

COUNT IT ALL

Joy

Discover a Happiness That
Circumstances Cannot Change

DAVID JEREMIAH

READERS' GUIDE

For Personal Reflection and Group Study

Before beginning your personal or group study of *Count It All Joy*, take time to read these introductory comments.

If you are working through the study on your own, you may want to adapt certain sections (for example, the icebreakers) and record your responses to all questions in a separate notebook. You might find it more enriching or motivating to study with a partner with whom you can share answers or insights.

If you are leading a group, you may want to ask your group members to read each assigned chapter and work through the study questions before the group meets. This isn't always easy for busy adults, so encourage them with occasional phone calls or notes between meetings. Help members manage their time by pointing out how they can cover a few pages each day. Also have them identify a regular time of the day or week that they can devote to the study. They too may write their responses to the questions in notebooks.

Notice that each session includes the following features:

COUNT IT ALL JOY

- Session Topic—a brief statement summarizing the session
- Icebreakers—activities to help group members get better acquainted with the session topic and/or with each other
- Group Discovery Questions—a list of questions to encourage individual discovery or group participation
- Personal Application Questions—an aid to applying the knowledge gained through study to one's personal living. (Note: These are important questions for group members to answer for themselves even if they do not wish to discuss their responses in the meeting.)
- Optional Activities—supplemental ideas that will enhance the study
- Prayer Focus—suggestions for turning one's learning into prayer
- Assignment—activities or preparation to complete prior to the next session

Here are a few tips that can help you more effectively lead small-group studies:

- Pray for each group member, asking the Lord to help you create an open atmosphere where

everyone will feel free to share with one another and you.

- Encourage group members to bring their Bibles, as well as their texts, to each session. This study is based on the *New King James Version*, but it is good to have several translations on hand for purposes of comparison.
- Start and end on time. This is especially important for the first meeting, because it will set the pattern for the rest of the sessions.
- Begin with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds and to give understanding so that truth will be applied.
- Involve everyone. As learners, we retain only 10 percent of what we hear, 20 percent of what we see, 65 percent of what we hear and see, but 90 percent of what we hear, see, and do.
- Promote a relaxed environment. Arrange the chairs in a circle or semicircle. This allows eye contact among members and encourages dynamic discussion. Be relaxed in your own attitude and manner. Be willing to share, yourself.

1 THE JOY OF COMMUNITY

PHILIPPIANS 1:1–11

SESSION TOPIC

The Christian life is a life lived in community, characterized by joy, with love as its highest goal.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Break into groups of two. Interview your partner, and allow your partner to interview you. Take turns introducing your partner to the whole group.
2. The author speaks of the essential nature of community and fellowship to the Christian believer. Name one or more of the communities to which you belong (e.g., family, church, neighborhood, job, interest groups) and tell how this community is important to you.

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. Why is fellowship necessary? What happens when we lack fellowship?
2. The author quotes Amy Carmichael on “unlove” and its deadly, spreading power. Have you ever witnessed the spread of “unlove” through a community? Describe this occurrence and its effect.
3. In the greeting of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, what is the significance of the words *grace* and *peace* being used together and in that order?

4. The author speaks of the diversity found in the Philippian church. Is your church community homogeneous or diverse? Why?
5. According to the author, love is useless unless it is expressed. How did Paul express his love for the Philippians? How can a spirit of gratitude be an expression of love?
6. Why was Paul so sure of the love the Philippians had for him? According to C. S. Lewis, what is the secret to loving someone?
7. In verses 9–11, Paul prayed for the growth and maturity of his Philippian friends. For what specifically did he pray? Express this prayer in your own words.

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What have been the benefits of fellowship in your own life? Are you lacking in fellowship? If so, talk to others in the group or to your pastor about where you could receive fellowship. If you're not but you know someone who is, how could you help him or her?
2. Humble service is an important theme in Philippians. What is your definition of healthy humility? Who in your life best exemplifies this trait? Is humble service a characteristic of your own life?
3. How unified is your community? What can you do to help build unity in your community?

COUNT IT ALL JOY

4. Paul called the Philippians to unity within diversity. How tolerant are you of diversity within your community?

5. Think of someone you love. What is one way you can express your love to him or her this week? (Remember that what makes you feel loved is not necessarily what makes someone else feel loved.)

6. In your closest relationship, how difficult is it to always seek the best interest of the one you love?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Express your love to someone in your community this week through an act of hospitality. (For example, invite someone to your home for dinner.)

2. Make a prayer box. You will need three-by-five index cards and a file box with seven dividers. At the top of each card, write the name of a person in your community for whom you would like to pray. Under the name write specific things you want to pray for that person. Divide the cards into seven groups and file each group under a different day of the week. Use your prayer box during your devotional time to pray for the people filed under that specific day. In the front of your box, make a card for yourself and anyone else you want to pray for daily.

PRAYER FOCUS

Use Paul's prayer for the Philippians (vv. 9–11) to pray for your community.

ASSIGNMENT

1. If you do not already keep a journal, begin one now. This week, reflect on the importance of your community in your life.
2. Read chapter 2 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

2 THE JOY OF ADVERSITY

PHILIPPIANS 1:12–26

SESSION TOPIC

Good things can come from adversity.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Tell about a time in your life or the life of someone close to you when good came from adversity.
2. Give some examples of well-known people through whom God used adversity to further His purpose.

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. What were some of the positive results of Paul's imprisonment?

COUNT IT ALL JOY

2. What did Paul mean by “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”?
3. Can good results ever come from evil motives? What was Paul talking about in verses 15–18?
4. Do you believe it is God who brings adversity into our lives? Why or why not?
5. Dr. Jeremiah points out that adversity makes some people better and others bitter. What makes the difference?
6. What are the seven advantages to adversity? Give an example of each of these seven principles from the Bible, from the life of a well-known Christian, or from your own experience.
7. What were some of the adversities Paul faced during his ministry (Acts 20:6–28:31; 2 Cor. 11:23–27)? How was he able to keep a positive attitude?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Think of an adverse situation from your own life. Can you see any of the seven principles at work?
2. What is the most common way for you to respond to adversity? What can you learn from Paul?

READERS' GUIDE

3. What was Paul's attitude toward death? How is it the same or different from your own attitude?
4. When people are in a life-and-death crisis like Paul, they are sometimes better able to focus on what is really important. What was Paul's focus? Where is your focus? With all of life's demands, how do you sort out what is really important?
5. Give an example from your own experience where courage was contagious. From whom do you draw courage? Who draws courage from you?
6. What have been some of the major adversities you have faced? Are you stronger for having faced them? If so, in what ways?
7. Has learning about the advantages of adversity been an encouragement to you in whatever trouble you are facing? If so, how have you been encouraged? How could you encourage someone else?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Get out the prayer box you made last week. Under each name write down the adversities currently being faced by that person and pray specifically for those struggles.
2. In your journal, write down an adversity you are currently facing. Envision how you would like to respond to this adversity and write this response down.

3. If you do not already have a support person or group, seek out someone with whom you can share adversities and encouragement.

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for others and yourself in the struggles you are currently facing. Pray that God will help you keep a clear conscience, a courageous testimony, and a Christ-centered focus.

ASSIGNMENT

1. This week include in your journal the adversities you face each day and how you are able to face them.
2. Read chapter 3 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

3 THE JOY OF INTEGRITY

PHILIPPIANS 1:27–30

SESSION TOPIC

Our lives must be guided by four priorities—conduct, consistency, cooperation, and courage—if we are to claim victory over the principalities and powers of this world.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Imagine you are a Christian in Paul's Philippian church. The authorities have been questioning some of your friends and have accused them of disloyalty to Rome. How would you explain to the Roman authorities what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

2. The author quotes Charles Colson's description of an antidraft poster that read, "Nothing is worth dying for." What would you die for?

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. The word *politeuomai*, translated "conversation" in the KJV, speaks of the conduct expected of a citizen. What are the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in this country?

2. What are the responsibilities incumbent on citizens of the kingdom of God?

3. Many of the early church leaders described the Christian's life as that of a sojourner (a foreigner residing in or traveling through another country). What opportunities do Christians encounter as we "sojourn" in this country? What challenges and/or dangers do we face as foreigners in a strange land?

4. The author suggests that the story of Daniel is a great illustration of a consistent lifestyle. How do you imagine Daniel was able to live such a life under these difficult circumstances?

5. Certainly one of the keys to Daniel's great strength was his strong sense of personal identity. His identity was rooted in the history and traditions of Israel. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees

three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Dan. 6:10). What traditions (practices or disciplines) do we as Christians observe to remind us of who we are?

6. The author, quoting Warren Wiersbe, states that the church must “face up to her sins, repent, and start being the true church of that Gospel. We Christians boast that we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, but perhaps the Gospel of Christ is ashamed of us.” In what ways has the church’s ministry failed to match its message?

7. In what areas have you seen your church community successfully “striving together”? Where could your community’s ministry be strengthened by attending to our common struggle?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. The author quotes Sheldon Vanauken, who states that “the best argument for Christianity is Christians: their joy, their certainty, their completeness.” Do these attributes characterize your life? If not, what are the struggles that you face in trying to live such a life?

2. Jesus said, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you” (Matt. 5:11). Yet most of us today are not explicitly reviled, and rarely do we face anything that could be considered persecution. Why do we seem to encounter so little opposition today? Are there other, more subtle, forms of opposition that confront us today? What are they?

READERS' GUIDE

3. What attributes of Paul's life would you like to see in yourself?

4. What are some of the important events from Paul's life that contributed to his psychological and spiritual formation? How did Paul respond to these events?

5. One common aspect of great leaders throughout the history of the church is the use of a spiritual discipline or rule. What are some disciplines you would like to incorporate into your life? (You're already following a rule if you've been using your prayer box and keeping a journal from week to week.)

6. Another important aspect of Paul's life is that he cultivated close relationships with Christians wherever he traveled. Choose one or two close friends with whom you can share your struggles and victories. Ask them to help you be accountable in following your spiritual rule.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Read some of the writings of the early church fathers. Most of these works are filled with extraordinary examples of Christians striving together in difficult circumstances. For starters, try the *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, or the letters of Ignatius. There are numerous translations of these works available through your local bookstore.

2. Select the card with your name from your prayer box. Write down the disciplines you wish to incorporate into your spiritual

rule. (Remember to start with a very simple rule.) For now, your rule might consist only of your prayer box and your journal. Try to follow your rule for several weeks (or months) before adding anything to it. Aim for simplicity and consistency, not volume.

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for God's help and wisdom as you select and begin to follow a spiritual rule.

ASSIGNMENT

1. In your journal reflect on the stories of Daniel and Paul and the characteristics that made their lives remarkable.
2. Read chapter 4 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

4 THE JOY OF UNITY

PHILIPPIANS 2:7–11

SESSION TOPIC

We are to come together in Christian unity, having the servant attitude of Christ.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Give some examples from movies or television of how our culture encourages a fixation with self.
2. Name someone you know who exhibits a servant attitude.

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. What did Paul mean when he said, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (v. 5)?
2. What is the price we must pay for unity? How does the story of the cross give us a glimpse of this price?
3. How is the Incarnation a demonstration of humility?
4. In what way did Christ empty Himself?
5. For what purpose did Christ come in the flesh?
6. Why is an attitude of humble service essential to unity in the body?
7. According to the author, "There is no spiritual unity without doctrinal oneness." Do you agree? If so, what do you consider to be the core doctrines essential to unity? Can you have unity with people from Christian denominations other than your own?
8. Give some examples (other than from movies and television) of how our culture is at odds with Paul's injunction to lose the self. How can we foster selflessness in ourselves and our children?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you have an attitude of humble service? In what ways do you not have a servant attitude?

2. What makes having a servant attitude most difficult for you? What can you do to encourage the development of the mind of Christ in yourself?

3. Paul probably wrote Philippians 2:1–11 to deal with the friction that had developed in the Philippian church. Is it possible to have a church without friction? Why or why not?

4. In relationships, how comfortable are you with conflict? Are you more likely to try to resolve conflict or ignore the fact that conflict exists? What do you think usually happens when conflict is ignored?

5. According to the author, the word *comfort* in verse 1 indicates a spoken word of encouragement. When has a word of encouragement been most meaningful to you? Is there someone who needs your encouragement?

6. The word *each* in verse 3 is a reminder that we have a personal responsibility for the unity of the body. What can you do to encourage unity in your church community?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Find verses from Paul's letters that show Paul's lowliness of mind.

2. Look through the names of the people in your prayer box. Are you involved in a conflict with any of these people? If so, what can you do to help resolve this conflict?

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray for the unity of your congregation, your denomination, and the church around the world. Ask God for faithfulness in building unity in your congregation.

ASSIGNMENT

1. In your journal this week, write down any interpersonal conflicts you have and how they are resolved.
2. Read chapter 5 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

5 THE JOY OF RESPONSIBILITY

PHILIPPIANS 2:12–16

SESSION TOPIC

Be responsible to discipline your own moral character.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. There are many stories of famous people who achieved great goals through self-discipline. Who is your favorite example and why?
2. What is your definition of the word *discipline*?

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”?

2. What is the relationship between faith and good works in regard to salvation?
3. What does the author say is the secret to godliness?
4. What is the relationship between the Christian working out his own salvation and God working in the Christian?
5. How are we to be different from the world?
6. How can we let people know what is going on in our lives and get prayer and support when we need it, without complaining? What is the difference between murmuring and disagreeing?
7. What are the disciplines of the Christian life? What are the advantages of being disciplined in following Christ? Is it possible to be too disciplined?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Are your feelings about the word *discipline* negative or positive? Why?
2. Do you think you are a disciplined person? Why or why not?
3. Which disciplines of the Christian life do you practice? Is there a discipline you would like to begin practicing in order to realize the full potential of all that you are and have in Christ?

READERS' GUIDE

4. Sometimes we spend so much effort trying to figure out what God wants that we forget to do the things we *know* God wants of us. According to the author, “When we are obedient to do all that we know God wants of us, then we have the joy of entering into all that God is doing in us.” Are you obedient to all that you know God wants of you? If not, how can you change that?

5. If you were on trial for being a Christian, would you be convicted? On what basis?

6. In what ways do you shine as a light in the world?

7. If “the disciplines of the Christian life were never meant to be easy,” how can we succeed?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Write down Bob Knight’s definition of *discipline* and put it in a place you will see it often.

2. If you have decided to begin a new Christian discipline (or to be more regular in a discipline you now practice), make a note of it in your prayer box and pray for yourself in this endeavor.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank God for doing His work in you and ask for His help in being obedient to do your part.

ASSIGNMENT

1. This week in your journal, write down how God is working in you and how you cooperate with Him.
2. Read through chapter 6 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

6 THE JOY OF MINISTRY

PHILIPPIANS 2:17–30

SESSION TOPIC

The three keys of effective ministry are selflessness, service, and suffering.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Who was your role model as a child?
2. What is your ministry?

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. Who are the role models for most American children today? What does that say about us as a nation? If you could choose role models for your own children, whom would you choose?
2. Paul's selfless service brought him joy. Does selflessness bring joy? Why or why not? Does selfishness bring sadness? If so, why is it so hard to let go of the self?

3. Why was Paul willing to sacrifice everything for the cause of Christ?
4. What did Paul sacrifice by sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians? Why did he make this sacrifice?
5. Is it possible to escape the trap of selfishness in American society? How can the church help? Is the church itself ever caught in the trap? If so, in what ways?
6. How does one seek the good of Christ?
7. The author says one must learn to be a warrior as well as a worker in the ministry. If so, with whom are we fighting? Who, or what, are the rulers, authorities, and powers Paul wrote about in Ephesians 6:12? What are the characteristics of a good warrior?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Paul told the Philippians to follow him. Whom do you follow? Would you want anyone to follow you? Why or why not? Who does follow you?
2. Does suffering always come with discipleship? Why or why not? Have you ever suffered for the cause of Christ? If so, in what way?
3. When do you find it easy to put others first? When do you find it difficult to put others first? Should we always put others first?

COUNT IT ALL JOY

4. Look at Philippians 1:21 and 2:21. Which verse best describes your life? Explain your answer.
5. Reread the author's quote of Bishop Ryle on pages 138 and 139. Are you a man or woman "of one thing"? Is it possible to be a man or woman "of one thing"?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. When you go through your prayer box this week, pray for each person in his or her ministry.
2. Who has ministered to you through selflessness, service, or suffering? Write a letter or make a phone call thanking this person.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank God that He calls us all to minister, and ask Him to give you an increased attitude of joy in your ministry.

ASSIGNMENT

1. This week, be aware of how Paul's example of selflessness, Timothy's example of service, or Epaphroditus's example of suffering can inspire you in your ministry. Make notes in your journal.
2. Read chapter 7 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

7 THE JOY OF HUMILITY

PHILIPPIANS 3:1–6

SESSION TOPIC

Rejoice only in Christ Jesus and not in who you are and what you have done.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Describe a humble person. Describe a person who is not humble.
2. When Paul listed his own credentials in Philippians 3:4–6, he didn't sound very humble. Why, then, is this chapter titled "The Joy of Humility"?

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. What were Paul's credentials? Do you think Paul could have accomplished all that he did if he had not been born with such advantages? Why or why not?
2. Would Paul's life have been considered a success by today's standards? Would Jesus's life? Why or why not?
3. What evidence do you see that Americans are obsessed with success? What type of success are we obsessed by? How is the American obsession with success antithetical to the gospel?
4. Why did it matter to Paul that some of the Philippian believers were being circumcised? Why was that so dangerous?

COUNT IT ALL JOY

5. Give some examples of legalism in the church today. Who are the Judaizers of the church today?
6. What's dangerous about legalism? How does legalism destroy joy?
7. When do good works become legalism?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What are your credentials? How are they a benefit? How are they a stumbling block?
2. How do you feel about your frailties? Are you able to rejoice in your smallness?
3. Paul's zeal was striking, whether he was persecuting the church or furthering the cause of Christ. Are you zealous about anything? What inspires (or would inspire) zeal in you?
4. Are you ever legalistic? If so, in what ways?
5. Does legalism ever rob you of joy? Can you think of a time in your life when you experienced an abundance of joy?
6. The author gives the example of George Whitefield as a person who, in his early years, was very religious but was not a Christian. Are you counting on your good works to make you acceptable to God? What is the relationship between faith and works?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. In your journal, write down the things you hope to accomplish before your death. Then answer the following questions:

a. Ultimately, will these accomplishments be the basis on which my life will be judged?

b. What will it mean to me if I am unable to achieve these goals?

2. Take the card with your name on it out of the prayer box. Write down the struggles you have with legalism. Pray for yourself in those struggles this week.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank God that you can rejoice in Jesus Christ and do not have to depend on your own accomplishments.

ASSIGNMENT

1. In your prayer journal this week, write down any struggles you have with legalism and any moments of joy you experience.

2. Read chapter 8 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

8 THE JOY OF VICTORY

PHILIPPIANS 3:7–14

SESSION TOPIC

We cannot be victorious without paying the price.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Who is your favorite athlete? What characteristics enable this person to be so successful in his or her field?
2. Name an achievement of yours that did not come naturally but was the result of much effort.

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. What things do we sometimes see as assets that may actually be liabilities to the Christian?
2. Restate Matthew 16:25–26 in your own words. What does it mean to lose your life for Christ's sake?
3. What things did Paul count as useless in winning Christ?
4. One of Paul's goals was to know the Lord Jesus Christ. What does it mean to know Christ? How do we come to know Christ better?
5. Why did Paul want to know "the fellowship of His [Christ's] sufferings"? Did Paul speak of suffering as a positive or negative

experience? How does his view of suffering differ from that of our culture?

6. Is it possible to share in Christ's glory without sharing in His suffering? What is the difference between suffering and suffering for the sake of Christ?

7. What does the author give as a formula for success in the Christian life?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What do you do to grow in your knowledge of Christ? How intense is your striving to know Him?

2. Have you ever suffered for the cause of Christ? If so, in what way? If not, why do you think you have not?

3. One of the steps in the author's formula for success is to develop the discipline of maintaining one's focus. What distracts you as you strive to live out your faith?

4. Are you able to forget your failures, or do some failures continue to haunt you? How can you use your failures as opportunities for growth?

5. The author shares that a leader of the persecuted church once said that 95 percent of the believers who face the test of persecution

pass it, while 95 percent of the believers who face the test of prosperity fail it. Have you faced either the test of persecution or the test of prosperity? If so, how did you respond?

6. What is the cost of being faithful to the call of Christ? In what ways have you struggled with the cost of following Christ in your own life?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Do a topical study on the word *suffer* in the New Testament by using your concordance and cross-references. (Be sure to include Matthew 5:10–12 and Philippians 1:29 in your study.)

2. Go through the names of the people listed in your prayer box. Pray for them to be victorious in being faithful to the call of Christ. Pray for anyone who may be suffering.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank God for calling you to follow Christ. Ask Him to give you intensity in your commitment.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Memorize Matthew 16:25–26. Meditate on those verses in your prayer time. Write down any thoughts you have in your prayer journal.

2. Read chapter 9 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

9 THE JOY OF MATURITY

PHILIPPIANS 3:15–21

SESSION TOPIC

We mature as Christians through encouragement, examples, personal purity, and the expectation of heaven.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. What is your definition of Christian maturity?
2. We've all heard children talk about what they would like to be or do when they grow up. Who do you hope to become as you strive toward Christian maturity?

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. Is maturity necessarily a factor of age? Why or why not? If not, what does bring maturity?
2. Paul exhorted the Philippians to follow his example and the examples of other mature believers. Who can we pattern our lives after today? What kinds of people does our society present as role models?
3. How did Paul's view of the body differ from the Greeks of his day? Why was this difference significant?
4. What are the privileges and duties of a person's national citizenship? What are our privileges and duties as citizens of heaven?

5. How does our heavenly citizenship affect how we respond as citizens of our nation? Does our allegiance to our country ever conflict with our allegiance to heaven? Is nationalism a sin or a virtue?

6. What do believers need in order to keep pressing toward the goal of spiritual maturity? What, if anything, could keep a person from growing?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to set your mind on earthly things or on heavenly things? In what ways do you struggle with keeping your mind on heaven?

2. What is one way you have become more mature in the last couple of years? What do you think contributed to this change?

3. The author quotes Malcolm Muggeridge as saying, “When I look back on my life nowadays,... what seemed at the time most significant and seductive, seems now most futile and absurd.” What in your life seems significant now that may later prove to be unimportant? What will have lasting importance?

4. Has there ever been someone whose godly example you tried to imitate? If so, who? Who would be a good role model for you now?

5. In what ways does the expectation of Christ's return encourage you?

6. How have you seen God's transformation in your life?

7. Are you striving for spiritual maturity? If so, what things impede your progress? What encourages your progress?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Draw a graph of your spiritual development, showing both the times that you've grown and the dry times. Identify the circumstances that encouraged or impeded your growth.

2. Select from your prayer box the card of a person who has been a godly example to you. Pray for this person every day this week.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank God that He works for our maturity. Ask Him to give you endurance and persistence for your spiritual climb.

ASSIGNMENT

1. This week in your prayer journal record the times when someone is a godly example to you. Also record the times when you may have been an example to someone else.

2. Read chapter 10 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

10 THE JOY OF HARMONY

PHILIPPIANS 4:1–5

SESSION TOPIC

We must do what we can to promote harmony in the body of Christ.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Where do most people look for happiness?
2. Why does happiness seem so elusive?

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paul urge the Philippians to “stand fast in the Lord” rather than to march forward into battle?
2. Have you ever witnessed or been involved in a major church argument? If so, what was the argument about? What were the results?
3. Why are harmony and teamwork in the church important? Why was it so important to Paul that Euodia and Syntyche work out their differences?
4. What is the difference between joy and happiness? How is it possible to experience joy in negative circumstances? How is Paul an example of this?

5. How is pain connected to joy? How does our culture reinforce our avoidance of pain?

6. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “The Lord is at hand”? (Look up verse 5 in several translations.) Why would Paul have given this reminder to the Philippians? What effect should this reminder have on our behavior?

7. What is the importance of the ministry of reconciliation? Have you seen this ministry in your church? How can we all be reconcilers?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Read the prescription for unhappiness in the introduction to this chapter. Are any of these ten ideas true of you? If so, which ones? What could you do to change this?

2. In what ways do you avoid pain? Is this always to your benefit? Why or why not?

3. What did William Hendriksen mean by “big-heartedness”? In what ways are you big-hearted? In what ways are you defensive?

4. What does it mean to “rejoice in the Lord always”? What can you rejoice over?

COUNT IT ALL JOY

5. What does it mean to let your gentleness (or moderation) be evident to all? How can you put verse 5 into practice?
6. What are Judson Edwards's six axioms for getting along with each other? Which of these rules are easy for you to follow, and which are more difficult?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Make a note in your prayer box to pray every day this week for harmony in the church.
2. Do a study on the important role of women in church history.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank God for giving you reason to rejoice. Ask God to give you a spirit of "big-heartedness."

ASSIGNMENT

1. In your prayer journal, write down one or two of the ideas from the prescription for unhappiness that give you the most trouble. Record in your journal every time you do *not* give in to that philosophy.
2. Read chapter 11 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

11 THE JOY OF SECURITY

PHILIPPIANS 4:6–9

SESSION TOPIC

We can be freed from anxiety through prayer. Proper thoughts and actions will help us to continue in peace.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. What are the kinds of things that most people worry about?
2. Compared to most Americans, do you live in a high-stress or low-stress environment? What makes it high or low stress? Is there anything we can do about the stress in our lives?

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. According to the author, only 8 percent of our worries have their basis in reality. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. What physical, spiritual, and emotional harm can come from worry?
3. Is it always wrong to worry? Can anything beneficial come from worrying? If so, what?
4. What is the value of prayer when we are in a stressful or difficult situation?

5. What are Paul's six guidelines for proper meditation and thought? How can an understanding of these guidelines affect what we watch, listen to, and read?
6. What is the connection between thoughts and actions? Why is it important for us to control our thoughts?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. To what fears and anxieties are you prone? How can Philippians 4:6–9 be a source of encouragement to you?
2. Share about a time when you prayed and got what you wanted. Share about a time when you prayed and did not get what you wanted. What made the difference?
3. How have you benefited from prayer, even when prayer did not change your situation?
4. What is the importance of thanksgiving in prayer? How much of your prayer life includes giving thanks?
5. Have you ever been in a difficult situation in which you experienced “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding”? Explain.
6. What are you allowing into your thoughts that should not be there? What is the result of this wrong thinking? What could you replace these thoughts with that fits Paul's six guidelines?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Look up the following verses.

Psalm 27:1–4

Isaiah 26:3

Isaiah 55:10–12

John 14:27

John 16:33

2. Pray for peace for yourself and for those whose names are in your prayer box.

PRAYER FOCUS

Pray to God about any anxieties that are currently on your mind. Thank Him for His gift of peace.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Memorize Philippians 4:6–9 or one of the verses listed under *OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES*. Record your reflections on this passage in your prayer journal.
2. Read chapter 12 of the text and work through the corresponding study.

12 THE JOY OF SERENITY

PHILIPPIANS 4:10–23

SESSION TOPIC

We, like Paul, can learn contentment.

ICEBREAKERS (CHOOSE ONE)

1. Which was your favorite chapter in this book? Why?
2. Where do people most often look for contentment?

GROUP DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

1. What is your definition of the well-lived life?
2. What was the secret of Paul's contentment? How can we learn to be content?
3. Do you agree that it can actually be harder to find contentment in times of abundance than in times of adversity? Why or why not? Give examples to support your opinion.
4. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10. What is the danger of money? In what ways does the relative wealth of Christians in the United States confront us with a danger not faced by Christians in less affluent countries?

5. To whom does giving bring a blessing? How can this knowledge encourage us to be more generous in our giving? Is it a proper motive to give in order to receive blessing?

6. How important to Paul's contentment was the presence of supportive friends? Is it possible to be content without people around to support you?

7. What did Paul mean when he told the Philippians that God would supply all their needs? Can we claim that promise for ourselves? How do you explain Christians who have unmet needs for food, clothing, or shelter?

PERSONAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Is there anything that you want *more* of? If so, does that desire keep you from being content?

2. What were your feelings as you read the poem at the beginning of this chapter? Are you satisfied with where you are? What are the good things about where you are now?

3. Was there a time in your life when the power of God enabled you to be content in a difficult circumstance? If so, when? How do you draw strength from Christ?

COUNT IT ALL JOY

4. Who are the people who support you? To whom are you a support? If you need a support group, make a commitment to begin building a support network this week.

5. Do you feel you are generous in your giving? Why or why not? Have you ever given sacrificially? Have you ever been the recipient of sacrificial giving?

6. What is the most important thing you have learned from this book? How will your life be different because of what you have learned?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Continue with your prayer box, making additions as needed.
2. Seek out an opportunity to give something to someone in need.

PRAYER FOCUS

Thank God that contentment is not dependent upon circumstances. Ask God to help you learn the secret of contentment.

ASSIGNMENT

1. This week in your prayer journal explore your struggles with contentment.
2. If the prayer journal has been helpful to you, continue to use it.

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