

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH
COUNTER CULTURE
WEALTH
1 TIMOTHY 6:6-19.
10/22/2017



MAIN POINT

The path to great gain is being content in God not in acquiring wealth.

INTRODUCTION

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

WATCH SESSION TWO OF COUNTER CULTURE.

You've heard many statistics about world poverty. Which one of these shocked you the most? Why?

What does it mean to be content? If you were honest, what standard of living do you expect to be content?

By any standard, modern Americans are the wealthiest people who have ever lived. When thousands upon thousands die every day from preventable disease, lack of sustainable food and clean water, living a life of luxury is no longer an option for the Christian. During Jesus' ministry, He identified with the poorest and most marginalized in society and gave them honor and dignity. We must be content with having necessities and be cautious when acquiring excess. We will take nothing with us when we die, so we live for a future kingdom instead of building a bigger kingdom in this place.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

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

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

What did Paul identify as the path to great gain? How is this different than what contemporary culture sees as the path to great gain?

How would you define "necessities"? How do you think someone in the majority world would define "necessities"? How do we reconcile these two viewpoints?

What language did Paul use to describe the drive and desire to constantly acquire more in verse 9-10? Is this a problem you treat as seriously as Paul did? Why or why not?

How have you seen money be a destructive force in your own heart and life? In the lives of those you know?

Godliness with contentment is great gain. These words from the apostle Paul provide key and crucial insights for how Christians should relate to wealth and possessions in this life. Chances are you are among the wealthiest people who have ever lived. We are tempted all the time to find our contentment in what we own instead of who owns us. The love of money and the desire for riches lead to live of self destruction and self mutilation. For followers of Christ, living for more in this life is not an option.

What are a few ways you could simplify you standard of living to reach greater contentment in God?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:11-19.

How is Jesus Christ described in verse 11-16? How does coming face to face with a God like this make all the riches in the world seem like filthy rags?

What makes riches uncertain? How do we maintain focus on the giver as opposed to the good gifts He provides?

Do you think of yourself as rich by your culture's standards? By the world's standards? Why or why not?

According to verse 17-19, how should rich people relate to the gifts God has given them?

What does it mean to be rich in good works? What kind of foundation does this store up and prepare for us in the world to come?

Our possessions will always let us down at the point we need them the most—when we die. Instead we have a rich inheritance in Jesus Christ. All believers, regardless of their poverty or wealth in this world, are truly rich. Living in light of those riches causes us to reorient our thinking concerning earthly treasures. God has blessed us to be a blessing to others. All Christians, without exception, should give of their resources to help reach the lost and dying world.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

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

How can you better steward what God has given you to radically give to the desperate physical and spiritual needs in the world? What are one or two things you could do differently?

How should the gospel affect how we relate to the good things God gives? How do we remain appreciative for all the things God gives?

What is God leading you to share? To sell? To sacrifice?

PRAY

Pray for God to help you be content in Him alone and avoid the dangers of excess and continually seeking after more. Close by asking God to show you those areas where you can sacrifice to give more of your material wealth to build His kingdom.

COMMENTARY

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-21.

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.