FIND CONTENTMENT

Paul talks in verse 9 about foolish and harmful desires that lead to destruction. What are some products or services emphasized in our culture that would match those categories?

**1 Timothy 6:17-19** <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, <sup>19</sup> storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life.

**Set your hope on \_\_\_\_\_ and store up riches in heaven.**

Paul's warning about the love of money applies to all us—rich, poor, and in-between. In verse 17, Paul issued a warning to those who have riches. I love the language he used here: “rich in the present age.” Any riches we possess in this present age are only in this present age; they won't transfer to the age to come. Paul's instructions were to guide the rich in how they should live with their temporary, current riches.



## LIVE IT OUT

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.

## TALK IT OUT

**Take your discipleship a step further. Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-11,17-19, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.**

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 isn't just a problem with hoarders. Most of us feel better off with more possessions, or at least *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.

*How would you define “godliness” in your own words?*

*What does it look like practically to “flee” from ungodly desires and temptations?*

*What's one step you can take this week to pursue godliness?*

## DAY 1: Contentment is found in pursuing godliness.

### Read 1 Timothy 6:6-8.

Paul made this assertion about godliness and wealth: “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (v. 6). Two definitions will help us to understand more about Paul’s words. 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.

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. In Him, we have enough.

Because of Christ’s sufficiency, we find ourselves enriched with spiritual treasures that last for eternity. As a result, our greatest needs are met in a relationship with Christ.

*Identify any areas of discontentment and consider what might be fueling that fire (such as social media, magazines, TV, and so on). Commit to a two-week break from one of these sources. Once complete, assess your level of contentment.*

*“Greed and godliness can never dwell in the same heart. One will be the resident, and the other will be the occasional visitor.”*

NOE GARCIA

## DAY 2: God's grace is a gift we can't earn.

### Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

Some people mistakenly believe that engaging in spiritual activities will automatically lead to financial blessings. Most churches lift up the doctrine of grace—we're recipients of God's grace, a grace we don't deserve—yet we often act like our acts of service, devotion, and giving will receive some form of reward from God.

I've never preached this false doctrine, but at one point I was living it. When I was single, I patiently waited for God to provide a wife. I was as faithful as I could be. I even fasted from dating for a whole year, and it wasn't easy. Surely God would bless my faithfulness to Him and provide a wife at the end of the year. I'd earned it. But the years just passed. Why hadn't God blessed my faithfulness? Then it hit me; I had been using my pursuit of godliness as a down payment for the things I wanted God to provide for me. I did love Him and wanted to please Him, but my motives weren't for His glory; I was motivated by what I might gain.

*Re-write Ephesians 2:8-9 in your own words in the space below.*

## DAY 3: Resist temptation and its harmful desires.

### Read 1 Timothy 6:9-11.

Have you ever had a craving for something sweet in the middle of the night? I'm thinking of those cravings so strong that they cause a person to get out of bed, get dressed, get in the car, and drive to the store. What we crave can have a lot of power over us! So, how should we respond to those cravings that pull us away from righteousness? Paul gave Timothy wise instruction: "flee from these things" (v. 11). Sound advice for sure, but by itself, it's not enough. It's equally important to consider what we run to. Paul called Timothy 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 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 and people.

*In your Bible, underline the word "flee" in verse 11. Consider how you can actively "flee" from ungodly desires and ask God to help you to take these steps the next time you face a temptation.*

## DAY 4: Refuse to place your confidence in wealth.

### Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

Paul did more than just give a warning about the love of money; he gave practical instructions for keeping your heart focused on the pursuit of righteousness.

- ▶ **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. To place our full confidence and trust in wealth is like driving a car and never expecting it to run out of gas. Wealth will disappear, and when it does, so will our hope.
- ▶ **Hope in God.** We have riches in God, but a different type of riches. God “*richly* provides us with all things to enjoy” (v. 17, emphasis added). God doesn't provide so that we can just exist. He gives us an abundant life (John 10:10), and we can enjoy what He richly provides!
- ▶ **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 earthly riches. When the rich do this, they are “storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age” (1 Timothy 6:19).

*Review your spending habits and consider what changes you need to make so you can respond in obedience when God calls you to give.*





## DAY 5: Generosity transforms the heart of the giver.

### Read 2 Corinthians 9:7-8.

I opened my first savings account at the age of twenty-two. Each month I placed a specific amount into this account, and I loved to watch the balance grow. This wasn't a big deal at first, but I became obsessed with seeing the increase in my savings. I became so focused on the increase of my savings that I found reasons not to tithe to my church or give anywhere else. I justified my disobedience by saying things like, "I don't trust how my tithe is being used by the church." "I don't like the preaching." "I will give when I make more money." The truth was I didn't want to give because I was greedy and I wanted more money in my account. This savings account slowly began to own me, and I became enslaved to my own riches.

I found the way to break this entrapment: I began giving again. The only cure for greed is generosity. Generosity was unbelievably hard for me—but only the first few times. I soon transformed into a cheerful giver. I could give freely and experience godly contentment.

*Memorize 2 Corinthians 9:8. Let this truth be a reminder of God's provision that enables us to "excel in every good work" (v. 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."*

2 CORINTHIANS 9:8

# LEADER GUIDE

## SESSION 1

### A Centered Life

#### GETTING STARTED

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item #1**, the “Worry” poster. As your group arrives, have pens available and instruct members to record onto the poster the kinds of things they tend to worry about. Responses can be less serious items but should include a few real issues that can lead to worry. Once everyone has arrived, discuss the responses and take a vote to determine the top three issues. Circle those top three issues on the poster.

**DISCUSS:** What are some things you never worry about anymore?

**RECAP (PAGE 7):** Worry. Can you relate to that word? A lot of us can. Two out of five Americans admit to worrying.<sup>1</sup> And I’m in that group.

I worry a lot. I worry about church, family, health, my future, and lost people in my city. The list goes on and on. I’ve let worry consume me and even spiritually paralyze me for years. I play the “what-if” game a lot. *What if I make the wrong decision? What if the desires of my heart never come to pass? What if my father never comes to know Christ?*

Do you ever wish you could just stop worrying and fixating on things you can’t control? I do. Jesus gave us the key, and it all has to do with our focus. When our focus is on the world, worry is usually the result, but when we focus on Christ ... well, that changes everything.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called us to seek His kingdom and His righteousness first. After that, everything else falls into place.

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Point** on page 8. Invite group members to fill in the blanks. **THE POINT: When your life is CENTERED in Christ, you FIND all you need.**

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item #2**, the “Simplicity” poster, and give a brief overview of the six session titles in this study.



## STUDY THE BIBLE

**GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT:** 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). Jesus 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).

**RECAP (PAGE 8):** 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 anxiety and worry.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:25-30 on page 8.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 8: **Don’t WORRY**.

**RECAP (PAGE 8):** Jesus’ words are unmistakable: “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life” (v. 25). Easier said than done, right? But it’s an important word from Jesus, and His use of “I tell you” is to get us to pay close attention to what He was saying.

God loves and cares for each one of us. Jesus illustrated this truth by focusing on two of our most basic needs: food and clothing. The birds in the sky are fed and provided for and the wildflowers are clothed. The birds and the flowers have no concern, and since we’re loved so much more deeply, why should we have any concern? Jesus was clear: don’t worry about things we shouldn’t be worrying about. Worry saps our energy. Worry steals hours from our day—and days from our lives. Worry reveals a lack of faith and trust in God.

**DISCUSS:** What kinds of things cause people to worry? [*ALTERNATE: What are some lies that cause worry to increase?*]

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:31-32 on page 8.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 9: **Trust God to do what is BEST for you**.

**RECAP (PAGE 9):** A lack of trust produces a life of worry. According to Jesus, worry is a “Gentile” mindset. While we may sometimes equate “Gentile” with anyone who isn’t a Jew, in other contexts—like this one—it refers to those who are outside the family of God. Those without Christ have every reason to worry about the essentials of life. They express no trust in God, who is the Source of all we need. Their trust is in their own ability to provide for themselves.

**DO:** Instruct group members to complete the activity, **God Is Able**, on page 9, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

**God Is Able:** What are some ways God has proven Himself worthy of your trust? Use the prompts below to record your answers in the spaces provided.

How has God provided for you financially? \_\_\_\_\_

How has God provided for your security? \_\_\_\_\_

How has God provided for you relationally? \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCUSS:** When has God provided for you in an unexpected way? *[ALTERNATE: What are some ways people deal with worry in their lives?]*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:33-34 on page 9.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 9: **Seek the THINGS of GOD above all else.**

**RECAP (PAGE 9):** "Seek first" (v. 33). The word Jesus used for "seek" is "zeteo," which means to desire and pursue. We aren't seeking something that's hidden; instead we're pursuing the things of God with a passion wherein it's our highest priority.

- ▶ Verse 33 takes us back to Jesus' earlier words in this chapter: "Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (vv. 19-21).
- ▶ Instead of being consumed with the temporary things of this world, we're called to be consumed with a desire for God and 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:** What does it look like to seek God's kingdom first? *[ALTERNATE: What does Jesus promise in this passage?]*

**DISCUSS:** How can our group help one another prioritize the kingdom of God?

## LIVE IT OUT

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use a puzzle competition to illustrate the idea of a life "falling into place" when we're centered on Christ. Bring two 50-piece puzzles to your gathering.

**In advance,** complete the border around one of the puzzles. Then divide your group into two teams and challenge them to complete their puzzle as quickly as possible. Help group members make the connection that centering our lives on Christ is like starting a puzzle with the borders already connected.



**SAY:** “How will you actively seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Consider the following suggestions.”

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 10. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **Confess.** 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.
- ▶ **Memorize.** 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 promises to provide.
- ▶ **Share.** 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.

**GUIDE:** Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 10) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 11-14).

**PRAY:** Close with a prayer. Praise God for being the One who holds all authority and is over all things. Ask for wisdom as you seek to center your life on Jesus each day.

## DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

**[VERSES 25-26]:** In these verses, Jesus challenged His followers not to worry. He confronted the 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 rob us of the quality of life He intends for us to enjoy as God’s people.

Next, 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 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. Without proper clothes, a person living in Israel ran the risk of being hurt or even dying because of the extreme temperatures. That’s why appropriate clothing was always a chief concern.

**[VERSE 29]:** King Solomon ruled over Israel with tremendous success. The Lord gave him wisdom to rule well. Because of Solomon's wisdom, his power and wealth grew exponentially (1 Kings 4:20-34). With his wealth, he constructed the temple in Jerusalem. The elaborate construction project took seven years (6:38). Then he built his palace, which took thirteen years to complete (7:1). With these buildings alone, Solomon rendered more than enough breath-taking beauty for Israel to see. But as Jesus confirmed, what Solomon produced didn't come close to the splendor provided by a field full of flowers.

**[VERSE 31]:** Jesus didn't intend to shame us or punish us with His assertion about the weakness of our faith in Him. 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. We should interpret His statement about our small faith as an appeal instead of a reprimand. He wants to take us from living with worry to walking by 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. For that reason, they tried to please the idol at every juncture. They had little or no hope that an idol would provide them with something to eat and drink or clothes to wear.

**[VERSE 33]:** What's our aim in life? We know from Jesus' words in the earlier verses that it shouldn't be worry over things we need. Jesus asserted that our target is the kingdom of God. He directed us to seek it. As Jesus helped us identify the target of our lives, He directed us to His righteousness. Being righteous means being right with Him. Of course, being right with Him comes by trusting in Him. That was true for Abraham (Genesis 15:6), and it's true for us too (Romans 4:16-25). Accordingly, when we seek His righteousness, our thoughts turn to living by faith in Him.

**[VERSE 34]:** 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.



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## LEADER GUIDE

# SESSION 2

## A Daily Pursuit

### GETTING STARTED

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, secure enough bottles of water for each member of your group to have one. Distribute these to your group.

**DISCUSS:** When can you remember being especially thirsty?

**RECAP (PAGE 15):** We need water. Every day. Water makes up 50-65 percent of a man's body weight and 45-60 percent for women. To keep our bodies in this optimal range, we need to drink a half a gallon of water a day. All this water protects our tissues, joints, and spinal cord. It aids our digestions and helps remove the waste. Every part of our bodies needs water.<sup>2</sup>

Without water, dehydration kicks in—and that's not good for a body so dependent on water! Dry mouth, headaches, dry skin, dizziness, muscle cramps, and tiredness are all signs we need water. We can get by for several weeks without food, but water is a different matter. At best, we can survive only three to four days without water.

Too many of us experience spiritual dehydration. We need daily contact with our heavenly Father. Dry souls, irritability, and difficulty in our spiritual walk are a few of the signs we need to be replenished through time with God. The cure is as simple as a time of prayer and praise to the One who keeps us going. We need Jesus. Every day.

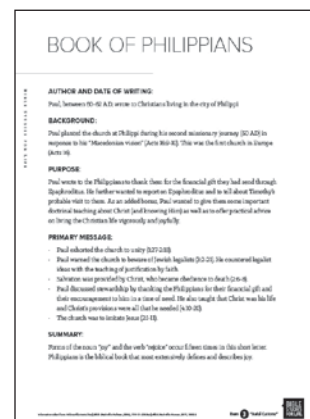
**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Point** on page 16. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

**THE POINT:** Deepen your RELATIONSHIP with God by spending TIME with Him every day.

### STUDY THE BIBLE

**GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT:** 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.

**LEADER PACK:** In advance, make copies of **Pack Item #3**, the "**Philippians**" handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to give some brief background information on the Book of Philippians.



**RECAP (PAGE 16):** The apostle Paul wasn't writing this letter to the Philippians from a comfortable back porch swing. He was in prison. Some of the Philippians surely remembered when, right there in their own city, Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned, yet the two evangelists spent the night praying and singing hymns of praise (Acts 16:11-12,22-25). Where did Paul's joy come from? It came from Jesus Christ.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:4-5 on page 16.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 16: **Begin your day with PRAISE.**

**RECAP (PAGE 16):** Paul didn't tell us once to rejoice; he told us twice. He intentionally repeated himself. He viewed a spirit of rejoicing as critical in the Christian's life. The word Paul used was "chairō," an action verb. The fact that it's a verb is telling. Rejoicing isn't something that happens by accident or through osmosis. It's a daily decision to choose to find our joy in Christ—regardless of our circumstances.

**DISCUSS:** When was the last time you really rejoiced over something? [*ALTERNATE: What's your favorite way of expressing praise to God?*]

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:6-7 on page 16.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 16: **Pray and LEAVE your concerns in the hands of God.**

**RECAP (PAGES 16-17):** "Don't worry about anything" (v. 6). 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. 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's often the most neglected spiritual discipline of the Christian's life. Through Christ, we have access to the Creator of the universe who hears our prayers. That truth alone should drive us immediately to His throne in prayer. Instead, we often find ourselves starving for time to pray. It sometimes seems like we're just too busy and have too much to do. How can we stop long enough to pray?
- ▶ **Petition.** Prayer is communion with God, and petition is a part of that. It's 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. I want my kids to see that life will always have highs and lows, but we can always be thankful to God. Those highs and lows will change, but our God never does. With God on the throne, we always have a reason to be thankful.



**DISCUSS:** What are some obstacles to experiencing the peace of God? *[ALTERNATE: When have you experienced the kind of peace described in verse 7?]*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:8-9 on page 17.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 17: **Fill your mind with the THINGS OF GOD.**

**RECAP (PAGE 17):** 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; and praiseworthy, not shameful.

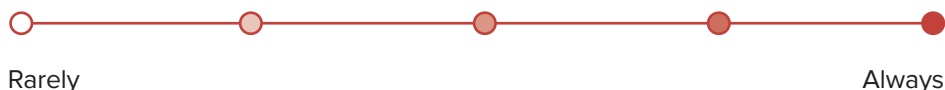
When we focus on and trust in Christ, we have peace. Peace is the natural by-product of a mind that spends time with God every day. Dwelling on His Word and the things of God draws our hearts closer to Him, and intimacy with Christ takes on a new meaning when we saturate our daily thoughts with the things of God.

**DISCUSS:** What tools and strategies have you found helpful in placing your focus on the things of God? *[ALTERNATE: Who do you know that consistently lives out these verses?]*

**DISCUSS:** Which of Paul's commands in verses 4-9 are easier for you and which are harder?

**DO:** Instruct group members to complete the activity, **Pursue Peace**, on page 17, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

**Pursue Peace:** On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Rarely" and 5 being "Always," how often do you begin each day with prayer and God's Word? Place a mark on the scale below.



What's one thing you'd like to begin doing to strengthen your daily time with God?

## LIVE IT OUT

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Display your bottle of water from earlier in today's session. Explain that just as we can't skip a day of drinking water and expect to feel healthy and good, we can't skip time with Jesus and expect to grow in our relationship with Him. Daily time with Jesus will enable us to know Him more and grow in our faith.

**SAY:** "What steps are you willing to take in order to deepen your walk with Christ? Consider the following suggestions."

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 18. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **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. 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.

**GUIDE:** Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 18) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 19-22).

**PRAY:** Close with a prayer. Thank God for the peace He gives that is unlike anything else we might pursue or strive for.

## DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

**[VERSE 4]:** Take a close look at the number of times Paul encouraged the Philippian Christians to rejoice. Paul 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). Paul certainly intended for believers to learn the value of abiding in the joy of Christ.

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).

**[VERSE 5]:** Any believer who experiences joy in Christ can testify to the way it affects us. For instance, rejoicing helps us focus our thoughts and actions more clearly on our

gratitude for His grace toward us. Also, when we rejoice, we find ourselves settled and secure in Him, even when facing the toughest challenges.

Rejoicing also affects our relationships with others. Think about everyone we encounter. Some people 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.

**[VERSE 6]:** The cure for worry comes in the form of prayer and petition. When we pray, we have conversations with God. In the conversations, 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 God 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 God to listen to us and to know what's best for us.

**[VERSE 7]:** 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 God with our needs and concerns, we remain confident He will answer our prayer. While we wait for His answer, He gives us His peace, a profound sense of His presence that settles and strengthens us.

**[VERSE 8]:** 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, and His plan for us. 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.

**[VERSE 9]:** Without hesitation, Paul counseled the Philippian Christians to follow the example he had set for them as they translated godly thoughts into worthwhile actions. He added that his companions who walked with the Lord also provided a worthy pattern for them to follow (Philippians 3:17).



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LEADER GUIDE

# SESSION 3

## The Key to Contentment

### GETTING STARTED

**DISCUSS:** What makes you feel especially content?

**RECAP (PAGE 23):** Life is filled with stages—and no matter the stage we're in, we seem eager to jump to the next one. We couldn't wait to get to high school, but once we were there, we couldn't wait to graduate. We couldn't wait to get to college, but it didn't take long before we were eager to move to a career in the real world. We couldn't wait to get married, but once we arrived, we began looking toward a family. We landed the job we wanted, but before long, we set our sights on another job or a better position.

For most of us, each stage offers some degree of contentment, but we still have a yearning. Our hearts are hungry for more. If we're not careful, our hearts can live in discontentment.

The apostle Paul knew what it was like to live a life of highs and lows, to have much and to be in need. As situations in his life changed, his contentment didn't. In Philippians 4, Paul gave us the “secret” to being content regardless of our current situation.

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Point** on page 24. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

**THE POINT:** True CONTENTMENT comes through Christ alone.

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item #2**, the “Simplicity” poster, and briefly review the titles for the past two sessions.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Capitalize on the word “key” from the session title “The Key to Contentment” by asking group members to take out their key rings. First, ask if group members have any keys that are so old they no longer remember which lock they go with. Then ask group members to describe any keys that are connected with something interesting or obscure. Explain that in our study of Philippians 4, we'll get a deeper look into Paul's “key” to contentment that allowed him to face any kind of circumstance.



### STUDY THE BIBLE

**GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT:** The church at Philippi 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 Philippians.

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.

**RECAP (PAGE 24):** It's a great boost to our faith when God takes care of us in a way that can only be explained by the work of God. We aren't the same when we see Him provide and no one else can get the credit. The apostle Paul knew well what it meant to move forward in faith and see God provide through a community of believers. In this passage, Paul wrote to express his appreciation for the financial support he received from the Philippians.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:10-14 on page 24.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 24: **Acknowledge the strength and provision of GOD.**

**RECAP (PAGE 24):** Although this gift came from the Philippians, Paul knew very well that they were only the deliverers of God's provision. He knew the mighty hand of God was behind this offering.

- ▶ Paul "rejoiced in the Lord" (v. 10). His gratitude was to the One who was behind the gift and Who moved the church to care and provide.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Paul 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" (Philippians 4:11).
- ▶ It's important to note that 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:** What obstacles keep us from experiencing contentment? [*ALTERNATE: Why is God's strength a necessary ingredient for contentment?*]

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:15-18 on page 25.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 25: **GIVE generously from God's provision.**

**RECAP (PAGE 25):** Paul had some hard days in Macedonia. He suffered physically in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24). In Thessalonica the spreading of the gospel met opposition and ultimately led to his departure (17:1-10). No wonder he was so grateful for a church that stood by him during these times. Although it was from a distance, Paul felt the Philippians' support. If it wasn't for the generosity of the church in Philippi, he could have been discouraged.



**DISCUSS:** How can we practically support and care for one another? *[ALTERNATE: When has someone's generosity overwhelmed you?]*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:19-20 on page 25.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 25: **Trust God to supply your NEEDS.**

**RECAP (PAGE 25):** "And my God will supply all your needs" (v. 19). 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. Trusting God means trusting Him to provide, and we trust Him to provide in His timing and in the way that is best for us.

**DISCUSS:** How have you experienced God supplying your needs? *[ALTERNATE: What truths about God encourage you to be generous?]*

**DISCUSS:** What do you appreciate about Paul's attitude expressed in these verses?

**DO:** Instruct group members to complete the activity, **He Is Good**, on page 25, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

**He Is Good:** Philippians 4:19 offers a promise that God will supply our needs. Use the lists below to record needs that God has provided for you and your family, and needs you're still waiting for Him to provide.

**Needs Provided**

**Current Needs**

## LIVE IT OUT

**SAY:** "A life of simplicity finds contentment in Christ alone. How can you live out that truth? Consider the following suggestions."

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 26. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **Choose contentment.** Evaluate your heart for signs of discontentment. Ask yourself: Am I trusting in wealth more than I trust 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 4:12b-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.** Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give of your time, talent, or treasures.

**GUIDE:** Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 26) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God's Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 27-30).

**PRAY:** Close with a prayer. Praise God for being the Source of our contentment.

## DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

**[VERSES 10-12]:** The situation Paul faced in Rome must have been full of changes. One day he might have everything he needed to pay his living expenses while waiting to appear before Caesar. The next day might find him with very little. 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.

**[VERSE 13]:** 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 Jesus help him? Paul affirmed the Lord gave him the strength he needed 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. His sufficiency proved to Paul that he could rest in contentment. The Lord would make him strong when he was weak (2 Corinthians 12:10). Paul's contentment came from his reliance on Christ alone.

**[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 in his missionary endeavors.

**[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). In Philippi, Lydia gave her life to Christ, as did the Philippian jailer and his family (vv. 14-34). 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.

**[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. The tumultuous situation became dangerous for Paul. His Christian friends urged him to leave the city (17:1-10).

**[VERSES 17-18]:** Paul wanted to make sure his Christian friends didn't misunderstand the reason for his joy over receiving their gift. 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 worrying over any lack of resources. Paul assured the Philippian Christians he had plenty of resources now. In fact, he had more than enough, thanks to their generosity. In this verse, Paul portrayed their gift as an offering to the Lord.

**[VERSES 19-20]:** 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. Paul affirmed the resources wouldn't 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. God intended to be glorified through His people. And 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.

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.

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## SESSION 4

## Godly Contentment

### GETTING STARTED

**DISCUSS:** What did you enjoy collecting as a kid?

**RECAP (PAGE 31):** For many of us, collecting is a hobby. We collected comic books or action figures as kids. As adults, many of us still enjoy collecting a certain item. It's a hobby that includes the thrill of the hunt, organizing, displaying, and trading with others.

Unfortunately, collecting isn't a hobby for some people. It's an obsession. Psychologists have identified a common trait among hoarders—those who compulsively collect anything and everything. That common trait is anxiety.<sup>3</sup>

We've all experienced a feeling of security from something we've possessed, even if that sense of security was short-lived. But seeking security and contentment from inanimate objects is elusive. Even trying to find security and contentment in people is ultimately unachievable because people will let us down at one time or another.

God offers us a simpler approach—an achievable approach to contentment—that grows out of our relationship with Him. A life of simplicity is a life of contentment, and we find that in Christ.

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Point** on page 32. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

**THE POINT:** Godliness with CONTENTMENT is great GAIN.

### STUDY THE BIBLE

**GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT:** 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.

**RECAP (PAGE 32):** Earlier in 1 Timothy 6, Paul spoke against false doctrine and human greed. False teachers were twisting God's truth to mislead people into believing that godliness would result in material gain. They weren't motivated by a desire to please God; instead they were motivated by a desire to gain the riches of this world. This isn't godliness; it's greed. Paul encouraged his readers to be aware of the pitfalls of our desires and to pursue godliness and righteousness first.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:6-8 on page 32.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 32: **Godly contentment doesn't depend on POSSESSIONS.**

**RECAP (PAGE 32):** In verse 6, the word Paul used for "contentment" is "autarkeia." It means to be totally satisfied with what one has. 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 the world, and we can take nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7).
- ▶ When we're not content with simply having our daily needs met, we become discontent and push for more and more. We may even think: *Perhaps a new job will fix the discontentment. If this old car doesn't make me content, perhaps a new car will. Or maybe it's a new wardrobe, or even worse, a new spouse.*
- ▶ The enemy loves the discontent heart, but contentment rests with the simple pleasures of life that come from God.

**DISCUSS:** Why does contentment seem so elusive today? [ALTERNATE: *When has a desire for a specific possession led you to feel discontented?*]

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:9-11 on page 32.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 33: **Craving more possessions only leads to RUIN.**

**RECAP (PAGE 33):** We've all experienced a craving for a specific snack. Paul warned about another craving: the craving of riches. The difference in the craving for a snack and the craving of riches is that the latter will lead to ruin and destruction. Craving riches isn't just foolish; it's harmful. It's not the mere presence of riches that brings harm; it's the desire for those riches that is so dangerous. Such desires are traps set to capture our hearts and guide us away from finding contentment in the things of God. Our flesh—our sinful human nature—will always crave the things of this world that never satisfy. If Satan can capture our hearts, then he can set us in motion on the path to destruction.

Scripture says "all kinds of evil" (v. 10) 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're susceptible to whatever the culture throws at us.

**DISCUSS:** What kinds of "traps" can an unhealthy pursuit of wealth create? [ALTERNATE: *What part of Paul's instruction in verse 11 do you find most challenging?*]



**DISCUSS:** How can we recognize when money is becoming an idol?

**DO:** Divide group members into subgroups of three or four people each. Invite subgroups to complete the activity, **Flee Temptation, Find Contentment**, on page 33, together. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

**Flee Temptation, Find Contentment:** Paul talks in verse 9 about foolish and harmful desires that lead to destruction. What are some products or services lifted up in our culture that would match those categories?

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:17-19 on page 33.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 33: **Set your hope on GOD and store up riches in heaven.**

**RECAP (PAGE 33):** Paul's warning about the love of money applies to all us—rich, poor, and in-between. In verse 17, Paul issued a warning to those who have riches. I love the language he used here: "rich in the present age." Any riches we possess in this present age are only in this present age; they won't transfer to the age to come. Paul's instructions were to guide the rich in how they should live with their temporary, current riches.

**DISCUSS:** What would it look like to obey Paul's commands in these verses today?  
[ALTERNATE: *What truths about God help you put your hope in Him, rather than your possessions?*]

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item #4**, the "Godly Contentment" poster. Divide group members into smaller groups of three to four members each. Review the three ideas discussed in today's session. **Ask:** "Which of these truths do you find easy to live out and which are challenging?" Allow time for groups to discuss. Invite volunteers to share their group's responses.

## LIVE IT OUT

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, secure a Monopoly® game board. Display the playing board to your group and ask, "How do you win a game of Monopoly? What's your strategy?" Allow time for responses. Explain that the winner is typically the player who has acquired the most property, placed houses on those properties, collected rent, and amassed the most money without going bankrupt. **Say,** "If we're not careful, our real life pursuits might begin to reflect this same goal at all costs. First Timothy 6:6-11,17-19 teaches us that having wealth isn't the problem, but loving wealth can lead to destruction. Instead, we're to pursue godliness, which leads to contentment."

**SAY:** "How will you pursue godliness with contentment?"



**GUIDE:** Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 34. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **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.

**GUIDE:** Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 34) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God's Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 35-38).

**PRAY:** Close with a prayer. Praise God for providing all we need so that we might experience contentment and godliness.

## DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

**[VERSE 6]:** False teachers had caused trouble in the church at Ephesus. That's why Paul placed Timothy in charge of the congregation. Some of the false teachers had come to believe being godly could make one rich (1 Timothy 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.

**[VERSES 7-8]:** 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.

**[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 is set by what we desire; the temptation to have it lures us toward the snare. 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).

**[VERSE 10]:** While loving Christ brings incredible joy, loving money renders something entirely 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.

**[VERSE 11]:** 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 as fast and as far as possible.

**[VERSE 17]:** Paul wanted to make sure Timothy taught God's people in Ephesus how to handle their money wisely. Of course, the wise use of money involved handling it so Christ would be glorified in their behavior. 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.

**[VERSE 18]:** Our resources give us opportunities to do "what is good." Paul 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.

**[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. 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 simply affirmed a spiritual reality Jesus taught believers. Jesus instructed His followers to lay up heavenly treasure for themselves. He compared it to treasure on earth that always ran the risk of disappearing. When people invested in it, they had to live with the risk. But when believers invested in heavenly treasure, they would never lose it (Matthew 6:19-20).



**EXTRA!**

*Free additional ideas for your group are available at*

[BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)