

The background of the page is an abstract composition of various shades of green and yellow, arranged in geometric patterns that resemble a quilt or a woven fabric. A large, solid white circle is centered on the page, creating a clean space for the text.

SIMPLICITY

(*A Starting Point for New Groups*)

LEADER GUIDE

LEADING SOMEONE TO The Greatest Decision of All

One of the great joys of leading a group in Bible study is seeing people deepen their walk with Christ. Everyone's walk with Christ begins with an initial decision to follow Him in repentance and faith. People may be in your group who have not made that decision yet.

Take advantage of your time with them to talk about becoming a Christian.

As you tell your own story about coming to Christ, share these key truths:

1. We are all sinners, and each of us needs to acknowledge that truth before God. That acknowledgement involves repentance, which is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Refer to Romans 3:23, 6:23, and Acts 3:19.
2. The only way a person can receive the gift of forgiveness is by faith in Jesus as God's Son. Use verses like Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; and John 14:6 when talking about faith in Christ.
3. Confessing your faith in Jesus Christ means both believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth that He is Savior and Lord. Share Romans 10:9-10,13.

Invite the person to pray a prayer similar to this:

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner and have rebelled against You in many ways. I believe Jesus died for my sin and only through faith in His death and resurrection can I be forgiven. I now turn from my sin and ask Jesus to forgive me and to come into my life as my Savior and Lord. From this day forward, I will choose to follow Jesus. Thank You, Lord, for loving me and for forgiving me. In Jesus name I pray, Amen."

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Simplicity: A Starting Point for New Groups
Adult Leader Guide

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USING THE LEADER GUIDE

HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY

Leading the group Bible study time is the most direct way you will help your group members grow as disciples. Each week, you will introduce your group to the Bible passage, examine the key message in that passage, and challenge the group to act on that passage. Doing so requires preparation. Begin by asking God to open your mind and heart to His Word as you study. Read the passage in your Bible, noting key words and phrases.

DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE

Review the Group pages. This content provides the foundation and direction for the discussion and study by your group. Also read the five daily studies and encourage your group to study this content during the week.

LEADER GUIDE

Review the Group Plans and make adjustments to fit the needs and personality of your group. These plans will guide you to engage your group in discussion around the Bible passage. Read the commentary to help you understand the passage. Share insights from the commentary as needed during your group discussion.



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.

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Leader Guide

NOTES

SESSION 1

A Centered Life

GETTING STARTED

LEADER (OPTIONAL): In advance, display a poster board with the outline for this study written on it. Give a brief overview of the six session titles in this study.

DISCUSS: What are some things you never worry about anymore?

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 8. Invite the group to fill in the blanks. **THE POINT:** When your life is **CENTERED** in Christ, you **FIND** all you need.

STUDY THE BIBLE

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

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 6:25-30 on page 8.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 8: Don’t **WORRY**.

DISCUSS: What kinds of things cause people to worry?
[ALTERNATE: What are some lies that cause worry to increase?]

LEADER (OPTIONAL): In advance, display a poster board with the word “Worry” written on it in large letters. As your group arrives, have pens available and instruct people to record onto the poster the kinds of things they tend to worry about. Responses can be less serious items but should include a few real issues that can lead to worry. Once everyone has arrived, discuss the responses and take a vote to determine the top three issues. Circle those top three issues on the poster.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 6:31-32 on page 8.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 8: Trust God to do what is **BEST** for you.

DISCUSS: When has God provided for you in an unexpected way?
[ALTERNATE: What are some ways people deal with worry in their lives?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 6:33-34 on page 8.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 8: Seek the **THINGS** of **GOD** above all else.

DISCUSS: What does it look like to seek God's kingdom first?
[ALTERNATE: What does Jesus promise in this passage?]

DISCUSS: How can our group help one another prioritize the kingdom of God?

DO: Instruct the group to complete the activity on page 9, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

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

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use a puzzle competition to illustrate the idea of a life "falling into place" when we're centered on Christ. **In advance**, bring two 50-piece puzzles to your gathering. Complete the border around one of the puzzles. Then divide your group into two teams and challenge them to complete their puzzles as quickly as possible. Help the group make the connection that centering our lives on Christ is like starting a puzzle with the borders already connected.

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

GUIDE: Direct the group to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 9. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **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.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 10) to guide their discussion. Encourage the group to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 11-15).

PRAY: Close with a prayer. Praise God for being the One who holds all authority and is over all things. Ask for wisdom as you seek to center your life on Jesus each day.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSES 25-26]: In these verses, Jesus challenged His followers not to worry. He confronted the inclination to be obsessed with anxiety over some of the basic needs in life. Granted, we need food and clothing. However, obsessive anxiety about these needs rob us of the quality of life He intends for us to enjoy as God’s people.

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

[VERSE 28]: After addressing our essential need for food, Jesus turned our attention to clothes. In our day, clothes protect us when we face terribly cold or awfully hot weather. In Jesus’s day, the harsh climate made the need for clothes even more critical. Without proper clothes, a person living in Israel ran the risk of being hurt or even dying because of the extreme temperatures. That’s why appropriate clothing was always a chief concern.

[VERSE 29]: King Solomon ruled over Israel with tremendous success. The Lord gave him wisdom to rule well. Because of Solomon’s wisdom, his power and wealth grew exponentially (1 Kings 4:20-34). With his wealth, he constructed the temple in Jerusalem. The elaborate construction project took seven years (6:38). Then he built his palace, which took thirteen years to complete (7:1). With these buildings alone, Solomon rendered more than

enough breath-taking beauty for Israel to see. But as Jesus confirmed, what Solomon produced didn't come close to the splendor provided by a field full of flowers.

[VERSE 31]: Jesus didn't intend to shame us or punish us with His assertion about the weakness of our faith in Him. Instead, He wants to shape our perspective. Gently but firmly, He works in us so we'll grow spiritually toward maturity in our relationship with Him. We should interpret His statement about our small faith as an appeal instead of a reprimand. He wants to take us from living with worry to walking by faith.

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

[VERSE 33]: What's our aim in life? We know from Jesus's words in the earlier verses that it shouldn't be worry over things we need. Jesus asserted that our target is the kingdom of God. He directed us to seek it. As Jesus helped us identify the target of our lives, He directed us to His righteousness. Being righteous means being right with Him. Of course, being right with Him comes by trusting in Him. That was true for Abraham (Genesis 15:6), and it's true for us too (Romans 4:16-25). Accordingly, when we seek His righteousness, our thoughts turn to living by faith in Him.

[VERSE 34]: Jesus helped us put tomorrow in its proper perspective by bringing up God's wisdom that's both simple and profound at the same time. Tomorrow's trouble will meet us then. When or if we're confronted with it, the Lord will be there. He'll get us through it by supplying what we need so we can deal with it.

Leader Guide

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SESSION 2

A Daily Pursuit

GETTING STARTED

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, secure enough bottles of water for each person in the group to have one. Distribute these to your group.

DISCUSS: When can you remember being especially thirsty?

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 17. Invite the group to fill in the blanks. **THE POINT:** Deepen your RELATIONSHIP with God by spending TIME with Him every day.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: In Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians, he thanked them for the gift they had collected for him. Throughout the letter, he returned quite often to the theme of joy in Christ. He reinforced the call for believers to rejoice by teaching them how to experience the peace God gives. God's peace resulted from spending time with Him in prayer.

LEADER (OPTIONAL): In advance, gather and bring a study Bible or commentary of the book of Philippians (or more than one if possible). Invite volunteers to give some brief background information on the book of Philippians, or you can provide a brief summary yourself.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:4-5 on page 17.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 17: **Begin your day with PRAISE.**

DISCUSS: When was the last time you really rejoiced over something?
[ALTERNATE: What's your favorite way of expressing praise to God?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:6-7 on page 17.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 17: **Pray and LEAVE your concerns in the hands of God.**

DISCUSS: What are some obstacles to experiencing the peace of God?
[ALTERNATE: When have you experienced the kind of peace described in verse 7?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:8-9 on page 17.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 17:
Fill your mind with the THINGS OF GOD.

DISCUSS: What tools and strategies have you found helpful in placing your focus on the things of God?

[ALTERNATE: Who do you know that consistently lives out these verses?]

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

DO: Instruct the group to complete the activity on page 18, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

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

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Display your bottle of water from earlier in today's session. Explain that just as we can't skip a day of drinking water and expect to feel healthy and good, we can't skip time with Jesus and expect to grow in our relationship with Him. Daily time with Jesus will enable us to know Him more and grow in our faith.

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

GUIDE: Direct the group to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 18. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **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.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 19) to guide their discussion. Encourage the group to spend time each day in God's Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 20-24).

PRAY: Close with a prayer. Thank God for the peace He gives that is unlike anything else we might pursue or strive for.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSE 4]: Take a close look at the number of times Paul encouraged the Philippian Christians to rejoice. Paul urged them to join him in rejoicing even though he happened to be in prison (Philippians 1:18). He challenged them to join him in rejoicing over the privilege he had been given to be an offering to the Lord (2:17-18). Later, he directed them to rejoice over the safe return of Epaphroditus to the congregation (v. 28). As he turned his attention to helping believers on the path of spiritual growth through difficult situations, he told them twice to rejoice (3:1; 4:4). Paul certainly intended for believers to learn the value of abiding in the joy of Christ. Because people can't count on only good things happening in their lives, they can't be happy all the time. Their happiness will be periodic at best. Dark times bring sadness, and painful experiences bring frustration, disappointment, anger, or regret. But Christians can always rejoice in the Lord. Paul underscored that sublime certainty as he urged us to embrace joy. Believers can rejoice consistently, even when sorrow takes hold of us (2 Corinthians 6:10).

[VERSE 5]: Any believer who experiences joy in Christ can testify to the way it affects us. For instance, rejoicing helps us focus our thoughts and actions more clearly on our gratitude for His grace toward us. Also, when we rejoice, we find ourselves settled and secure in Him, even when facing the toughest challenges.

Rejoicing also affects our relationships with others. Think about everyone we encounter. Some people have given their lives to Christ, while others either have rejected Him or have never heard the good news about Him. When we encounter them, Paul directed us to seize the opportunities to exhibit graciousness. It comes out of the joy in Him that's inside us. In other words, joy is the root, and graciousness is the fruit.

[VERSE 6]: The cure for worry comes in the form of prayer and petition. When we pray, we have conversations with God. In the conversations, we listen as well as talk. As we spend more time with Him in prayer, our relationship with

Him grows deeper and more rewarding. Because God has given us the honor of being His children through Christ, we can make our requests known to Him without fear or shame. Resting in the assurance He loves us, we trust God to listen to us and to know what's best for us.

[VERSE 7]: God's peace is more than a compromise or a truce. It's a deep and abiding sense of the Lord's comforting and sustaining presence in our lives, even during the worst storm or the most vicious battles. When we go to God with our needs and concerns, we remain confident He will answer our prayer. While we wait for His answer, He gives us His peace, a profound sense of His presence that settles and strengthens us.

[VERSE 8]: When we gave our lives to Christ, He renewed us "in the spirit of your minds" (Ephesians 4:23). In other words, He transformed the way we think so we could get His perspective on the world in which we live, and His plan for us. Such spiritual transformation begins the very moment we receive Christ, but it doesn't stop there. On the contrary, it's an adventure that will continue for as long as we live. For that reason, giving consideration to disciplining our minds is a wise choice. When we discipline our thoughts, we place ourselves on the path toward spiritual maturity.

[VERSE 9]: Without hesitation, Paul counseled the Philippian Christians to follow the example he had set for them as they translated godly thoughts into worthwhile actions. He added that his companions who walked with the Lord also provided a worthy pattern for them to follow (Philippians 3:17).

Leader Guide

NOTES

SESSION 3

The Key to Contentment

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: What makes you feel especially content?

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 26. Invite the group to fill in the blanks. **THE POINT:** True **CONTENTMENT** comes through Christ alone.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Capitalize on the word “Key” from the session title “The Key to Contentment” by asking the group to take out their key rings. First, ask if anyone has any keys that are so old they no longer remember which lock they go with. Then ask the group to describe any keys that are connected with something interesting or obscure. Explain that in our study of Philippians 4, we’ll get a deeper look into Paul’s “key” to contentment that allowed him to face any kind of circumstance.

STUDY THE BIBLE

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

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:10-14 on page 26.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 26: Acknowledge the strength and provision of **GOD**.

DISCUSS: What obstacles keep us from experiencing contentment?
[ALTERNATE: Why is God’s strength a necessary ingredient for contentment?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:15-18 on page 26.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 26: **GIVE** generously from God’s provision.

DISCUSS: How can we practically support and care for one another?
[ALTERNATE: When has someone’s generosity overwhelmed you?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:19-20 on page 26.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 26: Trust God to supply your **NEEDS**.

DISCUSS: How have you experienced God supplying your needs?
[ALTERNATE: What truths about God encourage you to be generous?]

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

DO: Instruct the group to complete the activity on page 27, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

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

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

GUIDE: Direct the group to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 27. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **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.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 28) to guide their discussion. Encourage the group to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 29-33).

PRAY: Close with a prayer. Praise God for being the Source of our contentment.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSES 10-12]: The situation Paul faced in Rome must have been full of changes. One day he might have everything he needed to pay his living expenses while waiting to appear before Caesar. The next day might find him with very little. Through the ups and downs of his situation over the course of his ministry, he had to gain wisdom on how to adapt to all the changes happening in his life.

[VERSE 13]: In his world filled with limitations, Paul came to grasp that his reliance on Christ made all the difference. Christ helped replace distress with contentment. In fact, Paul’s relationship with Christ made him grow confident. He rested in the assurance nothing he faced would get the best of him because of the presence of Christ.

How did Jesus help him? Paul affirmed the Lord gave him the strength he needed to push through adversity. Jesus also kept him from getting lazy during those times he enjoyed plenty. No matter what happened, he counted on Christ to empower him. His sufficiency proved to Paul that he could rest in contentment. The Lord would make him strong when he was weak (2 Corinthians 12:10). Paul’s contentment came from his reliance on Christ alone.

[VERSE 14]: What the Lord taught him about contentment didn’t diminish his gratitude for the Philippian Christians. Quite the opposite, he appreciated what they had done for him, the selfless and sacrificial decision to send the offering. They showed their spiritual maturity when they determined to provide Paul with their support in his missionary endeavors.

[VERSE 15]: As Paul reflected on his relationship with the church at Philippi, he elaborated on the unselfish way the congregation supported him early in his work. Their partnership with him had quite a history. It went back to the time when Paul responded to the Macedonian call and made his way to Philippi to preach the gospel of Christ there (Acts 16:1-13). In Philippi, Lydia gave her

life to Christ, as did the Philippian jailer and his family (vv. 14-34). When Paul determined he needed to leave the region of Macedonia, the Philippian church supplied him with resources to use as he continued to preach the good news of Christ wherever he went.

[VERSE 16]: From Philippi, Paul traveled to Thessalonica, a city teeming with people who needed to hear about Jesus. It also turned out to be another place Paul encountered fierce and cruel opposition. Jewish leaders instigated a mob-like uproar when locals from the marketplace accused Paul and his companions of stirring up trouble. The tumultuous situation became dangerous for Paul. His Christian friends urged him to leave the city (17:1-10).

[VERSES 17-18]: Paul wanted to make sure his Christian friends didn't misunderstand the reason for his joy over receiving their gift. He rejoiced over the money, but not for what he could obtain with it. He had learned the secret of contentment that came from trusting Christ completely for his needs, so he had not given himself to worrying over any lack of resources. Paul assured the Philippian Christians he had plenty of resources now. In fact, he had more than enough, thanks to their generosity. In this verse, Paul portrayed their gift as an offering to the Lord.

[VERSES 19-20]: Paul assured them God would supply what they would need so they could serve Him well. As they would see for themselves, the Lord would furnish them with everything necessary for their work to succeed. Paul affirmed the resources wouldn't come from a source that had limits. It wouldn't be like a checking account that constantly ran the risk of being overdrawn because of a paltry account balance. Quite the opposite, these resources would come from "riches." A descriptive term, the word called to mind a wealth of resources that would never be depleted.

Paul went on to connect the riches to glory. Of course, glory belonged to God alone. God intended to be glorified through His people. And as God's people glorified Him, they could be certain He would supply them with what they needed. Therefore, when the Philippian church gave to God by caring for Paul with their gift, they could count on God to provide what they needed in order to continue to serve Him.

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

Leader Guide

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SESSION 4

Godly Contentment

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: What did you enjoy collecting as a kid?

LEADER (OPTIONAL): If you created a poster of this Bible study outline, display it again and briefly review the titles for the past three sessions.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 30. Invite the group to fill in the blanks. **THE POINT:** Godliness with CONTENTMENT is great GAIN.

STUDY THE BIBLE

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

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:6-8 on page 35.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 35: Godly contentment doesn't depend on POSSESSIONS.

DISCUSS: Why does contentment seem so elusive today?

[ALTERNATE: When has a desire for a specific possession led you to feel discontented?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:9-11 on page 35.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 35: Craving more possessions only leads to RUIN.

DISCUSS: What kinds of "traps" can an unhealthy pursuit of wealth create?

[ALTERNATE: What part of Paul's instruction in verse 11 do you find most challenging?]

DISCUSS: How can we recognize when money is becoming an idol?

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Timothy 6:17-19 on page 35.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 35: Set your hope on **GOD** and store up riches in heaven.

DISCUSS: What would it look like to obey Paul's commands in these verses today?

[ALTERNATE: What truths about God help you put your hope in Him, rather than your possessions?]

LEADER (OPTIONAL): If you created one, display the poster with this Bible study outline once again. Divide group members into smaller groups of three to four members each. Review the three ideas discussed in today's session. **Ask:** "Which of these truths do you find easy to live out and which are challenging?" Allow time for groups to discuss. Invite volunteers to share responses.

DO: Divide the group into subgroups of three or four people each. Invite subgroups to complete the activity on page 36, together. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

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

LIVE IT OUT

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, secure a Monopoly® game board. Display the playing board to your group and **ask**, "How do you win a game of Monopoly? What's your strategy?" Allow time for responses. Explain that the winner is typically the player who has acquired the most property, placed houses on those properties, collected rent, and amassed the most money without going bankrupt. **Say**, "If we're not careful, our real life pursuits might begin to reflect this same goal at all costs. First Timothy 6:6-11,17-19 teaches us that having wealth isn't the problem, but loving wealth can lead to destruction. Instead, we're to pursue godliness, which leads to contentment."

SAY: "How will you pursue godliness with contentment?"

GUIDE: Direct the group to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 36. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **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.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 37) to guide their discussion. Encourage the group to spend time each day in God's Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 38-42).

PRAY: Close with a prayer. Praise God for providing all we need so that we might experience contentment and godliness.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSE 6]: False teachers had caused trouble in the church at Ephesus. That's why Paul placed Timothy in charge of the congregation. Some of the false teachers had come to believe being godly could make one rich (1 Timothy 6:5). Paul responded by making an assertion about wealth. He agreed godliness could be a great gain, but it had to be accompanied by contentment and wasn't particularly financial.

[VERSES 7-8]: In Paul's day, the necessities for life basically included something to eat and something to wear. Christians who had food and clothing didn't have to be distracted by the eagerness to get more for themselves.

[VERSE 9]: Indulging ourselves with luxuries and pleasures that come from money can be harmful to us. Paul insisted that when we crave wealth, we're being led into temptation. Although we may not know it at the time, the temptation to have more lures us into a trap. The trap is set by what we desire; the temptation to have it lures us toward the snare. In stark contrast to what an obsession with riches can do to us, Jesus taught that life overflowing with fulfillment comes from a relationship with Him (John 10:10).

[VERSE 10]: While loving Christ brings incredible joy, loving money renders something entirely different. Notice Paul's choice of words as he continued to warn Christians about money. He didn't say money itself is evil. For growing Christians, money serves as one of the tools that can be used to provide us with what we need so we can serve the Lord in keeping with His kingdom plan for us.

[VERSE 11]: Paul told Timothy to run away from the temptation to be obsessed with possessions. He was quite specific with his command for Timothy to flee. Others in the church had obviously embraced the notion they could profit financially by practicing godliness before the church. Their example may have been tempting. Therefore, the only way Timothy could avoid it was to run away from it as fast and as far as possible.

[VERSE 17]: Paul wanted to make sure Timothy taught God's people in Ephesus how to handle their money wisely. Of course, the wise use of money involved handling it so Christ would be glorified. Some Christians in the fellowship must have been wealthy. Paul urged Timothy to set them on the path of fulfillment that would come from using their riches to serve the Lord.

[VERSE 18]: Our resources give us opportunities to do "what is good." Paul was quite specific when he urged us to nourish hearts of generosity that prompt us to share what we have with others who need it.

[VERSE 19]: When we take Paul's instruction seriously, we come to understand what he meant by "treasure." The insight into how to use our resources as we devote ourselves to the Lord has a positive effect on people we help when we share with them. But something else happens when we're generous with others who need help. We find we've experienced a blessing too. In turn, the blessing becomes a treasure we enjoy.

Paul taught that the treasure believers enjoyed would be stored up for the future. He didn't mean to imply people could earn eternal life by doing good work for others. He simply affirmed a spiritual reality Jesus taught believers. Jesus instructed His followers to lay up heavenly treasure for themselves. He compared it to treasure on earth that always ran the risk of disappearing. When people invested in it, they had to live with the risk. But when believers invested in heavenly treasure, they would never lose it (Matthew 6:19-20).

Leader Guide

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SESSION 5

A Slower Pace

GETTING STARTED

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, collect a few travel guides or vacation planners. Pass these around the group as you discuss the question below. Encourage volunteers to talk about which activities or places would best fit with their ideals for rest and relaxation.

DISCUSS: What would your ideal day of rest and relaxation include?

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 44. Invite the group to fill in the blanks. **THE POINT:** Rest is a GIFT from GOD.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: The Lord had delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and had set them on the journey to the promised land. Along the way, He led them to meet Him at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19–20). There the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments. When God spoke the commandments, the Israelites responded with great fear and reverence to the Lord (20:18-21). Then the Lord directed Moses to instruct them regarding the laws associated with the commandments (20–31).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 20:8-11 on page 44.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 44: A day of rest is a COMMAND.

DISCUSS: What distractions can keep us from resting and reflecting on the Sabbath?

DISCUSS: What benefits of practicing a Sabbath rest resonate with you? [ALTERNATE: How would you describe your experiences with obeying the Sabbath?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 31:12-14 on page 44.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 44: A Sabbath rest is HOLY.

LEADER (OPTIONAL): In advance, bring a Bible dictionary and invite a volunteer to share a brief word study on the term “Sabbath,” as well as how this was practiced in biblical times.

DISCUSS: By observing the Sabbath, what are we declaring about God?
[ALTERNATE: By observing the Sabbath, what are we declaring about ourselves?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud Exodus 31:15-17 on page 44.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 44: A Sabbath rest reflects our **RELATIONSHIP** with God.

DISCUSS: How can we practically implement a Sabbath rest?
[ALTERNATE: How does a Sabbath rest reflect our relationship with God?]

DO: Divide the group into subgroups of three or four people each. Invite subgroups to complete the activity on page 45 together. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

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

Optional	Necessary	Difficult	Unproductive
Productive	Renewing	Witness	Relaxing
Reflective	Requirement	Gift	Law

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Invite the group to gather into the same subgroups they formed earlier to complete the activity. **Ask:** “How have your views on a Sabbath rest changed or been strengthened by today’s study?” Allow time for discussion. Afterwards, invite volunteers to share their subgroup’s responses with the entire group.

LIVE IT OUT

SAY: “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.”

GUIDE: Direct the group to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 45. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

- ▶ **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.** Journal what God is teaching you. Record your evaluation of the past day or week because such reflection will spur you on to greater things.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 46) to guide their discussion. Encourage the group to spend time each day in God's Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 47-51).

PRAY: Close with a prayer. Praise God for knowing what we need and providing for our physical and spiritual refreshment.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[EXODUS 20:8-9]: When the Lord gave His commandments on Mount Sinai, He expected His people to take them seriously as moral laws. Honoring them would render wholesome outcomes for them. However, ignoring them would have a harmful effect on His people.

Therefore, taking the fourth commandment to heart makes sense for believers today. But what's the meaning of the Sabbath day to Christians? It's a day in which we stop the work we're doing and turn our attention to resting. The Lord referred to the Sabbath day as holy. "Holy" gives the impression we set apart the Sabbath day from the other days of the week. On each of those six days we give ourselves to working.

[VERSE 10]: The fourth commandment included everyone within Israel. The Lord directed each family to keep the Sabbath day, and He made no room for any exceptions. Children, slaves, and foreigners who worked with an Israelite family had to stop and rest on that important day of the week. Even livestock had to be given the privilege of rest.

[EXODUS 31:12]: In Exodus 20, God gave the Ten Commandments to His people at Mount Sinai. Next, in Exodus 24-30, the people learned how God wanted them to construct a tabernacle (chapter 26) to serve as a sanctuary as they made their way through the wilderness to the promised land. The tabernacle had to be constructed and furnished. Once complete, it would be where the people would worship God. The Lord gave Moses several instructions to communicate to the Israelites in 31:13-17.

[VERSE 13]: God wanted Moses to tell His people that their worship would distinguish them. The tabernacle would provide them with the location for their worship. They would gather there and worship the Lord according to His instructions. Likewise, the Sabbaths would provide them with the times for their worship. By setting the Sabbath day aside for worship, they would set themselves apart from other nations. Worshiping God every Sabbath would be a sign. It would signal their devotion to Him and the expression of it in their worship. Worshiping God on the Sabbath would also have a spiritual

impact on His people too. They would live in the awareness He had consecrated them to be His people. He would continue to set them apart to Himself. Worshipping Him at the tabernacle every Sabbath day would reinforce their devotion to Him and their joy over being in His presence. Their Sabbath worship would also prompt other nations to sit up and take notice of Israel's distinctive place in the world.

[VERSES 14-15]: The Lord knew some of His people would insult Him and the holiness of the day with their rebellious behavior. If they took such a foolish approach, they would suffer serious consequences. The Lord set the day apart; He expected His people to treat it as a holy day too. When they didn't, they could expect to be put to death. He reserved such a severe penalty for grave crimes such as murdering another person, striking one's parents, kidnapping someone, or engaging in perversion (Exodus 21:12-17; 22:19).

[VERSE 16]: This verse drives home the reality that God wants His people in all generations to take a Sabbath rest and spend time in worshipping Him. God intended for the Sabbath day to be a gift for His people. The Lord stressed His intentions for us to make the Sabbath day's rest a permanent part of our walk with Him.

[VERSE 17]: Honoring the Sabbath day strengthens one's relationship with the Lord and His people. In the Old Testament, it served as a sign that pointed to the fact the Israelites worshiped and served Him alone. People in other nations could see for themselves the devotion of Israelites to the Lord by the way they kept the Sabbath. However, keeping the Sabbath would enable the people of Israel to understand the value of the sign too. They would see it as a sign of the relationship they enjoyed with Him. By honoring the Sabbath day as holy, they signaled the depth of their devotion to Him.

Leader Guide

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SESSION 6

Uncomplicated Relationships

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: What's your favorite friendship from TV or movies?

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 53. Invite the group to fill in the blanks. **THE POINT:** Let God's LOVE drive how you relate to OTHERS.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, gather enough sections of rope or shoelaces for each person to have one. Call attention to the word "uncomplicated" in the title for this session. Pass out the sections of rope or shoelaces to each person and encourage them to tie a complicated knot. Then have each person pass the rope to the person on their right. Challenge everyone to untie their knot within three minutes. Afterward, tell your group that you're going to engage a complicated issue in today's material, but you know God's Word can help "untie" the problem.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians to encourage Christians as they struggled to serve the Lord in a challenging environment. He also wanted to give them complete assurance about the return of Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 4, he provided practical instruction on how to grow toward maturity in relationships with each other as Christian siblings. At the heart of his instruction was an eagerness for believers to allow God's love to saturate their interpersonal relationships.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 on page 53.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 53: Approach every relationship with absolute PURITY.

DISCUSS: Where do you see evidence of sexual corruption in today's culture? [ALTERNATE: What are some relationship landmines prevalent in today's culture?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 4:6-8 on page 53.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 53: Don't TAKE ADVANTAGE of other people.

DISCUSS: What do these verses reveal about how God views our relationships?
[ALTERNATE: When have you recently had an opportunity to stand for holiness in the face of immorality?]

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 on page 53.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 53:
Focus on your own **ACTIONS**.

DISCUSS: What are some words that should describe godly relationships?

DISCUSS: What are some practical steps we can take to live the kind of life Paul describes?

[ALTERNATE: Where do you currently have opportunities to show God's love to others?]

DO: Instruct the group to complete the activity on page 54, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses. [**Note:** This activity includes an acrostic of the word PURITY with space for responses and the example word "Prayer" for the letter P.]

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.

P *Prayer*

U

R

I

T

Y

LIVE IT OUT

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

GUIDE: Direct the group to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 54. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer life this week.

► **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.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 55) to guide their discussion. Encourage the group to spend time each day in God's Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 56-60).

PRAY: Close with a prayer. Thank God for the people He has placed into your life and ask Him to reveal opportunities to demonstrate Christ-like love and purity in those relationships.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSE 3]: Believers in Thessalonica had devoted themselves to Christ, but they still needed to grow in Him. Paul referred to the challenge of growing from spiritual infancy to maturity in God as "sanctification." The Greek term meant being set apart for God. For Thessalonian believers, it underscored the process in which they grew to be mature followers of Christ who had been set apart to worship and serve Him alone.

One area of sanctification that needed the Thessalonian Christians' attention dealt with sexual purity in their relationships with each other. The city of Thessalonica fostered a culture of sexual immorality. The culture prompted people to live without any sexual restraints. When people immersed in the culture became Christians, they had to grow spiritually so they could nourish God's attitude about sexual purity. As a result of that growth, they would abstain from immorality.

[VERSES 4-5]: When we make up our minds that we're going to avoid sexual immorality in our interpersonal relationships, we set ourselves on the path of discipline. We learn how to bring our bodies under control. For people under the control of lust, a person's body isn't meant to honor the Lord. It's little more than a tool for selfish pleasure. A closer investigation reveals that giving in to lust leads to being controlled by it. Paul warned Christians about the power of lust to reign over us (Romans 6:12). Peter gave believers similar warnings (2 Peter 1:4; 2:10).

[VERSES 6-7]: Sexual immorality reflects another problem for Christians. It causes us to take advantage of other people. We take advantage of others when we disregard them as individuals to be respected, regarding them only as opportunities for satisfying our lust. Crossing the line by taking advantage of

the trust among believers won't go unnoticed. Paul assured believers the Lord wouldn't overlook such damaging behavior.

[VERSE 8]: When we gave our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit came to live in us and began to help us. He helped us then, and He continues to help us now. As we grow, the Holy Spirit keeps on working in us to renew our minds, warm our hearts, and strengthen our resolve. Each day, He enables us to live out the call to be set apart for Christ alone (Romans 8:9-11). The process of sanctification is possible only because of the Holy Spirit's involvement. Therefore, a Christian who ignores God's standard has also turned a deaf ear to the work of His Spirit.

[VERSES 9-10]: Paul affirmed that he didn't need to teach about this kind of love because God had already taught them. Thanks to God, they could identify it and live it out in their interpersonal relationships. As Paul affirmed the Thessalonian Christians, he commented on the reach of their love. Not only did they love one another in their church family, their love reached Christians throughout Macedonia.

[VERSE 11]: By the way we live each day, we demonstrate we have a relationship with Christ that sets us apart. Paul pointed us to three practical expressions of our uniqueness that believers should take seriously. First, we're challenged to live quiet lives. That challenge would have made sense to the Thessalonian believers. The church had experienced quite a controversy in the city. Opposition to the message of Christ led to a public outcry against Paul, as well as the congregation (Acts 17:5-9). Without compromising that message, Paul urged believers to strive for quiet relationships.

Second, we're urged to stay focused on our own business. Some of the believers in the Thessalonian church had become idle and had turned into busybodies who tried to get involved in matters that didn't concern them (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

Third, we're directed to work. The Jewish people in those days had a solid work ethic, but the Romans perceived work as an impediment. Work got in the way of their ambition to fulfill their desires. Therefore, a Christian's work ethic made a statement about his or her spiritual priorities.

[VERSE 12]: As believers, when we walk properly, we say something to the outsiders who watch us. With our actions, we show them the connection between what we believe and how we behave.

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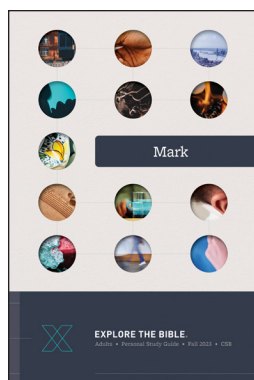


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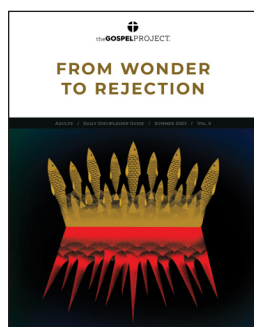


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