

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

**SENIOR ADULTS
Personal Study Guide**

FALL 2019 | KJV

STUDY 1:

*Simplicity:
Finding Contentment
in a Busy Life*

STUDY 2:

*How to Know
God's Will*



SESSION 1

A Centered Life



QUESTION 1:

What are some things you never worry about any more?

THE POINT

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

THE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:25-34

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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

I worry a lot. I worry about church, family, health, my future, and lost people in my city. The list goes on and on. I've let worry consume me and even spiritually paralyze me for years. I play the "what-if" game a lot.

- ▶ What if I make the wrong decision?
- ▶ What if the desires of my heart never come to pass?
- ▶ What if my father never comes to know Christ?

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

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

Matthew 6:25-30

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life.” Easier said than done, right? But it’s an important word from Jesus, and His use of “I say unto you” is to get us to pay close attention to what He was saying.

Let’s not lose sight of the fact that we are hearing these words from the mouth of the Creator. The Creator of the universe, the One who put the stars in place, the One who controls the oceans, the One who holds the world in the palm of His hand was telling us, “*Do not worry!*” You would think that would be enough to cure us of worry, but it often isn’t. The phrase *to worry* refers to a state of mind we choose. When we worry, it is because we have allowed our mind to focus and live in disbelief.

The problem is not when we have a concern for our physical needs, but when we let the physical take priority over the spiritual. Jesus was clearly telling us that life is more than food, body, and clothing.

So why shouldn't we worry when life seems overwhelming with so many unmet demands? Verse 26 tells us why, and the reason is tied to the great value we have in the eyes of our Father. Sometimes it is hard to truly comprehend that God loves us as His children. Some of us have not had the greatest father figures, and some of us have had no fathers at all. Others cannot understand why God would love them when they are so flawed and sinful. But Jesus painted a wholly different picture of our heavenly Father; One who takes care of the birds and adorns the flowers yet loves us so much more. In spite of our sinfulness, God loves and values us deeply. That wonderful truth should change our perspective and, therefore, cure any worry.

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

QUESTION 2:

What kinds of things cause people to worry?

Matthew 6:31-32

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

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

A lack of trust produces a life of worry. According to Jesus, worry is a Gentile mindset. While we may sometimes equate “Gentiles” with those who are not Jews, in other contexts—like this one—it refers to those who are outside the family of God: pagans. The lost—a group that has every reason to worry about the essentials of life. They express no trust in God, who is the Source of all we need. They trust only in their own ability to provide for themselves.

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

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

Trust should be placed in God who does what is best for us. Consider how God provided for our greatest need. We are sinners in need of a Savior. God saw that need and sent His Son, His greatest possession. We were separated from God, so Jesus lived a sinless life only to be crucified on a cross as an atonement for our sin. God provided the perfect lamb for imperfect people. And we didn’t have anything to do with that provision!

When we place our faith in Jesus, the Son of God, we are trusting that our greatest need was met. And since God has taken care of our biggest need, we can fully trust Him to take care of all other needs!

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

If there is a problem, it’s with us. It’s a faith problem. He called us “Ye of little faith.” Worry is simply a product of not trusting God.

The good news is that we do not have to stay faithless! You may be thinking, *But you do not understand my worry!* You are correct. I do not know the particular things you worry about, but I do know my God. He is sovereign. He is in charge. He knows all. He can do all. He is still on His throne. It is our choice not to worry and trust Him instead. It is an everyday decision.

QUESTION 3:

When has God provided for you in an unexpected way?

Matthew 6:33-34

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

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

“Seek ye first.” The word Jesus used for *seek* is *zeteo*, which means to desire and pursue. We are not seeking something that is hidden; instead we are pursuing the things of God with a passion wherein

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, 1984).

it is our highest priority. Verse 33 takes us back to Jesus’ earlier words in this chapter.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (vv. 19-21).

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

QUESTION 4:

What does it look like to seek God’s kingdom first?

This does not mean that if you seek God wholeheartedly, you will have whatever you want. Consider how that idea of prosperity plays out in other parts of the world. Countless believers live in poverty. Jesus’ words do not promise American prosperity but God’s provision. He takes care of His children. Seeking God gives us a proper perspective; we can rest assured that He knows what we need, and He provides.

Jesus promised that each day will have enough trouble of its own. We cannot escape the troubled day, but we can escape worry. Today, focus on Christ. Make Him first. We can think about tomorrow ... well, tomorrow.

The disciple who values the reign of God over his life and who diligently pursues righteous living can trust God to satisfy his needs.

KJV STUDY BIBLE, (MATT. 6:33)

Jesus was not speaking against planning or preparing for the future. My wife and I have four children and we are planning for their future. We have started college funds, we pray for their salvation, we pray for their purity, we pray for the right friends to enter their lives, and we pray for their spouses. After we plan, prepare, and pray, we leave the unknowns of the future in the hands of our Father. Without a focus on Christ, it is easy to be terrified of

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

QUESTION 5:

How can we follow Jesus' word not to worry about tomorrow yet still plan for the future?

ENGAGE

Write down as many things as 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. And that means bringing your needs to Him instead of worrying over it. He loves you and wants to help you.

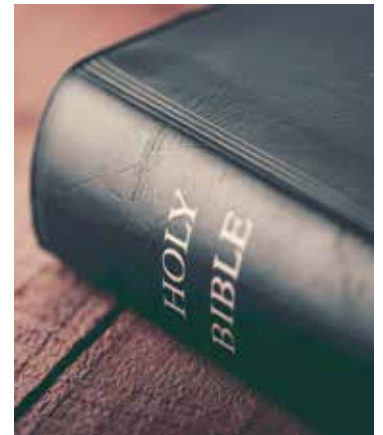
Use your worry list as a prayer list this week.

LIVE IT OUT

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

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

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



END NOTES

1. Roni Caryn Rabin, “Worried? You’re Not Alone,” *Well*, May 9, 2016, <https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/05/09/worried-youre-not-alone>

SESSION 2

A Daily Pursuit



QUESTION 1:

When has the taste of water felt especially good?

THE POINT

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

THE PASSAGE

Philippians 4:4-9

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We need water. Every day.

Water makes up 50-65 percent of a man's body weight and 45-60 percent for women. To keep our bodies in this optimal range, we need to drink a half a gallon of water a day. All this water protects our tissues, joints, and spinal cord. It aids our digestion and helps remove the waste. Every part of our bodies needs water.¹

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

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

We need Jesus. Every day.

Philippians 4:4-5

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.

Many things can rob us of joy. Doubt, death, challenges at work, illness, relational difficulties, and numerous other problems can cause Christians to lose their joy. But we need not lose our joy, because we do not rejoice in our circumstances; we rejoice *in the Lord*. Joy comes from our relationship with Jesus, not our circumstances.

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

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

Early in my walk with Christ, I outlined my prayers with wants, needs, and complaints. I ended my prayer time by reminding God what I wanted just in case He forgot. The entire prayer time was about me, myself, and I. Rarely did I pray for others or praise God for who He is or thank Him for what He had done. When I made a choice to change that, my prayer life was enriched and my walk with Christ was strengthened. I chose to always start my prayer time with praise—even when I was feeling depressed or

discouraged. Regardless of my state of mind or state of life, God never changes and for that I have a reason to praise.

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

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

Have you ever met a Christian who was going through the worst circumstances possible and yet carried a sense of peace and a larger-than-life smile? I have, and his name is Fred Dallas. Fred has been a missionary and traveled the world. He is a great father and husband, and he has ministered to thousands of people when they were at their lowest points.

Fred also has advanced cancer. It seems unfair that this would happen to such a faithful man of God, but the faithful are not exempt from the pains and trials of this life. But Fred has not felt sorry for himself or thrown pity parties; instead, he continually rejoices in who God is. He fills his social media with smiles and Scriptures! His daily posts are full of rejoicing. Fred embodies the truth of this passage: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.”

QUESTION 2:

When was the last time you really rejoiced over something?

Philippians 4:6-7

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

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

“Be careful for nothing.” We addressed the topic of worry in our previous session as Jesus called us to pursue His kingdom and His righteousness. The antidote for worry comes as we center our lives on Christ, and in this passage, Paul gave us a key to centering our focus on Christ with three words.

1. **Prayer.** Prayer seems like the obvious thing to do, but it is often the most neglected spiritual discipline of the Christians life. Prayer is more than communication with God; it is communion with Him. Prayer includes a worshipful attitude in which we come before the throne of God.

Through Christ, we have access to the Creator of the universe who hears our prayers. Let me state that again: the Creator hears our prayers! That truth alone should drive us immediately to His throne in prayer. Instead, we often find ourselves starving for time to pray. It sometimes seems like we are just too busy and have too much to do. How can we stop long enough to pray? We always find time for what is truly important to us. If you do not pray much, it is because you have decided not to do it. If you are considered a prayer warrior, it is because you made a decision to make prayer a priority. Those who find time to pray do so because they make the time for it.

2. **Petition.** Prayer is communion with God, and petition is a part of that. It is asking God for something specific. Paul was telling us to communicate our needs—and those things that tempt us to worry—to God.
3. **Thanksgiving.** Every night when my family sits around the dinner table, we share the highs and lows of our day, and then we discuss one thing we can each thank God for. I want my kids to see that life will always have highs and lows, but we can always be thankful to God. Those highs and lows will change, but our God never does. With God on the throne, we always have a reason to be thankful.

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 “passeth all understanding.” “Passeth” 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 “keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” “keep” 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 R. Mellick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, New American Commentary, gen. ed., David S. Dockery, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 149-150.

QUESTION 3:

Why do we often neglect to bring the little things before God?

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

Once we pray and give our burden to God, we can have peace in the midst of the problem. We can be surrounded and sheltered by the peace of God. This is a peace unlike anything the world can offer; it is a peace that “passeth all understanding.” One reason God’s peace is so extraordinary is that we can have it when it makes no sense to have it! How could Paul have peace when he was in a Roman prison? God’s peace flooded his soul *through prayer*. This peace transcends understanding.

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

QUESTION 4:

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

Philippians 4:8-9

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

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

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

A life of daily praise and prayer puts our focus where it needs to be: on Jesus Christ, the One who replenishes us with the living water. Jesus said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).

We can't stay focused on Christ if we let the wrong things crowd our minds. We have got to lose the baggage that crowds out the things of God. My family recently went to a family camp that included a host of recreational activities, theme nights, date nights, and so forth. With a family of six you can imagine how much luggage we had. Flying with five bags was going to be expensive enough, but if the bags were heavier than fifty pounds, we would have to pay an additional fee. All the bags cleared the scales—except one. We had to toss the extra weight.

We carry around a lot of unnecessary baggage, but if we lose it, what takes its place? God wants us to fill our minds with His Word. We need God's Word to saturate our thoughts daily so that our minds may be renewed and we will be kept from grievous ways. Paul called us to think on those things that are ...

- ▶ ... "true," not false.
- ▶ ... "honest," not dishonorable.
- ▶ ... "just," not unfair.
- ▶ ... "pure," not obscene.
- ▶ ... "lovely," not unlovely.
- ▶ ... "of good report," not wrong.
- ▶ ... filled with "virtue," not corrupt.
- ▶ ... worthy of "praise," not shameful.

When we think on these things, we can "[bring] into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Surrender your thought life to Jesus; don't allow it to drift into the gutter. The wrong thoughts will still want to invade your mind, but be aggressive and take them captive! Think in a Christ-centered, Christ-exalting way about all things.

In addition to thinking praiseworthy thoughts, Paul called us to follow godly examples. "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do" Imitate believers who set their minds on our Creator and Redeemer. Watch them. Pay attention to their lives, what they read, topics of their conversations, and what they value. As a result of striving to be like other

ENGAGE

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

believers, Paul said that each follower would know more of God's peace. The prophet Isaiah put it this way: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isa. 26:3).

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

QUESTION 5:

How can we focus our minds on the things pleasing to God?

LIVE IT OUT

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

- ▶ **Praise daily.** Begin your day—every day—with praise. Praise puts the day ahead of you into perspective.
- ▶ **Pray daily.** Set aside time every day for uninterrupted prayer where you give God your full attention. Consider using a prayer journal to help you stay focused. 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.



END NOTES

1. "The Water in You," USGS: Science for a Changing World, <https://water.usgs.gov/edu/propertyyou.html>

SESSION 3

The Key to Contentment



QUESTION 1:

What makes you feel especially content?

THE POINT

True contentment comes through Christ alone.

THE PASSAGE

Philippians 4:10-20

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Life is filled with stages—and no matter the stage we're in, we seem eager to jump to the next one.

- ▶ We couldn't wait to get to high school, but once we were there, we couldn't wait to graduate.
- ▶ We couldn't wait to get to college, but it didn't take long before we were eager to move to a career in the real world.
- ▶ We couldn't wait to get married, but once we arrived, we began looking toward a family.
- ▶ We landed the job we wanted, but before long, we set our sights on another job, another position, or even retirement.

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

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

Philippians 4:10-14

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some time had passed since the last time the Philippians were able to help Paul. They cared for him and what he was doing, but they "lacked opportunity." Perhaps they weren't aware of a need, or Paul didn't have a need. We don't know. We do know that, when the opportunity arose, they certainly stepped in.

Although this gift came from the Philippians, Paul knew very well that they were only the deliverers of God's provision. He knew the mighty hand of God was behind this provision. Paul "rejoiced in the Lord greatly." His thanks was to the One who was behind the gift and who moved the church to care and provide.

Even as Paul thanked them for their concern for him, he let them know he would be fine with or without a gift. The apostle Paul was no stranger to the trials of life that could have easily caused discontentment in his heart. He had been imprisoned, whipped five times with thirty-nine lashes, beaten with rods three times, and faced death and multiple dangers (2 Cor. 11:24-27). Paul often went without food and knew what it was like to sleep in the cold, yet he could say, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Paul wasn’t exempt from pain and the trials of this life just because he was a faithful servant; in fact, it seems that his hardships were due to his faithfulness.

The secret to Paul’s contentment? “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” He knew what it was to be “well fed or hungry, ... in or in both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need,” and in every situation, Paul found his strength and contentment in Christ.

Paul was writing specifically of his ability to be content in all circumstances. In order to achieve contentment, he needed to depend on Christ for his strength. The strength to rest in God and be fully satisfied came from Him.

It is unfortunate how many people take this passage out of context. Athletes like to quote verse 13 as if it were written to help them make a winning shot in basketball or a grand slam in baseball. People like to quote it before job interviews or daunting tasks. While we certainly should seek God and depend on Him in all circumstances, the point of this verse is that, however our circumstances turn out, we can be content because of Christ.

QUESTION 2:

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

Philippians 4:15-18

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

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

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

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

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

Paul had some hard days in Macedonia. He suffered physically in Philippi (Acts 16:16-24). Spreading the gospel in Thessalonica met opposition and ultimately led to his departure (17:1-10). No wonder he was so grateful for a church that stood by him during these times. Although it was from a distance, Paul felt the Philippians' support. If it weren't for the generosity of the church in Philippi, he might have been discouraged. Christians should be known as people of generosity, especially when it comes to the spreading of the gospel. We should be known as people who encourage and bless others.

Through Paul's ministry, he had spread the gospel and helped to start many churches, but only Philippi reciprocated and supported him when he needed it. Paul mentioned this fact without a hint of complaint. He focused on giving thanks for what was done instead of complaining about what was not done.

We are blessed to be a blessing in return. God has not only given to us so that we may be provided for, but He wants us to have the opportunity to be a provision for others. The American dream is to accumulate, while the gospel of Christ compels us to receive and give. We should all live as missionaries on this earth with a desire to spread the message of Christ, understanding that all we have is for Him and the advancement of His gospel. In the end, we will stand before our Father, and we will be held accountable for how we lived our lives (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). We must be careful that we don't get caught up in accumulating and forget to support the cause of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

To save is wise. To be a good steward is biblical. But to accumulate to the point of neglecting the spread of the gospel is ungodly. Live so that you leave a legacy of being a blessing to many!

QUESTION 3:

Can you share a time when someone's generosity overwhelmed you?

Philippians 4:19-20

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

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

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

That wonderful promise gets even more wonderful when we see that God supplies what we need “according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Sometimes we might approach the throne of God and forget who we are approaching: the Creator of the universe. The One who owns it all. The One who lacks absolutely nothing. Our God is not poor, in debt, or low on resources. His resources are unlimited—so we can rest in the truth that, when God provides, He provides abundantly! Our God has unlimited resources and riches.

This is not the false promise often proclaimed in the “prosperity gospel.” We can’t just name whatever we want and claim it. That indeed is a false gospel. God is not a genie who is here to answer all our commands, flood our accounts with money, and fill our homes with every possession we desire. God could certainly do that with His unlimited resources, but our contentment comes through resting in Him, not in an abundance of stuff. He provides what we need.

QUESTION 4:

How have you experienced God supplying your needs?

Living a life of simplicity rests in this truth. While we might acknowledge that truth, our human nature—our sinful human nature—always wants more. We often don't just pray for our needs; we seek after our wants. Having all our material desires met won't make us any happier or more content, even though our sin nature will try to convince us otherwise.

God will meet our needs—and He will often do it in unexpected ways. Paul described God as “him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20). Trusting God means

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 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 purposes. Since the glory is associated with Christ—it is “by 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*, New American Commentary, gen. ed., David S. Dockery, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), WORDsearch ed.

trusting Him to provide, and we trust Him to provide in His timing and in the way that is best for us.

I have been praying for my atheist father to receive Christ as his Lord and Savior but it hasn't happened—yet. I desperately want this to happen. I've asked and prayed, but no answer. Why? My only conclusion is that God knows best. He knows when to give me what I need and how to supply it. I will simply choose to trust that God knows how to supply my every need.

QUESTION 5:

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

ENGAGE

Why do you think so many people are discontent?

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

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

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 simply to trust Christ for all things: “Every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”
- ▶ **Choose to Give.** Give of your time, talent, or treasures. Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give to them. Let God use you as His answer to their prayers.



SESSION 4
Godly Contentment



QUESTION 1:

What's your favorite collector's item?

THE POINT

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THE PASSAGE

1 Timothy 6:6-11,17-19

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

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

Unfortunately, collecting is not a hobby for some people. It is an obsession. Psychologists have identified a common trait among hoarders—those who compulsively collect anything and everything. That common trait is anxiety.¹

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

We don't get our contentment from people or things, no matter how many things or relationships we surround ourselves with. God offers us a simpler approach—an *achievable* approach to contentment—that grows out of our relationship with Him. A life of simplicity is a life of contentment, and we find that in Christ.

1 Timothy 6:6-8

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

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

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

Earlier in chapter 6, Paul spoke against false doctrine and human greed. False teachers were twisting God's truth to mislead people into believing that godliness would result in material gain. They were not motivated by a desire to please God; instead they were motivated by a desire to gain the riches of this world. This isn't godliness; it is greed.

This unfortunate false teaching resides in the hearts of many today. Over two-thirds of American churchgoers believe God wants them to prosper financially. Most churches lift up the doctrine of grace—we are recipients of God's grace, a grace we do not deserve—yet we often act like our acts of service, devotion, and giving will receive some form of reward from God. In fact, thirty-eight percent of churchgoers believe God rewards us when we give to the church.²

Unfortunately, I have been there. I would never have preached this false doctrine, but at one point I was living it. When I was single, I patiently waited for God to provide a wife. I was as faithful as I could be. I even fasted from dating for a whole year, and it wasn't easy. Surely God would bless my faithfulness to Him and provide a wife at the end of the year. I had *earned* it. But the years just passed. By the time I was twenty-five I was sure that God had called me to be single for the rest of my life, but I couldn't understand why. Why hadn't God blessed my faithfulness?

Then it hit me. I had been using my pursuit of godliness as a down payment for the things I wanted God to provide for me. I had

been using God to fulfill my own desires. I did love Him and wanted to please Him, but my motives weren't for His glory; I was motivated by what I might gain.

Greed and godliness can never dwell in the same heart. One will be the resident, and the other will be the occasional visitor. Paul gave the antidote in verse 6: "But godliness with contentment is great gain." True gain comes when godliness is married to contentment.

The word Paul used for *contentment* is *autarkeia*. It means to be totally satisfied with what one has. It is fully sufficient. Paul used the same word in 2 Corinthians 9:8: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having *all sufficiency in all things*, may abound to every good work" (emphasis added). In the context of 1 Timothy 6:6, then, godliness is fully sufficient to give us all we need to be satisfied.

Paul then added this sobering statement: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." We should be thankful for the basic things like food and clothing; the simple pleasures of life should satisfy us. When we are not content with simply having our daily needs met, we become discontent and push for more and more. *Perhaps a new job will fix the discontentment. If this old car doesn't make me content, perhaps a new car will. Or maybe it's a new wardrobe, or even worse, a new spouse.* The enemy loves the discontent heart, but contentment rests with the simple pleasures of life that come from God.

QUESTION 2:

Why does contentment seem so elusive today?

1 Timothy 6:9-11

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

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

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

Have you ever had a craving for something sweet in the middle of the night? I'm thinking of those cravings so strong that they cause a person to get out of bed, get dressed, get in the car, and drive to the store. That's a lot of work to fill a craving! But what we crave can have a lot of power over us, so much so that it can cause us to go out of our way to satisfy it.

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

“All evil” grows out of people's love for money. The most dangerous thing this craving can cause is a wandering from the faith. At this point, people do not necessarily deny their faith, but they no longer let it play a role in their lives. If we don't seek our contentment in a godly life in Christ, our hearts are left open

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 the root of all 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 '87, 60-61.

for the enemy to fill. We are susceptible to whatever the culture throws at us.

QUESTION 3:

How can we recognize when money is becoming an idol?

Paul gave Timothy an alternate course: "flee these things." Sound advice for sure, but by itself, it is not enough. It is one thing to flee *from*; it's equally important to consider what we run *to*. Paul called Timothy—and us—to pursue six traits:

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

QUESTION 4:

How can you actively pursue one of the things Paul listed in verse 11?

1 Timothy 6:17-19

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

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

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

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

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

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

- ▶ **Don’t be highminded.** Riches can easily cause people to believe they are better than others because they have more. This arrogance is wrapped up in pride and entitlement.
- ▶ **Don’t place your trust in wealth (which is uncertain).** Money can give us a false sense of identity and a false sense of

security. Material things are bound to end one day. To place our hope—our full confidence and trust—in wealth is like driving a car and never expecting it to run out of gas. Wealth will disappear, and when it does, so will our hope.

- ▶ **Trust in God.** It's a whole different story when our hope rests in God! We have riches in God, but a different type of riches. God “giveth us *richly* all things to enjoy” (emphasis added). God doesn't provide so that we can just exist. He gives us an abundant life (John 10:10), and we can *enjoy* what He richly provides!

God is not opposed to owning riches; He is opposed to riches owning us. An easy way to determine who owns whom is to look at your receipts for the past month. How you spend your money reflects your heart. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). Set your hope and trust in Christ!

- ▶ **Do good.** Want to be rich? “Be rich in good works.” Give. Be generous. Share. This is the cure for the craving of mere earthly riches. When the rich do this, they are “laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come.” Giving here on earth is a deposit in heaven. Generosity on earth for the sake of God's kingdom results in treasures in heaven.

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

I found the way to break this entrapment: I began giving again. The only cure for greed is generosity. Generosity was unbelievably hard for me—but only the first few times. I soon transformed into a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). I could give freely and experience godly contentment.

QUESTION 5:

How do we maintain a healthy balance between money and contentment?

ENGAGE

At age _____ I had an experience that gave me great contentment. I felt a sense of overwhelming peace because I finally ...

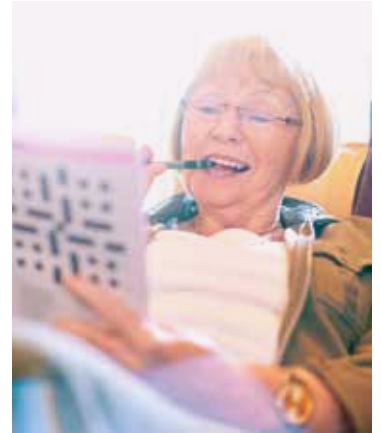
To get there it cost me ...

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

LIVE IT OUT

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.



END NOTES

1. Gregory L. Jantz, Ph.D., "The Psychology Behind Hoarding," *Psychology Today*, September 5, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-relationships/201409/the-psychology-behind-hoarding>.
2. "Most Churchgoers Say God Wants Them to Prosper Financially," *LifeWay Research*, July 31, 2018, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/07/31/most-churchgoers-say-god-wants-them-to-prosper-financially/>.