

## STUDY GUIDE

**NEW VISION  
SURVIVALIST  
CONTENTMENT  
1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19  
01/22/2017**



### MAIN POINT

The greatest riches in the universe are in Christ, and the gospel proclaims his grace to us.

### INTRODUCE

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

**How do you define contentment? In your own experiences, what have you discovered to be the key to contentment?**

**In what circumstances do you most typically struggle to be content? Why? Are there any recurring themes for you?**

Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:9 that the desire to be rich plunges people into ruin. He didn't point out that greed could mess up your marriage or your business (which it certainly can!) He is saying that covetousness can mess up your eternity. Or, as 1 Timothy 6:10 says, "It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (literally: "impaled themselves with many pains"). That sounds painful! Those who desire to be rich, who *love* money, will depart from the faith. The gospel and greed are mutually exclusive. This is why Jesus said that, "You cannot serve God and money" (Luke 16:13). Mercifully, God has gone the extra mile in the Bible to warn us that the idolatry of covetousness is a no-win situation. It's a dead-end street in the worst sense of the word. It's a trick and a trap. An eternal perspective (v. 7) helps believers to avoid the trap of greed; they can learn to be content with what God has given them, even if it consists of only food and clothing. The greatest riches in the universe are in Christ, and the gospel proclaims His grace to us. Will we avoid the trap and choose contentment in 1 Timothy 6:6-7?

### READ AND REFLECT

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

**HAVE VOLUNTEERS READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-8 AND PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13.**

**What similarities do you see between these two passages of Scripture?**

**Why do people believe material possessions will bring contentment? How does Paul's view of contentment compare with the modern world's view of contentment?**

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

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. Through the trials and testing he endured, Paul learned that contentment is achievable in spite of poverty or prosperity.

**Read Philippians 4:13 again. What made Paul's contentment possible? What do you think that contentment looks like in real life?**

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. As we see in 1 Timothy 6:6, godliness goes hand in hand with contentment. 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.

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

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

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 we are like God in our attitudes, actions, and ambitions the more godly we become. And the more godly we become the more contented 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.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:9-12.**

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**Define greed. What triggers greed? Describe the snowball effect it has on us.**

**Unpack verse 10. What sticks out to you most from that verse?**

Loving money can lead to evil such as betrayal, injustice, perjury, hatred, murder, and more. Paul pointed out two such evils that result from the love of money. One is that some have wandered away from the faith. Jesus said people cannot love God and money (Matt. 6:24). The other evil, Paul said, is that some have pierced themselves with many pains, such as guilt, remorse, and despair.

**How have you witnessed greed affecting people you know, both Christians and non-Christians? How has it affected you?**

Instead of becoming a person consumed with greed, Paul urged Timothy to pursue godly virtues. Paul's charge to Timothy carries with it a definite sense of admonition with the use of such commands as "pursue," "fight," and "take hold." Pursuing godliness requires action on our part.

**What are the godly virtues Paul listed in verse 11? What are some additional examples? Be as specific and tangible as you can.**

**What attitudes or situations typically prevent us from pursuing godly virtues? What is one new practice our group can implement to hold each other accountable to pursuing the things of Christ rather than the things of the world?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19.**

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One danger for the rich is false pride that leads the wealthy to look down on people who are poor and that motivates the rich to boast about their stuff. The other danger is false security. Paul instructed rich people not to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth. Riches are not a good object for hope because they may not be there when you need them.

**What are God's expectations for people who "are rich in this world," according to this passage?**

**Why is generosity an effective way to combat the false pride and false security that money brings?**

If we want to experience real life, the life of contentment, we must learn to give. Take a step away from the materialism of our age by renewing your commitment to be a giver. Then you lay hold of real life and inner contentment.

## APPLY

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

**Replacing greed with gratitude is the pathway to contentment. What do you have to be grateful for? How do Paul's words to Timothy and the Philippians help you apply this to your life?**

**Think about Jesus' time on earth. How did He model contentment for us? What can we learn from Him?**

**What concrete steps can you take this week to escape the trap of greed?**

## PRAY

During today's prayer time, give group members the opportunity to verbalize personal prayers for contentment. Pray that as the work of Christ overwhelms all lesser concerns, joy and abundant life would be obvious in the people of our church.

## COMMENTARY

### 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19

Paul expanded his brief reference to materialism among the false teachers (v. 5) into a pointed review of the dangers of greed. Addressing his words specifically to those who willed to become rich, he affirmed that godliness and not wealth brings great gain (v. 6). He explained two reasons for which contentment should be a companion of godliness (vv. 7-8). In vv. 9-10 he presented the desire for wealth as a trap that plunges the unwary into spiritual ruin.

6:6. Paul commended the benefits of godliness with contentment in v. 6 (see Ps 37:3-5). Paul used the word "contentment" to refer to an attitude of mind independent of externals and dependent only on God. He was not advocating godless self-sufficiency as a source of contentment. Paul believed that true sufficiency is Christ-sufficiency (Phil 4:13). Paul was affirming that those who felt that godliness leads to gain were indeed correct, for there is great profit (spiritual profit) in a brand of godliness that possesses a contentment in the realm of its material possessions. True godliness is a means of much gain, for it promises benefits for this life and the next (4:8). Adding contentment to this godliness would promote gratitude for God's gracious gifts in this life (see 1 Tim 4:4-5).

6:7-8. Why do godliness and contentment represent great gain? Paul's "for" clause introduced an eschatological reason for this contentment. Since after a brief stay we shall depart this life as we came in, it is sheer folly to concern ourselves with earthly matters. Material gain is irrelevant, and greed is irrational (see Job 1:21). The second reason (v. 8) is that we must be content when we possess life's necessities. The term "clothing" is general enough to include both clothing and shelter, but the immediate context favors limiting it to personal possessions such as dress. Paul's words reflect the teaching of Jesus (Matt 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31). Paul referred to food and clothing as symbols of

life's necessities. What is actually a necessity will vary somewhat in different societies. However, all of us face the temptation of greedily coveting more than we need.

In these verses Paul warned that godliness is not a trait from which to make material profit (v. 5). True godliness has contentment for its companion (v. 6). Since we cannot take life's luxuries into God's presence, we should be content with life's necessities (vv. 7-8). Greed can find no place in an attitude like this.

6:9-10. Paul spoke the words of vv. 9-10 to those who "want to get rich" ("men who keep planning to get rich," Williams). There is no condemnation of wealth as such, and the words do not apply to someone who wistfully longs, "It would be nice to have more money." In v. 9 Paul painted three progressive pitfalls in which the willful wealth-seeker becomes entangled. The "desires" are "foolish" because instead of bringing gain, they only produce harm. Paul supported this warning about wealth with a contemporary proverb. We can make three comments about the proverb. First, it does not condemn money but the love of money. Second, it does not state that all evil comes from the love of money, but such misplaced love can cause a great variety of ("all kinds of") evil. It is incorrect to say that the love of money causes all sins. Ambition and sexual lust are also fertile breeding grounds of sin. Third, the wandering elders from Ephesus who had sold out to greed were living proof of this maxim. The concern about materialism Paul had expressed in v. 5 had become a reality in the false teachers. Judas and Ananias and Sapphira were New Testament figures who "drowned" because of this inordinate love.

There is a link between the "faith" of the gospel and the blessedness God promises to his people (6:10b; Ps 1). The denial of one negates the other. Some translations (e.g., "spiked themselves on many thorny griefs," NEB) capture the intensely painful idea behind the word "pierced." With these graphic words Paul concluded his description of the heretics, their false teaching, and their false practice. He now turned his attention to specific words of guidance for his beloved Timothy.

6:11. The beginning words, "But you," show that Timothy's behavior was to provide an utter contrast to that of the false teachers mentioned in vv. 3-10. The twin commands of v. 11 contain a warning and a challenge. Timothy was warned to flee the heresy, divisiveness, and greed that Paul had denounced in vv. 3-10. He was challenged to "pursue" six virtues mentioned in three pairs. Each trait represents a must to insure Timothy's effectiveness in his ministry. The term "righteousness" refers primarily to upright conduct before human beings, and "godliness" describes an open and obedient relationship before God. The words "faith" and "love" reflect trust in God and benevolence and goodwill toward others (see 2 Thess 1:3; Titus 2:2). Timothy would need "endurance" in order to guarantee staying power for his difficult task. He needed "gentleness" in order to deal effectively with cantankerous heretics and wavering believers.

6:12. Having urged Timothy to avoid the false vagaries of the heretics and to develop needed Christian graces, Paul gave directives for perseverance. First, he borrowed an image from the athletic sphere to urge Timothy to "keep up the good fight for the faith." The metaphor can imply either running or boxing or wrestling. The use of the present tense for "fight" suggests a continuous struggle. Second, Paul used a command focusing on eschatology urging Timothy to continue in the contest. Depending on the context, Paul could present eternal life as a blessing to be realized at the end (here and in Rom 6:22) or as a present experience (2 Cor 4:10-12, though the expression differs in this passage). The fact that God had "called" Timothy to eternal life suggests that it was already in his grasp but not completely held. Paul's command was intended to stir up Timothy to renewed vigor, but it does not imply that Timothy earned eternal life by self-effort. It suggests that "eternal life" is more of a goal toward which Timothy was to orient his efforts rather than a prize that God would give him as a reward for that effort. The fact that God had called him was an incentive for his response.

Paul turned from a series of admonitions to Timothy to give advice to those already rich. The preceding words on wealth in vv. 6-10 were spoken to those who aspired to wealth. As a final thought Paul spoke a word to those who already had it. The constructive advice here balances the more extreme prohibitions of the earlier passage. He did not condemn wealth, but he showed the added temptations the wealthy face. He was vitally concerned that Christians have the right attitude toward their wealth and make the proper use of it (cf. Luke 12:13-21; Ps 52:7).

6:17. Paul's beginning reference to the "present world" suggests that the wealthy can have their wealth only in this age. It is good for this present world, but it does not convert automatically into blessedness in the world beyond. In this verse Paul contrasted right and wrong responses to the possession of wealth. A wrong response involves an arrogant attitude and the making of wealth as the "hope" of one's life. As a deterrent to trusting in riches, Paul mentioned the transitory, uncertain nature of wealth. The word "uncertain" contains a reminder that it is by no means clear that riches will continue with the one who has them. The right response is to hope in a God who lavishes on his people all their needs. The statement implies that God does not give wealth to promote pride but that we might use and enjoy it in his will (cf. Jas 2:5; 4:13-14; 5:2-3). Paul's sound advice walks the straight line between a world-denying asceticism and a self-centered indulgence. The advice promotes gratitude toward God for the benefits he bestows.

6:18. Paul mentioned four ways to use wealth wisely. "To do good" involves using wealth in a positive way instead of letting it feed a life of personal luxury. "To be rich in good deeds" pointed the wealthy in the direction in which they were to be truly rich, in the doing of good deeds. These two verbs probably include more than benevolence. The need for benevolence is emphasized in the next pair of terms. "To be generous" demands a liberal sharing of wealth with others. One who is "willing to share" shows that the generous act of giving is to spring from internal generosity. Paul was suggesting that genuine wealth is found in what we give, not what we have.

6:19. Paul outlined the outcome of such generosity by stressing two truths. First, he stressed that giving generously to the needy stores for the giver a future treasure. Paul was not advocating that the giver could earn salvation or favors from God. Good works are solid evidence of salvation and assure us that we have eternal life. Paul may have based these thoughts on such words as contained in Matt 6:19-21. The godless, on the other hand, lay up treasures for themselves of a different kind (Jas 5:1-5). Second, Paul stressed that generous actions allow the giver to lay hold of eternal life in the here and now. Paul had urged Timothy to lay hold of this in v. 12. Here Paul expressed that taking hold of eternal life is a goal of the unselfish giving he had commanded. Christians who enter the life of love by unselfish behavior will enter gloriously into God's presence in the life to come.