

# PAUSE & BE CONTENT

Week Six | May 28, 2017 | Better Together: Pause

## PREPARATION

### MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Read through Isaiah 43:13; Matthew 6:31-34; Romans 8:28; and Philippians 4:11-13. Pray the Holy Spirit would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

### THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Many questions have been included in this week's guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

### DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming weekend. Pray also for your time in this week's study.

## OPENING PRAYER

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## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God's children were created to find their contentment in Him.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

As we pause to find our contentment in God's character, provision, and providence, we avoid anxiety about the things of the world and life's fluctuating circumstances.

### MEDITATE

*"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content." (Philippians 4:11b)*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

*Have you ever been around a person who is constantly discontent with their circumstances? What does that feel like?*

*In what kinds of things does our culture find its contentment?*

*Why is the contentment of a person who does not know God a fluctuating experience?*

*Have you ever experienced intense anxiety? What usually triggers it?*

## FIGHTING ANXIETY

When we look around our society, we see that many people live unsettled and uncertain lives full of worry and disappointment. As we look further, we realize that this worry has a root: people are overwhelmed by ever changing circumstances and stressful life events. Even in the body of Christ, there are many things in life that disturb our minds and frustrate us. We can easily obsess over the circumstance we are in compared to the circumstance we wish we were in, for example, sickness versus health, being poor versus being wealthy, being a failure versus being successful, and so on. On top of these internal thoughts we have, our external experiences add another layer to the problem.

Everywhere we go, the norms of American advertising constantly tell us we don't have enough, that we're not okay without this or that product, that we haven't hit the "good life" yet, and that we haven't "made it" until we hit some sort of "next" thing. We are told that the next phase of life, the next raise in our paycheck, the next gadget, or the next relationship will make us truly content. However, each time we get there, instead of actually being content, we find ourselves reaching for more, still unappeased. While the culture says we are doomed to anxiety as life changes all around us, believers have a much brighter option in front of them. God promises us that we can learn to be content as we dwell on the character, provisions, and providence of God. As we trust in these things, our overwhelming anxiety is remedied by great contentment. As we will see, we truly can have the "good life" when we pause to be content in our good God.

*How do you usually resolve your anxiety?*

*What makes you feel most content in life? Most discontent?*

## ■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

This week we will study how to pause and be content in the Lord. While this is not an easy task, it's an incredibly fruitful one. When we choose to pause and trust in the three things below, we will see anxiety evaporate in our lives and contentment enter in:

### 1. CONTENT IN GOD HIMSELF

### 2. CONTENT IN GOD'S PROVISION

### 3. CONTENT IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

## GOING DEEPER

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

## CONTENT IN GOD HIMSELF

■ ■ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10; PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13; 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10;  
HEBREWS 13:5-6

*In what two situations has Paul learned to be content? [Phi. 4:11-13] What is his secret for being content in these circumstances? [Phil. 4:13]*

*What promise motivates us to be content with what we have, according to Hebrews 13:5?*

*What reason does Paul give for being content in 1 Timothy 6:7?*

In our culture contentment is an elusive dream that everyone chases but can't quite catch. For Paul, he says something staggering: he has caught it! What's most amazing is that a particular circumstance did not give him total contentment. Whereas most would assume that prosperous circumstances bring contentment, Paul says that contentment can be found in any circumstance. But How? He gives us the answer in verse 13: through knowing Christ, the God who can strengthen us for whatever we face. For Paul, contentment isn't in a circumstance, it's in a person. What's most interesting is that Paul says Jesus gives him the power he needs to face the circumstance of intense hardship, which one might expect. But he adds that Christ gives him the power to also face the circumstances of incredible prosperity, a situation most of us don't associate with needing fighting power! Paul knew how difficult poverty could be, and trusts Jesus for the strength to face it. He also knew how deceptive seasons of prosperity can be, and he trusts in Jesus' power to fight against the lies and false promises of wealth. In Paul's mind, both situations require Jesus' accurate perspective and fighting power.

*What happens to those focused on getting rich instead of God, according to 1 Timothy 6:8-10?*

*How should we view weak, uncertain seasons of life? Why? [2 Cor. 12:9-10]*

Like Philippians 4, Hebrews 13 and 1 Timothy 6 agree that the top contender for our trust apart from God is money, and they push us to believe that God being with us is enough to make us truly content in life. God is our helper, he leads us along the right paths in life, and he will never leave us. On the other hand, obsession with money leads us down harmful paths and compromises our faith, leading us away from God. On top of this, we can't take wealth with us when we die. Whether it's at the end of our life or week-to-week, unlike God, money eventually leaves us! God's goodness and mercy follow us wherever we go, and money, as we all know, doesn't. We can clearly see that God is the better choice when it comes to our lifelong needs of provision and security.

*What situations in life make you feel very content? What situations make you feel discontent?*

*How have these verses impacted the way you view all seasons of life? The way you view the pursuit of money?*

## CONTENT IN GOD'S PROVISION

■ ■ **PSALM 23:4; ISAIAH 40:31; ZEPHANIAH 3:17; MATTHEW 6:31-34; ROMANS 8:32; PHILIPPIANS 4:19**

*What common emotion does Jesus tell us to avoid in Matthew 6:31? What reason does he give for telling us this [v. 32]?*

*Instead of seeking the things of the world, what should we seek [Matt. 6:33]?*

*How do we know that God's nature includes being a giver and a provider, according to Romans 8:32?*

*What similarities do you see in Romans 8:32 and Philippians 4:19?*

Jesus tells us that anxiety over the daily parts of life is something he does not want us to experience. Like any good father, Jesus shows us that our Heavenly Father is well-aware of the things we need like food, shelter, and clothing. When we find ourselves in extreme anxiety, worry, or discontentment, we prove that we do not believe the Father knows our needs, and that we believe we are all on our own, much like those who don't know God. Instead of focusing on these things like the rest of the world does, we should pause and focus our attention on the kingdom of God and his work in the world. As we focus on the Lord, he takes care of the things we need along the way.

As Romans 8 teaches us, the clearest indicator to us that God is a giver and a provider is the fact that he gave us his very own Son! If we know God gave us what was most precious to him in order to provide for our most important

need of salvation, we can be sure that he will give us lesser things we need to thrive in our other areas of life. In fact, God promises to supply our every need as we follow him with our lives (Phil. 4:19). By using words like every and all, these verses give us great hope and contentment in the character of our God—that he cares about every square inch of our lives and our needs. There’s no need he does not know or care about, no part of our lives for which he does not want to provide. Our God provides for not just “spiritual” things, but all things.

*What specific provision does God give us in Isaiah 40:31?*

*What is God giving us right now, according to Zephaniah 3:17?*

*In difficult seasons of life, what provision from God helps us keep going [Ps. 23:4]?*

While we are extremely thankful that God provides for all things in our lives, sometimes we forget the specific things provided in the word “all.” The first thing that usually comes to mind when speaking of God’s provision is material blessings like money, houses, cars, furniture, and so on. Yes, God supplies material blessings when we need them, and we should be incredibly grateful when he does, knowing that every type of gift comes from him (James 1:17). However, material blessings are not the only or even the most important blessing God can give! While most people think in financial terms when God promises to richly bless us, God also blesses us with much more lasting and fulfilling things that give us everlasting contentment. For example, as Isaiah 40 shows us, God offers us divine strength to get through times of weariness, a very important resource many do not have in times of trouble. We also are given a calming love from God that quiets us in our anxiety, as well as the gift of his presence that walks with us through every hill and valley of life (Psalm 23:4; Zeph. 3:17). In these ways, God does not just want to provide for what’s going on in our bank account, but for what’s going on in our hearts. These provisions are incredibly precious, and when we rest in them, we are content in every circumstance.

*What do you need God to provide most in your life right now?*

*Which of these promises speaks most to you about the character of God and his desire to provide for you? Why?*

## CONTENT IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

■ ■ PSALM 139:16; PROVERBS 19:21, 21:1; ISAIAH 43:13;  
JOHN 19:10-11; ROMANS 8:28; EPHESIANS 1:11

*What do Isaiah 43:13 and Proverbs 19:21 teach us about God's control and work in the world?*

*We know that God is directing and guiding world history in general. What does that include, according to Proverbs 21:1?*

*We know that God is directing the paths of the powerful, but what else is he planning and directing, according to Psalm 139:16?*

We've seen so far in this lesson that we can be content in the Lord and his provisions over our life. On top of this, we can also pause and be content in the providence of God. God's "providence" simply means that God is working in the world, with every part of it at his disposal to accomplish his will. Isaiah 43 and Proverbs 19 shows us that when God works in the world, nothing can stop him—not Satan, not powerful people, not us! When God plans something, it's impossible for something to come against those plans. Even when we try to follow our own manmade path, at the end of the day, the plans that God has established will prevail. As we see in these passages, God's providence does not just extend over the world in a general way, but works on all levels of society—from the offices of the powerful to the tiny baby in a mother's womb (Prov. 21:1; Psalm 139:16). Knowing that God is working in everything all around us, we have great confidence and contentment.

*Jesus tells Pilate that the authority and decision to crucify him came from where? (John 19:10-11)*

*What common phrase do you see in Ephesians 1:11 and Romans 8:28?*

While we usually believe that God is at work when good circumstances come our way, we often treat our difficult circumstances as if God is absent. IF anyone can help us learn otherwise, it's Jesus. Immediately before he is crucified, the most agonizing circumstance of his entire life, Jesus makes a clear point to Pilate: the authority and decision to do this never really came from you, it came from God. Jesus believed God was involved, active, and working, even in the darkest moment of his life. And as we now know, God used the most horrific and unjust moment in history to create something as beautiful as salvation. When we struggle to believe God is providential in our lives, we can look to the cross, seeing that God truly works in all things (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:28). Knowing this about God's providence gives us great contentment in whatever circumstance we face, whether we are experiencing seasons of great prosperity or seasons of great pain. We take hold of the hope that the providence of our God is always at work, and we rest content in his power to work in the good and the bad. When we know that there is not one stray molecule he does not orchestrate for his own purposes, including the little details of our lives, there's no room for discontentment!

*What areas of your life do you struggle to believe God is at work?*

*Explain how the cross shows God's incredible providence.*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

*In what places of your life are you not trusting that God is a provider? Select some Scripture passages you can meditate on this week that will give you strength to believe this truth.*

*What do you usually trust in to provide security for you apart from the Lord? Take time right now to pause, repent for trusting in that thing, and run to the Lord for your security and provision.*



*What patterns in your life reveal that you do not believe God is providential and in control of your circumstances? What changes can you make to practically show that you believe God is truly at work in your life?*

*Jesus says that non-believers live in anxiety, but Christians believe that the Father knows their needs and provides for them at the proper time. What non-Christian in your life needs to see you modeling this kind of trust? How can you do that this week?*

## PRAY

*+ Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

*God, help me believe you are a better provider for me than the other things I run to for security and help.*

*God, show me the areas of my life that I don't trust you to provide for, and give me great faith to trust you in these areas.*

*God, give me contentment in your character, your provision for my needs, and your providence over my life. When I'm not being content in these things, convict me.*

*God, give me eyes to see when you are actively working in the details of my life so I may thank and praise you for it.*

## CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK

*Studies show that most of our disappointments and dissatisfactions come from things over which we have no control. Since anxiety often rises up in situations we can't control, we must fight to believe God is in control and combat our discontentment intentionally.*

*To do this, write down the disappointments and dissatisfactions in your life. For each one, write down how and why you can be content instead of angry, scared, or discontent. Provide Scripture passages with each if that helps you recall the truth of God in these situations.*

## COMMENTARY

**PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13:** When Paul says, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me,” he does not mean God will bless whatever a person does. He means that God will strengthen a believer when he faces all sorts of circumstances in life. For a Christian’s life it must be read within the context of the whole letter, which emphasizes obedience to God and service to God and others.

**HEBREWS 13:6:** This citation from Psalm 118:6 applies the idea of trusting in God for more than just financial needs, especially in light of persecution referenced just before in Hebrews 13:3. Part of trusting God for our needs is when we are ostracized and even mistreated for our faith.

**ISAIAH 40:31:** “Waiting for the Lord” means to savor God’s promises by faith until the time of fulfillment. “Renew” means to find endless supplies of fresh divine strength.

**EPHESIANS 1:11:** God had planned our salvation from all eternity. By definition God is sovereign and providential, directing all things freely according to his royal counsel. This is in sharp contrast with the pagan gods of the time, who were understood to be often fickle or bound by an unknowable and random fate. God’s predestination gives his people tremendous comfort, for they know that all who come to Christ do so through God’s enabling grace and divine appointment. When this passage says “who works all things according to the counsel of his will,” it is best understood to mean that every single event that occurs is in some sense predestined by God. At the same time, Paul emphasizes the importance of human responsibility, as is evident in all of the moral commands later in Ephesians and in all of Paul’s letters.

*\*All commentary resourcing for Lesson 6 was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and the NIV Compact Bible Commentary.*

