

## STUDY GUIDE

**PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**PHILIPPIANS: CITIZENS OF HEAVEN LIVING ON EARTH**  
**THE SECRET TO CONTENTMENT**  
**PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13; 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10**  
**11/19/2017**



### MAIN POINT

The secret to finding contentment is trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and seeking joy in Him.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Think about the past week. What is one thing you saw and thought, “I have got to have that”?**

**Why are we not content with just the basic necessities?**

**How does our culture fuel discontentment?**

Our materialistic culture leads us to believe we need all the things we want. Advertisers push us to buy with the promise that an item will make us happy and bring satisfaction. We buy into this philosophy of greed and discontent, always wanting more and never being satisfied. Contentment happens by moving the focus of contentment from stuff to God.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13 AND 4:19.**

**How does Paul’s view of contentment compare with the modern world’s view of contentment?**

**Why does God want His children to be content? What is He trying to teach us?**

Paul stated that he was content no matter what his circumstances. The word “contentment” Paul used in this passage is a term that describes an inner spirit of freedom and discipline, the ability to conquer circumstances and situations rather than be conquered by them. Because of his faith and trust in Christ, Paul was able to live triumphantly above changing circumstances. In order to find contentment in Christ, we must learn to trust God to meet our needs in the way He knows is best for us.

**Read verse 13 again. What made Paul’s contentment possible? What do you think that contentment looks like in real life?**

Paul knew that godliness goes hand in hand with contentment, and he wanted Timothy to understand this. When we're focused on living God-honoring lives, our contentment is measured by what God is doing in us rather than what we have. In order to understand true contentment, we have to reject the notion that it has anything to do with accumulating material possessions or earthly success.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:1-5.**

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**What can we learn about contentment from Paul's charge to slaves in verse 1? How might it relate to our role as an employee or an employer?**

The word for "slave" in verse 1 probably refers to indentured servants who sold themselves into slavery to pay off their debt. Though this type of slavery is not analogous to modern-day slavery, it is certainly not an ideal circumstance. Yet Paul challenges such slaves to regard their masters "with all honor" for the purpose of honoring God and not reviling the gospel.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10.**

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**How does godliness relate to contentment? What are some ways we can strive for godliness?**

The word "godliness" suggests an attitude focused on God and doing what pleases Him. It depicts a reverence that recognizes that we live each moment before God. The more godly we become the more content we will be. Contentment isn't based on what we have, it's based on whose we are. Without a desire to be more and more like the One who created us, we won't experience contentment.

**When we struggle to be content, what are we saying about our view of God and our relationship with Him?**

**What do you think is the "great gain in godliness with contentment" (v. 6)?**

**How does recognizing the shortness of life (v. 7) change our perspective on money?**

To find contentment in Christ, we must learn to trust God to meet our needs in the manner He knows is best.

**How can the desire to be rich become a snare (v. 9)?**

**How can a desire for money affect people spiritually? In what ways can it cause them to wander away from the faith (v. 10)?**

Notice the progression in verse 9 (from temptation to snare to senseless and harmful desires to ruin and destruction). Everyone is tempted, and the temptations in and of themselves are not sins. However, the danger often comes in focusing on these temptations more than God and the opportunity He always provides for a way to stand up under them (see 1 Cor. 10:13). In regards to money, He may do so through an opportunity to generously steward and give away the very things threatening to ensnare us. Otherwise, individuals trapped by their longings for riches become full of senseless and harmful desires for that which we cannot take into eternity. When life is built on the illusion that wealth can bring contentment, it only plunges us into ruin and destruction.

**How is verse 10 often misquoted? What's the difference in meaning between the way it's misquoted ("Money is the root of all evil") and the way it actually reads? Why is this difference important?**

Money is not evil in and of itself. If we as believers follow the many biblical principles of godliness and stewardship, God will enable us to act as His hands and feet on earth, glorifying His name and accomplishing much good for His

kingdom through generosity and eternal investments. However, when we love money, we take our eyes off the One who is of infinitely greater worth. Jesus made it clear that we can either love God or we can love money, but we cannot love both (see Matt. 6:24).

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**We have seen contentment doesn't come from something, but from someone. How might this realization change the way you pursue contentment?**

**What do your possessions say about the condition of your heart before God? What do they say about what you value?**

**What steps could you take this week to deepen your joy in Christ rather than your possessions and money?**

## PRAY

Pray that God would help us to see past the lies of the world that tempt us to seek satisfaction in temporary things.

## COMMENTARY

### PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13

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4:11. "Learned" (Greek perfect tense) implies a lesson resulting in better knowledge. "Content" (literally "self-reliant") is self-sufficiency that grows out of trust in Christ.

4:12. "I know" results from evaluating various circumstances. The difficult circumstances are "have a little", "hungry," and "need." The contrasting good "are a lot... well fed... abundance." Together these taught Paul how to be content.

4:13. "All things" refers to the economic fluctuations of life (v. 12). "Through Him who strengthens me" teaches that Christ empowers believers to live in God's will. Paradoxically, Paul was strong when he was weak; independent only when dependent. Such is the life of a disciple.

**Max Anders, Galatians-Colossians, vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary**

4:11. Paul makes clear that he was not hinting for another gift. He has solved his economic problems. How? Not with new resources but with a new attitude. He is content no matter what his circumstances. What is such contentment? It is a term apparently taken over from Stoic philosophers describing an inner spirit of freedom and discipline, the ability to conquer circumstances and situations rather than be conquered by them. Such an attitude is the exact opposite of worry and anxiety.

4:12–13. Paul spoke from experience. He had been through the extremes: surplus and poverty. He knew how to weather the dangers of both. This was his secret. Greek and Roman religions had secret initiation rites. Some religions and philosophies prided themselves on secret knowledge. Paul had a different kind of secret. His secret was his reliance on Christ, a reliance gained through his Christian experience. Stoics relied on personal will to gain contentment. Paul did not claim such personal inner strength. His strength came from Jesus living in him. Paul was in Christ and thus content no matter what his circumstances.

J. Vernon McGee writes: *Whatever Christ has for you to do, He will supply the power. Whatever gift He gives you, He will give the power to exercise that gift. A gift is a manifestation of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. As long as you function in Christ, you will have power. He certainly does not mean that he is putting into your hand unlimited power to do anything you want to do. Rather, He will give you the enablement to do all things in the context of His will for you* (McGee, *Thru the Bible*, V:327–8).

The Christian life is not only difficult; it is also impossible unless we acquire the power to live it through Christ. To be sure, this truth does not come naturally to us but must be learned.

6:6. In contrast to false teachers who were motivated by selfish greed (vv. 3-5), Paul urged believers to seek godliness with contentment. The Greek word translated “contentment” refers to self-sufficiency. In Greek philosophy, the word denoted a wise man’s independence of circumstances. It meant to become independent of outside support and to find all you need in yourself. To Paul, however, contentment was not found in himself but in Jesus Christ. Christian contentment is Christ-sufficiency, not self-sufficiency. Paul said to the Philippians, “In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content” (Phil. 4:12, HCSB). How so? Paul said he was “able to do all things through Him” (v. 13) because Christ had strengthened him.

Why is godliness with contentment great gain? Paul did not refer to destitute Christians, those who did not have even the basic necessities for human survival. No person can be content with destitution. He referred to godly people who had food and clothing and who felt content with that.

6:7. Paul then referred to a true fact related to human birth and death—for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. The Greek sentence begins with nothing for emphasis. Job said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return” (Job. 1:21; see also Eccl. 5:15). We were born into this world penniless, and when we die, we are penniless once again. Our entrance into life is identical to our exit from life. Our brief life on planet Earth is a journey between two states of having nothing. As someone said, “There are no pockets in a shroud.” Every human being starts life in the same financial condition—with nothing. You did not even have a diaper until your parents gave you one. Family can bury their dead in a display of wealth, but they leave behind everything they accumulated. Whether we have little or much, we have it only for a little while. Material gain is only the traveling baggage of time, not the luggage of eternity. Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19-20).

6:8. Since we enter life with no possessions in hand and leave the same way, what should be our attitude toward material things? Paul said, if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. Necessities are essential to our existence; luxuries aren’t. Food and clothing meet our basic needs. The Greek word translated “clothing” also means “house,” so shelter likely is included in the necessities.

Many Christians are in financial bondage. It’s because they did not learn to be content with the basic needs of life—food and clothing. They mistakenly added to the list of necessities a newer car, a bigger house, luxury items, and the newest gadget to come on the market. This passage calls us back to simpler living with God at the center of life. Real spiritual contentment occurs when you are Christ-sufficient.

6:9. “Those who desire to be rich” describes people motivated by money and possessions. The Bible has many warnings against covetousness (see Ex. 20:17; Ps. 49:10-20; Prov. 28:20; 30:7-9; Eccl. 5:10; Luke 12:13-21). The Bible also tells of many who came to grief because of it (Adam and Eve, Achan, Judas, and Ananias and Sapphira.)

People who walk the path of greed, who want to be rich, walk into peril. First, they fall into temptation, such as temptation to steal or lie or cheat. The snare that entraps them often is moral compromise. Second, when desire for riches goes unchecked, people fall into many senseless and harmful desires, such as lust for power and prestige. Money becomes an addiction—more money only inflames desire for more money. Greed is senseless (not rationally defensible) and harmful (brings bondage). Finally, greedy people, whether poor or rich, plunge themselves into ruin and destruction. The imagery is of people who are sinking and then drowning. Greed destroys marriages and causes men and women to jeopardize health and emotional well-being. Jesus warned about the eternal destruction that comes to those controlled by greed (see Luke 16:14-31). It was the rich man’s preoccupation with the world’s wealth that caused him to neglect his soul.

6:10. Ruin and destruction come because the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. This may be the most misquoted verse in the Bible. Paul did not say that money is the problem; the problem is the love of money. The Bible has much to say about money, primarily with regards to our stewardship of it. Jesus spoke much about money, because it is how we view and use money that tells where our devotion is. It is our attitude toward money that gets us into trouble.