

## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



### COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH

JAMES

CONTENTMENT AND WEALTH

JAMES 5:1-6; 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-8

06/25/2017

#### MAIN POINT

Materialism and greed do not build a righteous person, but instead lead a person to find contentment outside of God.

#### INTRODUCTION

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

**Have you ever wanted to buy something, or actually bought something, believing that if you just had that you'd be content? How did that work out for you?**

**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?**

Our society pushes material wealth and greed as the source of contentment. However, a person living for material wealth is headed down a dangerous path. James emphasized the importance of contentment from God and freedom from materialism and greed.

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN

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

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

---

**How does James describe rich people?**

**What happens to people if they obsess over greed and materialism?**

**Why do you think James had such harsh words for the material person?**

James offered serious warning against those who long for riches and material goods. James continued his push for helping others and becoming humble as he equated materialism with fattening the heart for the day of slaughter. Paul had the same message when he wrote to Timothy and the Philippians about greed and materialism.

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

---

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

One of the greatest challenges we face as we strive to be serious followers of Jesus is the struggle for contentment in a materialistic society. In order to understand true contentment, we have to reject the notion that contentment has anything to do with accumulating material possessions. Contentment is a choice.

**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?**

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

**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. To understand true contentment, we have to reject the notion that it has anything to do with accumulating material possessions or earthly success.

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

**How would you describe someone who has a Christlike attitude? What distinguishes that person from other people?**

**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. In other words, our attitude toward God results in actions that please Him. We could say that godliness is God-likeness. 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.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME**

---

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

**What do you have to be grateful for? How can gratitude keep you from materialism and greed? 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 materialism?**

**What do you see as the most common needs in our community—needs that the church could begin addressing? How might you create margin in your schedule or finances to be ready to help meet those needs?**

## PRAY

Pray that the work of Christ will overwhelm all lesser concerns, and that joy and abundant life would be obvious in you and the whole church.

## COMMENTARY

### **JAMES 5:1-6**

---

5:1. James 2:6-7 referred to ways unbelieving rich people treat believers—oppressing them, dragging them into court, and speaking evil of their Lord's name. James 5:1 addresses non-Christian rich people directly. The phrase "come now" is equivalent to "pay attention!" The rich people were unbelievers who took advantage of the destitute, some of whom were Christians.

"Weep and wail" describes loud mourning—howling in terror—and bursting into tears. The Greek word for "miseries" means "calamities" or "distresses." James declared a time was coming when the unscrupulous rich would face the consequences of their evil at God's judgment.

Clothing and precious metals were two measures of wealth in James's day. The rich people's wealth would decay. Moths would eat holes in their hoarded clothes. Their silver and gold would rust, for when precious metals are buried, an acid reaction corrodes them. At the final judgment wicked rich people's corroded, hoarded wealth will be strong testimony against them (see vv. 2-3).

5:4. With another call to attention, "Look!" James outlined three charges against the unbelieving rich. First, they had hired workers to reap their fields and had withheld the laborers' pay. The failure to pay was cruel and fraudulent. Poor Jewish day laborers expected to be paid at the end of each day as the law required. They depended on receiving this pay for their families' survival. By withholding wages, the rich employers demonstrated a total disregard for human life (see v. 6).

5:5. The heartless landowners had deprived the day laborers of their subsistence, but the wealthy lived luxuriously on the land and indulged themselves. They lived a soft ("delicate") life and engaged in extravagant wastefulness; they gave themselves to pleasure. Using the fraudulently withheld wages, they "lived it up" while their workers went hungry.

James compared the self-indulgent rich with animals that went on feeding securely, unaware of the looming day of slaughter. This phrase could refer generally to a time of reckoning or it could refer to the final judgment day.

5:6. James leveled a third charge against wealthy unbelievers: They condemned the poor. He may have referred to their having control of the courts so the poor had no recourse and thus were deprived of justice.

James asserted that wealthy people's exploiting the poor amounted to murder. In Jewish tradition people could murder others by depriving them of their living. The righteous man likely indicated a class of people—the pious poor. Defenseless, they did not resist the oppressing rich. The poor had no power to gain a fair hearing in the courts.

### **1 TIMOTHY 6:6-8**

---

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.