

For Sunday, October 10, 2021

Lesson from N.T. Wright's "For Everyone Bible Study Guides - Collection"

(use questions 6-10 to go with this week's lesson)

Contentment in All Circumstances

Phl 4:10-23

For Paul, the arrival of Epaphroditus was like spring flowers suddenly bursting into bloom, telling him the Easter message once more. Paul was quick to say as well that his deep gratitude for the money didn't mean he was the sort of person who would grumble or moan at God if he wasn't kept well supplied with creature comforts. On the contrary, God had put him through a tough school in which he had learned one of the most important lessons in life: contentment.

Open

What would you say is necessary for contentment?

Study

1. *Read Phl 4:10-23.* Roman prisons didn't provide food for prisoners. That was left for friends and family. Now that Epaphroditus has arrived, Paul has received the gift the Philippians had gathered for him (vv. 10,18). How does Paul express his gratitude?
2. While expressing his thanks, how does Paul also distance himself from a complaining or grumbling attitude?
3. How do Paul's words and his attitude speak to a culture of discontent and cynicism?
4. In what ways do you find what Paul says to be challenging?
5. Paul would have struck many people as a human dynamo. His main public ministry probably lasted not much more than ten years, but he achieved more in that time than most people achieve in a long life. He suffered hardships and faced dangers that most people cannot even imagine. Why was he able to do it? Because of *the one who gives me power* (v. 13). He leaves it open as to whether

the one means God or Jesus the Messiah, but it seems more likely that he means God himself—the God, of course, whom we know in Jesus. In his letters Paul often speaks of the energy or power which he found welling up within himself, and which, as he declared, all came from God.

How have you found verse 13 to be true?

6. With whom have you entered or with whom could you enter into a partnership in suffering (v. 14)?
7. What motivates you to do this?
8. How had the Philippians turned out to be different from other churches Paul had started (vv. 15-16)?
9. Paul seeks to show gratitude while not letting anyone think he is really in this business for the money (v. 17). There were many wandering teachers and philosophers in the ancient world who would go from place to place selling their ideas, and many of them came to be regarded as crooks and cheats. So Paul returns to an accounting metaphor not to suggest for a moment that the Philippians were earning their salvation, but to say that God was delighted that their faith, hope and love were finding this practical expression.

According to Paul, what blessings come from sacrificial giving (vv. 18-19)?

10. In verse 19 Paul made the Philippians a promise, not from himself but from God. How has that promise proved true for you?

At last we understand the full extent of why Paul is so grateful for the Philippian church's partnership in the gospel (see Phl 1:5,7; 4:14-15). It isn't just that they have sent him money with Epaphroditus as their willing messenger. It is that they have continued a habit which goes right back to the beginning. This is why the whole letter has the warm tone, the sense of deep trust and affection, that we have sensed throughout.

11. What practical help does this Scripture passage offer on being more grateful to God?

Pray

Claim the promises of verses 13,19, not in a general way but for specific situations. Where do you need strength and renewed energy from God? How are you fearful about your needs not being met? What anxieties weigh you down? Pray about each concern, thanking God for the promises of verses 13,19 and their encouragement to you.

Guidelines for Leaders

My grace is sufficient for you. (2Co 12:9)

If leading a small group is something new for you, don't worry. These sessions are designed to flow naturally and be led easily. You may even find that the studies seem to lead themselves!

This study guide is flexible. You can use it with a variety of groups-students, professionals, coworkers, friends, neighborhood or church groups. Each study takes forty-five to sixty minutes in a group setting.

You don't need to be an expert on the Bible or a trained teacher to lead a small group. These guides are designed to facilitate a group's discussion, not a leader's presentation. Guiding group members to discover together what the Bible has to say and to listen together for God's guidance will help them remember much more than a lecture would.

There are some important facts to know about group dynamics and encouraging discussion. The suggestions listed below should equip you to effectively and enjoyably fulfill your role as leader.

Preparing for the Study

- 1 Ask God to help you understand and apply the passage in your own life. Unless this happens, you will not be prepared to lead others. Pray too for the various members of the group. Ask God to open your hearts to the message of his Word and motivate you to action.
- 2 Read the introduction to the entire guide to get an overview of the topics that will be explored.

- 3 As you begin each study, read and reread the assigned Bible passage to familiarize yourself with it. This study guide is based on the For Everyone series on the New Testament (published by SPCK and Westminster John Knox). It will help you and the group if you have on hand a copy of the companion volume from the For Everyone series both for the translation of the passage found there and for further insight into the passage.
- 4 Carefully work through each question in the study. Spend time in meditation and reflection as you consider how to respond.
- 5 Write your thoughts and responses in the space provided in the study guide. This will help you to express your understanding of the passage clearly.
- 6 It may help to have a Bible dictionary handy. Use it to look up any unfamiliar words, names or places. The glossary at the end of each New Testament for Everyone commentary may likewise be helpful for keeping discussion moving.
- 7 Reflect seriously on how you need to apply the Scripture to your life. Remember that the group members will follow your lead in responding to the studies. They will not go any deeper than you do.

Leading the Study

- 1 . At the beginning of your first time together, explain that these studies are meant to be discussions, not lectures. Encourage the members of the group to participate. However, do not put pressure on those who may be hesitant to speak-especially during the first few sessions.
- 2 . Be sure that everyone in your group has a study guide. Encourage the group to prepare beforehand for each discussion by reading the introduction to the guide and by working through the questions in each study.
- 3 . Begin each study on time. Open with prayer, asking God to help the group to understand and apply the passage.
- 4 . Have a group member read aloud the introduction at the beginning of the discussion.
- 5 . Discuss the "Open" question before the Bible passage is read. The "Open" question introduces the theme of the study and helps group members to begin to open up, and can reveal where our thoughts and feelings need to be transformed by Scripture. Reading the passage first will tend to color the honest reactions

people would otherwise give-because they are, of course, supposed to think the way the Bible does. Encourage as many members as possible to respond to the "Open" question, and be ready to get the discussion going with your own response.

- 6 . Have a group member read aloud the passage to be studied as indicated in the guide.
- 7 . The study questions are designed to be read aloud just as they are written. You may, however, prefer to express them in your own words.
There may be times when it is appropriate to deviate from the study guide. For example, a question may have already been answered. If so, move on to the next question. Or someone may raise an important question not covered in the guide. Take time to discuss it, but try to keep the group from going off on tangents.
- 8 . Avoid answering your own questions. An eager group quickly becomes passive and silent if members think the leader will do most of the talking. If necessary repeat or rephrase the question until it is clearly understood, or refer to the commentary woven into the guide to clarify the context or meaning.
- 9 . Don't be afraid of silence in response to the discussion questions. People may need time to think about the question before formulating their answers.
- 10 . Don't be content with just one answer. Ask, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anything else?" until several people have given answers to the question.
- 11 . Try to be affirming whenever possible. Affirm participation. Never reject an answer; if it is clearly off-base, ask, "Which verse led you to that conclusion?" or again, "What do the rest of you think?"
- 12 . Don't expect every answer to be addressed to you, even though this will probably happen at first. As group members become more at ease, they will begin to truly interact with each other. This is one sign of healthy discussion.
- 13 . Don't be afraid of controversy. It can be very stimulating. If you don't resolve an issue completely, don't be frustrated. Explain that the group will move on and God may enlighten all of you in later sessions.
- 14 . Periodically summarize what the group has said about the passage. This helps to draw together the various ideas mentioned and gives continuity to the study. But don't preach.

15 Conclude your time together with the prayer suggestion at the end of the study, adapting it to your group's particular needs as appropriate. Ask for God's help in following through on the applications you've identified.

16 End on time.

Many more suggestions and helps for studying a passage or guiding discussion can be found in *How to Lead a LifeGuide Bible Study* and *The Big Book on Small Groups* (both from InterVarsity Press/USA).