

SERIES: "MEANT TO BE CONTENT"

Discussion Guide #1

Lesson: "True Riches"

Text: 1 Timothy 6:3-10

Aim: to introduce this series on the importance of a healthy attitude toward money.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: As we begin, I'd like to go around the circle and ask everyone to tell his/her name and to answer this question: **Can you remember the VERY FIRST PAYCHECK you ever received? If so, how old were you, and where were you working at the time? I'll begin: my name is _____, and I can remember receiving my first paycheck when _____.**

The rest of our questions are for any of the group members who have something they can share. I like to get at least two or three different responses for each question, so please help me out by sharing your response whenever you have something to contribute!

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Can anyone remember **HOW MUCH** you received in your first paycheck? And, can you remember **HOW YOU FELT** when you received it?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Now, who can remember **WHAT YOU DID** with the money you received from that first paycheck?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: I know that getting that first paycheck marks a big transition in life, so let me ask you this: **IN WHAT WAYS** does our life change when we start earning our own money? How do you think having our own money affects us?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: After the initial thrill of getting our first paycheck wears off, usually our next goal is.....getting a raise! No one ever thinks they're paid too much! However, have you ever seen people whose life changed for the **WORSE** when they got more money? Can there ever be negative consequences to an increase in money?

One of the most important life lessons we can ever receive is learning to have a healthy attitude toward money. We know from observation that money can either be one of the most helpful, or one of the most destructive, influences in life. This series is entitled "Meant to Be Content," because God wants us to be blessed, not cursed, by our money.

TURN TO the book of 1 Timothy (near the back of the New Testament), Chapter 6. READ Verses 3-5. Paul's comments remind us that "sound doctrine" is marked by two things: it comes from God and it promotes "godliness."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What does the word "godliness" mean to you? When you think of a "godly" person, what do you imagine them looking or acting like?

Paul had previously told Timothy in Chapter 1 that the reason these false teachers must be opposed was so that the Christians in Ephesus could experience "LOVE, which comes from a PURE HEART and a GOOD CONSCIENCE and a SINCERE FAITH" (verse 3).

DISCUSSION QUESTION: As you look at the passage we just read, what are some characteristics of these false teachers? And, how are those characteristics the OPPOSITE of the qualities of love/ purity/ integrity/ sincerity?

READ Verses 6-8 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** After Paul has accused these false teachers of wanting to use religion to get rich, he then turns around and says that we CAN use religion to get “rich”! However, what are some ways that Paul’s definition of “great gain” is different from that of the false teachers? How does HE define it? *Possible Answers: Paul’s definition begins with “GODLINESS”, not greed; He recognizes that possessions cannot make us truly rich, because they don’t LAST; Paul’s definition includes CONTENTMENT.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Most people crave contentment, but few actually achieve it. Why do you suppose it is so difficult for human beings to be satisfied and happy? What do you think prevents people from being content with what they have?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: When you compare our life today to that of our grandparents when they were our age, do you think it is harder, or easier, for people today to be content? Why?

READ Verses 9-10 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Paul uses three phrases in these verses to describe what he’s warning against: “People who want to get rich” – “the love of money” – “eager for money.” Do you think Paul is talking about an ATTITUDE, or an AMOUNT, or BOTH?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Do you think our society today encourages, or discourages, the “love of money”? If so, how?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Now think about the answers you just gave. Can you think of some examples in American culture that reveal how people feel about money?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What would be some signs that WE are beginning to fall into the “temptation and trap” that Paul is describing here? What would be some indications that our own attitude towards money might be in danger of becoming unhealthy?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: If we did see any indications that our attitude towards money is becoming unhealthy, what do you think we should do? How can we avoid the “griefs” that Paul describes in verse 10?

SUMMARY STATEMENT: A person who doesn’t have God in their life or contentment in their heart will always be poor, no matter how much money they have in the bank! God wants us to be “truly rich”!

NEXT WEEK we will protect ourselves from the enemy of contentment by getting an inoculation against the disease of “Affluenza.” To obtain your booster shot, read Deuteronomy 8:1-8 and 1 Timothy 6:6-10 and 17-19.

SERIES: "MEANT TO BE CONTENT"

Discussion Guide #2

Lesson: "Affluenza"

Texts: Deuteronomy 8:1-18; 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19

Aim: to understand how prosperity is a threat to spirituality, and to learn what we can do about it.

CASE STUDY: "My Super Sweet 16" was a show on MTV that profiled extravagant birthday parties of affluent teenagers. An article in the New York Times describes the formula for the show: "(1) kid makes a series of high-priced demands (a fireworks display, a helicopter ride, perhaps a harem of belly dancers); (2) parents capitulate and cough up the cash; (3) kid gleefully humiliates the uninvited; (4) something goes wrong; (5) kid has a meltdown and repeatedly refers to self in the third person; (6) party miraculously comes together, and kid is presented with an automobile before his salivating, less fortunate peers." It is not uncommon for the teens to receive not one but two expensive sports cars, and the parties often end up costing as much as \$200,000. Source: Lola Ogunnaike, "MTV's 'Super Sweet 16' Gives a Sour Pleasure," April 26, 2006.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 1. Did anyone in our group ever happen upon this show while flipping through the channels? If so, what struck you about it when you first saw it? 2. Divya Kothapalli, the daughter of a prominent cardiologist in Beaumont, Texas received a Bentley, diamonds, and two houses in India for her birthday present. Divya said, "I was really surprised, because I was only expecting a Bentley and one house." Long after the party is over, how do you think Divya's life will be affected by her parents' extravagance? 3. Sophie Mitchell, a high school senior in Florida, strongly defended her mother's decision to spend \$180,000 on Sophie's birthday party by saying, "Unless they were crazy or hated their child, any parent who was financially able would do it." Do you agree with Sophie? Why, or why not? 4. On one episode Marissa, described as a "daddy's girl," dyes her two poodles pink so they will match her party dress. When she grows up, what sort of marriage do you predict Marissa will have, and why? 5. Perhaps the most significant thing about the show is that it was wildly popular among teenagers (and some adults). What does that suggest to you about American culture?

We are all familiar with influenza (the "flu"). In this conversation we will learn about a different kind of sickness: the spiritual disease of "affluenza." That is, whenever people become more affluent and prosperous, they are at a greater risk of becoming spiritually sick and of forgetting God! TURN to Deuteronomy (it's the fifth book of the Old Testament), Chapter 8. READ Verses 1-5.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 1. People sometimes complain about hard times when they are going through them, but then looking back they have a very different perspective on those years. Why do you suppose people often have fond memories about their past, even when it was difficult? 2. In this passage Moses tells the Israelites that God used their difficult experiences while wandering through the desert in order to "discipline" them. Can you identify any hardships you have experienced in your own life that God was able to use to make you stronger? [Background Note: See Hebrews 12:1-12]

READ Verses 6-9. Notice that the Promised Land was a rich and plentiful land: God wanted to bless the Israelites with every good thing they needed. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. How would you finish this sentence: "We know that we are really blessed here in America, because _____"? 2. Have you ever talked someone from another country who has come to the United States, either on a visit or to live permanently? If so, what impresses foreigners most about America when they first visit this country?

CASE STUDY: America is such a rich country that even our “poor” people are blessed when compared to the rest of the world. For example, according to the Census Bureau, which creates the official definition of poverty, the average poor American has more living space than the average person living in Paris, London, Vienna, Athens, and other cities throughout Europe. In addition, 80% of poor households in this country have air conditioning (back in 1970, only 36% of the entire U.S. population had air conditioning!); 89% own microwave ovens; and 97% of poor households have a color television. Source: Robert Rector, Executive Summary Backgrounder, August 27, 2007.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 1. Based on those statistics, were you “poor” growing up?
2. Do you think **YOU** are “rich” right now? What is your definition of a “rich” person?

We are materially blessed here in America. That’s why we need to be especially careful not to catch the disease of “affluenza”! READ Verses 10-18. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. Why does prosperity lead some people to forget God? After reading this passage, what would you say are some of the CAUSES of “affluenza”? 2. How would someone know they were coming down with a case of “affluenza”? What would you say are the very first symptoms of this sickness? 3. Many charities use a “poster child” in their fundraising efforts to fight some disease. Who would you nominate as the “poster child” for the spiritual sickness of affluenza? Is there some famous person that you think has been spoiled by their riches?

Since we DO live in such an affluent country, and since ALL of us are “rich” in comparison to the rest of the world, we need to inoculate ourselves against the disease of “affluenza.” To get our booster shot, let’s turn to the book of 1 Timothy (near the back of the New Testament), Chapter 6.

READ Verses 6-10. **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Last week we saw that it is a sin to grow so obsessed with BECOMING rich that we lose both our character and our contentment. In your opinion, however, is it a sin to BE rich? Why, or why not?

Based on what we read back in Deuteronomy 8, it may not be *WRONG* to be rich, but it IS spiritually dangerous! That’s why we need to READ Verse 17 of 1 Timothy 6. **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** The first way that rich folks like us can prevent “affluenza” is to develop the right ATTITUDES. What are some attitudes you see described in this verse that could help us maintain a healthy perspective towards our possessions and our money?

READ Verse 18 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** The second way to prevent “affluenza” is to perform the right ACTIONS. Why do you think it is important for rich folks like us to SERVE and to SHARE? How could helping others help US avoid “affluenza”?

READ Verse 19 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** The third way to prevent “affluenza” is to maintain the right ANTICIPATION. Why would it be important for rich folks like us to be reminded of heaven? What are some ways that focusing on our eternal destination might help us achieve the right perspective on our possessions? [Background Note: See Matthew 6:19-24]

SUMMARY STATEMENT: We live in a rich and prosperous country, so we need to especially guard against contracting the disease of “affluenza”! We should never forget that our material blessings can become a spiritual curse *if* we don’t maintain the proper attitudes towards our money!

NEXT WEEK we will learn more about what Paul calls “life that is *truly* life” when we read the words of Jesus in Luke 12:13-34.

Series: "MEANT TO BE CONTENT"

Discussion Guide #3

Lesson: "True Life"

Text: Luke 12:13-34

Aim: to understand how money affects our outlook on life.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: As we begin, I'd like to go around the circle and ask everyone to tell his/her name and to answer this question: Have you ever been to Washington, D.C.? And if so, what was the most impressive sight you viewed there? I'll begin: my name is _____, and

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: Did any of you who HAVE been to Washington get to see the National Gallery of Art there?

NOW LET ME READ YOU A TRUE STORY ABOUT THE FOUNDER OF THAT ART GALLERY: Paul Mellon died at the age of 91. He was born into a fabulously wealthy family. His father, Andrew W. Mellon, had worked diligently to create a banking and financial empire. Paul did not have a happy childhood, however, because his father was never close to him and his parents divorced when he was young.

When Paul grew up he did an unusual thing with his inheritance: he gave almost \$1 billion of it away! And he did not seek any publicity for his philanthropy. For example, when he endowed the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., he insisted that it not be named after him.

Paul Mellon openly rejected his father's materialistic goals. In fact, Paul once wrote of his father Andrew's lifestyle, "What does he think life is for? Is it to make money, accumulate, eat, drink, and die?"

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Who do you think enjoyed their money more: Paul, or his father Andrew? Why?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How do you suppose Andrew Mellon would have reacted if he had known that one day his son Paul was going to give his fortune away? For example, do you feel Andrew would have lived his life any differently if he had known what was going to happen to his money after he died? Why, or why not?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: One billion dollars is a lot of money. Do you think it was difficult for Paul Mellon to give that money away? Why, or why not?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: In your opinion, which do you believe would find it easier to be generous: RICH folks or POOR folks?

This series is entitled "Meant to Be Content," because God wants us to be blessed, not cursed, by our money. You and I may never have a billion dollars, but we all need to learn how to have the proper attitude towards the money that we DO possess.

TURN TO the gospel of Luke, Chapter 12. We will read three sections, and in each one the key word you want to be watching for is the big little word “LIFE.”

READ Verse 13 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** We aren’t told whose money these two brothers are quarreling over, but it would most likely have been their father’s estate. How do you suppose their dead dad would have felt if he were aware of their dispute?

READ Verses 14-15 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. How do you believe this man felt when he heard Jesus’ answer? Would you guess he was: a. Disappointed? B. Ashamed? Or, C. Angry? 2. Why did you pick the answer you did?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: A few years ago a bumper sticker that could be seen on many vehicles which read, “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” If a person really did live by that philosophy, how do you think it would affect the quality of their life? Their relationships with others? Their level of contentment?

Now let’s review these verses by focusing on our key word: “LIFE.” RE-READ Verses 13-15. **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Ok, in your opinion, what does this passage teach us about the meaning of life?

In the second section of our passage Jesus goes on to tell a parable about a farmer who had a “bumper crop,” and his windfall became his downfall! READ Verses 16-19 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** If you had to describe this man’s philosophy of life, what would it be? How do you think HE would explain the meaning of life?

READ Verses 20-21 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** This story illustrates one more way that money can become a curse rather than a blessing: the MORE MONEY that people get, the HARDER it seems to be for them to “let go” of any of it. In fact, when you look at the percentage of their income that Americans give to all charities, the people who earn less than \$10,000 give, on average, more than 3 times what people who make \$100,000 give! What does that statistic teach you about the power of possessions?

Background Note: People who earned under \$10,000 gave 5.2%. Those who earned \$10,000 to \$19,999 gave 3.3%. Those who earned \$75,000 to \$99,999 gave only 1.6%! [*Time*, 7/24/00].

DISCUSSION QUESTION: This story is not primarily about dying – it’s really about how we should live. So, what do you think it means for us to be “rich toward God”?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: When we are “rich toward God,” how do you think it affects the quality of our life? How does our giving affect our living?

SUMMARY STATEMENT: In this lesson Jesus warns us never to confuse LIFE with THINGS!

NEXT WEEK we will learn the true meaning of life by reading the third section: Luke 12:22-34.

SERIES: "MEANT TO BE CONTENT"

Discussion Guide #4

Lesson: "True Life" (Part 2)

Text: Luke 12:13-34

Aim: to understand how greed fosters a short-term perspective that can rob us of "true life."

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: As we begin our conversation we're going to take a junk mail survey. As we go around our circle I'd like for each of us to introduce ourselves AND I am interested in hearing your best guess as to HOW MANY pieces of unsolicited sales material (ads, offers, catalogs, flyers, etc.) you receive in an average week. I'll begin: my name is _____, and I suppose I would get about _____ pieces of junk mail a week.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 1. Some people hate junk mail, and other folks don't mind it. How about you: how do you react when you look into the mailbox and find a stack of sales material? 2. When we open our email account we may find our inbox cluttered with "spam" (which is the e-mail equivalent of junk mail). How do you feel when you log on and see that you have received unsolicited offers?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Do you ever wonder where these companies get your name and address? Has anyone in our group figured out how they identified you?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Most junk mail gets thrown away, but: what would catch your eye? What might make you stop to look at sales material you had received in the mail?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Since junk mail is unsolicited, the companies that use it must identify some basic human desire and then work hard to try to convince you that their product can fulfill that desire. What are some basic human motivations that these companies appeal to, in their effort to persuade you that purchasing their particular product will enhance your life? *Possible Answers: Security & shelter; pride & status; sexuality; health & well-being; hunger; greed and possessiveness.*

In a wealthy consumer society like ours we are constantly bombarded by sales pitches: some appeal to needs, and others appeal to greed. Greed leads a person to believe that they could enhance the quality of their life if they just owned more possessions, but Jesus taught us a very different philosophy of life! TURN TO Luke, Chapter 12.

READ Verses 13-15 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Jesus warns us that greed can confuse people into thinking that the secret of life is to have a lot of THINGS. That raises an interesting question: Do you think some people are addicted to shopping? Why, or why not?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: If you believe some people are addicted to shopping, what do you think gets them hooked? Why might cause a person to find short-term satisfaction from buying things?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How would we know if this warning of Jesus against greed applied to US? Suppose we began to get greedy and THINGS started becoming too important: how would we know it? What would be a sign that our life was getting out of balance?

READ Verses 16-19 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Imagine that you were reading a profile of this rich man in the latest issue of a popular magazine that you had purchased at the newsstand. What magazine do you think he would be featured in, and what would the story say about him?

Now let's read this profile again, and this time we'll add "the rest of the story". READ Verses 16-21 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** One of the sure signs of greed is a short-term, self-centered focus. For example, look at the distorted perspective of this rich man: what are some of the things that he forgot or overlooked? *Possible Answers: That he couldn't keep his possessions forever; He certainly overlooked OTHERS, and especially those less fortunate; He forgot GOD (note that his speech is full of "I, I, I" but there is no mention of God, gratitude, or thankfulness); He forgot the uncertainty of life and the inevitability of death (READ James 4:13-17); He forgot that there is more to life than possessions.*

READ Verses 22-23 Last week we read Paul Mellon's statement about his billionaire father: "What does he think life is for? Is it to make money, accumulate, eat, drink, and die?" This week we learn that Jesus made that very same observation many centuries before!

DISCUSSION QUESTION: In our previous lessons we have learned that we are "meant to be content": that is, God wants us to be blessed, not cursed, by our possessions. How could a preoccupation with possessions lead a person to worry about their life? What would you say are some of the connections between GREED and ANXIETY?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Notice that Jesus says that "life is more than food and the body more than clothes." The Lord insists that material things may bring some temporary pleasure, but they can never bring lasting fulfillment in the long term. Whenever you are tempted to become worried or anxious, what helps you to gain a long-term perspective?

SUMMARY STATEMENT: In this lesson Jesus has emphasized that greed causes us to take a short-term, self-centered focus on things. The problem with possessiveness is that it distorts our perspective and ultimately robs us of the true satisfaction God wants us to enjoy in life.

NEXT WEEK we will consider the connection between WORRY and GREED, and we will finish learning the secret of life, by reading Luke 12:27-34.

Series: "MEANT TO BE CONTENT"

Discussion Guide #5

Lesson: "True Life" (Part 3 of 3)

Text: Luke 12:13-34 (compare Matthew 6:25-34)

Aim: to understand the connections between greed and anxiety

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: As we begin our conversation I'd like for each of us to tell our name AND recommend a good pharmacy. If you had to fill a prescription, where would you go?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: If you weren't sick before you bought your medication, you will be after you see your bill! The price of medicine seems to go up and up these days. Does anyone have a theory as to why it costs so much to fill a prescription?

In this conversation we will consider a serious illness that is connected to money: the disease of ANXIETY. We have learned that we are "meant to be content": that is, God intends for us to be blessed by our possessions, not cursed. So, let's discover Jesus' prescription for curing the disease of greed and worry. TURN TO the gospel of Luke, Chapter 12.

READ Verses 22-24 We read this last week and learn the ultimate problem with GREED is that it causes us to waste our life away focusing on things when we could be enjoying true life.

READ Verses 25-26 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Intellectually we know WORRY is worthless, or even counter-productive, but that awareness doesn't stop us from worrying. What are some of the things that worrying does to us? How are people affected by anxiety?

READ Verses 27-30 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Since Jesus is talking about our attitudes toward our possessions, maybe we need to define "worry." What would you say is the difference between a "WORRY" and a LEGITIMATE CONCERN? *Possible Answers: WORRY is CONCERN that has become obsessive; WORRY is a fear of those things you can't do anything about, while CONCERN focuses on those problems we can address; CONCERN is realistic, while WORRY is often uncertain or exaggerated; CONCERN motivates us to action, while WORRY paralyzes us into fear.*

Background Note: Many people are familiar with the Serenity Prayer: "God, Give me the courage to change the things I can change; the serenity to accept the things I cannot; and the wisdom to know the difference."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How could birds and flowers remind us of the proper perspective on life? What do you think Jesus is trying to teach us here?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Why do you think Jesus says when we worry we have "little faith"? What are some ways that WORRY is the opposite of FAITH? *Possible Answers: When we worry, we forget that we have a Father who loves us and provides for us; Because worry tends to make us doubt, and doubt is the opposite of faith; Because when we worry we tend to think that WE have to take charge of everything, rather than allowing God to be in control; Worry may well cause us to doubt the power, provision, and goodness of God.*

Having diagnosed the problem, Jesus now provides the prescription. As we read the next section Jesus will provide four principles that will enable us to cure the disease of worry.

READ Verse 31 **PRINCIPLE #1 – TO WIN OVER WORRY, PUT GOD FIRST!** To win over worry, we have to get our priorities in order. **DISCUSSION QUESTION: Let's try to translate this principle into real life. In practical terms, what do you think it means to get our priorities in order? When we are tempted to become worried or anxious about material things, what are some things we should DO to continue putting God first?**

READ Verse 32 **PRINCIPLE #2 – REMEMBER THAT GOD IS GOOD!** Jesus reassures us that God is not grudging, but generous (see Matthew 7:7-11). God wants us to be blessed – in fact, he is “pleased” to give us the kingdom. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 1. It seems to be a principle of human nature that we forget all our blessings the minute we encounter a problem. Why do our problems always seem so much larger than our blessings when we worry? 2. In what ways could counting our blessings cure greed and anxiety?**

READ Verse 33 **PRINCIPLE #3 – DON'T FORGET TO GIVE!** You would think that the last thing an anxious person would want to hear is a command to give their possessions away! And yet, that is exactly what the Lord says! **DISCUSSION QUESTION: Can you see any logic to this command? How could GIVING possibly change our orientation away from worry and anxiety?** *Possible Answers: When we give, we are redirecting our heart away from ourselves and towards the needs of others; We experience a greater sense of confidence when we realize that we can help others (see Acts 20:35); Whenever we are generous we will be blessed by God (see 2 Corinthians 8:6-11); Giving helps us get our priorities in order (see verse 31) by reminding us that our rewards comes from God, not this world.*

READ 34 **PRINCIPLE #4 – WE CAN ADJUST OUR ATTITUDE BY REDIRECTING OUR INVESTMENTS.** A person who worries is investing in insecurity, while a person who is generous is investing in eternity (READ Matthew 6:19-21). Jesus tells us that if we are not satisfied with our attitude, we need to re-examine what we have been investing our life in.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus began this passage by telling us that life is more than simply material things (see verses 15 & 23). Now we need to decide what true life is really all about. After reading this passage, how do you think Jesus would complete this sentence: “If you want to know the secret of LIFE, you just need to remember to.....”?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What one thought or action have YOU found that helps you to put this teaching of Jesus into practice? When you are worried, what gives YOU peace of mind?

SUMMARY STATEMENT: If worry is the opposite of faith, then faith is the opposite of worry. The best description for the disease of worry and anxiety is to increase our trust in God, and then act on the basis of that trust!

NEXT WEEK we will consider the strange case of the clever crook in Luke 16:1-15.

SERIES: "MEANT TO BE CONTENT"

Discussion Guide #6

Lesson: "The Strange Case of the Clever Crook"

Text: Luke 16:1-15

Aim: to learn how to use material possessions to gain spiritual blessings.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: As we go around the circle I'd like each of us to state our name **AND** tell the group your dream destination: that is, if you could travel to any country in the world, where would you like to go? I'll begin: my name is _____, and if I could go to any foreign country I chose, I'd like to visit _____.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Now suppose you have arrived at your dream destination, and you have some free time to go shopping. Is there anything that you'd especially go looking for? What might you shop for at your dream destination, if you had the chance?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Has anyone here ever been shopping overseas and tried to convert American dollars into a foreign currency? If so, what was that experience like? Did you find it difficult to change American money into another country's currency?

When we go to a foreign country, we have to convert our dollars into the local currency. What about when we go to heaven? In this lesson we will learn how to convert American money into heavenly currency. TURN TO the gospel of Luke, Chapter 16.

READ Verses 1-8. **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Many people have found this story confusing at first. Is there anything in it that YOU find hard to understand? [Note To Group Leader: Don't try to resolve any of their questions at this point. Just register any questions the group presents.]

It seems odd to many that the "hero" of this parable is a clever crook! To best understand what Jesus is teaching it helps to go to the end of this passage and work our way backwards.

READ Verses 14-15 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** As we try to understand this story it helps to know that a group of Pharisees who were overhearing this parable were "sneering" at Jesus. What does that expression mean to you? Have you ever seen someone "sneer"?

Background Note: The Greek word here means "to turn up one's nose." To see contemporary examples of "sneering," watch professional wrestling on television.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: That is a strong expression of contempt! Why do you suppose someone who "loved money" would sneer at Jesus? Can you think of any ideas that Jesus had about money that the world might consider impractical or even foolish? *Possible Answers: On a couple of occasions Jesus commanded individuals to sell their possessions and give to the poor (see Luke 12:33, 18:18-30); Jesus himself left his carpenter's job to wander around the countryside preaching, with no visible means of support, and his disciples did likewise (see Luke 9:2-3); Jesus taught that it is "more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35; Many Jews in Jesus' day believed that financial prosperity was a sign of God's blessing and thus the more money you had (and displayed) the better! Jesus taught that the riches of this world are impermanent and that we should invest in eternity (see Luke 12:21, 33-34).*

READ Verse 13 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** We have often heard that “You cannot serve both God and Money,” but why? Do you think there is something unique about the nature of MONEY that makes it particularly dangerous to FAITH?

READ Verses 10-12 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** The story becomes even clearer when Jesus once again contrasts worldly wealth with “true riches.” We cannot serve God and money, but we can serve God with our money! What do you think Jesus means when he says “Whoever can be trusted with VERY LITTLE can be trusted with MUCH”?

Now we’ll go back to the beginning and re-read the strange story of the clever crook. READ Verses 1-7 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** This guy is dishonest, but you have to give him credit: he is a clever crook! In fact, can you figure out his scheme? What do you think he is trying to accomplish by being so generous with his master’s money? *Possible Answers: By making the master’s creditors personally indebted to HIM (and implicated with him) they would be less likely to testify against him in court (see Proverbs 29:24); By doing them a financial favor, they would be his “friends” and thus might be more likely to hire him or help him out once he was fired; Maybe he was asking for a “kickback” from the money he had saved them (it is ironic that this manager would be “too ashamed to beg” but he’s not too proud to steal!)*

Background Note: A “steward” (KJV) or “manager” (NIV) was a servant in charge of his master’s possessions. The closest equivalent today would be a “money manager.” See 1 Corinthians 4:1-2.

READ Verse 8 One key to understanding this puzzling parable is to note that the master did not commend the shrewd manager because he had acted DISHONESTLY; he commended the dishonest manager because he had acted SHREWDLY! **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Even though the master was cheated, he had to at least admire the manager’s shrewdness. So, although the man was crooked, are there any positive things we could say about him? *Possible Answers: He didn’t panic, but kept his cool; At least he was thinking ahead; He knew how to use his master’s money to “make friends” for himself; He worked quickly!*

READ Verse 9 Here is the most important point: Christians may not be as shrewd as worldly people when it comes to cutting a crooked deal, but we should be wise enough to plan for the future by converting earthly money into heavenly currency! **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** What do you think it means to use “worldly wealth” to make “eternal” friends? Can you think of any ways we can use our material possessions to gain spiritual blessings?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: If we truly understood that “you can’t take it with you” but you can “send it on ahead,” how would that change our perspective on our money?

SUMMARY STATEMENT: The dishonest manager may have been a crook, but at least he was smart enough to use his master’s money to prepare himself for the future! As stewards/managers of God’s money, we need to be generous with the material possessions He has entrusted to us in this life so that we can gain spiritual blessings later on.

NEXT WEEK we will finish learning the secret of being content by reading Philippians 4:4-20.

SERIES: "MEANT TO BE CONTENT"

Discussion Guide #7

Lesson: "The Secret of Being Content"

Text: Philippians 4:4-20

Aim: to understand how our contentment is not tied to possessions, but to the promises of God.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: As we go around the circle I'd like each of us to state our name **AND** answer this question: If you needed to make a quick trip to pick up a loaf of bread, where would you go? I'll begin: my name is _____, and if I were in a hurry to buy some bread, I would probably run down to _____.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Has anyone here ever gone into a store to purchase a loaf of bread or a gallon of milk and then, when you got to the cash register, you discovered you didn't bring enough money with you, and had left your credit cards at home? If so, how did you feel? What did you do?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: It can be a helpless feeling to reach into your pocket and not find any money when you need it! All of us have been low on cash occasionally, but have any of us ever been in a situation in which you had **NO** money at all?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Chances are all of us have forgotten to bring our money with us to the store at one time or another, but it's usually not a big deal. However, suppose you were on a trip in a foreign country and you were robbed. The thieves take all your money and identification. You're in a strange city and you don't know a soul. What would be your first reaction? What would you do next? How would you eat? Get home?

Today if we were stranded in a strange city we could call friends and family and they could wire money to us. But when Paul traveled around the Roman Empire, without a credit card or traveler's checks, he often was forced to depend on God to provide for his needs. Strangely enough, it was through such difficult circumstances that Paul learned the secret of contentment!

TURN TO the book of Philippians, Chapter 4. READ Verse 10, then READ Verses 14-18.

Background Note: "Epaphroditus" is pronounced *ih PAF roh DIGH tuhs*.

SOME BACKGROUND: This gift came during a particularly difficult period in Paul's ministry. After establishing the church in Philippi he had been forced to leave the city abruptly (see Acts 16:19-40). From there Paul traveled to Thessalonica. In Thessalonica he was persecuted (see Acts 17:1-9), ran out of money, and had to take on outside work to make ends meet (see 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10). But, out of this difficult experience Paul discovered three promises that can give us contentment: the **peace** of God, the **presence** of God, and the **provision** of God.

READ Verses 4-5. Note the PROMISE in verse 5: Paul assures us that the Lord is close to us.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: I can't always "rejoice" in life, because frankly things in life don't always go the way I want them. But, what does the promise that "the Lord is near" mean to you? And, how do you think that could help us to "rejoice in the Lord"?

READ Verses 6-7 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. What could we say is the **PROMISE** in these verses? 2. How would you try to explain “the peace of God” to an unbeliever? How does praying about our problems help us overcome anxiety?

READ Verses 8-9 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** What is the **PROMISE** in these verses?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: If we want to experience the presence of God, we should avoid things that will stir up greedy, envious, or discontented thoughts! What are some negative influences in the world that can “drag you down” spiritually? Can you think of any examples of influences that would make it more difficult to experience the peace of God?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: These verses suggest that we should live **INTENTIONALLY**: that is, we should carefully consider and deliberately seek out the kinds of influences we want in our life. So, if you were writing out your own life plan, how would you complete this sentence: “To experience the presence of God, the positive influence that I want most in my life right now is.....”? What is one quality that you would seek for your life?

READ Verses 11-13 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** What do you see as the **PROMISE** in these verses?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Because Paul’s contentment wasn’t tied to outward possessions or material things, he could be content with a **LITTLE** and he could be content with a **LOT**. Which do you think is more difficult for folks today? Why?

READ Verses 18-20 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. When Paul went to Thessalonica to preach the gospel and then ran out of money, how do you suppose that affected his faith? Why? 2. How do you think Paul’s perspective changed when Epaphroditus showed up with this gift from the Philippian Christians?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What is the **PROMISE** in these verses? And, why might Paul feel strongly about this promise?

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Paul discovered the secret of contentment by experiencing firsthand the provision of God: when he was in a difficult situation in Thessalonica and was forced to depend on the Lord, Paul learned that he could trust God to come through for him! What about people like us today who live in a prosperous country and have all our basic needs met: what are some areas in which **WE** can learn contentment by allowing God to demonstrate that He will take care of us? Based on this lesson, what would you say are some ways that we can strengthen our faith by recognizing our dependence on God?

SUMMARY STATEMENT: This passage sums up all we have learned in this series: Genuine contentment is not found in gathering up possessions, but in learning to trust in the provision of God and by experiencing the peace and the presence of God. The more we exercise our faith and trust in God, the more convinced we can become that God *really will* take care of us!