

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE.®

Herschel Hobbs Commentary

FALL 2019

STUDY 1:

*Simplicity:
Finding Contentment
in a Busy Life*

STUDY 2:

*How to Know
God's Will*



LifeWay | Adults

SESSION 1

A Centered Life

THE POINT

When your life is centered in Christ, everything else falls into place.

THE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:25-34

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

So many things vie for our attention each week. Good things. Even important things. Each thing claims to be a priority and demands to be the focus of our lives, drawing on our time, energy, and resources. Therefore, in trying to meet those claims and demands, we are pulled in multiple directions. Wouldn't it be great if we could clearly identify what is truly important? Jesus gives us help at that point. Seek "the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). When we do that, everything else will fall in place.

THE SETTING

The verses for this session are a portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7. These three chapters record some of the most well-known sayings of Jesus. They may have all been spoken in this single setting or they may represent a collection of Jesus' teachings. A parallel passage is found in Luke 6:20-49, which, obviously, is not as extensive as that in Matthew. Luke's collection is often known as the Sermon on the Plain because of the setting in which

it occurred. It should come as no surprise that an itinerant teacher like Jesus would repeat His teachings as He moved from place to place.

The concluding verses of Matthew 4 had noted that Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (v. 23) had resulted in His growing popularity among the people. Therefore, as He traveled from town to town and across the countryside, throngs gathered around Him; many even followed Him. Some people were attracted to Him by the His dynamic teaching and preaching, for what He spoke touched them unlike what they heard from any other teachers, even the most learned of their society (Matt. 7:28-29). Likely, others followed Him from self-serving motives desiring to lay claim to His healing power. Still others were simply curious, for they had never seen anyone like Him.

When Jesus spoke this sermon, He had not yet selected the Twelve or at least they had not been specifically identified (See Matthew 10:1-5.). Matthew had already recorded Jesus' initial call of some of the men who eventually would become part of that special group and who would be intimately involved in His ministry (Matt. 4:18-22). No doubt, many others responded favorably to His appeal to repent and made intentional decisions to follow Him. Thus, with all these in mind, Jesus desired to institute His own training initiative to teach them what it meant to be His disciple.

The portion of the Sermon recorded in chapter 6 opened with a call for His disciples to practice their spiritual disciplines with integrity; for the glory of God not the eyes of others (vv. 1-18). Next, He declared that true disciples will give undivided loyalty to God, choosing Him as Master over a system of materialism (vv. 19-24). With that decision having been made, they could live with confidence that God would provide for them. By trusting Him to meet their needs, they would be set free from the crippling effects of anxiety. They would have no reason to worry. They could be certain God

would take care of them. They could be confident that God knew what they would need. They would come to understand His provision was sufficient for today—and tomorrow.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Matthew 6:25-30

How do these verses fit into the larger lesson Jesus addressed in verse 19-24? How do the two illustrations from nature support Jesus' admonition against worry and His appeal to trust God

²⁵ **Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?** ²⁶ **Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?** ²⁷ **Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?** ²⁸ **And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:** ²⁹ **And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.** ³⁰ **Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?**

Don't worry. Therefore points back to the choices believers were confronted with in the preceding verses (vv. 19-24). Once an individual focuses on accumulating treasures in heaven, living in the light, and serving God as the only Master, that person is positioned to heed the admonition **take no thought for your life**. Jesus is not endorsing thoughtlessness, indifference, apathy, laziness, or the like. Christians

can and should be diligent in preparing for the future. However, Jesus is challenging an attitude wherein a person becomes so consumed with doing so that he or she forgets God and is overwhelmed with a worrisome spirit.

Take no thought comes from a word that means “to be troubled with cares” or “to be anxious about.” The word is used six times in verses 25-34. This is the same word used to describe Martha in Luke 10:40. “Martha was cumbered about much serving,” or “was distracted by her many tasks” (CSB). Of course, in Matthew 6:25, the word is preceded by the negative particle *not*. “Do not be worried about your life” (NASB). “Do not be anxious” (ESV). The verb tense can mean “Don’t fall into the habit of being anxious.”

Life refers to the vital life force housed in a body that makes one a living being. It is the life principle bound up in flesh and blood; hence, it can, as it probably does here, refer to physical life. Disciples ought not to worry about physical necessities as if their entire existence is limited to such things.

Jesus cites three specific examples. Don’t fret over **what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink**. Don’t worry about **your body, what ye shall put on**. Certainly, food, drink, and clothing are basic human needs. However, **Is not life more than meat, and the body than raiment?** What good is food and clothing if there is no life or a body? Therefore, the argument is, if God has given us life and a body, then, He can be trusted to give us the lesser things—like food and clothing.

To support His claim, Jesus draws on two illustrations from nature: **fowls of the air and lilies of the field**. “They are not models to be imitated but powerful symbols of God’s providential care. It is irrelevant that some birds starve and some lilies fail to mature. The rhetorical development of these symbols draws our attention away from our frantic pursuit of the necessities of life to a calmer vision of God’s bountiful care in the natural world.”¹

Could it be that as He spoke, birds soared over the flowered hillside? Upon seeing them, He declared, **Behold the fowls of the air.** *Behold* means to “gaze on,” but metaphorically, it can mean “to look at with the mind, to consider.” Thus, look at the birds with your eyes, but don’t stop there. Think about the way God takes care of them. **They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns**—tasks extremely familiar to members of an agrarian culture who labored to sow seed—sometimes in unproductive soil—, tended to and harvested the crop, and placed it in storage in anticipation of hard times.

Yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Notice Jesus referred to God as *your* Father not the birds’ Father. By doing so, He was reminding His disciples of their special relationship with God. Birds don’t have to worry about being cared for. God, as Creator, cares for them. **Are ye not much better than they?** Reasoning from the lesser to the greater, Jesus concludes that if God as Creator can be counted on to provide for birds, then God as **heavenly Father** will provide for His children who are of even greater value to Him.

Furthermore, how does worrying about things help anyway? **Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?** A *cubit* was a unit of measurement, approximated by the distance from the joint of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. Relying on other manuscripts, some contemporary English translations render the phrase is reference to time rather than stature. “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?” (NASB); “Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?” (NLT). “Can any of you add one moment to his life-span by worrying?” (CSB). Whether referring to stature or time, the point is the same. “Worry presents us with the dual temptation to distrust God and to substitute fear for practical action. Worry means paying attention to what we cannot change instead

of putting our energies to work in effective ways.”² Worry doesn’t change anything, so why worry.

Jesus cited another illustration from nature to support His admonition concerning the futility of worry. **And why take ye thought for raiment?** “And why do you worry about clothes?” (CSB). **Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.** Perhaps this time He waved His arms in a sweeping motion to call attention to the wild flowers that decorated the landscape. *Consider* means “to study closely.” Lilies denotes flowers in general, not necessarily a specific kind of flower. **They grow,** but **they toil not**—meaning “become wearied”—**neither do they spin**—their growth is not dependent on their effort such as would be necessary when making cloth. The flowers are well-cared for by God Himself. Once again, Jesus is not endorsing idleness; rather He is emphasizing God’s care, which eliminates any need for worry.

Furthermore, their beauty is unmatched. **Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.** *Glory* may be rendered “splendor” (CSB). The finest apparel worn by Solomon at the height of his splendor would be no match for the pristine God-given beauty of the flowers growing so abundantly around them. Hence, the lesson: **If God so clothe the grass of the field ... shall he not much more clothe you ...?** God even took care for **grass, ... which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven.** In a land where fuel sources were limited, dried grasses were used to fuel household ovens.

Therefore, in another argument from the lesser to the greater, Jesus declared that if God was so attentive to provide adornment for grass that would eventually be burned up, then He can surely be depended on to provide for His children who have a glorious eternal future. And if what He provides to clothe the grass is so beautiful, then He is fully capable of providing at least the basic clothing for them.

Jesus referred to disciples who were overcome by worry as **ye of little faith**. *Little faith* renders a word that can mean “lacking confidence,” or “trusting too little.” The Father had given His promise of provision, presence, and power. Thus, to worry would be to discount God’s promise. To fail to trust Him is an act so opposite of what it means to be His disciple that doing so is incredulous.

What are some lasting truths that come from Matthew 6:25-30?

- ▶ We can trust God to provide His children what they need.
- ▶ Worry is nonproductive.
- ▶ Worry smothers trust
- ▶ Rather than worrying about material things, spend time considering where God is at work and ways you may join Him in it.

Matthew 6:31-32

What is the summary truth Jesus declared? What two additional reasons did He include for not worrying? Who are Gentiles, and why should followers of Christ not think like them? On what basis can we be assured that God will provide for his children?

³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Trust God. Verse 31 summarizes what Jesus has said to this point. **Take no thought**—“So do not worry” (NIV). Don’t ask, **What shall we eat?** Don’t wonder, **What shall we**

drink? Neither question, **Wherewithal shall we be clothed?**

Wherewithal is an interrogative pronoun more commonly render as “what” (NIV, ESV, CSB) “What shall we wear?” (NIV, ESV). Nothing is to be gained by raising such concerns. Furthermore, such questions imply a lack of trust in the Father’s provision—a thought already raised by addressing them as “ye of little faith” (v. 30).

Verse 32 gives two additional reasons for not being anxious about things. First, it distinguishes followers of Christ from others. **For after all these things**—food, drink, clothing—**do the Gentiles seek.** *Gentiles* is a way of referring to non-Jewish peoples; thus, by implication, a heathen people who do not worship the one true Lord God and are completely ignorant of the reality of His promises. They are “pagans, (NIV) or “unbelievers” (NLT). *Seek* means “search for diligently,” “crave,” “strive after,” “clamour for.” Other translations render the word as “eagerly seek” (NASB), “run after” (NIV), or “dominate the thoughts of” (NLT).

Such people live by a philosophy that says, if a person wants what he or she craves, the person must search it out. It is a life of self-indulgence and self-dependence rather than trust and reliance on a God of love, who is fully capable of providing what is needed. The gods of the Gentiles were unpredictable and capricious. They could not be trusted or relied on to do what was best for those who served them; they were always watching out for themselves. Jesus’ admonition was that true followers of the Lord God would not lower themselves or the Lord to the standards of the Gentiles.

Second, **for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.** “Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs” (NLT). The word for *knoweth* denotes “to have a full knowledge of the facts, an understanding of what they mean, and even implies having the ability and skill to do something about it.” The Father is so loving, that

His knowing of their needs is in itself an assurance that He can and will provide. Therefore, His disciples live by faith in Him, However, “faith is not an intricate ritual to get what we want for ourselves; faith is obeying God’s will with the assurance that he will ultimately fulfill for us what is in our best interest. This kind of faith grows only in the context of an intimate relationship of love between the heavenly father and his children.”³

What are some lasting truths that come from Matthew 6:31-32?

- ▶ Worry and anxiety are characteristic of unbelievers not a people who trust God.
- ▶ God knows what we need.
- ▶ Because God is a God of love, He will take care of His children.

Matthew 6:33-34

How are we to understand first in verse 33? What does it mean to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness? What promise is associated with doing so? What should be our attitude toward tomorrow and any concerns that may surface?

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

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

Seek God’s kingdom above all. This portion of the discourse moves toward a climax via a positive command that reinforces the message of trust in the Father. Verse 33 is one of the most well-known in the Sermon on the Mount. **But**

seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.

The particle *but* sets up a contrasting statement. The root of the word rendered *seek* is the same as “seek” in verse 32 and carries the same meanings: “search for diligently,” “crave,” “strive after,” “clamour for.” The verb tense would permit a rendering “keep on seeking.” The admonition to seek constantly is not because what is being sought can’t be found but because it can be and is constantly needed. It represents a persevering commitment. The issue here is not salvation but discipleship; the way one who has been redeemed lives.

We have seen what the unbeliever and even the worldly-minded disciple seeks after: food, drink, clothing; symbols of “mammon” (v. 24), a worldview driven by the system of materialism. On the other hand, the faithful disciple seeks **first** those things valued by God, who is Master and loving heavenly Father. *First* indicates principal and priority. It is the first thing to be looked for first.

Kingdom of God refers to God’s rule and reign. Those who recognize God as king submit to Him; they give every area of life over to Him. Of course, when—and only when— one pursues the things of God, **His righteousness** will prevail. *His righteousness* can be variously understood: it is what is required by a holy God; what is right according to His standard; making right what is wrong; and being in right relationship with Him. None of this is the outcome of living according to personal preferences, popular opinion, or trending whims. Righteousness is rooted in who God is and what He desires for His children. **His righteousness** is imputed by God alone and only to those who believe and obey His will manifested in Christ.

A promise is attached. **And all these things shall be added unto you.** “All these things will be given to you as well” (NIV). “All these things will be provided for you” (CSB). *These things* was used in verse 32 to refer to the physical

necessities that had become priorities and were the cause of worry. When God's rule, reign, and righteousness are put first, **these things** are viewed from a different perspective. They are not seen nearly as important. The faithful disciple lives with confidence that in some way "these things" will be provided or the need will be met.

If that is true, then how do we explain some believers, especially in parts of the world marked by extreme poverty, who suffer from want? Craig Blomberg addresses this concern. "One possible solution to this problem is to reserve all guarantees for the age to come. 'Will be given' does not specify when God will provide But it is hard to see why Jesus would rule out worry in the present age if his promise applies only to a distant future Hence, verse 33b is probably to be interpreted in light of Luke 12:33 and Mark 10:30a, which presuppose the sharing of goods within the Christian community. When God's people corporately seek first his priorities, they will by definition take care of the needy in their fellowship."⁴ In other words, God will provide for needs through the faithfulness of His people. The young church in Jerusalem realized that and put it into practice (Acts. 2:44-45).

Jesus offered yet one final and direct word of instruction concerning worry. **Take therefore no thought for the morrow.** "So do not worry about tomorrow" (NASB). As noted previously, Jesus is not prohibiting preparing for the future—immediate or long-term—, but He does prohibit worrying about tomorrow. Stay focused on the present **for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself**; "because tomorrow will worry about itself" (CSB). God provides for today; trust Him to provide for tomorrow when tomorrow comes (Matt. 6:11). His faithfulness and provision is constant (see Lam. 3:22-23). **Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.** *Evil* means "trouble." The trouble may be that

perpetrated by people with evil intent against disciples of Jesus (Matt. 5:10-11). At any rate, “each day has enough trouble of its own” (NIV) without adding to it the concerns of tomorrow.

What are some lasting truths that come from Matthew 6:33-34?

- ▶ Pursuing the rule of God and His righteousness is to be the priority of a disciple of Jesus.
- ▶ In His way, in His time, God will provide for those who are committed to Him and living in right relationship to Him.
- ▶ We ought not to add to the struggles of today concerns about tomorrow, which may or may not actually come.
- ▶ God will provide what we need to face any struggles that occur tomorrow just as He provided for today.

LIVE IT OUT

When we are driven by greed, the desire to accumulate possessions, and concern for meeting temporal needs, inevitably we will fall victim to anxiety and worry. Even if we accrue those things, we soon discover, what we have is never enough, so we start the pursuit all over again trying to gain even more. No matter how much we acquire, eventually those things will fail us, leaving us to wallow in our worries.

However, when we look up to the God of heaven, and make Him, His reign, and His righteousness the first choices, the primary objectives, the priorities of our lives, we can begin to live with a sense of confidence. When the Lord and the things of the Lord become the center of our lives, we discover Him to be ever faithful, sufficient, and caring. He knows the needs of His children and provides for them. Thus, we can live free of anxiety, enjoy the abundant life

He provides, today and tomorrow—and for eternity. Life becomes less complicated in Christ,

What do you worry most about? How is that worry affecting the quality of your life, especially your relationship with the Lord? _____

What steps can you take to move away from worry toward trusting God to provide for you; especially in that one thing that worries you most? _____

What practical actions are you take that demonstrate you are focused on seeking the things of God above all else? _____

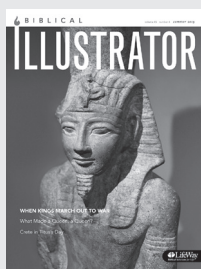
Review the verses for this session and identify reasons Jesus gave for not worrying. Claim one each day as God's promise to you and ask Him to help you apply it to a situation you are facing. _____

1Douglas R. A. Hare. Matthew, in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 74.

2Bruce B. Barton, Mark Fackler, Linda Chafee Taylor, and David R. Veerman. Matthew, in the Life Application Bible Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 123.

3Craig S. Keener. Matthew, in The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 154.

4Craig L. Blomberg. Matthew, in The New American Commentary, vol. 22, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 126.



For a deeper dive, check out the article ***Bins and Barns: Food Storage in the Biblical World*** in the current issue of Biblical Illustrator.

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SESSION 2

A Daily Pursuit

THE POINT

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

THE PASSAGE

Philippians 4:4-9

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Where does a life of simplicity start? It starts with how we begin our day. Because we are convinced we have so much to do, we may be tempted to jump immediately into that day's tasks. After all, we are convinced "the early bird gets the worm." However, when we begin the day with God, we will tend to dwell on Him and seek His presence throughout the day. He will help us stay focused on the day's work and lead us to know a greater sense of contentment with what we accomplish.

THE SETTING

Paul's initial visit to Philippi is recorded in Acts 16. He and those who accompanied him on his second missionary journey entered Macedonia in response to a divine revelation; it was not part of Paul's original travel itinerary. Because he and his friends responded obediently, they discovered a new field of missionary opportunity.

Apparently, Paul made friends for life. He would return to visit the city more than once during his missionary travels. He not only ministered to them, but they provided a place of

respite and encouraged him when the opposition was most intense. Thus, Paul had a special place for them in his heart.

His affection for them is evident in the opening verses of the letter. The very thoughts of his dear friends brought him great joy. He affirmed what God had done through them, was still doing in them, and would continue to do for them in the near future and in eternity.

More specifically, the letter was prompted by Paul's desire to express gratitude for an offering they sent to him during his first Roman imprisonment. While that may have been the impetus for writing the letter, Paul seized it as an opportunity to speak to other issues of which he was aware. Paul may have been on the road constantly and in prison often, but he always seemed to know what was happening in the churches. So as he wrote, he gave an update on his legal status, addressed a few issues concerning the fellowship of believers in the church, and offered encouragement to them as they dealt with other issues related to Christian living.

The verses for this session come from chapter 4. The chapter begins with brief instruction to resolve a conflict between two individuals in the church (vv. 2-3). Paul did not address the nature of the disagreement. What was important was that it be solved to prevent a greater breach in the fellowship.

Then, beginning with verse 4, Paul offered practical counsel on several topics. First, he gave a prescription for a life free of anxiety. Then, he encouraged them to engage in right praying, right thinking, and right living. By doing so, they would know the presence of the God of peace and joy. Finally, in verse 10, he actually got around to talking about the gift they had sent to him.

The verses for this study session (4:4-9) speak to principles for the overall lifestyle of a follower of Christ. They are not specific to the topic of a daily "quiet time" with God, but they do offer guidance for developing a fruitful time of devotion

and prayer. We will examine them with that perspective in mind. We will be challenged to begin each day with praise, to pray and leave our concerns in the hands of God, and to fill our minds with rich thoughts from God. Such daily pursuits will lead to a deepened relationship with the Lord and a richer and fuller life that honors Him.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Philippians 4:4-5

What two admonitions did Paul give in these verses? What motivation did he offer for doing both? How do they relate to our emphasis on spending time with the Lord daily?

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

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

Begin with praise. Joy is one of several recurring themes Paul used in his Letter to the Philippians. In verse 4, Paul surfaced the theme of joy in the form of an imperative. **Rejoice in the Lord always.** *Rejoice* (*chairō*) occurs nine times in Philippians. It means “to enjoy a state of gladness, happiness, well-being.” The word often was used as a salutation in a letter, as a greeting in a personal encounter, or even as a farewell when departing.

The joy is **in the Lord**, not in the situation. On the surface, some events give little reason for rejoicing. Life brings troublesome circumstances: disease and illness; financial challenges; loss of employment; broken relationships; tragedy and pain. We rarely find anything to rejoice over when these things befall us. However, “Christian joy does not come and go with one’s circumstances; rather it is predicated altogether on one’s relationship with the Lord and is thus an abiding, deeply spiritual quality of life.”¹ Earlier in this letter, Paul spoke of his own joy in the Lord despite his imprisonment

and those who personally opposed him. However, such joy was not something unique to him; it is for anyone **in the Lord**. The preposition *in* denotes position. It also can mean “because of.” **Always**, meaning “at all times,” was another reminder that this joy was an ongoing attitude not dependent on surroundings.

We tend to repeat things because they are important. We want to be certain our words are heard clearly, understood properly, and will be acted on immediately. Perhaps Paul felt the same way; thus, he repeated the admonition: **And again I say, Rejoice**. *I say* added a personal element to his appeal. Perhaps he thought that by emphasizing the appeal was from him—especially considering he was a dear friend—his readers would take the exhortation more to heart.

Verse 5 is another imperative, but on a different topic. **Let your moderation be known unto all men**. *Moderation* means “gentle,” “patient,” or “mild.” Other translations render the word as “gentle spirit” (NASB), “gentleness” (NIV), “graciousness” (CSB). The English Standard Version rendering is “reasonableness,” denoting “fairness, mildness, equitableness.” *Known* means “be aware of,” “be evident,” or “be seen.” “Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do” (NLT). They were not to function as a self-focused people consumed with claiming what they felt they were entitled to. Rather they were to focus on showing respect for the rights of others. How many quarrels have erupted between individuals or in a group because one person wanted what he believed he was entitled to have? Perhaps this was the cause of the difference between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2).

To this imperative Paul added **The Lord is at hand**. *At hand* comes from a word that means “near,” either in place or position. The Lord was near to them through His indwelling presence. They were near to Him because they were abiding in Him. The statement would serve to remind the

Philippians that the Lord was observing what they were doing.

The phrase *at hand* also can be used in reference to time. Paul believed the coming of the Lord was not some distant event but something that could happen soon. Believing the coming of the Lord was near also would be an incentive for right behavior. They surely would not want to be found acting unfaithfully at His appearing. That remains sound counsel for us as well.

What are some lasting truths that come from Philippians 4:4-5 that can guide our daily pursuit of Him?

- ▶ Praise the Lord for the day He has given to you.
- ▶ Praise the Lord for the joy that comes from being in right relationship with Him.
- ▶ Praise the Lord for opportunities to act with graciousness toward others.
- ▶ Praise the Lord that He is present and near.
- ▶ Praise the Lord for the hope that comes from knowing He will come again—maybe soon!

Philippians 4:6-7

What is the remedy for anxiety Paul commends to his readers? What is to be one's attitude when praying and asking for needs to be met? What outcome comes from such praying? What differentiates the peace God gives and peace as we might usually think of it?

⁶ Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Pray and replace anxiety with peace. Paul issued a third imperative; one stated negatively that has positive intent. **Be careful for nothing.** Paul was not promoting carelessness. The Greek word means “to be anxious,” or “to be troubled with cares.” “Be anxious for nothing” (NASB). “Do not be anxious about anything” (ESV). Jesus used the same word in Matthew 6:25-34. The cares of life on this earth may weigh down the believer who dwells on them. As Jesus pointed out, however, worry and anxiety add nothing positive or of value to one’s life (Matt. 6:27). Of even greater concern ought to be that a life marked by constant worry is an indication of a life lacking in faith, much like the heathen, meaning those who do not believe in the one true God (vv. 30-32).

Paul offered a remedy for anxiousness: **prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.** Here was the way to **let your requests be made known unto God**, not just for certain things or at some times **but in every thing**; “in every situation” (NIV). The three combined—**prayer, ... supplication, and requests**—present a comprehensive picture of what it means to approach God in times of anxiousness. “The Greek word translated ‘prayer’ is a general word conveying the idea of adoration, devotion, and worship. It does not refer to petitions but to the mood of the petitioner.”² When we are anxious about something, what we should desire is to spend time worshiping the Lord. *Supplication* is a specific kind of prayer in which one makes a petition for something that will meet a need.

Of course, *requests* denotes petitioning. To make a request implies a perceived or actual need on the part of the requestor. It also implies the requestor believes the one to whom the request is being made has the compassion, ability, and resources for granting the request. Without a doubt, Paul believed in the compassion of God, His ability to do what needs to be done, and that He has all the resources of

heaven at His disposal. With that in mind, why worry?

Petitions are to be accompanied by **thanksgiving**, which ought to be a consistent element of prayer, especially when prayer is understood as worship. Our petitions to Him should include expressions of gratitude for life, the provisions of the past, and a confession that God can be trusted with the future.

How do we understand the idea of making requests **known unto God**? Obviously, an omniscient God already knows what we need even before we ask (Matt. 6:32), so our making them **known** does not equal informing Him. However, when we make our needs known to God, we have an opportunity to examine the authenticity and earnestness of those needs in our own minds and to acknowledge them unto God with trust that He hears us and will respond appropriately. Perhaps you have requested something from the Lord but in the context of expressing it to Him persistently and communing with Him regularly have discovered the request was ill-founded and not consistent with God's will.

A blessed result comes to those who approach the Lord with their anxieties: **the peace of God**. The phrase refers both to the peace God possesses and the peace God gives. *Peace* is the absence of conflict within, with others, and with God. Yet it is so much more. The Greek word also includes the concepts of security, prosperity, quietness, and rest.

His peace **passeth all understanding**. *Understanding* refers to "intellect," "reason," or "the capacity to perceive and understand spiritual truth." *Passeth* means "to excel," "to be superior," or "to surpass." "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."³

We may not be able to explain the peace God gives, but we can experience it and benefit from it. His peace **shall keep your hearts and minds**. *Keep* is a compound word that means “to be a watcher in advance.” It is the picture of a guard posted on the city walls or at the city gate to prevent hostile action from the outside and to provide protection for those on the inside. “Because God’s peace is on duty, they do not have to be anxiously scanning the horizon for new threats. Alert, yes; anxious no.”⁴ **Hearts and minds** are two ways of speaking of one’s inner being. *Hearts* may refer to emotions; *minds* to thoughts. Anxiety, for example, can be defined as troubled thinking brought on by dwelling on the lack of something we are convinced we need. However, the peace that God gives enables one to know victory over downcast feelings and depressing thoughts, which when left unchecked can destroy. The peace comes in knowing and believing that God will provide in some way.

This surpassing peace comes **through Christ Jesus**. It is an outcome of being in right relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Paul never lost sight of the fact that blessedness is in Christ. He did not want the Philippians to forget it either.

What are some lasting truths that come from Philippians 4:6-7 that can help influence our daily time with Him?

- ▶ Do not be anxious about anything.
- ▶ Prayer is God’s alternative to anxiety.
- ▶ Our anxiety decreases in proportion to our increase in worshiping and trusting the Lord.
- ▶ Peace is a gift of God given through Jesus Christ.
- ▶ The peace of God stands as a sentinel against anxiety and worry.

Philippians 4:8-9

While we frequently think of our relationship with the Lord as emotive, what did Paul say to remind his readers that a relationship with the Lord also has a cognitive dimension? What is the relationship between right thinking and right living? What benefit comes from right thinking and right living?

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. ⁹ Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Dwell on the right things and live out what you know. Finally, brethren would suggest the letter was ending. But Paul also had used the same words before launching into the discussion contained in chapter 3. Perhaps he had intended to close the letter but then remembered something else he wanted to say. Maybe he just found it difficult to say “goodbye” to these dear friends. Even in the act of composing the letter, he felt closer to them. He had a deep kinship with them. Truly, they were his spiritual brothers and sisters.

The verb in verse 8 comes near the end of the sentence. **Think on these things.** “Dwell on these things” (CSB). *Think* comes from a word that means “to take an inventory” or “to make an account of.” Thus, ponder or reflect on *these things* to consider their meaning and value to life. Then, consider how such contemplation will shape personal conduct.

Grammatically speaking, the verb is a present middle imperative, second person plural. An imperative is an entreaty, command, or exhortation. Paul was doing more than

giving them a suggestion. In English the pronoun *you* is implied in most imperatives. Even if supplied, *you* is written in English the same whether singular or plural. Paul used a plural verb; he is speaking not to any one individual but to the body. The quality of community life would be improved only when everyone saw it as their responsibility to think in godly ways. As a present middle imperative, Paul challenged them to keep on thinking for themselves; as opposed to letting someone else think for them. Furthermore, the kind of thinking he called for was to be ongoing, not a one-time occurrence.

These things refers to the several virtues or qualities he listed in the first part of the sentence. However, Paul was not writing just about abstract matters. Some argue these virtues are not unique to Christianity and that similar lists could be found in other religions and in moral philosophy. While that may be true, that does not negate the value of them for the Christian believer. In fact, the Christian ought to be a major proponent of choosing and practicing the best things of life. Of course, the gospel is the ultimate paradigm for understanding and living out these virtues.

In the King James Version the word translated *things* in verse 8 actually is the word for **whatsoever** or “whatever” (NASB, NIV, HCSB, ESV); **things** was supplied by the translators. Moreover, in the Greek text, only the first clause includes a verb: **is**. The clauses that follow include only the word for **whatsoever** followed by the adjective. Thus, the rendering would be “whatsoever true, whatsoever honest,” and so forth. However, most English translations supply the verb: “Whatever is true, whatever is ...” and so forth.

The focus is on thinking in a godly way. What we put in our minds affects what comes out. Our attitudes, speech, and behavior become a reflection of what and how we think. Consider the meaning of each virtue in the list.

Whatever things are true. *True* denotes reality, veracity, and faithfulness. Christian thought and action is to be according to what is true as opposed to what is unreal, false, or deceptive.

Whatever things are honest. *Honest* refers to something worthy of honor or reverence. Other renderings include “honorable” (NASB, CSB, ESV) or “noble” (NIV). Believers are to think lofty thoughts, not lowly, dishonorable thoughts.

Whatever things are just. The word translated *just* can also be translated “righteous,” “upright,” or “right” (NASB, NIV). In Scripture, the standard for determining what is righteous or **just** is the Word and will of God.

Whatever things are pure. *Pure* means “without stain,” “free of fault,” and is often used in relation to God. However, the word can also be translated as “chaste” and used in reference to thoughts and acts involving the body.

Whatever things are lovely. *Lovely* things are pleasing to look at, but more than external appearance is intended here. Lovely things are things that are worthy of being loved.

Whatever things are of good report. *Of good report* refers to “a good reputation” or “that which is well-spoken of.” Other renderings include “admirable” (NIV, NLT) or “commendable” (CSB, ESV).

Paul shifted to a conditional sentence structure for the final two items—**If there be**—with the implication being “and there is.” **Virtue** denotes moral and ethical excellence or goodness (ESV, CSB). **Praise** also is rendered “praiseworthy” (NIV, CSB) or “worthy of praise” (NLT, ESV). Then came the exhortation: **think on these things**. “Dwell on these things” (CSB). Let such thoughts fill and reside in your minds.

What Paul was teaching was more than information; it was practical instruction. **Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do.** In 3:17, Paul had urged his friends to follow him as a model.

Here he once again offered himself as an example to follow. “The example includes Paul’s teaching, the tradition he received from the apostles and passed on, his reputation for Christian living, and the Christian lifestyle they saw him practice.”⁵ Even though salvation is an act of God’s grace, He expects godly action on the part of those whom He saves.

Their faithfulness would reap a benefit. **And the God of peace shall be with you.** Because of right thinking and right action, they would know the presence of the God of peace. He would dwell with them, for where He is, there is peace and contentment.

What are some lasting truths that come from Philippians 4:8-9 that can apply to our daily pursuit of God?

- ▶ When life is out of order, one remedy is to chart a course of right thinking and disciplined practices that manifest Christ.
- ▶ The information of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be translated into practical living where it serves as a testimony to the gospel’s power to affect life.
- ▶ Daily pursuit of the things of God brings the peace of God.

LIVE IT OUT

When we begin our day with the Lord, His joy and peace will flood our lives. We begin by praising God for His faithful love and the blessing of each day. We pray and leave our concerns in the hands of God, believing He will provide for us. And we fill our minds with the things of God, by reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word.

⁵ Max Anders, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, vol. 8 in the Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 263.

SESSION 3

The Key to Contentment

THE POINT

True contentment comes through Christ alone.

THE PASSAGE

Philippians 4:10-20

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Life would be simpler if we didn't have to think about paying bills or taxes, right? Or at least if we had more money, we wouldn't worry or feel stressed over such obligations. Such thinking seems logical, but it doesn't work that way. True contentment is not dependent on our bank balance; it begins in our hearts. The apostle Paul knew this to be true by experience. We can too.

STUDY THE BIBLE

One of the dominant themes in Philippians is joy. Joy is a product of faith in Christ; it is not dictated by circumstances. Joy can maintain itself even in the face of affliction. Joy is a present reality that will be brought to its fullness in eternity. Paul rejoiced over the gift his Philippian friends had sent to him by Epaphroditus. He commended them for their willingness to give to him in a time of need. But as much as anything, Paul wanted his dear friends to know the joy of contentment that comes from being in Christ, from giving to benefit others, and trusting that God would supply their needs. Therefore, he seized their giving to him as an opportunity to share what he had learned about true contentment and the joy it brings.

Contentment is not found in things but in Christ. God would meet their needs according to His glorious riches.

Philippians 4:10-14

What prompted Paul to rejoice in the Lord? Was his joy in the gift itself, or in the fact his friends had provided it? What great life lesson had Paul learned? What was a key truth that supported the life lesson he had learned?

¹⁰ **But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.** ¹¹ **Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.** ¹² **I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.** ¹³ **I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.** ¹⁴ **Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.**

Acknowledge the strength and provision of God. If Paul was prompted in part to write a letter to the Philippians to express gratitude for the offering they sent to him, we may wonder why he waited so long to mention it. Even then, he did not directly say thank you. Some Bible expositors think Paul had written other letters to the Philippians and had already expressed thanks for their gift of love and support. Nevertheless, the gift provided him an occasion to rejoice. But his joy was not because of the gift itself—that might come across as self-serving. He **rejoiced in the Lord greatly.**

This was not the first time his Philippian brothers and sisters had given to support him, but apparently, a considerable gap had existed between this time and the last. **Now at the last your care of me hath flourished again.** *Care* comes from

a Greek word that suggests having a mind focused on the well-being of another person. Paul used the word frequently in the letter—1:7; for example, where it is translated “to think this of you”—appropriately so in a letter between people who shared mutual concern for each other. *Flourished* is a botanical term used to refer to a flowering plant that was dormant in the winter, but in spring blossomed again. Thus, after a lapse in time, the Philippians blossomed in their giving.

Some interpreters think *now at the last* sounds like the beginning of a mild reprimand, as in “Finally, after such a long break, you are concerned about me again?” Or as we sometimes quip, “Thanks for the gift; why didn’t you give it to me sooner?” However, such would be inconsistent with the overall tone of the letter. People with deep affection for one another do not respond that way. Thus, other renderings attempt to soften the statement. “Once again you renewed your care for me” (CSB).

Paul may have been concerned, too, that they might misunderstand what he meant, so he immediately added, **wherein you were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.** *Careful* comes from the same Greek word as *care*. *Opportunity* means “occasion,” “seasonable time,” or “the right time.” Paul affirmed that he knew they had no lack of concern for him and his situation, but they did lack an occasion to do anything about it. “Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it” (NIV).

Several things could have limited their opportunity to respond to him. Paul was on the move as an itinerant missionary. They would not always know where he was on given days. Communication between cities would have been slow. Perhaps they were limited in available personnel who could travel the distances required to deliver a gift to him. Maybe they didn’t have the resources available or were dealing with external pressures that limited their ability to respond.

Paul walked a fine line in desiring to express appreciation for the gift and wanting them to understand he was not dependent on them for their financial support. His joy was not because he was **of want** or from “being in need” (ESV). **For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.** *Learned* assumes a lesson taught resulting in acquired knowledge. To be *content* is to accept one’s lot in life even when it is less than desirable, and then to use the circumstance in the best possible way to fulfill life’s purpose. Contentment is an attitude, a frame of mind, an expression of the heart. However, it is not natural to most of us, not even the likes of Paul; it is learned. “For I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself” (CSB).

Paul explained, **I know how to be abased and how to abound.** *Know* comes from a word that denotes “knowledge gained by experience.” *Abased* means “to bring into a humble condition”; “to do with little” (CSB). *Abound* means “abundance”; “to make do with a lot” (CSB). **Everywhere and in all things** can be rendered “in any and every circumstance” (NASB, ESV); “in any and every situation” (NIV). “One mark of maturity in Christ is that the mature know how to depend on the Lord in every situation of life, not only in those for which they assume they need help.”¹ The mature believer acknowledges the strength and provision of God.

I am instructed. *Instructed* means “to teach fully” or “to be disciplined in a practical lesson.” In the mystery religions, the word also meant “to learn or be taught sacred mysteries or secrets.” Paul had “learned the secret of being content” (CSB) whether **full**—“well-fed” (NIV, CSB)—or **hungry**. He knew how **to abound**—“with plenty” (NLT)—or **to suffer need**—“in want” (NIV). For Paul, contentment had nothing to do with what he had or didn’t have. He treated abundance and need as equally unimportant life details. The wealthy can be as discontent as the poor, though the poor man might

think if he is going to be discontent, he would prefer to be a member of the discontent rich. Of course, such thinking is to miss Paul's point. His focus is on how to know the way to true contentment, which has nothing to do with possessions.

The secret was this: **I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.** This is one of the most well-known verses in Philippians. However, "some people abuse this verse by taking it out of context. They assume Paul was making a comprehensive statement about the spiritual abilities of a Christian."² It is not a blanket promise that *through Christ* (actually a literal rendering of the Greek text would be "through Him") a person can achieve anything he or she chooses. *All things* refers to the circumstances he had just spoken about in verses 11-12. "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (NIV). Paul had learned that the secret of contentment and the source of abiding strength was union with Christ. Christ exceeds circumstances. Circumstances vary; Christ is constant.

Warren Wiersbe likened Paul's reliance on Christ to the way some elements of the natural order are dependent on resources that may not be readily seen by the natural eye. "The great trees send their roots down into the earth to draw up water and minerals. Rivers have their sources in the snow-capped mountains. The most important part of a tree is the part you cannot see, the root system, and the most important part of the Christian's life is the part only God sees. Unless we draw upon the deep resources of God by faith, we fail against the pressures of life. Paul depended on the power of Christ at work in his life (see 1:6, 21; 2:12-13; 3:10). 'I can—through Christ!' was Paul's motto, and it can be our motto too."³

Christ was the difference-maker for Paul. Nevertheless, Paul still wanted his friends to know their gift was meaningful to him. **Notwithstanding ye have well done, that**

ye did communicate with my affliction. Well done means “to act rightly.” It could be rendered, “You did beautifully!” *Communicate with* translates a compound word (the preposition *with* joined with a form of the word *koinonia*, or “fellowship”) meaning “to have fellowship with,” or “to become a partaker together.” *Affliction* can be rendered “pressure,” “distress,” tribulation.” Paul used it often to describe the suffering of Christians because of their loyalty to Christ. Their giving financial support to him was a tangible expression of the partnership he had spoken about in chapter one (vv. 5,7). “Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship” (CSB). “Yet it was kind of you to share my troubles” (NIV). They had accepted his trouble as theirs as well.

What are some lasting truths that come from Philippians 4:10-14?

- ▶ God uses the compassionate concern and tender actions of believers as a way of strengthening and providing for others.
- ▶ Godly contentment is not a product of our circumstances but our union with Christ.

Philippians 4:15-18

What history did Paul have with receiving support from the Philippian Christians? What was his point in noting their faithfulness in giving in the past? How is giving an act of worship?

¹⁵ **Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.** ¹⁶ **For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.** ¹⁷ **Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.**

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

Give generously from God's provision. Paul continued to express his joy in the Lord, not for the gift but for the givers; that they had discovered the joy of giving. Giving to others and particularly to Paul was not something new to the Philippians (2 Cor. 9:1-4). **In the beginning of the gospel** is to be understood from the perspective of the Philippian believers and likely alludes to Paul's initial introduction of the gospel to them in the events recorded in Acts 16:6-40.

Paul had ventured into Macedonia, the region of Greece where Philippi was located, in response to a dream in which a Macedonian man called out for Paul and his companions to come and help them. Paul accepted the dream as a message from the Lord. Later, he **departed from Macedonia** to continue his missionary journey.

He recalled that **no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.** *Communicated* is the same word used in verse 14, which can be rendered "shared" (NASB, NIV, CSB) or "partnership" (ESV). The Philippian believers had demonstrated their commitment to the gospel and their love for Paul by **giving and receiving**. No other church had supported him, **but ye only**. They were the exception. Other churches had been willing to receive what Paul had given in ministry, but apparently only the Philippians reciprocated by giving of themselves as his ministry partners. No doubt, this helped cement the strong relationship he had with them.

Following his departure from Philippi, he journeyed to **Thessalonica**, another major city of Macedonia and the residence of a Roman governor. Thessalonica also had a Jewish synagogue. Some in that city believed the gospel. Those who

did not believe strongly opposed Paul. They created uproar in the city and accused Paul and those with him of defying the laws of the Caesar “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (Acts 17:6).

While his stay in Thessalonica was brief, the Philippians **sent once and again unto** (his) **necessity**. Immediately and “several times” (CSB) thereafter, they sent a gift to help meet his necessity, or “needs” (ESV). Paul never indicated what the gift was. Perhaps it included money, clothing, or writing materials. Paul’s willingness to receive the gift from these dear friends is somewhat unusual in that he reminded the Corinthians and Thessalonians that when he dwelt in their cities he provided his own support by working with his hands (1 Cor. 4:12). He did not want to be a burden to them or to appear that he was taking advantage of their support (1 Cor. 9; 2 Cor. 11: 2 Thess. 3:6-12), even though he was entitled to it. Apparently, Paul did not have that fear where the Philippians were concerned. They knew his heart for ministry and shared it themselves.

His reference to his needs led him to shift his focus again. He did not want it to appear that his joy over their giving and receiving was only about him and his needs. His affirmation was **not because I desire a gift**; “Not that I seek the gift itself” (NASB). Rather, **I desire fruit that may abound to your account**. The word *fruit* can also be rendered “profit” (NASB, CSB), which would fit with the commercial accounting imagery suggested by the phrase **abound to your account**: “which increases to your account” (NASB); “that is increasing to your account” (CSB); “increases to your credit” (ESV). Their investment in the things of God was returning dividends (Matt. 6:19-21). That was what he desired for them.

The word *abound* can suggest compounded interest. Thus, the credit they would receive to their spiritual account would be multiplied rather than just added. Just how we are

to apply his metaphorical use of the terms *fruit* (“profit”), *abound*, and *account* is not specified, but given that he has just declared that an abundance of things is not the path to contentment, we may assume these terms are to be understood spiritually. They refer to the spiritual blessings of God to those who serve in His name and for His glory.

He continued to use accounting language. **I have all, and abound: I am full.** As for Paul himself, he considered that he had “received everything in full,” he had an “abundance,” and was “fully supplied” (CSB). “I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied” (ESV). The full satisfaction he enjoyed was that he had **received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you.** However, once again, the emphasis is not only on **the things** themselves but on the act of sending.

Furthermore, Paul was pleased to receive the gift because he saw it as a gift *from* God but also as a gift *to* God. Thus, he changed from using accounting language to worship language. Their act of giving was **an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.** The first phrase, rendered in several translations as “a fragrant offering” (NIV, CSB, ESV), is often found in the Old Testament as part of the description of the Levitical sacrifices. Paul used the same language in reference to Christ’s offering of Himself on our behalf (Eph. 5:2). He also used similar words to speak of believers who offered themselves to God (Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 2:14-16). Thus, by their gift to Paul, the Philippians had given themselves to God in an act of worship. God had accepted their worship and was pleased by it.

What are some lasting truths that come from Philippians 4:15-18?

- ▶ As believers, we are to look for opportunities to reach out to brothers and sisters in need.
- ▶ The concept of giving is rooted in the gospel beginning

with the truth that God gave His Son.

- ▶ When we discover the grace of giving, we will find the joy of living.
- ▶ We lay up treasures in heaven when we give freely to build God's kingdom.
- ▶ Giving to others in the spirit of Christ is worship to God.

Philippians 4:19-20

At the end of the day, upon whom were the Philippians to depend? And at the end of the day, who should be glorified both in giving and receiving of gifts? Ultimately, in whom do we have access to all that God provides?

¹⁹ But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Trust God to supply your need. We give not to get; but when we give, we get, for God loves and blesses cheerful givers (2 Cor. 9:5-15). Paul may have wished he could know the joy of giving back to the Philippians and helping meet any needs they might have. However, he and they knew full well he could not do so. Obviously, since he was receiving help from others, his own resources were limited and, as a Roman prisoner, so was his opportunity.

Nevertheless, he was confident that their needs would be met. Paul believed that God had met his personal needs through the Philippians. Therefore, he could affirm to them his conviction that **My God shall supply all your need.** *My God* speaks of Paul's sense of personal relationship with God. Paul did not own God but he was owned by Him. *Supply* comes from a word meaning "to make full" or "to bring to realization." This verse is not a promise of prosperity, but

of necessity. Neither does it imply that they could tap into God's riches to satisfy any of their selfish desires. God knew their needs. They could count on Him to fill those needs.

He would do so **according to his riches in glory by 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 purpose."³ *Riches* denotes "abundance." God is not working out of a short supply; His supply is inexhaustible. He has all resources at His disposal. *In glory* is a reference to His exaltedness; His being worthy of all praise in infinite splendor and majesty. Therefore, because of who He is, what He gives is far superior to the material possessions of this world. What God gives comes from His glorious, heavenly storehouse where all things are dedicated to His exaltation and praise.

By Christ Jesus is one more reminder that He is the ultimate difference-maker. Apart from Christ we cannot be saved from sin, know the joy of serving the Lord, enjoy the blessing of His goodness, find full and unending contentment, claim the hope of eternal life, and a multitude of other things that Paul had described or alluded to in his letter. "Only those in him have access to God's account and can ask him to meet their needs."⁴

The thought of the abundant blessing of God in Christ led Paul to erupt in praise. **Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.** The best last word is always eternal praise to God. **God is our Father**; thus, He gives life, provides for us, sustains us, protects us, and loves us. To Him **be glory**. *Glory* means "highest opinion, resulting in praise and honor." He is deserving of our love in return, as well as our honor, obedience, and praise. The praise He is due is not confined to this world. *For ever and ever* expresses the idea of ages to come, wherein His people shall ever glorify

His name without end. *Amen* was a word used to express approval of what had been spoken and confidence that it would come to pass. Even for us, as we read this doxology, our hearts, even if not our lips, should also cry out “Amen!”

What are some lasting lessons that come from Philippians 4:19-20?

- ▶ God will meet our needs.
- ▶ God’s supply of heavenly riches is inexhaustible.
- ▶ We have access to God and His blessing through Jesus Christ alone.
- ▶ God is worthy of all praise, now and forever.

LIVE IT OUT

Paul’s message in these verses reminds us that contentment is not a product of what or how much we possess; it comes through a relationship with Christ. Our giving to benefit others is not so much a sacrifice on our part as it is an investment in the things of God. Furthermore, our giving is an expression of worship to Him. We can freely give to others because we have confidence that God will provide for our every need according to His glorious supply. Reflecting on such truth ought to bring us joy. In turn, joy in the Lord ought to make us content. After all, what could be better than that?

How would you explain to someone that the source of true contentment is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? _____

What has been your personal journey toward being willing to give to others in their time of need? How has giving become worship of God for you? _____

Recall a time when God used someone to provide for a great need you were facing. _____

One scale of 1-5, how would you assess your contentment attitude? _____

Based on this message from Paul, what do you see to be the relationship between joy and contentment? _____

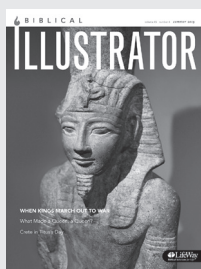
¹Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32 in The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1991), 155.

²Melick, 154.

³Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful: A Practical Study of Philippians* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1974), 124.

⁴Melick, 158.

⁵Max Anders, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, vol. 8 in the Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 265.



For a deeper dive, check out the article ***Debit or Credit? Paul's Use of Financial Terminology*** in the current issue of Biblical Illustrator.

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SESSION 4

Godly Contentment

THE POINT

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THE PASSAGE

1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Possessions can give us a sense of security. That sentiment, if left unchallenged, can lead to hoarding. We think, *if possessions make me feel secure, then more possessions will make me feel more secure*. Therefore, we devote ourselves to collecting more things. But the contentment we hope to gain from accumulating more—or at least better—things continues to elude us. God offers a simpler approach to being content. It comes out of being in right relationship with Him.

THE SETTING

First and Second Timothy and Titus are usually referred to as “Pastoral Epistles,” because they were written to two young protégés of Paul serving as pastors of important first-century churches, Ephesus and Crete, respectively. The apostle wrote to give them pastoral advice but even more so to teach Christian living in light of the gospel message and salvation in Christ Jesus. His instructions were intended to encourage them personally but also to provide content for their pastoral instruction to others.

The verses for this session come from the conclusion of Paul’s first letter to Timothy. He had challenged the motives

of false teachers who had infiltrated the church at Ephesus. They were moved by a desire for personal financial gain (6:3-5). His assessment opened the door for him to provide additional instructions concerning the believer's view of wealth. How should believers deal with possessions? What dangers do they pose? What potential for good do they provide? What was the relationship of a desire to be rich to personal contentment and the hope of eternal life? The bottom line is, set your hope on God and store up riches in heaven. True contentment is in the gain that comes from being in right relationship with God and living a godly life.

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Timothy 6:6-8

What is the relationship between godliness and contentment? Why is depending on material goods a misguided and short-sighted view of life? How did Paul's instructions reflect the teaching of Jesus concerning anxiety and contentment?

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

Godly contentment does not depend on possessions. Paul was not denouncing wealth or the wealthy; achievement or the ambitious; productivity or the hard-worker. Nevertheless, he was concerned that wealthy, ambitious, hard-working persons know and understand that **great gain** was not measured by their wealth, achievement, or productivity. None of those things, even if attained, was proof of **godliness** or guaranteed **contentment**.

Godliness denotes "having a pious attitude toward God; living with respect and reverence toward God; having a lifestyle that reflects the holiness of God." "Godliness

in Paul's vocabulary means the genuine Christian life, a faith relationship with God and a new way of life."¹ *Contentment* was a word Paul borrowed from the Stoics, who prided themselves on being self-sufficient and satisfied with what they had. However, Paul applied a new understanding to the concept. Contentment was not a result of self-sufficiency; it was a fruit of God-dependency. It was not a matter of being able to control one's attitude; it was a matter of being in right relationship with Christ

Paul openly admitted he had to learn how to be content; it wasn't natural behavior. When it comes to the gospel and living for Christ, we sometimes assume Paul just got it all at once. No, even the likes of Paul saw the need to grow in Christ. His ability to encourage others in living out the gospel was an outcome of growing in the things of the Lord himself. He could not share what he did not have. So, how did he learn?

First and foremost, Paul learned from—was taught by—the Holy Spirit. Growing in the ways of the Lord is a spiritual experience. He described it to the Romans as being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Paul was convinced that one's way of thinking would be changed (“transformed,” v. 1) by the spiritual disciplines of praying, reading, and reflecting on God's Word, worshiping, and thinking on godly things, all the while allowing the Holy Spirit to work within. He described this spiritual experience as walking and being led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 18, 25). By doing so, a believer would manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Paul's other teacher for living out the gospel was life experience. That was his testimony to his Philippian friends. Look back at Philippians 4:11-12. “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content” (v. 11). “Learned” assumes a lesson was taught that resulted in acquired

knowledge. “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound” (v. 12). The word for “know” denotes knowledge that is gained by experience. “I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (v. 12). Apparently, he had experienced both abundance and want—and learned valuable life lessons from them.

Hence, Paul knew firsthand what he was talking about. He had come to know that **contentment** in partnership with **godliness** would produce **great gain**. *Gain* in most other settings would be defined in terms of “getting,” of material enrichment. However, a focus on right living for the purpose of material gain would be diabolically opposed to the call of Christ. It would be nothing short of religious greed. A life built on possession will ultimately fail (Matt. 6:19-20). “Material wealth has only a very limited and transient value. It operates only in the narrow space between birth and death. What good does it do to accumulate a storehouse of treasure only to die and leave it all?”²

Gain, therefore, is to be measured according to the economy of God. Ronald Ward described it this way. “The man of *godliness* also ‘gets,’ but with a difference. He gets: what he did not have before; what is better than anything he had before; what will help him at the deepest level; and what is capable of infinite exploration.”³ What God gives is **great**, for He is generous and always gives what is best.

Verse 7 could have been a popular proverb of the day. At birth, **we brought nothing into this world**. When we die, **we can take nothing out**. It is a no-nonsense statement. Who can argue with it? The statement fits well in the larger context, especially if we read **we** as a reference to believers, godly ones, in Christ.

In between our coming into the world and our going out of the world, we may accumulate wealth and things—or we may not. When we die, it doesn’t matter. If we have wealth

and things, they will stay for someone to enjoy or at least to use. Eventually, those who follow us will face the same end; they will be caught up in the same cycle. Therefore, the source of contentment for the believer is not things. Possessions neither add to nor subtract from who we are; that has been settled in Christ. Because our sufficiency is in Christ and our life is devoted to godliness, we will be content even if we just have **food and raiment**, or “clothing” (ESV, NIV, CSB). The reference to food and clothing identifies life’s basic necessities. The reference also parallels the teaching of Jesus concerning the futility of being anxious over such basics (Matt. 6:25-34).

What are some lasting truths from 1 Timothy 6:6-8?

- ▶ Contentment is not a matter of material gain but of godliness.
- ▶ Godliness is the result of being in right relationship with God through Christ.
- ▶ The accumulation of goods has nothing to do with godliness or true contentment.
- ▶ The Christian view of life is not defined by the period between birth and death, but by hope in Christ that produces eternal life.

1 Timothy 6:9-11

What warning did Paul give to those who were driven by a desire to be rich? What did Paul identify as the root of all evil? What would that root produce? What advice did Paul give to Timothy, and hence, to any person who belongs to God?

⁹ But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love

of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.¹¹ But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

Craving more possessions only leads to ruin. Next Paul specifically addressed **they that will be rich**. *Will* comes from a word that means “to will deliberately, be minded to.” It may be rendered “desire” (ESV) or “want” (NIV, CSB). He was not speaking to those who may have made light-hearted statements such as; “I wish I were rich” or “If I were rich, I would do such and such.” Paul was referring to those who were so desirous of acquiring wealth that they had contrived “at-whatever-cost” plans to make it happen. Becoming rich had become their life goal, measure of success, and the driving force behind every action. They were consumed by the desire to make money.

People possessed with such desires and plans **fall into temptation**. Notice he did not state this as a possibility but as a fact. *Fall* means “to be entrapped by” or “to be overwhelmed with.” *Temptation* in this instance refers to “an enticement to sin; that which tries a person’s fidelity, integrity, virtue, or constancy.” Hence, such persons act imprudently, unseemly, or wickedly. They **fall into ... a snare**, or “trap” (NIV, CSB). Just as birds or wildlife suddenly and expectedly become entangled or caught unawares in a trap, so the person driven by the desire for riches faces the allurements and seduction of sin that leads to unexpected and deadly peril.

As if his point still wasn’t clear enough, Paul used yet a third image to communicate his warning. Those who desire to be rich **fall into ... many foolish and hurtful lusts**. *Many* intensified the warning. A person might avoid one or two things; but beware; many other dangers are out there. *Foolish* means “not understood, unwise.” *Hurtful* may also

be rendered “harmful” (NIV, ESV, CSB). Obviously, the word suggests something that is not in one’s best interest; something painful and destructive. *Lusts* denotes “cravings, longings, desires, especially for what is forbidden.”

The final clause in the verse probably applies to all three images. The **temptation, snare, or lusts** will **drown men in destruction and perdition**. *Drown* comes from a word that means “to sink; to plunge into the deep.” *Destruction* implies “ruin, destruction, even death.” *Perdition* refers to “damnable ruin, utter destruction.” In some uses in the New Testament, *perdition* refers to “the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell” (2 Pet. 3:7; Rev. 17:8,11).

The ruin could be in the areas of finance, relationships, or influence. However, Paul was most concerned about spiritual ruin. He was convinced that **the love of money is the root of all evil**. Actually, “love of money” is a single Greek word that also can be rendered “avarice” or “covetousness.” Of course, *root* is to be understood as imagery; it is a beginning point from which something sprouts. While some translations identify it as **the root** (KJV, NLT), several other translations render it as “a root” (NASB, NRSV, NIV, ESV, CSB). *Evil* refers to anything that is “depraved, injurious, evil, wicked.” *All* can be understood to mean “each, every, everything” or as “some of all types”; thus, the renderings “of all sorts” (NASB) and “of all kinds” (ESV, NIV, CSB). The money itself is not **the root of all evil**, but that it was **coveted after**. *Coveted after* comes from a word that means “to stretch one’s self out in order to touch or grasp something.” They were “craving it” (ESV, CSB) or “eager for” (NIV) it.

Apparently, Paul had observed that in craving for money some persons had little by little **erred from the faith**. *Erred* means “to cause to go astray; seduce.” Not that they intentionally had set out to wander away from **the faith**—convictions of the truth—but they had been seduced by their

desires. As a result, they **pierced themselves through with many sorrows**; “pierced themselves with many griefs” (NIV, CSB). The nature of the **many sorrows** was not specified. They represent what comes to any person who looks for contentment in earthly things rather through godly living. The language suggests painful grief that was both intense and self-inflicted. Those who suffered such pain in life had no one to blame but themselves.

In verses 3-5 Paul had noted that false teachers were driven to do their work by a desire for material gain. In contrast, Paul exhorted Timothy as **a man of God**—a reference to his relationship to God, not some official position—to live a different kind of life. First, he urged Timothy to **flee** from **these things**, meaning the desires for material gain and the dangers that come with them. The word rendered *flee* can be used literally and figuratively. Sometimes we need to remove ourselves physically from situations that would tempt us. At all times, we need to “run away” from things that seek to invade our minds and spirits.

However, living as one in right relationship with God is more than avoiding certain things. On the active side, it is obeying God’s commands, accepting His will, and being devoted to His purpose. Thus, Paul urged Timothy to **follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness**, each being a quality that reflects the character of the Lord Himself.

Righteousness would suggest right thinking, right attitudes, and right actions. *Godliness* means reverence and respect toward God; being holy as He is holy. *Faith* refers to convictions of the truth, in this case convictions about the truth of Jesus and the salvation available through Him. *Love* is the familiar Greek word *agape*, usually used in the New Testament to refer to an unconditional, sacrificial, kind of love—to love as God loves. *Patience* denotes steadfastness

and endurance, and is characteristic of a person who does not swerve from his purpose, loyalty of faith, or commitment, even though facing great challenge. *Meekness* is having a gentleness or mildness of spirit; humility.

What are some lasting truths that come from 1 Timothy 6:9-11?

- ▶ An uncontrolled desire for riches will lead to ruin.
- ▶ A life driven by greed and avarice will cause one to wander away from the truth and lead to great sorrow, if not in this life, certainly in eternity.
- ▶ The Christian life consists of fleeing from those things that are harmful to us and following after the things of Christ that are truly edifying.
- ▶ Individuals in right relationship with God will devote themselves to pursuing the qualities that identify them as people of God.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

What did Paul charge the rich not to do? What positive instructions did he give them? Who is the source behind the riches a person possesses? What benefits come to those who act with generosity toward others?

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

¹⁸ That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; ¹⁹ Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Set your hope on God and store up riches in heaven. Verses 12-14 include additional personal instructions to Timothy encouraging him to be diligent, faithful, and obedient to

the call of Christ on his life. Verses 15-16 are words of praise declaring the glory and majesty of Christ who is worthy of everlasting praise. In verses 17-19 Paul returned to the previous subject: riches and the believer. His message in verses 9-11 had been directed to those who wanted to be rich. Apparently, a few believers were already rich in the present age. Paul had a message for Timothy to share with **them that are rich in this world**. The phrase *rich in this world* may also be rendered “rich in the present age” (ESV, CSB) or “present world” (NIV). Paul suggested “that the wealthy can have their wealth only in this age. It is good for this present world, but it does not convert automatically into blessedness in the world beyond.”⁴

While Paul did not malign the rich for being wealthy, he did have a **charge** for **them**. Other renderings include “Command them,” (NIV); “Instruct them,” (NASB, CSB). He had instructions for how the rich should handle their wealth. He began with a word about attitude. Wealth was not an excuse for being **highminded**, meaning to think more of themselves than others; “conceited,” (NASB); “arrogant,” (NIV, CSB); “haughty,” (ESV). Being wealthy did not make them better than others. Neither were they to **trust in uncertain riches**. The adjective *uncertain* was a reminder of the temporal nature and the dangers of relying on an abundance of possessions. *Trust* comes from a word meaning “to expect, confide, hope in.” They were not “to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth” (CSB). Rather, their hope was to be **in the living God**. God not only was the only certain hope; He was the One who **giveth us richly all things to enjoy**; “who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (NIV). Don’t trust or have hope in the gifts but in the One who gave them.

The charge continued: **do good ... be rich in good works**. *Do good* is yet another reminder that being a follower of

Christ is an active not a passive lifestyle. It is not just “not doing bad” things; it is doing *good works*. Synonyms for *good* include “beautiful, commendable, excellent, surpassing”; they were efforts of the highest quality. Such followers are to be **ready to distribute, willing to communicate**. The word rendered *distribute* denotes “being ready to share.” *Communicate* is from the same root as the word *koinonia*, meaning fellowship or partnership. Believers are to share with others because they are partners in the faith. Wealth was not just for the individual’s own good pleasure. Wealth brings with it a stewardship responsibility “to be generous and willing to share” (CSB). Overall, Paul was suggesting that true wealth is not found in what one possesses but in his willingness to share; not in getting but in giving.

By doing good works the rich would be **laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come**. Paul’s words here are similar to Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:19-21. In neither case are we to see the statements as indicating that one earns salvation or gains favor with God through his or her own effort. Salvation is only by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8). Verse 19 needs to be understood against the backdrop of verse 17, where Paul urged the rich to trust, or “set their hope” (ESV, CSB), on the living God. Because their hope was in God, not their riches, they were set free to use their possessions for the benefit of others who suffered great need. By doing so, they were storing up the kind of treasures in heaven Jesus spoke about. Furthermore, they were giving evidence they were building their lives on **a good foundation** and had already laid **hold on eternal life**.

Consider John Stott’s summary of Paul’s instructions to the rich. “Bringing together Paul’s negative and positive instructions to the wealthy, they are not to be proud and despise the poor, but to do good and be generous; they are not to fix their hopes on uncertain riches but on God the Giver

and the most valuable of all his gifts, the treasure of eternal life.”⁵ The generous rich are “storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life” (CSB).

What are some lasting truths that come from 1 Timothy 6:17-19?

- ▶ The rich have a responsibility to use their resources in ways that affirm their trust in God and benefit others.
- ▶ All that we have comes from God.
- ▶ Abiding hope is in God, not the things of this world or present age.
- ▶ Followers of Christ strive to lay up treasures in heaven, not as the means of eternal life but as evidence they possess it.

LIVE IT OUT

A few years ago, several nations teetered on the brink of financial failure. Even the strength of the United States economy was tested by bank failures, rising unemployment rates, and a massive national debt. Governmental leaders, politicians, economists, and the average citizen struggled to find a solution to the national economic ills.

Without minimizing the need for a strong national and global economy or denigrating individual financial success and the wealthy, this session reminds us of the eternal importance of pursuing spiritual gain over material gain. The greatest gain is not what goes in our pockets but what fills our hearts. Our certain hope and true and lasting contentment is not in what we have but in the One we serve. Hope and contentment are found in the awesome God who has reached out to us in Jesus.

Describe a time when you experienced the contentment of godliness during a particularly difficult time of life? _____

Recall examples of which you are aware when the pursuit of riches led to a person's ruin or downfall? _____

Even if you don't consider yourself wealthy by your community's standards, what are some ways you can be "rich in good works" with what you have? _____

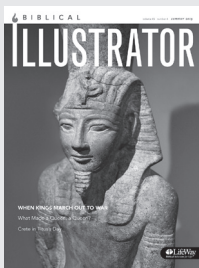
¹ Philip H. Tower, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, vol. 14 in The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 137.

² Malcolm O. Tolbert, *Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, vol. 22 in Layman's Bible Book Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1980), 125.

³ Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1974), 97.

⁴ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34 in The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 175.

⁵ John Stott with Dale and Sandy Larsen, *Reading Timothy and Titus with John Stott* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 90.



For a deeper dive, check out the article ***Food and Diet in the First Century*** in the current issue of Biblical Illustrator.

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