

## SMALL GROUP LESSON

# Keeping Up With The Phoneses

The logo for 'hyphen' is located in the top right corner. It consists of the word 'hyphen' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are colored: 'h' is blue, 'y' is orange, 'p' is green, 'h' is red, 'e' is yellow, and 'n' is light blue. The logo is set against a dark grey rounded rectangular background.

### Lesson Aim

This lesson will teach you why it is important to live contentedly despite what everyone else owns.

### Preparation Necessary

Make sure there will be many different cell phone models in attendance from old to new.

### Scripture Texts

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Philippians 4:11-12).

But godliness with contentment is great gain (I Timothy 6:6).

### Looking Deeper

I Kings 4:20-34—Background on Solomon

## INTRODUCTION

### Interaction

Ask everyone to pull out their cell phone and share at least one major feature each person is proud to use or show others.

(NOTE: Now give the following as if it were a testimony at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.)

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a phone-aholic.

It all started so innocently. I had to go into the cell phone store to fix a problem. They took my name and said they would be with me in a few moments, so I spent my time checking out the new phones. I thought they looked cool and I was amazed at how much they had changed since I had gotten mine the year before.

A few days later I was out to lunch with some friends and one of my friends pulled out her new phone (complete with PDA) and put in an upcoming appointment. She showed me how it worked and I suddenly became very intrigued. I started thinking about how much longer I had on my contract before I could upgrade my phone, how much better a new model would make my life, how I could maximize the internet with a new model, and how it wouldn't cost that much more to multiply my features into eternal happiness.

Soon enough, I just happened to be going past that phone store, and I just happened to go in to get my phone checked and soon enough I had that brand new Super Phone that has all the latest internet tools, a camera phone better than most cameras and for only \$10.99 more per month, it

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offers Martian decoder software just in case aliens ever land on Earth. I mean, how can you pass that up?

Yes, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a phone-aholic.

## THE IDEAS

What is it in us that causes us to act this way? This Gotta-Have-The-Latest, Gotta-Own-Stuff-That-Will-Impress-Strangers-I-Don't-Care-About disease. Sure, we can blame advertising and peer pressure, but those factors wouldn't work if there wasn't something inside us that allowed advertising and peer pressure to keep us in a state of eternal anxiety over stuff.

### 1. Now Is the Winter of our Discontent

Learning to be content is difficult in the world we live in and sometimes it seems impossible. The seeds of discontentment are subtle. Often, we don't even realize what's happening to us until we get the itch, that restless feeling to obtain something new. Maybe it's because of:

**a. Unthankfulness**—For most North Americans, no matter how bad we think we have it, we have it much better than most people in the history of the world. Yet, we're always thinking about what we don't have. You can trace unthankfulness back to Satan, who wanted to be worshiped like God instead of being thankful of being in the presence of God. We can be guilty of the same. Then the source of what we don't have becomes a source of greed and discontentment. Truly thankful people do not have to be reminded of Who is providing them with health, a job, a brain, or a family they know and it is evident by their actions.

**b. Who You're Around**—It's easier to be content when all your friends are like you. Start sharing a dorm room or an apartment with others and you start noticing who has cool stuff that you don't. Then it gets tough, especially when you have room on your credit card or time to peruse what you now want even if you didn't know you did. This is an easy trap that one prominent Bible character faced.

Solomon had it made. He was king, he was rich, he was wise, and he had plenty of women at his command. Yet, it wasn't enough he kept on adding stuff (women, horses, navies) to his realm without the blessing of God. Instead of seeking God's approval and following God's instructions against marrying those who do not worship pagan gods, Solomon began using man's wisdom to create alliances with other kingdoms by marrying foreign princesses.

Scripture says nothing in regards to the possibility that Solomon's wisdom had diminished by the end of his life, yet it gives us plenty of examples where his wisdom began taking on a less God-centered focus. It's been said many times that Solomon's problem wasn't that he was no longer wisest was that he rejected God's laws. So what caused him to veer away from God's laws? Was it lust for more land, women, or money, or was it simply boredom. Whatever the reason, he refused to stay content, disobeyed God, and earned a divisive kingdom at the end of his life. A sad end to a dynamic beginning.

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## Interaction

Can you name some obvious decisions in your life that didn't need God's input, before it all went wrong? What was it about this obvious decision that kept you from consulting God?

**c. Seeking the Wrong Things**—It's not a sin to be curious about America's celebrity culture, but buying into the mentality that you're insignificant unless you're rich or famous is a great lie. It's the rare person who claims to want no more money and even rarer for the famous to release their fame for anonymity. (Just insert almost any aging sports star here.) From the magazines in the checkout lane to the insane popularity of internet gossip sites, we're daily reminded that only money and fame matter. Neither are a sin if moderated by a walk with God and strong spiritual mentors, but buying into the mono-mind expressed by our media is a sure way to jettison the peace of mind Scripture promises every believer.

## 2. Solid Signs of Discontentment

We're all susceptible to undervaluing contentment. Here are some solid warning signs that you might not be as spiritually content as you think.

**a. Constant Upgrades**—If you're constantly upgrading your gadgets, unable to let a new version of software or phone or accessory pass you by, then you're showing the world you're not content. There are some products that make our life much easier, but you must ask yourself the question if the expense and change are a want or need? What's necessary and what's just for showing off?

Here is a simple way to determine the difference between a want and a need: If you have a need, then anything will suffice. Here's an example: You need a new pair of everyday shoes because your current pair is worn through. So you research your possibilities and purchase the best pair for your budget, even ignoring the brand of the shoe. However, if you want a new pair of shoes, then you go to the store and pick up the hottest brand that you want, even if you can't afford them, that is not choosing based on need. Need hasn't specifics, wants do.

**b. Lack of Accountability**—Staying accountable to someone else isn't very North American, but it is biblical. While America certainly has more than its share of lone heroes, the Bible celebrates those who stay accountable to mentors and community. There's a reason why Elijah taught Elisha who taught Gehazi; it was because you had to learn to be a servant before you could learn to be a leader. If you're freelancing through college without specific people to guide you and keep you honest, you're forfeiting some of your spiritual potential.

**c. Debt**—Impatience, pride, and lack of contentment lead many to use their credit cards to buy now and pay later. I'm not talking about paying for college, but getting the credit card bill, looking at the list of purchases and wondering what so many of them are about. Have you ever asked yourself, Why was it so important that I buy that last month? One statistic (<http://moneycentral.msn.com/content/Banking/creditcardsmarts/P74808.asp>) on debt states:

More than a third (36%) of those who owe more than \$10,000 on their cards have household incomes under \$50,000, according to the VIP Forum analysis.

The Bible states that we should not become slaves of men (1 Corinthians 7:23). In our times you can become a slave to men by encumbering your life with debt, inviting worry, the necessity of working extra jobs, and lost opportunities in the future. They then become less able to be available to God's desire for their life.

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## 3. Attributes of Contentment

Paul has a brilliant way of bringing home the way a Christian should live by writing, I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances (Philippians 4:11). Learned to be content is how the greatest missionary in history put it. That's reassuring isn't it? It doesn't come easy for any of us. Were human.

Still, it's essential we notice what guides us toward contentment. Humility doesn't get much play in our society, but it's the state we seek as Christians. So implementing these points into our lives can only make us more effective for Him.

**1. Clear Priorities**—When you decide what is most important to you, then what others have, or what advertising tells you you're missing, doesn't create the anxiety that the undecided suffer. One of the great, non-spiritual attributes of Christianity that is often overlooked is peace of mind. To be at peace with God and man is to want nothing God hasn't given you.

### Interaction

What should a Christians top priorities be as they attend college?

**2. Giving Rather Than Receiving**—When we focus on how to help others with their spiritual and physical needs, our anxieties, our itch to buy stuff because its the latest, hottest thing to buy, recedes. When we prioritize the real needs of the lost or those needing discipleship, we often lack the desire to please ourselves. Despite a busy schedule at college, it's important to find a way to give regularly to others to keep our own selfish desires in check.

**3. Praising God Rather than Petitioning God**—Do you spend more time praising God or asking God for things you want (and need)? The power is in praise! The more we praise God the less we want things for ourselves! Yet, too often Americans treat their prayer time as a few minutes with Santa Jesus! Take 2-3 days and determine to spend your time praising Him and asking for nothing. Not only is He worthy, but you might be surprised at how your desires fade as you seek to fulfill His!

## CONCLUSION

Everyone is different. There are some people who could live their entire life contently within the walls of one room as long as they enjoyed the basics of life. Yet most of us in this society of overabundance find it difficult to stay content. Yet spiritually, it is to our benefit to acknowledge these weaknesses, because through our weaknesses we can allow Gods power to shine, we can maintain a reliance on him, and consistently work toward developing a lifestyle that is pleasing to Him.

## LED-BY-THE-SPIRIT QUESTIONS

What physical items make you itchy to buy them when they are first (or continually) released? Why do they intrigue you?

Can you name some biblical characters who were never content? Can you name some biblical characters who learned contentment? What was the difference between them?

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Discuss the difference between a need and a want in your physical life. Discuss the difference between a need and a want in your spiritual life.

What ministry can you contribute too regularly to keep your priorities centered?

Think of a person in your life who lives a life that displays contentment; what makes that person so content? Make a pointed effort to ask that person the next time, and express to them your appreciation at how they live their life.

What area will you work on to approach contentment as a priority?

## PRAYER

Lord, help me live my life so that I can learn to distinguish between my needs and wants. Help me to be wise about the itch to satisfy my every want. Please provide me with friends and family who will help me make decisions according to Your Word. Help me be wise enough to be aware of the things that I watch, read, listen to, or expose myself to that might cause me discontentment in my own life.

Most of all Lord, I want to be thankful for your goodness and mercy that you daily give me. No matter what manner of life you give me, help me to be thankful enough to give you praise. Lord help me to pray the prayer of Solomon in Proverbs 30:8-9 (The Message):

Give me enough food to live on, neither too much nor too little.

If I'm too full, I might get independent, saying, 'God? Who needs him?'

If I'm poor, I might steal and dishonor the name of my God.

Amen. ★