



Life is like Swiss Cheese — Leader Guide

NOTE: Each time “answers will vary” appears, please encourage everyone to share.

Introduction: The scent of melted candle wax permeated the sacristy as murmured prayers filled my ears. Worship had ended and several people remained for personal petitions. I stood at the end of the line with my eyes closed, focusing my thoughts on God.

Pastor moved down the line, not rushing or belaboring the time he took to anoint and pray for each person's needs. Words of healing, comfort, and peace broke the silence as individuals patiently waited their turn and, prayer ended, quietly left the church.

I began to wonder what the prayer would be for me. Would it be for my physical needs, or would God give Pastor insight to the emptiness of my being. I yearned for fulfillment in my life and direction in ministry. Maybe my prayer would finally be the answer to the gaping hole in my soul.

I couldn't help but overhear the words Pastor prayed for the young man beside me. "Go forth, knowing you are a child of God. Your faith is strong and deeply rooted. Your family will heal from the loss of your grandfather. God's Holy Spirit resides in your heart and will bless you. Remember His Word is true. Continue to believe in Jesus Christ, and you will be blessed. The Lord has great things planned for you. Remain in Him. Amen" The prayer closed; the young man turned and left the room.

Wow! What a great prayer! I would have leapt for joy if Pastor had just touched me and said, "Ditto," but that was not the case.

Finally, it was my turn. Pastor anointed my head with oil, placed his hands on my shoulders, paused a moment, snickered a little (yes, he actually snickered,) and then said, "Life is like Swiss cheese ..."

I immediately felt deflated. My head snapped up, and I said, "What the heck? Swiss cheese? Are you kidding me?"

He began again, "Life is like Swiss cheese. You can concentrate on the cheese or focus on the holes; it's your choice. God knows many of the holes in your life have not been caused through any fault of your own. He also knows there are many solid blessings in your life too. Concentrate on the solid parts. Don't waste time on what isn't there."

I was stuck at Swiss cheese. What was I supposed to do with that? Go home and make a Reuben sandwich?

While Pastor's prayer for me was unique, it can be true for all of us. Aren't we all drowning in blessings, yet complaining about the few things we don't have or that are not going the way we wanted? **This may lead to open discussion. Encourage everyone to share.** Name at least three blessings in your life. **Answers will vary.** What things distract you from focusing on the blessings in your life? **Answers will vary.**

Opening Prayer: Father in Heaven, teach us to recognize Your gifts in every realm of life. Lead us always to receive them with thankful hearts. Amen.*

Read Hebrews 13:5. ⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Define the word “content”: **to be satisfied with what one is or has; not wanting more or anything else.** What does “being content” mean to you? **Answers will vary.** When is it easiest to be so? **Answers will vary.** Hardest? **Answers will vary.** Why do we struggle with being content? **Answers will vary.**

Look at **Philippians 4:11-12.** ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

Paul wrote these words while he was in prison, and they attest to the fact that he had learned to be content – whatever his circumstances. Share times when you have been content in either abundance or need. **Answers will vary.**

Everyone faces trials, hardships, and times of great sorrow. Talk about how God helped Paul through in **2 Corinthians 12:8-10**; ... **Answers will vary.**

⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Then discuss how He has sustained you through your own trials. **Answers will vary.**

*Paul’s outpouring of appreciation contrasts sharply with feelings of neglect, resentment, and even anger that can arise when we lack the privileges and comforts we expect. Paul invites us to see the blessings and fulness of God that are present in every situation.***

Most people in today’s world measure worth by the amount of money they have in the bank, the size and location of their homes, the car they drive, etc. Paul’s letter to Timothy claims that great gain is achieved through Godliness with contentment. **See 1 Timothy 6:6-7.** ⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.

Define “Godliness”: **conforming to the laws and wishes of God; devout; pious.**

Discuss ways you can achieve this “great gain” Paul describes. **Answers will vary.**

After some self-examination, I find that much of my angst is derived from my constant wrestling with sin. Define “wrestling”: **to contend, as in a struggle for mastery; grapple, struggle.** What sins do you wrestle with? **Answers will vary.** What tools do you use? **Answers may include prayer, reading the Word, worship, etc. Other answers may vary.** How does wrestling with sin keep you from being content? **Wrestling with sin takes our focus off God. Some may feel they need battle sin on their own. Assure everyone that God is always with them, even when they are wrestling.**

I often wrestle with wanting more and devaluing the priceless gift Christ has given me. This constant tug-of-war — between my pride-filled self (that desire to be noticed and appreciated) and being content with the gifts God has given me — drags me down and I let go of my joy. Praise God I don't have to face these battles alone!

Psalm 13: ¹How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ²How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? ³Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, ⁴lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. ⁵But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. ⁶I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

What frustrations did King David express in **Psalm 13: verses 1-2**? **Waiting on God, being impatient, feeling alone.**

What did he ask of God in **verses 3-4**? **David wanted God to hear him, restore him, keep him safe from his foes.**

How did David resolve his frustration in **verses 5-6**? **Resolved to trust God who has never deserted him.**

God's Word is filled with encouraging ways to combat times of feeling discontent. Write down the tools mentioned in the following selections that we can use in battle.

Psalm 5:11-12 ¹¹But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. ¹²For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Ephesians 1:3-10 ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

1 Corinthians 13:7 ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Discuss what the above verses mean for your life. How do you "rejoice always"? How does "pray without ceasing" happen for you on a weekday? On a Sunday? How do these verses help you "do life with God"? **Answers to the discussion will vary.**

When I remember and trust God — the Creator and Redeemer of the world — Who resides within my soul, my joy becomes uncontainable!

Read the following verses. Is there anything you shouldn't bring to God? **No.** Do you have a tangible reminder that God is with you always? **Answers will vary, but may include the underlined.**

Psalm 9:10 ¹⁰ And those who know Your name put their trust in You, for You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.

John 14:18 ¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

John 14:27 ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

What does it mean to be in God’s peace? **Answers will vary.**

When I recognize all that God has done for me and the price Jesus Christ paid on my behalf, I become utterly ashamed that I ever asked for one iota more! Have you ever felt ashamed? **Answers will vary.** Where do you find peace in the following verses?

Psalm 28:2 ² Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary. **Answers will vary, but may include worship, prayer, and Sacraments.**

Psalm 40:11 ¹¹ As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!

Hebrews 4:16 ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1 Peter 1:3-5 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 2:10 ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

It is when I shift my focus from the things that are missing in my life and refocus on Jesus Christ, remembering His rock-solid love for me, that I finally find true contentment in my soul. And now — *any* time I see Swiss cheese – I’m reminded of the same!

Let’s pray: Holy Father, Almighty God, we magnify Your name and thank You for your saving grace. Help us to focus on the gifts You have given us and find contentment in Your blessings. Teach us to use those gifts to generously bless others. Amen.

Closing Hymn: “O Bless the Lord My Soul” (*LSB #814; LW #457; TLH #27*).

**The Lutheran Study Bible, Page 2074 **TLSB, Page 2039*
