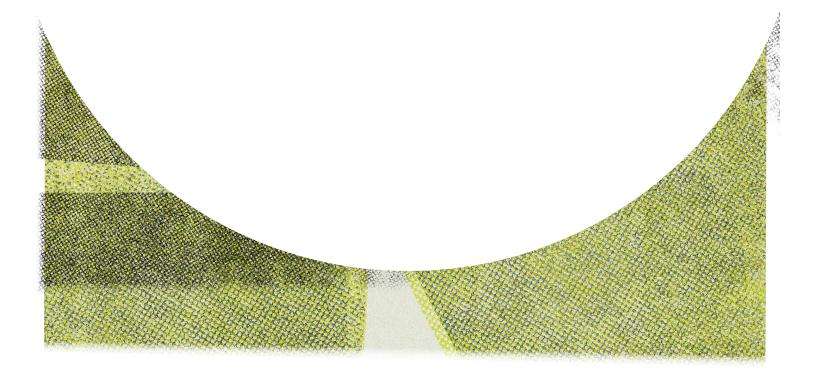


SIMPLICITY

(A Starting Point for New Groups)

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE



When Self-Help Won't Cut It

Why pay someone when you can fix the problem yourself? There's no shortage of free online blogs and videos to show how to fix anything and everything. When it comes to our lives, the same could be said. According to WordsRated.com, currently there are over 85,000 self-help books on the market, and 15,000 more books are added each year.

When it comes to our relationship with God, though, no video or book can help us fix ourselves.

We have a sin problem, and because of that very sin, we cannot remove it ourselves.

The good news is that Jesus Christ took on our sin. He had no sin of His own, yet He willingly took our sin upon Himself and paid for it on the cross. But that's not all the good news; Jesus also rose from the dead, conquering death. He forgives, removes our sin, and gives us a new, eternal life.

To embrace this gift of forgiveness and eternal life, put your faith in Christ. Admit to God that you are a sinner and ask Him to forgive you of all the wrong things you have done. Turn from the sin that has kept you from God and accept Jesus's gift of forgiveness and new life. Express your repentance and faith by praying a prayer like this:

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I'm sorry for all the wrong I've done and ask You to forgive me.

I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for forgiveness and for new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You.

In Jesus's name, Amen."

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Be baptized as an expression of your faith. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith.

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Simplicity: A Starting Point for New Groups Adult Daily Discipleship Guide

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USING THE DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

Your Daily Discipleship Guide is full of tools to help you grow as a disciple. But like any tool, you have to use it to get the benefit.

GROUP TIME

Use these pages when studying with a group. The Group Time pages help the group leader introduce a Bible passage and move you toward acting on the truths discovered.

DAILY STUDY

Use the Daily Study pages to go deeper into God's Word, building on your group's study experience. Engage in daily Bible study, record your thoughts, reflect on the questions, and take action.

TALK IT OUT

Use the Talk It Out section at the end of each session to hold yourself and others accountable by meeting in a smaller group of same-sex individuals. Share with the smaller group what God has been teaching you through the group time and your personal daily Bible study.

Use this resource every week, even when you're unable to attend your group's Bible study. Missing a group Bible study doesn't excuse you from being engaged daily with God through His Word. Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* to move forward in your spiritual growth.

INTRODUCTION

It's never our plan to complicate our lives, but it happens. Over time, we keep adding layers to our lives. We think a plate overflowing with activity, money, or possessions will lead to a cup overflowing with joy and satisfaction, but contentment eludes us. When we quit filling our lives with everything else, simplify our lives, and focus on the one thing that matters most, we find the contentment we want. And it's all wrapped up in Christ, trusting and living simply in Him.

Noe Garcia serves as senior pastor for North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, Arizona.

SESSION 1 (a centered life)



What are some things you never worry about anymore?

THE POINT When your life is ______ in Christ, you _____ all you need. Matthew 6:25-30 25 "Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? 27 Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? 28 And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don't labor or spin thread. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. 30 If that's how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won't he do much more for you-you of little faith? Don't . Matthew 6:31-32 31 So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Trust God to do what is _____ for you. Matthew 6:33-34 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. 34 Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Group Time

NOTES

(8) SESSION 1 Lifeway adults

Seek the of

above all else.

ACTIVITY

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

How has God provided for you financially?

How has God provided for your security?

How has God provided for you relationally?

LIVE IT OUT

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

- Confess. In order to overcome worry, confess the areas where you struggle to trust God. Admit your struggles with worry and allow God to begin working in you.
- Memorize. Hold strongly to the promises of God and memorize Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you." Continually remind yourself of God's promises to provide.
- Share. Find someone you trust and share the things that cause you to worry and the areas of your life where you lack a trust in God. Invite this friend to pray with you and for you.

(9) SESSION 1 Lifeway.adults

Talk it Out

NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

(10) SESSION 1 Lifeway adults

Daily Study

NOTES

KEY DOCTRINE:

God's Providence

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3; Genesis 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order, but also the individuals and events within human history.

DAY 1

We can trust God because He's our Creator who holds all authority.

Read Matthew 6:25.

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

Worry won't change anything. Who can forget the old saying that worrying is like sitting in a rocking chair. Rocking back and forth in the chair gives us something to do, but it really doesn't get us anywhere. Likewise, worrying will consume our thoughts, imprison our emotions, and take away the joy in our lives. But it won't do anything to solve the problems in life that are pressing down on us. No, worry won't change anything because it can't. But God can.

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

(11) session 1 Lifeway.adults



We can trust God because He loves us.

Read Matthew 6:26-30.

What's the best way to handle worry? Jesus taught us to take a long look into the sky. When we do, we'll find birds flying everywhere, and not a one of them seems concerned about what they'll eat. They don't give attention to planting seeds or harvesting grain. Neither do they appear to be interested in gathering and storing food just in case of an emergency. They're free from care because the Father cares and provides for them.

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

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

(12) SESSION 1 Lifeway adults

DAY 3

We can trust God because He alone gives meaning and lasting peace.

Read Matthew 6:31-32.

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

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

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

(13) SESSION 1 Lifeway adults



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

Read Philippians 4:19.

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

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

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

BIBLE SKILL:

Reflect on and memorize a verse.

Reflect on Philippians 4:19.
Focus on each phrase and how that phrase impacts a person's contentment. Memorize the verse. Use the verse in your prayers this week. How does this verse summarize Paul's message to the Philippians?

DAY 5

We can trust God to help us grow in spiritual maturity.

Read Matthew 6:33-34.

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

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

Consider your plans for the future (both immediate and long-term).

Ask God to reveal any areas where you're putting your personal "kingdom" above His kingdom. Be ready to make adjustments to seek His kingdom first.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY:

"Our final good is therefore the kingdom of God and his justice. We ought to seek this good and fix our aim upon it. Let us perform all our actions for the sake of it. Yet, since we are waging war in this life in order to be able to reach that kingdom and since this life cannot be maintained unless those necessities are supplied, he says, 'These things shall be given you besides, but seek you first the kingdom of God and his justice." —Augustine (354-430 AD)

Lifeway adults

SESSION 2
(a daily pursuit)



When can you remember being especially thirsty?



Group Time

NOTES

(17) session 2 Lifeway.adults

ACTIVITY

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



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

LIVE IT OUT

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

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

Lifeway.adults

Talk it Out

NOTES

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Philippians 4:4-9, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

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

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

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

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

(19) SESSION 2 Lifeway adults

Daily Study

NOTES

BIBLE SKILL:

Review the Use of a Word

Paul used the word translated "rejoice" six times in his letter to the Philippians: 1:18; 2:17; 2:18,28; 3:1; and 4:4. Review these six passages, noting the nature and the source of the rejoicing. What common themes do you see in these six passages related to rejoicing? How does each passage give us a different view of the same action?

DAY 1

How we begin our prayer time matters.

Read Philippians 4:4-5.

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

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

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

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

(20) SESSION 2 Lifeway.adults



In prayer, we can take all our needs to God.

Read Philippians 4:6.

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

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

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

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

(21) SESSION 2 Lifeway.adults

DAY 3

God offers us His peace in Christ Jesus.

Read Philippians 4:7.

Paul affirmed that our best efforts at comprehending God's peace always fall short. When God gives us peace in response to our prayer, we find ourselves comforted and filled with the confidence He has heard our need and He'll respond. The distance between what we know and what we need is filled with His peace that "surpasses" (v. 7) our best attempt to understand it.

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

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

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY:

"The peace of God,' which he imparted to us, 'passes all understanding.' For who could have expected and who could have hoped for such benefits? It transcends every human intellect and all speech. For his enemies, for those who hated him, for the apostates—for all these he did not refuse to give his only begotten Son, so as to make peace with them."

— Chrysostom (347-407 AD)



Daily prayer and praise focus our attention.

Read Philippians 4:8.

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

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

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

(23) SESSION 2 Lifeway.adults



Follow the godly example of other believers.

Read Philippians 4:9.

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

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

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

KEY DOCTRINE:

Cooperation

Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. (See 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.)

(24) SESSION 2 Lifeway.adults

SESSION 3 (the key to contentment)



What makes you feel especially content?

Group Time

NOTES

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True _____ comes through Christ alone.

Philippians 4:10-14 ¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. ¹² I know both how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. ¹³ I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Still, you did well by partnering with me in my hardship.

Acknowledge the strength and provision of ______.

Philippians 4:15-18 ¹⁵ And you Philippians know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent gifts for my need several times. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that is increasing to your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

generously from God's provision.

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

3 Trust God to supply your ______.

(26) SESSION 3 Lifeway adults

ACTIVITY

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

Needs Provided	Current Needs

LIVE IT OUT

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

- ➤ Choose contentment. Evaluate your heart for signs of discontentment.

 Ask yourself: Am I trusting in wealth more than I trust in Jesus? Do money and possessions bring me more joy than Jesus? Can I really say, "Christ is all I need?"
- Choose to trust. Make a daily decision not to allow circumstances determine how content you will be in this life. Memorize Philippians 4:12b-13 to remind you to simply trust Christ for all things: "In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me."
- **Choose to give.** Sometimes the cure for discontentment is to give to others. Find those with needs and give of your time, talent, or treasures.

Talk it Out

NOTES

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

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

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

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

How does our contentment provide glory to God?

(28) SESSION 3 Lifeway adults

Daily Study

NOTES

DAY 1

When we place our trust in Jesus, we can be content in any circumstance.

Read Philippians 4:10-12.

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

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

Just to make sure the Philippian church didn't get the impression Paul rejoiced over the money itself, he made a crystal-clear assertion—his joy didn't emerge from his need for something money could buy. Quite the opposite; he assured them he had become quite content. In other words, he grown to the point he could be satisfied under any condition.

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

(29) SESSION 3 Lifeway.adults



Christ is the Source of our strength.

Read Philippians 4:13-14.

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

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

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

(30) SESSION 3 Lifeway adults

DAY 3

God uses us to support His kingdom work.

Read Philippians 4:15-18.

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

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

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

KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship

God's intention for mankind is that we serve Him as faithful stewards of His creation (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2). We are to invest the time, talents, and material possessions God has given us for His kingdom work (Matthew 25:14-29), knowing that God is the true owner of all we have, and that our true treasure is found not on earth but in heaven (Matthew 6:19,21; Luke 12:16-21). Motivated by God's generosity to us made most clear in the gospel, we are to give God the best of what we have (Proverbs 3:9), regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2), sacrificially (Matthew 12:41-44), humbly (Matthew 6:1-4), and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), praying that God may be glorified in our stewardship of His provisions.



Our God has unlimited resources and riches.

Read Philippians 4:19.

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

It's important to remember that verse 19 isn't the false promise often proclaimed in the "prosperity gospel." We can't just name whatever we want and claim it. God isn't a genie who is here to answer all our commands, flood our accounts with money, and fill our homes with every possession we desire. God could certainly do that with His unlimited resources, but our contentment comes through resting in Him, not in an abundance of stuff.

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

In your Bible, highlight the phrase "according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (v. 19) as a reminder of God's abundance.

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY:

"You'll see how rich you are when you add up everything you have that money can't buy and death can't take away."

- Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)



Recognizing God's provision leads us to worship.

Read Philippians 4:20.

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

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

When we glorify God, we acknowledge that He gets all the credit. When we succeed, He gets credit for the success. When we stumble and fall, He gets credit for picking us up and putting us back on the path toward growth in Him. Our spiritual maturity isn't the result of our tremendous devotion or tenacious diligence. God alone gets credit for making us into kingdom citizens who can make an eternal difference in our world. Following Paul's affirmation of praise in this verse, God gets the credit for supplying us with the resources necessary to live for Him.

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

(33) SESSION 3 Lifeway.adults

SESSION 4 (godly contentment)



What did you enjoy collecting as a kid?

THE POINT Godliness with is great . 1 Timothy 6:6-8 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. 8 If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. Godly contentment doesn't depend on ______. 1 Timothy 6:9-11 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 11 But you, man of God, flee from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Craving more possessions only leads to . . 1 Timothy 6:17-19 17 Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, 19 storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life. Set your hope on _____ and store up riches

Group Time

NOTES

(35) session 4 Lifeway adults

in heaven.

ACTIVITY

Paul talks in 1 Timothy 6:9 about foolish and harmful desires that lead to destruction. What are some products or services emphasized in our culture that would match those categories?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you pursue godliness with contentment?

- **Be content.** Begin your day—every day—with a focus on Christ. Ask Him to transform your thoughts from self to living a godly life for Him. Commit to finding your contentment in the things God provides and choose to live for Him.
- **Be accountable.** If you struggle with craving and buying things to give you a sense of security and contentment, choose someone you trust to be your coach and mentor, holding you accountable for how you spend your resources. 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, forgo a purchase for yourself and step in to help with the need.

(36) SESSION 4 Lifeway.adults

Talk it Out

NOTES

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

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

How would you define "godliness" in your own words?

What does it look like practically to "flee" from ungodly desires and temptations?

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

(37) SESSION 4 Lifeway adults

Daily Study

NOTES



Contentment is found in pursuing godliness.

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-8.

Paul made this assertion about godliness and wealth: "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (v. 6). Two definitions will help us to understand more about Paul's words. First, godliness has to do with growing in truth about Christ. It involves putting that truth to work in everyday life. As a result, mature believers reflect the character of Christ in what they think, what they say, and how they behave.

Second, contentment carries the idea of living in a way that's independent of circumstances. Whether circumstances are favorable or unfavorable, content people exhibit a sense of confidence, certain they don't need anything. For Christians, being content doesn't mean our sufficiency comes from ourselves. Rather, our satisfaction comes from Christ. In Him, we have enough.

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

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

(38) session 4 Lifeway.adults



God's grace is a gift we can't earn.

Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

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

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

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

KEY DOCTRINE:

Justification by Faith

Justification refers to the moment when a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ's atoning death (Romans 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ and not as a result of human works or effort (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

Lifeway adults

Resist temptation and its harmful desires.

Read 1 Timothy 6:9-11.

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

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

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

BIBLE SKILL:

Review a parable of Jesus on the same subject.

Read about Jesus's encounter with the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22). What were the similarities and differences found in 1 Timothy 6? What guidance do these Scriptures provide? What adjustments might a believer need to consider to live out these passages?



(41) SESSION 4

Refuse to place your confidence in wealth.

Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

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

- Don't place your hope in wealth (which is uncertain). Money can give us a false sense of identity and a false sense of security. To place our full confidence and trust in wealth is like driving a car and never expecting it to run out of gas. Wealth will disappear, and when it does, so will our hope.
- Hope in God. We have riches in God, but a different type of riches. God "richly provides us with all things to enjoy" (v. 17, emphasis added). God doesn't provide so that we can just exist. He gives us an abundant life (John 10:10), and we can enjoy what He richly provides!
- **Do what is good.** Want to be rich? Be rich in doing good works. Give. Be generous. Share. This is the cure for the craving of earthly riches. When the rich do this, they are "storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age" (1 Timothy 6:19).

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

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Generosity transforms the heart of the giver.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:7-8.

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

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

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

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH:

- Randy Alcorn

"He who lays up treasures on Earth spends his life backing away from his treasures. To him, death is loss. He who lays up treasures in Heaven looks forward to eternity; he's moving daily toward his treasures.

To him, death is gain. He who spends his life moving away from his treasures has reason to despair. He who spends his life moving toward his treasures has reason to rejoice. Are you despairing or rejoicing?"

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SESSION 5
(a slower pace)



What's your favorite way to spend a day off?

	THE POINT
	Rest is a from
Group Time	Exodus 20:8-11 ⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: ⁹ You are to labor six days and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates. ¹¹ For the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.
	1 A day of rest is a
	Exodus 31:12-14 ¹² The Lord said to Moses: ¹³ "Tell the Israelites: You must observe my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, so that you will know that I am the Lord who consecrates you. ¹⁴ Observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Whoever profanes it must be put to death. If anyone does work on it, that person must be cut off from his people.
	2 A Sabbath rest is
	Exodus 31:15-17 ¹⁵ Work may be done for six days, but on the seventh day there must be a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord. Anyone who does work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. ¹⁶ The Israelites must observe the Sabbath, celebrating it throughout their generations as a permanent covenant. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the Israelites, for in six days the Lord

and was refreshed."

Lifeway.adults (44) SESSION 5

made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day he rested

A Sabbath rest reflects our _____ with God.

ACTIVITY

Circle the words below that best describe how you view Sabbath rest:

Requirement

Optional Necessary Difficult Unproductive

Productive Renewing Witness Relaxing Reflective

Gift

Law

LIVE IT OUT

God loves us and is very serious about His covenant with us. He knows what we need and why we need it—and that includes our need for a Sabbath rest. Consider one of these suggestions as a way to capture rest as a gift from God.

- Rest. Take a day off from any work. Rest your mind and body—and don't convince yourself you're being unproductive. Proper rest will make you more productive.
- **Refresh.** Spend time in prayer and worship, both by yourself and with others. Let the things of God fill your mind and renew you.
- Reflect. Use a journal and write down what God is teaching you. Record your evaluation of the past day or week because such reflection will spur you on to greater things.

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Talk it Out

NOTES

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

Being productive is considered a virtue in our culture, but how far do we take that? We stay busy with jobs, family activities, sports, and hobbies. We desire a simpler lifestyle, but who has the time? Productivity isn't tied to the number of things we do, but the way we use our time. God has given us a gift toward that end: rest.

What does it mean to keep a day "holy"?

What's your initial reaction to the commands in these verses?

What steps do you need to take to implement a Sabbath rest?

(46) SESSION 5 Lifeway adults

Daily Study

NOTES

DAY 1

God modeled a Sabbath rest for us.

Read Exodus 20:8.

When we study the Ten Commandments, we notice God didn't direct us to honor the Sabbath day without helping us to understand the underlying reason for taking it seriously. The reason has to do with the time frame of His work in creation. He worked for six days to create the heavens and the earth and everything He placed in them. Then He did something unique with the next day. Instead of continuing His work, He rested.

By taking the day to rest, God underscored the day in a way He wanted His people to notice. Even more, He expected them to follow His example by recognizing the day as distinctive. That's why He blessed the day. In the account of creation, we learn that the Lord blessed the people He created (Genesis 1:28). He smiled with approval on them, and He intended for their relationship to be a blessing. He affirmed His approval of the Sabbath day with a blessing too. He guided His people to set it aside as a blessing to them. Just as noteworthy, He made it a holy day, set apart completely for resting. Of course, resting involved putting aside work for the day. But it also included turning aside to worship Him. As people worshiped God, they could renew their perspective on who they were in His eyes.

Memorize Exodus 20:8. Meditate on this concise and profound command, seeking to align your life with the instruction and guidance God has given us.

KEY DOCTRINE:

The Lord's Day

The Lord's Day commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private.

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A Sabbath rest reflects our dependence on God.

Read Exodus 20:9-11.

When I completed my seminary training, I met with a council of professors. Their duty was to strengthen and prepare me for ministry and expose any weaknesses that could potentially cause me harm. In one meeting, one professor told me, "Noe, this is a marathon, not a race. If you keep going at this pace, you will burn yourself out of ministry." He was right. My workaholic personality has caused problems in my relationships, brought strain to my health, and produced ministry burnout. Why did this happen? I didn't like to stop and rest. This may sound absolutely ridiculous, but I loathe resting! However, I have discovered so many benefits to the Sabbath rest.

- Physical rest. God didn't create our bodies to run without rest. If we fail to stop on a regular basis, we will exhaust ourselves. He created the Sabbath for physical rest.
- **Spiritual refreshment.** While we are to walk with Christ daily—moment-by-moment—a Sabbath rest allows us to slow down and renew ourselves spiritually, even as we restore ourselves physically.
- ▶ **Reflection.** The Sabbath rest forces us to pause from our "busy-ness." Reflection allows us to make course corrections and realign ourselves with the will of God.

Pay attention this week to times when you need rest and when you allow yourself to rest. How might your actions affirm or deny your dependence on God?

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Observing a Sabbath rest is an act of obedience.

Read Exodus 31:12-14.

The Sabbath rest was obviously an important command for God's people. When the Israelites chose to obey God in this matter, it reflected that they belonged to God. Their obedience was an outward sign that they had entered into a covenant relationship with Him: "the LORD who consecrates you" (v. 13).

We also are called to be holy. "But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16). In Christ, we're to be set apart—to live for God in a way that is a far cry from the way the world expects us to live. That holiness is reflected in our desire to keep a Sabbath that lends itself to worship, rest, and reflection.

Review your calendar for the next three weeks. Identify what needs to change so that you can observe a Sabbath rest and make adjustments to your schedule.

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A Sabbath rest is vital to our spiritual maturity.

Read Exodus 31:15.

Neglecting to follow God's instruction and guidance leads to consequences. When Christians sin against God, we're convicted. We often feel shame, guilt, and discouragement. We've created a distance in our relationship with God. A barrier exists in the relationship. For example, when my wife and I are in a disagreement, I can't focus well. I don't eat right; I don't act the same. We experience a wall in our relationship that affects every area of my life until I clear the air with her and make it right.

The worst feeling for a Christian is living in unrepentant sin because we know it is hindering our relationship with God. Our worship, Scripture reading, and prayers are all affected. Sin impacts every area of life until we repent. The remedy is to repent of our wrong, turn back to God, and resume the holy life He calls us to live. And when we observe the Sabbath rest He gives us, we're renewed physically and spiritually. We're drawn once again to those things that keep us living for Him.

In prayer, repent of any unconfused sin and commit to follow God's instruction. Praise Him for being our Source of spiritual renewal and guidance.

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH:

"Because Jesus fulfilled the Law, and thus fulfilled the Sabbath commands, He, not some day of the week, is what offers the believers rest. We obey the Sabbath Commandment of the Decalogue as we spiritually rest in Christ, letting Him bear our heavy burdens, trusting Him for salvation, and committing our lives to Him in service, then remaining faithful in lifelong loyalty to Him."

- Craig L. Blomberg

A Sabbath rest is a witness of our commitment to God.

Read Exodus 31:16-17.

The Sabbath was a covenant between God and His people; it was a sacred pledge of commitment. When we observe a Sabbath today, it demonstrates our commitment to the Lord and His commands.

As Christians in our time and culture, we don't observe the Sabbath in the same way the Israelites in Moses' time would have observed the day, but the principle spans across all places, all times, and all cultures. The timeless truths of the Ten Commandments and the principle of a Sabbath rest still stand. We now celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every week by joining together with other believers to worship Jesus at our local churches. We celebrate the Lord's Day as a day to worship our Savior and rest from work. It is a shining sign to the world that we have been saved by Jesus. He has sanctified us and set us apart!

What activities hinder or help you enjoy a Sabbath rest? In the space below, create a practical list of things to avoid, as well as a list of things to pursue. Consider these guidelines as you seek to establish or strengthen a habit of Sabbath rest.

BIBLE SKILL:

Explore further a word or phrase used in a verse or passage.

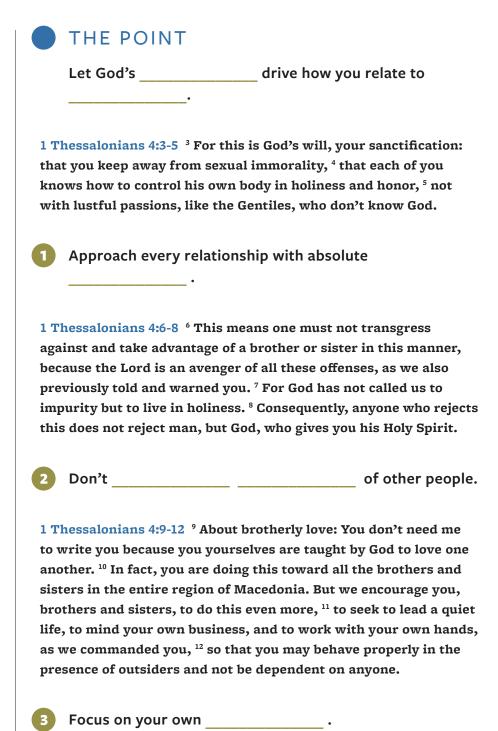
God identified Himself in various Bible passages as the One who had made a covenant with Israel. Look up the following passages and find that phrase: Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 103:17-18; and Jeremiah 31:31-34. How do these passages compare to Exodus 31:16-17? How are the situations different? How are these situations related (if at all)? What do they reveal about the importance of remembering what God has done for His people?

Lifeway adults

SESSION 6 (uncomplicated relationships)



What's your favorite friendship from TV or movies?



Group Time

NOTES

(53) session 6 Lifeway adults

ACTIVITY

Use the acrostic below to record characteristics of a life that is dedicated to purity and integrity in all relationships. An example has been given.

Prayer

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Т

Υ

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do this week so that God's love drives how you relate to others?

- **Evaluate.** Review your list of friendships and ask yourself: Why are we friends? Are we friends because the person wants something from me or I want something from them? Determine to see the people you interact with as people loved by God and not as individuals placed here to meet your needs.
- Apologize. If you have a relationship with someone that isn't Christ-honoring, seek to change that. Apologize if needed and take steps to rebuild the relationship.
- ▶ **Act.** How can you demonstrate Christ-like love to someone this week? Set aside any hindrances and put brotherly love in action. Ask God to equip you for this endeavor and pray for Him to be glorified.

Lifeway adults

Talk it Out

NOTES

Take your discipleship a step further. Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-12, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

Living a life of simplicity includes living in simplicity in our relationships with others. Just as we can simplify our lives by eliminating the demands we place on ourselves, we can simplify our relationships by eliminating the demands we place on others. We can avoid the drama that complicates our relationships with an attitude that puts Christ first, people second, and ourselves third.

Who has modeled godly relationships and friendships for you?

What kinds of boundaries maintain "holiness and honor" (v. 4) in relationships?

How have you been blessed by brotherly love from your friends?

(55) SESSION 6 Lifeway adults

Daily Study

NOTES

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY:

"The church is to be a loving church in a dying culture. How, then, is the dying culture going to consider us? . . . Upon His authority He gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians."

- Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984)

DAY 1

Pursue purity in your actions and relationships.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5.

God has a standard for sexual intimacy: it is to be experienced only between one man and one woman within a marriage relationship. Those who oppose this biblical standard say it restricts their freedom, but in truth, they're enslaved to their harmful lusts. True freedom and true enjoyment come from God's standard. An acquaintance once described a middle school experience where the PE teacher let the boys play basketball with no rules. It didn't matter how you got the ball in the hoop. A kid with the ball might be physically picked up and carried to the goal. Players even were tackled. In that moment, the teacher and students learned the value of rules. Rules free us to enjoy the game and not get hurt in the process! In the same way, living according to the rules God has laid out for our lives leads to an enjoyable life.

Following God's will regarding our sanctification and purity in relationships calls for two actions that are inseparable:

- Keep away from sexual immorality.
- Know how to control our bodies.

Who is setting the standard for purity in your life? Pray today that God would open your eyes to areas where you're following culture instead of Christ and renew your commitment to follow Him.

(56) SESSION 6 Lifeway adults



Pursue purity in your thought life.

Read Philippians 4:8.

Someone once placed a pound of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups® on my desk. For me, this was like manna straight from heaven! These cups were my weakness. However, I was starting a diet, so I placed the pound of candy in a closet out of sight. I may have "hidden" the candy, but I knew where it was. I hadn't yet learned self-control, so anytime the craving hit me, I went to the hiding place and indulged. It was too easy; temptation was a mere three steps away.

The only way I was going to stay completely away from the candy was to get rid of it, so I threw it in the trash. The same principle applies to our thoughts and behavior in relationships. We must rid ourselves of all things that led us to think or act inappropriately toward others. We won't keep immoral or inappropriate thoughts and actions away simply by "hiding" them in the closet. We must remove them completely from our lives, and in their place, we surround ourselves with relationships that encourage our purity and walk with Christ. We control our bodies even as we give our thoughts to Christ.

Identify a weak area that tempts you to sin. Repent of any unconfessed sin and ask God to help you dwell on things that are honorable and pure.

BIBLE SKILL:

Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about sanctification.

Use a Bible dictionary to dig deeper into sanctification. Find out how God sets His people apart and how sanctification fits into the progressive narrative of salvation and glorification. What makes sanctification so important to the Christian life? What is the relationship between regeneration and sanctification?

Act with integrity and selflessness.

Read Philippians 2:1-4.

No one likes to be taken advantage of, but we've all experienced it. It's disheartening when we discover someone has befriended us only for what he or she can personally gain from us.

- The guy at work who flatters you and goes out of his way to be helpful, hoping you will reciprocate with sexual favors.
- The neighbor who feigns friendship so that she can sell you something.
- The person who joins the church with hopes of gaining new clients for his business.

Layers—unwanted layers—get added to what should be a simple friendship or relationship. The person is no longer interested in us as individuals, but as a means to an end. We need to be on guard, then, to make sure we're not viewing anyone—whether our most intimate relationship or a complete stranger—as someone whose purpose is to meet our own needs. When we treat people as objects for our needs, we lose sight of the image of God in them.

Re-read Philippians 2:1-4. Underline the words or phrases that indicate actions we're to take as we pursue Christ-centered relationships.

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Pursue a life of holiness by honoring others.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:6-8.

Paul gave us three strong reasons why we shouldn't "transgress against and take advantage of a brother or sister" (v. 6).

- Such behavior is subject to punishment by God, who "is an avenger of all these offenses" (v. 6). In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul had in mind a time in the future when all sin will be judged "before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- Such behavior is inconsistent with the call "to live in holiness" (v. 7). Our fear of punishment can be a strong motivator, but a greater motivation should be our desire to please Christ. Through Christ's work, He has set us apart from sin so that we might live a life of holiness.
- Such behavior is a rejection of "God, who gives you his Holy Spirit" (v. 8). Failure to live a holy life is a failure to live under the lordship of Christ and the power of His Holy Spirit. To ignore the power of the Spirit God has given us to live holy lives constitutes rejection of the One who blessed us with His gifts.

Memorize 1 Thessalonians 4:7. Place a copy of this verse on your phone's lock screen or someplace where you will see it often.

KEY DOCTRINE:

Sanctification

After we are justified by faith, declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ, we undergo a lifetime of sanctification where we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole of a person, transforming one's heart, mind, and character to reflect that of Jesus.

Demonstrate God-centered love continually.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12.

In his message for the Thessalonian believers, Paul exhorted them to love one another. This command to express brotherly love toward one another was one these believers were already putting into practice, and Paul had no new revelation to add about love beyond what God had already taught them. The apostle may have earlier communicated Jesus' teaching on love, but certainly the Holy Spirit led them to know and understand the value and need for loving kindness. They were "taught by God" (v. 9).

The proof that the Thessalonians had received God's teaching on brotherly kindness was seen in their actions. They were doing "this toward all the brothers and sisters in the entire region of Macedonia" (v. 10). What a great testimony for any church! Consider what would happen if your group or your church became known for its brotherly love more than anything else. By displaying God-centered love in all our actions and relationships, others will take notice. That's what happened with the Thessalonians. "For the word of the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out" (1:8).

Identify a way your Bible study group can demonstrate God-centered love for someone or some family in your community. Share this with your group and make a plan to follow through. Allow God to use your group as a witness to others.

(60) SESSION 6 Lifeway adults