

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE®

KJV ADULTS Leader Guide

FALL 2019

STUDY 1:
*Simplicity:
Finding Contentment
in a Busy Life*

STUDY 2:
*How to Know
God's Will*

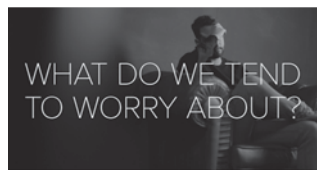


Get into the Study



5 minutes

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 1**, the “Worry” poster. As members arrive, invite them to record on the poster the kinds of things they tend to worry about. Responses can be less serious items but should also include a few very real issues that can lead to worry. Once everyone has arrived, discuss and vote to determine the top three issues. Circle those issues on the poster.



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 12 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What are some things you never worry about anymore?”**



SESSION 1

A Centered Life

THE POINT

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

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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

THE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:25-34

THE SETTING

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

MATTHEW 6:25-30

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

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

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

Verse 26. What's the best way to handle worry? Jesus taught us to take a long look into the sky. When we do, we'll find birds flying everywhere, and not a one of them

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 13 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of centering our lives in Christ by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 2**, the “Simplicity” poster, to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the special focus of each session.



GUIDE: Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 13 of the PSG: “**When your life is centered in Christ, you find all you need.**”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, print out a photo or show a video clip displaying the Big Dipper pointing toward the North Star or go to BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra and click on the Leader Extra for today's session. Ask members if they recognize the constellation and if they can pick out the North Star. Point out how ancient seafarers used this star to guide their travels. Invite discussion about how Jesus is our "North Star." If we stay focused on Him and His kingdom, everything else falls into place.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to help the group direct our attention to Him and hear from Him during this study so that we can center our lives in Christ.

Study the Bible

Matthew 6:25-30



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:25-30 on page 14 of the PSG.

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.

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

Verse 27. But Jesus didn't stop there. He asked another question. It's a question that gets to the heart of our fretful anxiety. With this question, Jesus connected worry with our lives. Will worry help us become taller? Will it add even a fraction of an inch to our height? Does it add anything to our lives? If it doesn't, it's a gigantic waste of our time and energy.

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

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.

Again, Jesus took us outdoors to help us to overcome obsessive worry. He encouraged us to take time to study how God adorns a field full of wildflowers that gush with radiant colors. However, we won't find any of the flowers in the meadow working diligently to make themselves beautiful. Their beauty appears effortlessly. They obviously

don't give a minute of their time to working in the meadow where they bloom. We'll never see them making thread so they can weave bolts of cloth to sew into garments.

Verse 29. King **Solomon** ruled over Israel with tremendous success. The Lord gave him wisdom to rule well. Because of his wisdom, his power and wealth grew exponentially (1 Kings 4:20-34). He led the kingdom to extend its reach far and wide. 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 everyone in Israel to see. In addition, his attire, chariots, and other evidences of his splendor must have been something to behold! But as Jesus confirmed, what Solomon produced didn't come close to the splendor provided by a field full of flowers.

Verse 30. Jesus led us to observe the way God adorns **the grass of the field**. At the same time, He guided us to notice how long it lasts. Beautiful flowers fade quickly. Before long, the plants start to shrivel in the heat, then they're gone. They're tossed in a furnace and turned into food for a fire. When we reflect on their glorious splendor that stays only for a little while, we marvel at the way God goes to so much trouble for His creation. We matter more to Him than plants that grow in a field. We'll certainly stay around longer, so we can count on Him to take even better care of us. Therefore, the issue at the heart of worry isn't whether God will care for us. Rather, it's whether we will trust Him to do it. Our little faith in Him fosters our big worries over how our needs will be met. ◀

MATTHEW 6:31-32

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

2 ▶ Verse 31. Jesus didn't intend to shame us or punish us with His assertion about the weakness of our faith in Him.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **1** on pages 5-7 to explain the comparisons Jesus made to the birds of the sky and the grass of the field.

RECAP: 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 we focus on the physical rather than the spiritual. A wrong focus leads to a wrong state of mind which leads to anxiety and worry.

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

RECAP: Sometimes it's hard to truly comprehend that God loves us as His children. Some of us have not had the greatest father figures, and some had no fathers in our lives at all. Others cannot understand why God would love them when they are so flawed and sinful. But Jesus painted a wholly different picture of our heavenly Father as One who takes care of the birds and adorns the flowers yet loves us so much more. In spite of our sinfulness, God loves and values us deeply. That wonderful truth should change our perspective and, therefore, cure any worry.

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

Study the Bible

Matthew 6:31-32



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:31-32 on page 15 of the PSG.

RECAP: A lack of trust produces a life of worry. According to Jesus, worry is a “Gentile” mind-set. While we may sometimes equate “Gentile” with anyone who is not a Jew, in other contexts—like this one—it refers to those who are outside the family of God. This group of lost people has 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.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **2** on pages 7-10 to explain further what Jesus meant by “the Gentiles.”

He’s not interested in hurting us. Instead, He wants to shape our perspective. Gently but firmly, He works in us so we’ll grow spiritually toward maturity in our relationship with Him. For that reason, we do well to interpret His statement about our small faith as an appeal instead of a reprimand. He’s interested in taking us from living with worry to walking by faith.

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

Notice Jesus taught us where our battle with worry begins. When we worry, we bring up questions that allow us to become paralyzed by anxiety. When we ask questions about what we will have to eat, we show that anxiety has crept into our minds. Before we know it, we’re stressed. In turn, we worry more. We become obsessed with wondering where the food will come from or how we will find it. Then our stress level increases even more, and we begin to ask whether we will ever have enough food. Eventually, we make the molehill of a concern about something to eat into a mountain of despair that escalates to the fear that we’ll never have enough food.

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

Ultimately, we come face to face with a hard reality about worrying. When we center our lives on ourselves and our needs, we prove we have lost sight of the Lord. By the same token, if we determine we’re going to trust Him, we center our lives in Him and the assurance of His care. If we center on our needs, we worry. However, if we center our lives in Christ, we learn to walk by faith. We

take critical steps away from futile and frustrating anxiety toward fruitful and fulfilling faith.

Verse 32. Jesus intended for His disciples to be characterized by faith in Him instead of anxiety over what they needed but didn't have yet. Such a character trait would make Christians distinctly different from people with no relationship with Him. When Jesus mentioned **Gentiles**, He had in mind people who didn't know Him or how He worked. They devoted themselves fully to the pagan deities of their day, but they didn't live by faith in those idols. Rather, they lived in fear of them. They thought the idol they worshiped had to be appeased. If the deity was displeased with them, they could expect its wrath to be poured out on them. For that reason, they tried to please the idol at every juncture.

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

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

Centering our lives in Christ nourishes our trust in Him. We come to rest in the certainty that He's faithful to provide us with anything and everything that will enable us to serve Him effectively. He's not forgetful; He doesn't need us to remind Him of our needs because He's absent-minded or distracted. According to Jesus, our heavenly Father has a firm grasp of what's going on with us and what we need. Therefore, we can settle into the simple certainty that He'll provide. We have no need to let worry drive us to be fretful over what we need and how we'll get it. Rather, we allow our faith in Him to center us and

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 17 of the PSG: **"When has God provided for you in an unexpected way?"**

SUMMARIZE: When we place our faith in Jesus, we are trusting that our greatest need was met. And since God has taken care of our biggest need, we can trust Him to take care of all our needs! Highlight the main points from page 17 of the PSG.

- *God does not have a hearing problem. He hears our requests (Ps. 66:18-20).*
- *God does not have a providing problem. He owns "the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10).*
- *God does not have a timing problem. He provides what we need when we need it (Prov. 3:5-6).*

If there is a problem, it's with us. It's a faith problem. He called us "O ye of little faith." Worry is simply a product of not trusting God. The good news is that we do not have to stay faithless!

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, on four or five name tags, write words like: *work, family, church, community, financial needs.*

(Continued on the next page.)

Ask volunteers to wear the name tags and “represent” each priority by shouting out the concern or demand that applies to that area of our lives. Ask another volunteer to wear a blindfold and listen for yet another volunteer who represents Christ to whisper their name through the noise. Have fun with the exercise, playing like “Marco Polo.” After a few minutes, invite members to talk about how they deal with all the demands seeking their attention and how they have learned to focus on Christ.

TRANSITION: The next verses further demonstrate that we must seek the things of God above all else.

Study the Bible

Matthew 6:33-34



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:33-34 on page 17 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **3** on pages 10-12 to explain what Jesus meant by the “kingdom of God.”

assure us He loves us, cares for us, and provides for us because we’re His children. When we center our lives in Him, we live in the confidence that everything else in our lives will fall into place. ◀

MATTHEW 6:33-34

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

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

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

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

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

Jesus assured us that when we take the path He directed in this verse, everything in our lives will fall into place. When we look at our needs through His eyes, we'll notice they don't matter as much. Also, we'll be able to tell the difference between what we actually need and what we thought we would need. We'll learn to see more clearly what we need and trust Him more completely to make it available for us. That's when we're able to live in the confidence He'll never fail us. He'll make sure we'll be provided with what we need so we can serve Him well.

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

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

RECAP: The word Jesus used for "seek" is *zeteo*, which means to desire and pursue. We do not seek something hidden; instead, we pursue the things of God with a passion that makes it our highest priority. Instead of being consumed with the temporary things of this world, we are called to be consumed with a desire for God and for the things of God. The cares of this life are not unimportant; even Jesus invited us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread" (v. 11). As we focus on Christ and pursue Him with obedience, He takes care of everything else.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 18 of the PSG: **"What does it look like to seek God's kingdom first?"**

RECAP: This does not mean if you seek God wholeheartedly, you will have whatever you want. Consider how that idea of prosperity plays out in other parts of the world. Countless believers live in poverty. Jesus' words do not promise American prosperity but God's provision. He takes care of His children. Seeking God gives us proper perspective. Jesus promised each day will have enough trouble of its own. We cannot escape the troubled day, but we can escape worry. Today, focus on Christ. Make Him first. We can think about tomorrow ... well, tomorrow.

DISCUSS: Question #5

on page 20 of the PSG:

“How can our group help one another prioritize the kingdom of God?”

DO: Direct group members to complete “Engage” on page 20 of the PSG to help them reflect on their own priorities and make application.

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

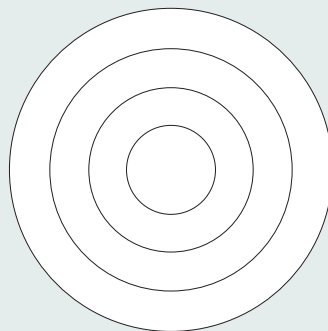
ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use a puzzle competition to illustrate the idea of a life “fitting into place” when we are centered in Christ. Bring two 50-piece puzzles to your gathering. Divide your group into two teams and challenge them to complete their puzzles as quickly as possible. You might offer a prize to the winning team. Help group members make the connection that centering our lives in Christ is even better than starting a puzzle with the borders already connected.

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

When we embrace Jesus’ instruction about not worrying about tomorrow, we gain a renewed appreciation for what He taught us about asking our Father to “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). We have no idea what tomorrow may bring. It could be a terrible day, or it could be the best day ever. When the sun rises in the morning, we won’t know what the day will hold until we live through it. Only after the sun begins to set can we know for certain what’s happened to us in it. Granted, we want to give proper attention to planning our day and anticipating our future. However, our planning can only go so far. We have no better choice than to center our lives in Christ by trusting Him today and tomorrow. ◀

ENGAGE

Reflect on the common areas of life listed below. Consider the circles as levels of concern in your life. Place the letter beside each word from the list onto the circle that represents its importance based on the amount of attention you give it.



A. Work B. Family Time C. Recreation D. Rest E. House Maintenance F. Church Life G. Christ H. Other: _____

If Jesus is not in the center, offer a prayer of repentance and commitment to give Christ lordship in your life.

LIVE IT OUT

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

- ▶ **Confess.** 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 ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Continually remind yourself of God’s promise 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.

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

Live It Out



5 minutes

Guide: Direct group members to page 21 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the applications to carry out this week.

Wrap It Up

Transition: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 19 of the PSG:

We have a decision to make: will we be paralyzed by fear and worry of tomorrow’s unknowns, or will we choose to seek the kingdom of God? It is a daily choice to trust the sovereign and loving God on His throne.

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



EXTRA!

Free additional ideas for your group are available at

BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra

Get into the Study



5 minutes

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 23 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of daily spending time with God by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging members to read it on their own.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, use a phone or other electronic device to load the song “Psalm 63” or a similar song about seeking God or go to **BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra** and click on the Leader Extra for today’s session. Invite members to join singing. Following the song, ask members to share experiences of seeking God when they first awake.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 22 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“When can you remember being especially thirsty?”** Allow time for each person to respond.



SESSION 2

A Daily Pursuit

THE POINT

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

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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

THE PASSAGE

Philippians 4:4-9

THE SETTING

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

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-5

4 Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

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

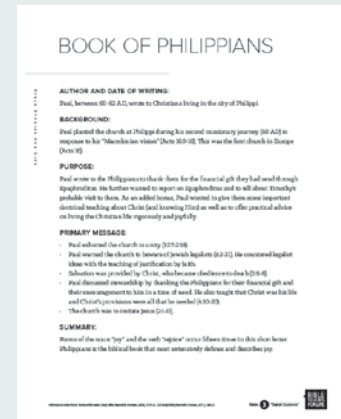
The number of references has led many Bible scholars to suggest the theme of Philippians has to do with Christian joy. Paul's conviction about rejoicing in the Lord serves as a central idea that links the issues he addressed in the letter.

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

The presence of the Lord in our lives makes us rejoice. The source of our joy, Christ alone, makes us different from people who don't know Him. They strive for happiness and associate being happy with experiencing positive circumstances in their lives. They're happy when they get something they want or experience a moment that brings glee. Their delight comes from what happens to them. In stark contrast, believers' joy comes from the Lord who lives in us and walks with us.

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

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Item 3**, the "Philippians" handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to give background on Paul's Letter to the Philippians.



GUIDE: Call attention to "The Point" on page 23 of the PSG: "Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day."

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):

Draw a timeline on the board beginning at 4 am and going to 11 pm. Poll members about the time they normally spend some time with God. As participants call out responses, mark them on the board at the appropriate time slots. After everyone has responded, **ask:** What are some of the reasons people give for not having a consistent, daily time alone with God? What things seem to hinder you the most from having consistent time alone with God?

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to give group members a lasting thirst for Him. Thank Him for the way He loves spending time with us.

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:4-5



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:4-5 on page 24 of the PSG.

RECAP: Many things can rob us of joy. Doubt, death, challenges at work, illness, relational difficulties, and numerous other problems can cause Christians to lose their joy. But we need not lose our joy. We do not rejoice in our circumstances; we rejoice in the Lord. 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*, a verb of action. Rejoicing is not something that happens by accident or through osmosis. It is a daily decision to choose to find our joy in Christ—regardless of our circumstances.

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 Cor. 6:10).

To rejoice **alway** implies each day finds us living in joy. As we begin the day, we rejoice over the gift of another day the Lord has given us. Our joy becomes more focused as we reflect on His Word and the insights He gives us as we serve Him. Our joy overflows when we remember He has given us new life in Him, lives in us now, and promises eternal life in heaven when we draw our last breath on earth. No wonder Paul told us **again** to rejoice.

Verse 5. 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. We're constantly overwhelmed by the reality that He loves us and honors us with the privilege to be His children when we place our faith in Him.

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

Getting a good grip on **moderation** can be difficult because the Greek term doesn't have a word that matches it exactly in the English language. The Greek conveys the idea of being selfless, but it also suggests the priority of being gentle and kind. The picture portrays authentic kindness that's altogether unselfish and gracious. We exhibit it with our sincere eagerness to be thoughtful and considerate in our relationships with people who come into our lives.

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

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

2 ▶ Verse 6. Paul led us to think about the positive influence our joy can have on everyone around us. Next he urged us to think about the favorable effect praying can have on us. He pointed us in that direction by bringing up our tendency to be **careful**, or to worry. We understand a certain amount of anxiety may be helpful to us. Paul used the same term earlier in the book (2:20) to express genuine care that motivates action. If we're anxious about passing a test, for example, we usually study harder. Also, anxiety over our health can prompt us to take care of ourselves. However, our anxiety level can reach the stratosphere if we're not careful. Worry can consume us and we can get extremely anxious about everything.

The cure for such excessive worry comes in the form of **prayer and supplication**. When we pray, we have conversation with God. In the conversation, we listen as well as talk. As we spend more time with Him in prayer, our relationship with Him grows deeper and more rewarding. Within the context of our intimate conversation

GUIDE: Use Commentary **1** on pages 15-17 to describe how often Paul encouraged the Philippians to rejoice.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 25 of the PSG: **“When was the last time you really rejoiced over something?”**

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 25 of the PSG. 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 do not fight to gain victory; we fight because the victory has been won in Christ!*

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

TRANSITION: We should begin our day with praise. The next verses further demonstrate that we should also pray and leave our concerns in the hands of God.

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:6-7



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:6-7 on page 25 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **2** on pages 17-19 to explain how we are to have a conversation with God.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 27 of the PSG: “What are some obstacles to experiencing the peace of God?”

with Him, we’re encouraged to ask Him for whatever we need as we serve Him. Because He has given us the honor of being His children through Christ, we can make our **requests** known to Him without fear or shame. Resting in the assurance He loves us, we trust Him to know what’s best for us. That same assurance enables us to rest in the confidence He listens to us.

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

Verse 7. When we pray, we take our concerns to the Lord and leave them with Him. We trust Him to answer our prayers in His own way and time. While we wait for answers, He gives us a sense of His **peace**. Paul brought up the peace that God alone can give so we will know what to expect when we bring our needs to Him.

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

Other Christians compare the peace of God to a well dug in the middle of a meadow. The meadow can turn into a battlefield in which opposing armies fight each other with fierce determination and brute force. Though war rages around the well, it doesn’t disturb the sweet, cool

water inside. So it is with the peace of God. The worst battles can't disturb it; it alone satisfies the thirst of a parched soul.

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

Paul affirmed that our best efforts at comprehending God's peace always fall short. When God gives us peace in response to our prayer, we find ourselves comforted and filled with the confidence He's heard our need and He'll respond. The distance between what we know and what we need is filled with His peace that **passeth** 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. It protects us from notions about our relationship with Him that don't conform with His Word.

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

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 26-27 of the PSG. Paul gave us a key to centering our focus on Christ with three words.

1. **Prayer.** Prayer seems like the obvious thing to do, but it's often the most neglected spiritual discipline of the Christian life. Prayer is more than communication with God; it is communion with Him. Prayer includes coming before the throne of God with a worshipful attitude.
2. **Supplication.** Prayer is communion with God, and supplication is a part of that. It's asking God for something specific. Paul was telling us to communicate our needs—and things that tempt us to worry—to God.
3. **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.

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

TRANSITION: The next verses demonstrate how we should fill our minds with the things of God.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): To illustrate the importance of being with God daily, bring some bottles of water into the session. Use the bottles of water as an object lesson—pointing to our body’s daily need for hydration. Ask group members to open the water bottles and take a drink. Make the point that we cannot skip a day of drinking water and expect to feel healthy and good. Jesus promised to be the well that would never run dry. Just as we need physical hydration, we also must drink from Jesus, our never-ending fountain, daily to live in the peace of Christ.

9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

KEY WORD: Virtue (v. 8)—a Greek term that points to the ethical ideals of Christian character that we display before the world as we walk with the Lord.

3 ► Verse 8. Having shown us the importance of rejoicing and praying every day, Paul directed us to another area deserving our attention each day: our minds. When we gave our lives to Christ, He renewed us “in the spirit of your mind” (Eph. 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.

Paul showed that path by directing us to qualities that deserve our focused attention as we discipline our thoughts. Each day will find us thinking through a variety of ideas, perspectives, notions, insights, and experiences. As we discipline ourselves in the way we think, we turn our thoughts to what’s **true**. If a thought rolling around in our heads is truthful, faithful, or dependable, we will allow ourselves the time to think about it. If it’s not, we won’t allow ourselves to give it any of our time. Ultimately, the best way to think about what’s true is to direct our thoughts to the Lord. After all, He’s the truth that sets us free (John 8:32). When we think about what’s **honest**, we have in mind whatever builds us up and prompts us to be noble and respectable Christians. By focusing on what’s **just**, we allow ourselves to consider what’s right in God’s eyes. That’s when our thoughts about being right with God and right with each other come into view. Such thoughts help us to make an understanding of justice and righteousness a priority. Of course, **pure** thoughts direct us to God’s call for us to be holy people (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Pure thoughts also chase away the temptation to engage in filthy, putrid thinking.

When we consider Paul's instruction to devote ourselves to thinking that's **lovely**, the reality of beauty comes to mind. We live in a world full of disgusting and revolting realities that should turn our stomachs. If we intend to live above such repulsive influences, we must fix our minds on realities the Lord considers admirable and attractive. By the same token, we decide we'll wrap our minds around what's **of good report**. What's **of good report** for believers? The words themselves imply graciousness and kindness. When we direct our thoughts to what's gracious and kind, we're setting the stage for consistent renewal of our minds.

Paul summed up the qualities by bringing up **virtue**. He challenged followers of Christ to give attention to what's best as we think about our ethical standards, virtue, honesty, and integrity. Likewise, he cautioned us to turn our thoughts only to what truly deserves to be praised. To dwell on such thoughts means we ponder them and direct our lives according to them. Of course, these kinds of thoughts emanate from our relationship with the Lord as we learn the truths of His Word and live them out by the power of His Spirit.

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

Without hesitation, Paul counseled the Philippian Christians to follow the example he had set for them as they translated godly thoughts into worthwhile actions. Earlier in his letter, he encouraged them to follow the example he had set for them as they gave themselves fully to Christ. He added that his companions who walked with the Lord also provided a worthy pattern for them to follow (Phil. 3:17).

Paul set an example for the believers in his day. His life and ministry continue to serve as a worthy pattern of devotion to the Lord for Christians today. Similarly, we can probably add the names of spiritual siblings in Christ in our lifetimes who consistently have a positive influence on us by their examples. When we consider what we have learned from them about walking with the Lord, we affirm that they taught us by example as well as by precept. The examples in our lives continue to inspire us each

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:8-9



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:8-9 on page 28 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **3** on pages 20-22 to explain the spiritual transformation that begins the moment we receive Christ and doesn't stop there.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 29 of the PSG: "What tools and strategies have you found helpful in dwelling on the things of God?"

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 29 of the PSG. Paul called us to think on those things that are:

- *true, not false.*
- *honest, not dishonest.*
- *just, not unfair.*
- *pure, not obscene.*
- *lovely, not unlovely.*
- *of good report, not wrong.*
- *virtuous, not corrupt.*
- *praiseworthy, not shameful.*

DISCUSS: Question #5

on page 30 of the PSG:

“How can our group help one another live out these praiseworthy principles?”

DO: Direct group members to “Engage” on page 30 of the PSG to help them realize the importance of scheduling time with Jesus.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: **“Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day.”**

day. From the pattern they supply, we receive inspiration and determination from the way they model a Christ-centered lifestyle. Like the believers in Paul’s day, we listen carefully to what our mentors say about walking with the Lord and watch them closely as they put it into practice. Christians who set solid examples help us grow. Likewise, we do well to keep in mind that younger believers need us to set worthwhile patterns for them.

The purpose of disciplining our thoughts and actions becomes clear as we consider Paul’s prayer for believers. His instruction nourishes a climate in which we can experience God’s presence. As the Lord abides in us, He gives us His peace.

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

ENGAGE

Take a look at your day planner or calendar. Write down some of your more important appointments this week. Then answer the questions.

List some of the appointments you have kept this past week:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Number each according to the order of importance.

Where was your appointment with Jesus? Too often we think of a daily quiet time as something rather than Someone.

Take a moment now to pray and enjoy some time with Him. Look ahead at your calendar and make sure you have some appointments set aside for Him.

LIVE IT OUT

What steps are you willing to take 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. Prayer is a daily decision. Pray about your day, and pray for the challenges others are facing. Let the peace of God rule your heart as you leave these needs in His hands.
- ▶ **Read daily.** Get into God's Word daily. Choose a Bible reading plan, 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.

Make a daily choice to do these things, and intimacy with Christ will follow. Spiritual dehydration will be a thing of the past.

Live It Out



5 minutes

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 31 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the applications to carry out this week.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 30 of the PSG.

When we focus 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.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for His desire to spend time with us. Ask Him to fan the flames of our passion so that we will long to spend time with Him.



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Get into the Study



5 minutes

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 33 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of finding contentment in Christ by reading or summarizing the text—or by having members to read it on their own.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, place blocks or similar items (perhaps clay) on a table. Ask members to use these to fashion examples of things people use in an attempt to gain contentment. When finished, invite them to explain their items and discuss why they do not provide true contentment. Lead a conversation about how true contentment comes from Christ alone.

Discuss: Question #1 on page 32 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What makes you feel especially content?”** Allow time for each group member to respond.



SESSION 3

The Key to Contentment

THE POINT

True contentment comes through Christ alone.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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

THE PASSAGE

Philippians 4:10-20

THE SETTING

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

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-14

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

14 Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

1 ▶ **Verse 10.** Joy overflowed Paul's heart because of the concern the Philippian Christians had shown for him. They had finally been able to renew their connection with him and his mission effort. The renewal came by way of a gift they had enlisted Epaphroditus to deliver (2:19-30). Earlier they had supported Paul's ministry (2 Cor. 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. The situation had changed, and their connection with him had blossomed once more.

When the Philippian Christians reconnected with Paul, he was in Rome awaiting his opportunity to appear before Caesar (Acts 25:1-12). He lived there two years under house arrest (28:30). The church's gift turned out to be a remarkable blessing for him, but not because of what the money provided. He rejoiced for another reason. His heart burst with joy because of what the money represented. It signified the church's eagerness to care for him. With the gift, he had been blessed with the assurance they were still concerned about him, but hadn't had any way of demonstrating it until now.

Verse 11. 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 **want** for something money could buy. Quite the

GUIDE: Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 33 of the PSG: “**True contentment comes through Christ alone.**”

PRAY: Transition into the study by praising God for being the One in whom we find contentment. Ask Him to help us learn to rest in Him.

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:10-14



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:10-14 on page 34 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **1** on pages 25-27 to learn how Paul had grown so close to the Philippian believers.

RECAP: It's a great boost to our faith when God takes care of us in ways that can only be explained by His work. We aren't the same when we see Him provide and no one else can get the credit. 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.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 35 of the PSG: “What do you appreciate about Paul’s attitude expressed in these verses?”

RECAP: The secret to Paul’s contentment? “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Whether he was well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need, Paul found his strength and contentment in Christ. Paul was writing specifically of his ability to be content in all circumstances. In order to achieve contentment, he needed to depend on Christ for his strength. The strength to rest in God and be fully satisfied came from Him.

opposite, he assured them he had become quite **content**. In other words, he grown to the point he could be satisfied under any condition.

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

Verse 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 might find him with very little. The changes put him in a position in which he had to adjust. He couldn’t spend his days wondering how he would tackle the financial and spiritual challenges of his lengthy stay in Rome. Through the ups and downs of his situation over the course of his ministry, he had to gain wisdom on how to adapt to all the changes happening in his life.

Paul described the wisdom he received (**instructed** refers to being initiated into a mystery). In those days, pagan religions promoted the notion that spiritual secrets existed. Pagan philosophers fostered similar notions. They believed secrets about life could be discovered, but only the most elite worshipers or most refined thinkers could uncover them, eluding ordinary people.

Paul had learned the secret about being content in changing circumstances. This knowledge enabled him to handle an empty stomach or a full stomach. His contentment resulted from this wisdom, and he wanted to share it with the Philippian Christians. Even more, he wanted them to embrace it.

Verse 13. Embracing this wisdom didn’t have anything to do with Paul’s knack for elite spirituality or refined

intellectual reach. It came from another source altogether. In his world filled with limitations, he came to grasp that his reliance on Christ made all the difference. Christ helped replace distress with contentment. In fact, his relationship with Christ made him grow confident. He rested in the assurance nothing he faced would get the best of him because of the presence of Christ.

How did Christ help him? Paul affirmed the Lord gave him 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 Cor. 12:10). Paul's contentment clearly 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.

The Philippian church's partnership with Paul highlights the uniqueness of Christian fellowship. Because believers are spiritual siblings, we share with one another as we serve the Lord. We walk alongside each other so we can carry out His kingdom tasks effectively. Without each other, we would grow frustrated quickly and be inclined to give up too soon. But with other believers by our side, we can press on in the full assurance we are not alone. We need the certainty of that kind of partnership, especially when we face hardship. Like Paul, we find contentment in Christ alone through the presence of other believers who help share the burdens that come with troubling circumstances. ◀

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):

Ask group members to think about a missionary or local ministry leader who embodies contentment and strength. If you think it will be challenging for your group to come up with an example, reach out to a missions representative in your church for ideas and connections to a ministry partner. If possible, invite them to speak to the group. Afterward, list ways this individual reflects the attributes found in Philippians 4:10-20. As an added step, bring a card to class that everyone can write in, sharing their appreciation and thanks for this person's example and spiritual influence. After the session, mail this card to the leader as a gesture of encouragement.

TRANSITION: We should acknowledge the strength and provision of God. The next verses remind us we should also give generously from God's provision.

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:15-18



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:15-18 on page 36 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 37 of the PSG: “What’s the connection between contentment and generosity?”

RECAP: Paul expressed gratitude for the way the Philippian church supported him. In fact, it was the only church in Macedonia that supported him. He was grateful they believed in God’s call on his life and contributed to the cause of spreading the gospel. This is a reminder that our churches should be leading the charge in supporting missionaries and church planters who have forsaken all for the great cause of spreading the gospel. Each church planter and missionary should be able to echo the words Paul wrote: “Ye sent once and again unto my necessity.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:15-18

15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

2 ▶ 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.

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

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).

Sometime later, he wrote a letter to the Thessalonian Christians from Athens (where he had been taken for his safety, v. 15) or Corinth. In it, he noted he didn't ask the church for money to support him because he didn't want to be a burden to them (1 Thess. 2:9). In Philippians, he revealed how his needs were met while he served the Lord in Thessalonica. The church at Philippi had met his needs so he could give his attention to sharing Christ and to nurturing new-born believers toward maturity. Their partnership had been a critical link to Paul's effectiveness in the Thessalonian church. The Lord used them to provide what Paul needed so he could get the church off to a healthy start before he had to leave. Philippian gifts had made a monumental difference in the church's growth. They had given generously, and God blessed what they had provided.

Verse 17. 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 didn't have in mind what the money could buy. He had learned the secret of contentment that came from trusting Christ completely for his needs, so he had not given himself to fretting over any lack of resources. His joy over their gift had to do with how it would be a blessing for the Christians at Philippi who gave it to him.

Paul identified the money they had sent him as a **gift**. He understood it had been given by Christian people who loved him and believed in his mission effort. For that reason, he didn't want them to misread his intention by writing about having received it. He wasn't trying to imply that he expected them to send another gift. He set aside the possibility for such a misunderstanding by stating clearly that he wasn't trying to get more money out of them. Instead, he wanted to instruct them on how he looked upon the gift they had recently sent his way.

Financial language saturates this verse. It's full of accounting terms that resonate the realities of profit and loss. In this verse, however, the language of loss doesn't

GUIDE: Use Commentary **2** on pages 28-30 to explain how Paul's work began in Philippi with his Macedonian call.

RECAP: We are blessed to be a blessing in return. God has not only given to us so that we may be provided for, but He wants us to have the opportunity to be a provision for others. The American dream is to accumulate, while the gospel of Christ compels us to receive and give. We should all live as missionaries on this earth with a desire to spread the message of Christ, understanding that all we have is for Him and the advancement of His gospel. In the end, we will stand before our Father, and we will be held accountable for how we lived our lives. We must be careful that we don't get caught up in accumulating and forget to support the cause of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

DO: Direct group members to "Engage" on page 40 of the PSG to help them realize the importance of finding our contentment in Christ.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):

Ask everyone in the group if they're hungry. Then, regardless of their answer, set a bowl of candy in the middle of the group and ask if anyone would like some. The odds are good that you will hear a lot of "sure, I'll take a piece" from people who said they weren't hungry. Talk about how often, even if we don't need something, if we see it, we want it. Sometimes this is harmless, like eating a piece of candy at our Bible study—but sometimes we can feel discontent until we get the thing we want, regardless of whether or not it's something we need or should have. Ask the group to describe what Godly contentment looks like in our daily lives.

TRANSITION: The next verses demonstrate how we should trust God to supply our need.

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:19-20



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:19-20 on page 37 of the PSG.

appear. Only profit comes into view. Believers who give generously to share Christ receive an eternal profit that goes into the account of our treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21).

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

In the Old Testament, God told His people to sacrifice animals, place them on the altar, and allow them to be burned in the fire. The scent of the burnt offerings rendered an aroma that would please Him (Ex. 29:18-25). The sacrifices of His people signified their desire to worship Him.

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

PHILIPPIANS 4:19-20

19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

20 Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Verse 19. For years, Paul had walked closely with the Lord. Their relationship had become most intimate. In this verse, Paul underscored his intimacy with God when he referred to God in an intensely personal way. He showed that the Lord wasn't just **God**. Rather, Paul declared Him

to be **my God**. Of course, he had an excellent reason for his declaration. Paul had learned to trust the Lord completely to be with him and to provide for him. He wanted the Philippian Christians to be assured of the same certainty for themselves.

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

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

An assortment of other Bible passages support what Paul taught in this verse. For instance, an Old Testament proverb assures us that when we give to help a poor person, we're lending to God, who always pays His debts (Prov. 19:17). Also, Jesus Himself taught us that when we give to others in His name, we're giving to Him (Matt. 25:40). We do well to depend on Christ Jesus to give us contentment. When we count the blessings we receive because we have given our lives to Christ, we affirm that He gives us much more than we could ever imagine. He alone makes us truly content.

3 ▶ Verse 20. Paul continued to write about the **glory** the Lord alone deserves. Shifting from theology, he moved toward doxology (praise). Writing about God's supply prompted him to give his attention to worshiping the God

RECAP: "But my God shall supply all your need." The Philippians helped Paul in his time of need. They supported him and sacrificed much. They gave out of a heart of generosity and a love for the gospel. They could do so freely because God would take care of them. Living with simplicity rests in the truth that God takes care of us.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 38 of the PSG: "**How have you experienced God supplying all your needs?**"

RECAP: Living a life of simplicity rests in this truth. While we might acknowledge that truth, our human nature always wants more. We often don't just pray for our needs; we seek after our wants. Having all our material desires met won't make us any happier or more content, even though our sin nature will try to convince us otherwise. God will meet our needs—and He will often do it in unexpected ways. We trust Him to provide in His timing and in the way that is best for us.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **3** on pages 31-32 to explain how Paul moved from theology to a doxology.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 40 of the PSG: “How can our group help one another give glory to God through our generosity?”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, enlist a volunteer to lead the group in singing the traditional doxology to conclude this session on a note of praise.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “True contentment comes through Christ alone.”

who supplied. As he worshiped, he drew his attention to two aspects of God. First, he used 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.

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

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. He alone gets credit for making us into kingdom citizens who can make an eternal difference in our world. Following Paul’s affirmation of praise in this verse, God gets the credit for supplying us with the resources necessary to live for Him.

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

The title **Father** resonates with Jesus’ instruction about how to pray. In His model prayer, He directed us to talk with God as our Father (6:9). The Bible includes a variety of names and titles for God. Each one helps us know Him better. However, the title **Father** enables us to see ourselves through His eyes. When He saved us, He honored us with the privilege to be His children. In our relationship with Him, we experience His loving presence in a way that prompts us to join Paul in testifying that all the glory belongs to Him now and in the ages to come. ◀

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 money more than in Jesus? Do money and possessions bring me more joy than Jesus? Can I really say, “Christ is all I need”?
- ▶ **Choose to Trust.** Make a daily decision not to allow circumstances determine how content you will be in this life. Memorize Philippians 4:12-13 to remind you to simply trust Christ for all things: “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”
- ▶ **Choose to Give.** Give of your time, talent, or treasures. Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give to them. Let God use you as His answer to their prayers.

ENGAGE

Choose one of the following images that would challenge your contentment. Then write what you would say to God to acknowledge your contentment in that situation.



Live It Out



5 minutes

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 41 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the applications to carry out this week.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate these words from the final paragraph on page 40 of the PSG.

My only conclusion is that God knows best. He knows when to give me what I need and how to supply it. I will simply choose to trust that God knows how to supply my every need.

Pray: Thank the Lord for His abundant provision. Ask Him to teach us to depend on Him for all our needs.

Get into the Study



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 42 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “What are some things you’ve enjoyed collecting over the years?”

Allow time for each person to respond.



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, locate and print images related to the opposite approaches of minimalism and hoarding. Display the images and **ask:** “What do these images have in common? How do they differ?” **Say:** “While it might be hard to identify, both images have possessions in common—either very few or way too many.” Lead participants to call out some of their favorite possessions, some of their possessions that save them the most time, and some of their possessions they feel it would be hard to live without. **Ask:** “If you could only keep three items, which three would you keep? Why?”

SESSION 4

Godly Contentment

THE POINT

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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

THE PASSAGE

1 Timothy 6:6-11,17-19

THE SETTING

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

1 Timothy 6:6-8

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

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

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

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

Because of Christ's sufficiency, we find ourselves enriched with spiritual treasures that last for eternity. As a result, we need nothing other than a relationship with Christ. As people watch us, they see we live out an old saying about contentment. According to the saying, there are two ways to be rich: one is to have everything, the other is to want nothing. Because of Christ's sufficiency, we have the wealth that comes from spiritual riches. Therefore, we want nothing more.

GUIDE: Direct group members to "The Bible Meets Life" on page 43 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of godly living by summarizing the text—or by encouraging them to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to "The Point" on page 43 of the PSG: "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

PRAY: Transition into the study by praising God for His holiness. Thank Him for giving us His Spirit so that we can live godly lives.

Study the Bible

1 Timothy 6:6-8



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:6-8 on page 44 of the PSG.

RECAP: In chapter 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.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **1** on pages 35-37 to explain the definitions of godliness and contentment.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 45 of the PSG: “**Why does contentment seem so elusive?**”

RECAP: We should be thankful for the simple things like food and clothing; the simple pleasures of life should satisfy us. When we are not content with simply having our daily needs met, we become discontent and push for more and more. The enemy loves the discontent heart, but contentment rests with the simple pleasures of life that come from God.

TRANSITION: Godly contentment does not depend on possessions. In the next verses we learn that craving more possessions only leads to ruin.

Verse 7. Paul gave an important reason for not connecting contentment with possessions. The reason turns out to be plain and simple, although many people overlook it as they seek to have more. As we reflect on this verse, another old saying comes to mind: When we’re born, our hands are clenched; when we die, our hands are open. In other words, we begin our lives trying to get our hands on everything. However, when we die, we let it go, all of it. We won’t take any of it with us when we draw our last breath.

Other Bible passages verify the wisdom of Paul’s statement. Job reminded us we’re naked when we come into the world, and we’ll be naked when we leave it. He affirmed God’s supremacy in our lives by telling us the Lord gives us what we have now but also takes it away from us (Job 1:21). Similarly, the psalmist nudged us to notice that rich people will carry none of their wealth with them when they die (Ps. 49:16-17). Furthermore, Solomon warned God’s people to be wise about possessions. As we seek wealth, we must keep in mind that our hard work may render possessions, but we can’t take them with us when we die (Eccl. 2:21).

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

Verse 8. For that reason, we’re wise when we take hold of Paul’s perspective on what counts as profit. For anyone who connects contentment with possessions, money matters most of all, believing contentment can be purchased one possession at a time. But for Christians, contentment has nothing to do with what we possess. Therefore, money doesn’t have the same influence over us.

Paul mentioned **food and raiment** as he wrote about what would make a wise Christian **content**. By mentioning only these items, he didn’t imply believers had

to live in poverty to experience true contentment. Instead, he affirmed that wise believers wouldn't make greed the master of their lives. In Paul's day, the necessities for life basically included something to eat and something to wear. Christians who had food and clothing didn't have to be distracted by the eagerness to get more for themselves. They didn't need anything else to enable them to serve the Lord with joy in their hearts.

Mature Christians today live by the same principle. We're content with having what's necessary to meet the basic needs of our lives. For instance, a car will help us with transportation to work, but we don't need an expensive luxury vehicle. Also, we need food, but we don't need to eat it in expensive restaurants all the time. Granted, our home provides us with the shelter we need for ourselves and our families. However, we don't need a house we can't afford.

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

1 TIMOTHY 6:9-11

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

2 ▶ Verse 9. Indulging ourselves with luxuries and pleasures that come from money can be harmful to us. In fact, that kind of self-indulgence can be downright dangerous. 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 **snare**. The trap's set by what we desire; the temptation to

Study the Bible

1 Timothy 6:9-11



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:9-11 on page 46 of the PSG.

RECAP: 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 is not just foolish; it's harmful. It's not the mere presence of riches that brings harm; it's the craving—the desire—for those riches that is so dangerous. Such desires are a trap 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.

GUIDE: Use Commentary **2** on pages 37-40 to further explain the danger of craving wealth.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 47 of the PSG: **“What examples of brokenness have you seen that are a result of the love of money?”**

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 47 of the PSG. Paul called Timothy—and us—to pursue six traits:

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

DO: Direct group members to “Engage” on page 50 of the PSG to help them sort through their priorities and find contentment in Christ.

TRANSITION: The next verses teach us how we should set our hope on God and store up riches in heaven.

have it lures us toward the snare. We deceive ourselves into thinking we’re allowed to accumulate possessions for ourselves because we deserve them. Or we convince ourselves nothing harmful will come from lavishing ourselves with selfish pleasures. Before we know it, however, we’re caught in the snare. When we try to escape, we fail every time.

Once we’re entrapped by our obsession with being wealthy, we disappoint ourselves with our behavior. Instead of being wise, the snare of the need for possessions makes us **foolish**. For some folks, foolishness can be detected in how they shift debt from one credit card to another in a futile attempt to put off the payment a little longer. Other folks exhibit it by hiding purchases from people who will be hurt by their deceitful indulgence. But then something even worse happens. Foolishness gives way to danger. The desires that entrap us can put us in harm’s way. Equally devastating, our behavior hurts the people we love. As a result, we find ourselves being dragged down by our obsession, drowning us spiritually and leaving us devastated.

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

Verse 10. While loving Christ brings incredible joy, loving money renders something 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. The Lord gives us money, whether it comes our way through work, investments, or gifts. Accordingly, some believers have more of it than others, but all of us do well to see it as a useful tool that helps us live out our love for Christ.

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

reality, we can find ourselves loving money and using the Lord. Once we begin to take that dangerous path, we stop thinking about anything other than getting our hands on more money. When we crave money, we're headed for trouble. Before long, we'll regret the path we've taken. Granted, loving money can't be blamed for every evil in the world. However, it can take the blame for more than a few heartaches in believers' lives.

What's so bad about craving money? When we anchor ourselves to money, we drift away from Christ. We may not set out to separate ourselves from Him, but it happens while we don't notice. One day finds us focusing our energies on getting more money and less time on growing in the faith that centers us in Christ alone. Without realizing it, we've wandered away from worshiping the Lord as we give ourselves to adoring our possessions. Paul warned that such drifting leads to pain and heartache.

Verse 11. How do we stay on track in our walk with the Lord so money won't distract us and control us? Paul's stern command to Timothy helps us answer that critical question.

Paul had charged Timothy with the responsibility for leading the church in Ephesus back on track toward spiritual health. Leading God's people required Timothy to set a worthy example for them to follow. Earlier, Paul called attention to the value of Timothy's example in his leadership of the church (1 Tim. 4:12). Here he brought it up again by challenging Timothy to see himself as the example of a believer who wouldn't be distracted by anything in his walk with the Lord. Instead, he would devote himself to honoring Christ with his life.

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

As Paul challenged Timothy to run from the love of money, he also instructed him on practical ways he could run toward a healthy love for Christ. By pursuing a lifestyle of upright behavior for other believers to observe

Study the Bible

1 Timothy 6:17-19



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:17-19 on page 48 of the PSG.

RECAP: Paul's warning about the love of money applies to all of 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 this world." Any riches we possess in this world 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: Question #4 on page 49 of the PSG: "What does it mean to store up treasures in heaven?"

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 48-49 of the PSG. Paul's instructions were to guide the rich in how they should live with their temporary, current riches.

- ▶ **Don't be arrogant.**
- ▶ **Don't place your hope in wealth (which is uncertain).**
- ▶ **Hope in God.**
- ▶ **Do what is good.**

LEADER PACK: Display Item 4, the "Godly Contentment" poster. Divide group members into smaller groups of three to four members each. Review the three main ideas discussed in today's session. **Ask:** "What did you find easy to apply to their lives from today's study and what do you anticipate to be a bit more challenging?" Allow time for groups to discuss. Invite volunteers to share their group's responses.



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

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

KEY WORDS: **This world** (v. 17)—The time frame in which people live before they die. In other words, the “here and now” in a world that’s only temporary.

The time to come (v. 19)—The time frame for life that never ends in a world that lasts forever. In other words, in the future and for eternity.

Verse 17. Another side of leadership for Timothy involved instruction. Paul wanted to make sure Timothy taught God's people in Ephesus how to handle their money wisely. 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.

Like before, Paul's instruction underscored what to avoid and what to embrace. He expected believers to avoid

being **highminded** with their wealth. Left to themselves, people with lots of resources could harbor selfish pride because of their money. Conceit could cause them to be obsessed with themselves and look at others with contempt. Instead of allowing arrogance to take root in their lives because of their confidence in their wealth, they would be wise to place their **trust** in the Lord alone. Paul reasoned that confidence in money would be risky since **riches** would come and go. One day they could be separated from their money and the satisfaction that went with it. However, placing absolute confidence in God would carry no risks at all. Trusting Him with their lives would render the kind of riches that could only be measured in eternity. They would discover for themselves the contentment that comes with knowing He would supply them with more than enough. In fact, they would see He enriched them with what was really needed to experience true joy.

Verse 18. Believers today can take to heart Paul's insistence about the sole source of resilient hope. Confidence in money alone leads to disappointment. However, hope in the Lord promises a different outcome. It leads to fulfillment. Our hope in Him prompts us to embrace His perspective about our resources. That's when Paul's instruction to Timothy begins to make sense to us. Our resources give us opportunities to **do good**. In other epistles, Paul drove home the point about doing **good works**. It's a way for us to honor the Lord and bear witness of Him to people who watch us (Eph. 2:10; Col. 1:10; 2 Thess. 2:17). Peter also affirmed the need for Christians to do what's good (1 Pet. 2:12). Being rich in resources may enable us to have more possessions. But using money to do something good for others enriches us in a more profound way. Money cannot get for us the kind of wealth that comes by devoting ourselves to good works that point people to God's love for them.

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

Again, Paul's insistence about sharing what we have for whatever is good isn't limited to his instruction to

GUIDE: Refer back to “**The Point**” for this session: “**Godliness with contentment is great gain.**”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Draw a creative map of life. Using a whiteboard or two large sheets of paper, divide into two groups. Explain that this exercise requires creativity. Envision you are drawing a “map of life” to illustrate one of two paths someone can take. As you draw the maps, consider 1 Timothy 6:6-11,17-19. Ask one group to draw a map that is all about pursuing monetary wealth in this life. What would it look like? Ask the other group to sketch out a map that reflects the journey of pursuing God. After each group sketches out their respective maps, have them share what they illustrated. This exercise affords a creative way to think through the meaning of Paul's teaching on wealth and contentment.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 50 of the PSG: “How can our group help one another strive for godly contentment?”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): To end the session, write the word “CONTENT” vertically on the board to create an acrostic. Lead participants to call out words or phrases that start with each of the letters to describe what it means to be content, or to have contentment.

Timothy. His directive about sharing with others can be seen in other epistles (Rom. 12:8-13; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 4:28). James also encouraged believers to show God’s love by sharing with others (Jas. 2:14-26). As we serve the Lord by pointing others to Him, we use our money as well as every other aspect of our lives.

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

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 (Matt. 6:19-20).

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

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

LIVE IT OUT

How will you pursue godliness with contentment?

- ▶ **Be Content.** Begin your day—every day—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.

ENGAGE

Consider your family budget. Put a number beside each of these common family expenditures representing the approximate percentage of monthly income dedicated to each item. Then answer the questions.

Tithe (church) ____ House ____ Food ____
Car ____ Insurance ____ Entertainment ____
Utilities ____ Cable/Internet ____ Misc. ____

How do each of these items help provide a sense of security and contentment?

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.....
.....

How do they compare with the security and contentment you find in Christ?

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.....
.....

Live It Out



5 minutes

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 51 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the applications to carry out this week.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 49 of the PSG.

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 (2 Cor. 9:7). I could give freely and experience godly contentment.

PRAY: Thank the Lord for giving us His Spirit to live in contentment and helping us pursue godliness to be content in Him.