

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE®

SENIOR ADULTS

Leader Guide

FALL 2019 | CSB

STUDY 1:

*Simplicity:
Finding Contentment
in a Busy Life*

STUDY 2:

*How to Know
God's Will*



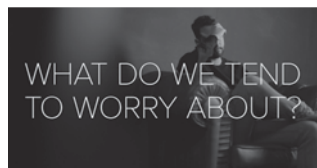
Get into the Study



5 minutes

LEADER PACK: Display

Item 1: Worry poster. As members arrive, instruct them to record on the poster 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 the responses and take a vote to determine the top three issues.



GUIDE: Invite group members to turn to **page 3** of the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review the titles of the six sessions of this study titled **Simplicity**.

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 tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

26 Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they?

27 Can any of you add one moment to his life-span by worrying?

28 And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread.

29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these.

30 If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith?

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

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

1► Verse 26. What’s the best way to handle worry? Jesus taught us to take a long look into the sky. When we do, we’ll find birds flying everywhere, and not a one of them seems concerned about what they’ll eat. They don’t give attention to planting seeds or harvesting grain. Neither do

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 2: Simplicity** poster and point out the session titles that speak to ways we can uncomplicate our lives.

SIMPLICITY: Finding Contentment in a Busy Life

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

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 12** and ask **Question 1: What are some things you never worry about any more?**



GUIDE: Introduce **The Point** on **PSG page 13: When your life is centered in Christ, you find all you.**

GUIDE: Refer group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” (**PSG, p. 13**). Highlight the statistic that two out of five Americans admit to worrying.

SAY: “Today we will look to the Scripture to see what Jesus taught about worrying and the solution He proposed to worrying.”

Study the Bible

Matthew 6:25-30



10 minutes

GUIDE: Before reading the passage, refer to “The Setting” on page 4 to establish the context of the passage.

READ: Ask a group member to read Matthew 6:25-30.

SAY: “Jesus told us not to worry about the most basic human needs: food and clothing.”

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 1** on page 5 and this page to give more information about the examples Jesus gave from nature and life to show worry as unnecessary:

- *Birds in the sky.*
- *Life span.*
- *Wildflowers of the field.*

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 life span. Will our worry help us to live longer? Will it give us one additional moment of life? If it doesn’t, it’s a gigantic waste of our time and energy.

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

2 ▶ 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 So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'

32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Verse 31. Jesus didn't intend to shame us with His words about the weakness of our faith. 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. 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.

SAY: "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."

SUMMARY: Refer to **Bible Commentary 2** to share two other comparisons Jesus makes in this passage:

- *Solomon and his wealth.*
- *Beautiful flowers of the field are here today and gone tomorrow.*

DISCUSS: Question 2 (PSG, p. 15): What kinds of things cause people to worry?

Alternate: What are some lies that cause worry to increase?

TRANSITION: "Next we will see that worry is the practice of unbelievers."

Study the Bible

Matthew 6:31-32



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read Matthew 6:31-32.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 17** to examples of what it looks like to trust God with every aspect of our life:

- *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 on 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).*

SUMMARY: Refer to **Bible Commentary 3** to explain we are not to center our lives on what we need but rather on the things of God.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Ask: What is your strategy for working a puzzle? (Possible responses: start with the border pieces, match colors, study the picture on the box.) Remind members the only way to get a complete picture is to make sure all the pieces fit together. Display a puzzle with one piece missing out of the middle. Stick the last piece into the puzzle. Say: That’s what Jesus does for us. When we focus on Him, everything else will fall into place.

3 ▶ 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. ◀

4 ▶ **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 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. ◀

SUMMARY: Refer to **Bible Commentary 4** for background informations about the **Gentiles**.

- *Worship of pagan deities, Idolatry.*
- *Primary motivation: Fear or terror.*
- *No hope that their god would provide for them.*

SAY: "The difference for believers is our assurance that our heavenly Father knows we need these things."

DISCUSS: Question 3
(PSG, p. 17): **When has God provided for you in an unexpected way?**

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

TRANSITION: "Next we will be reminded of what we are to seek after as God's children."

Study the Bible

Matthew 6:33-34



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read Matthew 6:33-34.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **Digging Deeper** on **PSG page 18** to explain the significance of *God's Kingdom*.

SUMMARY: Refer to **Bible Commentary 5** to provide further explanation about the following:

- *The kingdom of God.*
- *Righteousness.*

DISCUSS: Question 4 (PSG, p. 19): What does it look like to seek God's kingdom first?

MATTHEW 6:33-34

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

34 Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

5 ▶ 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.

DIGGING DEEPER

God's Kingdom

In modern thought, a kingdom is a specific geographic region. In the OT, however, "kingdom" is best expressed by the idea of reign or sovereignty. One's kingdom is the people or things over which one has authority or control. The Bible speaks of the entire universe as God's kingdom, for He exercises sovereign rule over all things at the present time.

The import of "kingdom" (Greek *basileia*) in the NT is derived from OT understanding, not the understanding of a geographic region, of God as the ruler of the entire universe. The "kingdom of God" is the realm in which God as king exerts control and authority. In reading the NT it is important to remember "kingdom" refers to the realm in which a ruler acts to carry out his will.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) teaches believers to live with this understanding of the nature of the kingdom. In His teaching, Jesus presents a statement about how people of every age are to live when they abandon themselves to God's will. We are to give priority to seeking God's kingdom and righteousness, and we trust our Father to supply our material needs (Matt. 6:25-33). This understanding of the nature of the kingdom. In His teaching, Jesus presents a statement about how people of every age are to live when they abandon themselves to God's will. We are to give priority to seeking God's kingdom and righteousness, and we trust our Father to supply our material needs (Matt. 6:25-33).

Larry Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words in the Old and New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 378.

6 ▶ Verse 34. Once more, we're drawn to the first word in the verse: **therefore**. It challenges us to reflect on what He has taught about centering our lives in Him. It prompts us to put into practice what we've learned. He guides us to think simply and clearly about **tomorrow**. Jesus knows we tend to get anxious about what we need today but do not

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Invite a member of the class to read the following words of the "Ultimate Worrier:"

Worry and fear are my top two spiritual gifts. I've taken the tests. It's been confirmed by several mentors, family members and three clinical psychologists. If you don't fear, then what kind of Christian are you? Every researcher finds a new habit, food, or lifestyle choice that causes cancer.

I haven't mentioned all the other things we need to fear: gum disease, retirement, Social Security, euthanasia, laser surgery, warts, tax reform, artery health, gun control, grandchildren, depression that just jumps out at you from nowhere, computer viruses, premature graying, terrorism, planes, trains, automobiles, the ring around the toilet, the ring around the collar, the bags under my eyes.

It's what I do. My two greatest talents and gifts. I worry!

Invite group members to add to the list of fears used by infomercials and politicians used to manipulate and motivate senior adults.

Ask: What impacts you and plants seeds of anxiety in your mind?

SUMMARY: Refer to **Bible Commentary 6** to discover Jesus teaching about tomorrow.

DISCUSS: Question 5 (PSG, p. 20): How can we follow Jesus' word not to worry about tomorrow yet still plan for the future?

Alternate: What would it practically look like to take your mind off your worries and seek the things of God?

ENGAGE: Have group members complete the activity on page 13 (PSG, p. 20). Invite volunteers to share responses.

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.

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 today 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. ◀

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 first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.” Continually remind yourself of God’s promise to provide.
- ▶ **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.

ENGAGE

Write down as many things you can think of that you worry about and then respond to the question:

.....
.....
Why do you worry when worry doesn’t really do any good?

.....
God wants you to trust Him. That means bringing your needs to Him instead of worrying over it. He loves you and wants to help you. Use your worry list as a prayer list this week.

Live It Out



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** **When your life is centered in Christ, you find all you need.**

REVIEW: Live It Out (PSG, p. 21); (see text to the left). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

Wrap It Up

GUIDE: Remind group members the antidote to worry is trusting God. Encourage those who struggle with worry to pray and seek the Lord when tempted to give into worry.

PRAY: “Father thanks for knowing our needs before we ask. Help us to trust You to provide for what we need.”



EXTRA!

Free additional ideas for your group are available at

BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra

Get into the Study



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 22** and ask **Question 1: When has the taste of water felt especially good?**



GUIDE: Refer group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” (**PSG, p. 23**) and point out information about water and the importance of hydration. Without water, dehydration kicks in.

SAY: “Sometimes we become spiritually dehydrated.”

GUIDE: Introduce **The Point** on **PSG page 23: Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day.**

RECAP: Refer to “The Bible Meets Life” on this page to help introduce the session.

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to reveal to us ways we can stay attuned to Him everyday.

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 always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

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 bring sadness, and painful experiences bring frustration, disappointment, anger, or regret. But Christians can

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:4-5



10 minutes

GUIDE: Before reading the passage, refer to “The Setting” on page 14 to establish the context of the passage.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 1** for the overview of the first three chapters of Philippians and the theme of rejoice.

LEADER PACK: Distribute copies of **Item 3: Philippians** and take a few minutes to give an overview the Book of Philippians, including the date it was written, who was the author, what was its primary message, and who was its intended audience.



READ: Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:4-5.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG, page 25** for these reasons to rejoice regardless of life circumstances:

- *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!*

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 2** to explain:

- *Believers are instructed to always have their graciousness on display.*
- *Christians are to be motivated by the truth the Lord is near.*
- *The Lord is near has two possible meanings: His appearing is near; or He is present with us. Both meanings are true.*

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

2 ▶ 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 **graciousness**. It comes out of the joy in Him that's inside us. In other words, joy is the root, and **graciousness** is the fruit.

Getting a good grip on **graciousness** can be difficult because the Greek term doesn't have a word that matches it exactly in the English language. The Greek conveys the idea of being selfless, but it also suggests the priority of being gentle and kind. The picture portrays authentic kindness that's altogether unselfish and gracious. 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 near**. 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 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Verse 6. Paul led us to think about the positive influence our joy can have on everyone around us. Next he urged us to think about the favorable effect praying can have on us. He pointed us in that direction by bringing up our tendency to worry. 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.

3▶ The cure for such excessive worry comes in the form of **prayer and petition**. 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 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

DISCUSS: Question 2 (PSG, p. 25): When was the last time you really rejoiced over something?

Alternate: What typically causes you to rejoice?

TRANSITION: "Next we will again see the admonition not to worry and what to do instead."

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:6-7



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:6-7.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 26-27** to the antidote for worry: centering our lives on Christ. In this passage, Paul gave us a key to centering our focus on Christ with three words:

1. *Prayer.*
2. *Petition.*
3. *Thanksgiving.*

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 3** the cure for excessive worry:

- **Prayer**—conversation with God where we listen as well as talk.
- **Petition**—making our requests known to God.
- **Thanksgiving**—a heart of gratitude to God for all He has done for us.

DISCUSS: Question 3 (PSG, p. 27): Why do we often neglect to bring the little things before God?

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 4** for the results of trusting God and taking our concerns to Him:

- He gives us a sense of peace.
- Peace is 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.
- His peace is beyond comprehension.

(Continued on next page.)

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). ◀

4 ▶ 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 and yanks 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 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 **surpasses** our best attempt to understand it.

Even though we can't comprehend God's peace, we can experience it. Paul assured us God's peace stands **guard** over our hearts and keeps out the anxiety that may overwhelm us. Our hearts can be filled with worry when we allow feelings of guilt, anger, regret, or apprehension to control us. Likewise, His peace guards our minds and halts anxious thoughts from creeping in and paralyzing us with worry. 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. ◀

DIGGING DEEPER

Peace Instead of Anxiety

The answer to anxiety is the peace of God. Paul made three statements about this peace. First, it is divine peace. He did not envision a situation where circumstances changed or external needs were met. This peace was a characteristic of God which invaded the Christian.

Second, it "transcends all understanding." "Transcends" translates the word *hyperechousa* ("excellent"), which is found in 2:3; 3:8, and here in a compound form. Paul contrasted knowledge and peace at one point: Peace excels over knowledge. No doubt he had in mind situations where knowledge is insufficient. Sometimes it cannot explain, and sometimes explanations do not help. Peace, however, is always appropriate and meets the need of the heart.

Finally, this peace will "guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." "Guard" is a military term, implying that peace stands on duty to keep out anything that brings care and anxiety. For these reasons, prayerful people are peaceful people.

Richard Mellick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, New American Commentary, gen. ed. David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 149-150.

- *His peace stands guard over our hearts and keeps out the anxiety that may overwhelm us.*
- *His peace guards our minds and halts anxious thoughts from creeping in and paralyzing us with worry.*

GUIDE: Refer group members to **Digging Deeper** on **PSG page 28** to provide further explanation about how to experience *Peace Instead of Anxiety*.

DISCUSS: Question 4 (PSG, p. 28): **When have you experienced the kind of peace described in verse 7?**

Alternate: How is prayer an antidote to worry?

TRANSITION: "Next we will learn what to focus on so we maintain the peace of God."

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:8-9



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:8-9.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG, page 29** to the list of contrasts:

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

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

8 Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.

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

KEY WORDS: **Moral excellence** (v. 8)—a Greek term that points to the ethical ideals of Christian virtue that we display before the world as we walk with the Lord.

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

5 ▶ 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 **honorable**, we have in mind whatever builds us up and prompts us to be noble and respectable Christians. By focusing on what’s **just**, we allow ourselves to consider what’s right in God’s

eyes. 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 **commendable**. What's **commendable** for believers? The word itself implies graciousness and kindness. When we direct our thoughts to what's gracious and kind, we're setting the stage for consistent renewal of our minds.

Paul summed up the qualities by bringing up **moral excellence**. He 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. ◀

6 ▶ 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

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 5** for deeper insights into the list of things we are to make our focus.

- **True**—those things that are truthful, faithful and dependable,
- **Honorable**—whatever builds us up and prompts us to be noble and respectable Christians.
- **Just**—what's right in God's eyes
- **Pure**—thoughts which direct us to God's call for us to be holy people.
- **Lovely**—that which is beautiful.
- **Commendable**—implies graciousness and kindness.
- **Moral excellence**—give attention to what's best as we think about our ethical standards, virtue, honesty, and integrity.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **Key Words** on **PSG page 28** to provide further explanation about the phrase *moral excellence*.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 6** on page 21 and this page to emphasize the importance of being an example to others.

DISCUSS: Question 5 (PSG, p. 30): How can we focus our minds on the things pleasing to God?

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

ENGAGE: Have members complete the activity on page 23 (PSG, p. 30). Invite volunteers to share responses.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: To help group members think about making prayer and Bible study a priority each day, distribute blank sheets of paper and ask each person to create a "to do" list for the following week. List the top two or three things you'll need to accomplish this week. After a few minutes, allow a few volunteers to share some of their "to do" priorities. Then ask the group to consider their spiritual "to do" list for this week.

Say: "Prayer and Bible study should be a priority in our lives. These disciplines should be a regular part of our routine if we are going to get closer to God."

Point out that making prayer and Bible study a priority will give us the wisdom we need to order the rest of our lives.

on us by their examples. When we consider what we have learned from them about walking with the Lord, we affirm that they taught us by example as well as by precept. The examples in our lives continue to inspire us each day. From the pattern they supply, we receive inspiration and determination from the way they model a Christ-centered lifestyle. Like the believers in Paul's day, we listen carefully to what our mentors say about walking with the Lord and watch them closely as they put it into practice. Christians who set solid examples help us grow. Likewise, we do well to keep in mind that younger believers need us to set worthwhile patterns for them.

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. ◀

LIVE IT OUT

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

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

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

ENGAGE

After studying this passage written by a first-century believer in prison, how can you translate these values to your life?

How would your life change if you began to thank God for your problems?

What thought processes must you change in order to live a life of gratitude?

Live It Out



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day.

Review: Live It Out (PSG, p. 31); (see text to the left). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

Wrap It Up

GUIDE: Remind group members to focus their minds and hearts on the things of God in the coming weeks so they can experience His peace.

PRAY: “Father teach us to make You the focus of our lives. Speak in Your still small voice and remind us of our need to spend time with You this week.”



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Get into the Study



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 32** and ask **Question 1: What makes you feel especially content?**



GUIDE: Refer group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” (**PSG, p. 32**) to the different stages of life we couldn’t wait to get to, then we couldn’t wait to get through.

SAY: “If we are not careful, our hearts can live in discontentment.”

GUIDE: Introduce **The Point** on **PSG page 32: True contentment comes through Christ alone.**

RECAP: Refer to “The Bible Meets Life” on this page to help introduce the session.

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to reveal to us the true source of contentment.

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 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it.

11 I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.

12 I know both how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.

13 I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.

14 Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship.

1▶ Verse 10. Paul's heart overflowed with joy because of the concern the Philippian Christians had shown for him. They had been able to renew their support for 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. 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 had no way of demonstrating it until now. ◀

2▶ 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 **need** for something money could buy. Quite the opposite, he assured them he had become quite **content**. In other words, he grown to the point he could be satisfied under any condition.

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:10-14



10 minutes

GUIDE: Before reading the passage, refer to “The Setting” on page 24 to establish the context of the passage.

LEADER PACK: Remind group members of the overview of **Item 3: Philippians** distributed in the previous session (Distribute copies to group members who were not present the previous week). Briefly review this overview of the Book of Philippians.



READ: Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:10-14.

SAY: “The church at Philippi was a very generous group of people who had been blessed by Paul’s ministry and wanted to support him in his calling to take the gospel to the Gentiles.”

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 1** for background information on Paul’s unique relationship with the believers in Philippi.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 2** on page 25 and this page to explain how Paul had arrived at the place where he could be satisfied under any condition:

- *His contentment portrayed itself in the form of self-discipline.*
- *The Secret—Pagan religions and philosophers promoted the notion that spiritual secrets existed.*
- *Secrets about life could be discovered, but only the most elite refined thinkers could uncover them, eluding ordinary people.*
- *Paul had learned about being content in changing circumstances. He wanted to share the secret with his Philippian friends.*

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.

He described the wisdom he received as the **secret**. 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 refined thinkers could uncover them, eluding ordinary people.

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

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

How did Christ help him? Paul affirmed the Lord gave him the strength he needed to endure 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'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 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. ◀

PHILIPPIANS 4:15-18

15 And you Philippians know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone.

16 For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times.

17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account.

18 But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 3** show how the Lord was the secret of Paul's strength:

- *Paul's reliance on Christ made all the difference.*
- *Christ helped replace distress with contentment.*
- *The Lord gave him the strength he needed to endure adversity.*
- *Paul's contentment clearly came from his reliance on Christ alone.*

DISCUSS: Question 2 (PSG, p. 35): **Why is God's strength a necessary ingredient for contentment?**

Alternate: How have you experienced the truth about contentment in Philippians 4:13?

TRANSITION: "Next we will hear the story of this church and its support of Paul."

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:15-18



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:15-18.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 4** provide details to the relationship between Paul and the Philippian Christians.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Ask: “What does the term ‘First-World problems’ mean?” Point out that First-World problems are issues in First World nations that never cross the minds of those who live in countries with more pressing concerns. (For example: slow Internet access, a bad haircut, a remote that doesn’t work, etc.) Distribute index cards and instruct members to write down one first-world problem. Then allow them to share responses. Talk about what makes each situation a first-world problem. Highlight that what makes most problems “first-world” is that they reflect a lack of contentment.

Say: “People in poorer countries give little or no thought to first world problems.’ There’s nothing wrong with having nice stuff, but we also need to realize that God is ultimately our source of true contentment.” Challenge group members to focus on how they can trust God to meet their needs—and to use them to meet the needs of others—as they reflect on today’s verses.

4 ▶ 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 with his comments 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 passage. It uses accounting terms including profit and loss. In this verse, however, the language of loss doesn't appear. Only profit comes into view. Believers who give generously to share Christ receive an eternal profit that goes into the account of our treasure in heaven (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 a spiritual profit. 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

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Ask group members to divide up into groups of two to complete the following activity.

With a partner, take turns sharing two things about your life in which you feel very content. Then talk about issues where you may feel some level of discontentment (Some group members may not have any level of discontentment).

Did you find any similar items on your list and your partner's list? Discuss what contentment means to you, and if comfortable, share why you are not content in certain areas. Take a minute to pray over those areas of discontent as a pair, and commit to pray for one another during this week. Additionally, praise God together for the things in which you find great contentment.

DISCUSS: Question 3 (PSG, p. 37): Can you share a time when someone's generosity overwhelmed you?

Alternate: How can we support and care for one another?

TRANSITION: "Next Paul will make it clear God is the source of provision, the One who meets our needs."

Study the Bible

Philippians 4:19-20



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read Philippians 4:19-20.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 5** to provide a more detailed explanation of verse 19:

- **My God**—*Paul had learned to trust the Lord completely to be with him and to provide for him*
- **Supply**—*The Lord would furnish them with everything necessary for their work to succeed.*
- **Riches**—*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. These resources would come from riches. A descriptive term, the word called to mind a wealth of resources that would never be depleted.*

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 And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

5 ▶ 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. 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.

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. 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. ◀

DIGGING DEEPER

Biblical Stewardship

Paul developed a comprehensive theology of stewardship. Its most thorough statement occurs in 2 Cor 8–9, where he solicited support for a famine relief offering. He stated that the Macedonians led the way in giving, and most likely the primary church to give was Philippi (2 Cor 8:1-5). Their giving was exemplary because they gave out of “rock-bottom poverty.” Their contribution was a “fragrant offering” to God because of its sacrifice, its Christian motivation, and its significance to the spread of the gospel.

A benefit to the believers was that they would experience God's provision. Just as God had met Paul's needs in the work of the gospel, so God would meet their needs. The context of this promise deserves careful attention. Paul spoke to those who actively supported the work of the Lord. His statement of 4:15 indicates what he meant: God meets the needs of those who give to him. In the context of ministering being ministered to occurs.

God's supply is “according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” “According to” means that the supply is suited to the resource and like it in kind and extent. God, therefore, bountifully blesses those who give with glorious provision in accord with his glory and for his purposes. Since the glory is associated with Christ—it is “in Christ”—Paul probably spoke of one of the benefits brought to those who are in Christ. “Glorious riches” are available to those who give as the Philippians did.

Richard Mellick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, New American Commentary, gen. ed. David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 149-150.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **Digging Deeper** on **PSG page 39** to provide the explanation of *Biblical Stewardship* outlined in this passage.

DISCUSS: **Question 4** (PSG, p. 38): **How have you experienced God supplying your needs?**

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

Enlist someone from your church's worship ministry to come and lead your group in singing the first verse of the hymn, “God Will Take Care of You.” For lyrics, go to BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra for today's session.

Invite group members to share ways God has provided for their needs in the past. Remind them He will be faithful to meet your needs in the future.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 6** to provide more information about verse 20:

- *Shifting from theology, he moved toward doxology (praise).*
- *Paul emphasized what Jesus taught us in His model prayer, the Lord's Prayer. Jesus instructed us to speak of God using "our" and not "my" when we pray (Matt. 6:9).*
- *Paul referred to God in an intimate way by calling Him Father.*

DISCUSS: Question 5
(PSG, p. 20): What do you appreciate about Paul's attitude expressed in these verses?

Alternate: How do you demonstrate trust that God will meet your needs?

ENGAGE: Have group members complete the activity on **PSG, page 40**. Invite volunteers to share responses.

6 ▶ Verse 20. Paul continued to write about the **glory** the Lord alone deserves. Shifting from theology, he moved toward doxology (praise) giving his attention to worshiping the God who supplied. As he worshiped, he drew his attention to two aspects of God. First, he referred to God with a significant plural pronoun—**our**. Earlier, Paul assured the Philippian church **his** God would supply their needs. In this moment of worship, he included all believers in his affirmation of praise.

By using **our** instead of "my," Paul emphasized what Jesus taught us in His model prayer, the Lord's Prayer. Jesus instructed us to speak of God using "our" and not "my" when we pray (Matt. 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 that we serve the Lord together, whether it's through 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: “In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content —whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.”
- ▶ **Choose to Give.** Give of your time, talent, or treasures. Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give to them. Let God use you as His answer to their prayers.

ENGAGE

Respond to the following questions:

Why do you think so many people are discontent?

.....

Are you more or less content than you were 2 years ago?
Why?

.....

How would total contentment in your circumstances actually change your circumstances?

.....

Live It Out



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** True contentment comes through Christ alone.

Review: Live It Out (PSG, p. 41); (see text to the left). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

Wrap It Up

GUIDE: Remind group members of God’s all encompassing power and resources available to His children. Encourage each person to commit to making the truths found in this passage the source of their contentment.

PRAY: “Father thank You for Your power, strength, and resources You graciously provide to us, Your children.”

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog.

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry

Get into the Study



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 42** and ask **Question 1: What's your favorite collector's item?**



GUIDE: Refer group members to “**The Bible Meets Life**” (**PSG, p. 43**) to the author’s observation about the difference between collecting as a hobby and an obsession. A common trait among hoarders—those who compulsively collect anything and everything is anxiety.

SAY: “Many of us know people who are on the line or have even crossed over the line to become hoarders.”

GUIDE: Introduce **The Point** on **PSG page 43: Godliness with contentment is great gain.**

RECAP: Refer to “The Bible Meets Life” on this page to help introduce the session.

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to reveal to us the things in our own lives that may be extreme and reveal some things about our lack of contentment.

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 the world, and we can take nothing out.

8 If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

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. ◀

2► Verse 7. Paul gave an important reason for not connecting contentment with possessions. The reason

Study the Bible

1 Timothy 6:6-8



10 minutes

GUIDE: Before reading the passage, refer to "The Setting" on page 34 to establish the context of the passage.

READ: Ask a group member to read 1 Timothy 6:6-8.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 1** to Paul's words about wealth:

- *Godliness accompanied by contentment is great gain.*
- ***Godliness** has to do with growing in Christ. Mature believers reflect the character of Christ in what they think, what they say, and how they behave. Pleasing the Lord becomes all that matters to godly believers.*
- ***Contentment** carries the idea of living in a way that's independent of circumstances.*
- *Because of Jesus, we have enough. We're enriched by the certain peace He alone can give.*
- *We have stored up spiritual treasures that last for eternity.*

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 2** to give more explanation about an ancient adage still true today:

- *We bring nothing into the world.*
- *We can't take it with us (we can take nothing out).*
- *Job's assertion that "we're naked when we come into the world, and we'll be naked when we leave it (Job 1:21).*

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 3** to Paul's perspective on what counts as profit:

- *Food and clothing—In Paul's day, the necessities for life basically included something to eat and something to wear.*
- *Mature Christians today live by the same principle. We're content with having what's necessary to meet the basic needs of our lives.*

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. ◀

3 ▶ 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 clothing** as he wrote about what would make a wise Christian **content**. By mentioning only these items, he didn't imply believers had to live in poverty to experience true contentment. Instead, he affirmed that wise believers wouldn't make greed the master of their lives. In Paul's day, the necessities for life basically included something to eat and something to

wear. Christians who had food and clothing didn't have to be distracted by the eagerness to get more for themselves. They didn't need anything else to enable them to serve the Lord with joy in their hearts.

Mature Christians today live by the same principle. We're content with having what's necessary to meet the basic needs of our lives. For instance, a car will help us with transportation to work, but we don't need an expensive luxury vehicle. 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 those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

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

4 ▶ 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 when we crave wealth, we're being led into temptation. Although we may not know it at the time, the **temptation** to have more lures us into a **trap**. The trap's set by what we desire; the temptation to have it lures us toward the snare. We deceive ourselves into thinking we're allowed to accumulate possessions for ourselves because we deserve them. 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.

DISCUSS: Question 2 (PSG, p. 45): Why does contentment seem so elusive today?

Alternate: What's the connection between godliness and contentment?

TRANSITION: "Next we will see another famous adage and its implications for believers."

Study the Bible

1 Timothy 6:9-11



15 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read 1 Timothy 6:9-11.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 4** on this page and page 38 to point out the words with negative connotations used to describe the dangers of desiring riches:

- They fall into temptation.
- They will fall into a trap.
- They will have foolish and harmful desires.
- They will be plunged into ruin and destruction.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

Display a recent stock market report, perhaps one that only lists the top stocks or go to BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra for today's session.

Say, "The range of emotions about the wealthy range from admiration to contempt."

Ask, "What are some companies whose stock you wish you had purchased in your lifetime?"

Consider how your life might be different today, in both positive and negative ways, if you had made that investment decision.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **Digging Deeper** on page 39 (PSG, p. 47) to provide a more information about "The Love of Money."

DISCUSS: Question 3 (PSG, p. 47): How can we recognize when money is becoming an idol?

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. ◀

5 ▶ 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. ◀

DIGGING DEEPER

Love of Money

Throughout the New Testament, one finds teachings on the dangers inherent in the possession of riches. Jesus repeatedly warned against being enslaved by the material. The New Testament does not teach that possessions or riches are themselves evil. However, the New Testament certainly condemns the sin of covetousness. A desire to be rich leads to a senseless preoccupation with the things of the world. The struggle for fortune too often makes one selfish. It breaks down one's sense of dependence on God.

The general attitude toward the pursuit of money is reflected in 1 Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." The writer does not say money is the root of evil. Money itself is neither good nor evil. It is amoral. The way one uses money determines whether it is good or evil. It is the love of money that causes problems.

Paul Robertson, "The Love of Money," *Biblical Illustrator*, Summer 1987, 60-61.

6 ▶ 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.

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 5** to provide further explanation about Paul's choice of words in verse 10 as he continued to warn Christians about money:

- *He didn't say money itself is evil.*
- *Our problem with money has to do with the harmful way we can love it.*
- *When we love money, we're headed for trouble.*
- *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.*

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 47** to the six traits Paul called Timothy—and us—to pursue:

- **Righteousness and godliness.** *These traits concern 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 God and others.*
- **Endurance and gentleness.** *We need staying power in the face of difficulties, and gentleness in dealing with difficult situations and people.*

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 6** on page 39 and this page to provide more information about the six traits mentioned in verse 11.

DISCUSS: **Question 4 (PSG, p. 48):** How can you actively pursue one of the things Paul listed in verse 11?

Alternate: How does social media affect our capacity to be content with what we have?

TRANSITION: “Next we will discover specific instructions Paul gave to those believers who were rich.”

Study the Bible

1 Timothy 6:17-19



10 minutes

READ: Ask a group member to read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

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 as well as a sincere eagerness to please the Lord with his life, Timothy would set the example for others in the congregation. Also, by devoting himself to **endurance**, he could go the distance necessary to handle difficult situations. At the same time, nourishing **gentleness** would enable him to work with difficult people in a 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 Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy.

18 Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share,

19 storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life.

KEY WORDS: **The present age** (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 coming age (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.

7 ▶ Verse 17. Another side of leadership for Timothy involved instruction. Paul wanted to make sure Timothy taught God’s people 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 **arrogant** with their wealth. Left to themselves, people with lots of resources could harbor selfish pride because of their money. Conceit could cause them to be obsessed with themselves and look at others with contempt. Instead of allowing arrogance to take root in their lives because of their confidence in their wealth, they would be wise to place their **hope** in the Lord alone. Paul reasoned that confidence in money would be risky since **wealth** would come and go. 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 what is good**. In other epistles, Paul drove home the point about doing **good works**. It's a way for us to honor the Lord and bear witness of Him to people who watch us (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 share** 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 Timothy. His directive about sharing with others can be

GUIDE: Refer group members to **Key Words** on **PSG page 48** to provide explanation about the phrase *the present age*.

GUIDE: Refer group members to Paul's instructions on **PSG pages 48-49** to guide the rich in how to live with wealth:

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

SUMMARIZE: Refer to **Bible Commentary 7** on pages 40-42 to provide more information about Paul's instructions to the wealthy.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **Key Words** on page 40 (**PSG, p. 48**) to provide explanation about the phrase *the coming age*.

DISCUSS: Question 5 (**PSG, p. 50**): **How do we maintain a healthy balance between money and contentment?**

Alternate: What does it mean to store up treasures in heaven?

ENGAGE: Have group members complete the activity on page 43 (**PSG, p. 50**). Invite volunteers to share responses.

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 **treasure**. The insight into how to use our resources as we devote ourselves to the Lord has a positive effect on people we help when we share with them. But something else happens when we're generous with others who need help. We find we've experienced a blessing too. The awareness we have honored the Lord and helped someone in His good name becomes a choice blessing for us. In turn, the blessing becomes a treasure we enjoy. 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—everyday—with a focus on Christ. Ask Him to transform your thoughts from self to living a godly life for Him. Commit to finding your contentment in the things God provides and choose to live for Him.
- ▶ **Be Accountable.** If you struggle with craving and buying things to give you a sense of security and contentment, choose someone you trust to be your coach and mentor, holding you accountable for how you spend. Seek a person who will encourage you to find your contentment in God alone.
- ▶ **Be Generous.** If you're not in the habit of giving, start. Give faithfully through your church. When you see a need, forego a purchase for yourself, and step in to help with the need.

ENGAGE

Complete the sentences from your personal experience:

At age _____ I had an experience that gave me great contentment.

I felt a sense of overwhelming peace because I finally ...

.....
To get there it cost me ...

.....
If I could go back in time I would remind myself that ...

.....

Live It Out



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:** Godliness with contentment is great gain.

REVIEW: Live It Out (PSG, p. 51); (see text to the left). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

Wrap It Up

GUIDE: Encourage members to evaluate their perspectives on money and wealth, being sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and his ability to convict us when we are out of balance in our view of riches and possessions.

PRAY: “Father help us always keep godliness in the equation in regard to our values when it comes to money.”



Free additional ideas for your group are available at

BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra