

Lesson 12

Joy in Christ

Leader Guide

Leader Guide Bible Studies

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Lesson 11

Joy

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' *Matthew 25:21, ESV*

Prayers

Introduction

Definitions for joy and happiness are closely related, but the scriptures make a distinction. Happiness is the outward expression of pleasant circumstances. The joy the Bible speaks of transcends circumstance. Joy is our state of awareness resting in God's promises. We can face suffering with joy, knowing the depth of God's love for us. We can endure hardship and loss knowing God's kingdom is not a matter of earthly comfort. We can face death with joy, knowing our eternal life is secure. Suffering, hardship, loss, and death do not bring happiness, but they do not take away our joy.

As Christ's disciples, we should both have joy and be joyful. We do not have to smile all the time, but neither should we look like try-outs for "American Gothic," Grant Wood's painting of stoic depression-era farmers.

Discussion

1. What brings you joy? Do the things that bring you joy bring you closer to God or further away?

We probably have lists that include family, some prized possessions, some great trips, and perhaps some spiritual things. Hopefully, sin does not look good to us! The discussion might also reveal that our toys bring us closer to God.

2. One of my favorite illustrations of joy is by John Ortberg in his book, *The Life You've Always Wanted*. Pastor Ortberg talks about bathing his three young children. As he was trying to dry off the second child, she ran in circles singing Dee Dah Day over and over. He was not amused and was aggravated by his lack of progress in the bath / getting ready for bed department. John wrote, "When she is unable to hold it in any longer, when words are inadequate to give voice to her euphoria, she has to dance to release her joy. So she does the Dee Dah Day." For his daughter, having wet hair, dry hair, or being in pajamas were causes for a Dee Dah Day celebration. How are you at finding joy in the small mundane things of life, or are you more preoccupied with meeting objectives and agendas and spending too much time in transit?

Rejoice in every moment because every moment of life is a gift. We need to set our agendas aside and take in the beauty around us.

3. John Ortberg mentioned his daughter's Dee Dah Day dance because he thought it reflected the mind of God, God taking joy in the smallest things in creation. To illustrate God's joy in creation, G. K. Chesterton writes, "It is possible God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike, it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that he has the eternal appetite for infancy, for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we." How do you see God's joy reflected in his creation?

Creation's incredible diversity and beauty testify to God's creative and joyful divine nature. There is no monotony in nature. Even my atheist friends acknowledge that life is miraculous. We see God's love for beauty all around us; animals play for no reason, flowers are more beautiful than they need to be, no two snowflakes are alike, and the sun rises and sets with infinite variation.

God's creation will end with all his creatures praising his name, singing, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13). Joy is God's basic character, our eternal destiny.

4. God takes joy in celebration. God established three Jewish pilgrimage festivals at harvest times (barley, wheat, and fruit) when food was plentiful. His people could rest from their harvest and bring their offerings to the temple to commemorate his acts of deliverance. The festivals were times of large gatherings, joy, praise, singing, and dancing. Read the following verses about celebration during the festivals and discuss the questions.

Dt 16:13 Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress.

Dt 16:14 Be joyful at your Feast—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns.

Dt 16:15 For seven days celebrate the Feast to the LORD your God at the place the LORD will choose. For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.

Dt 16:16 Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed: ¹⁷ Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.

Ps 150:1 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.

Ps 150:2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Ps 150:3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,

Ps 150:4 praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute,

Ps 150:5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

Ps 150:6 Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

Ne 8:10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

- a. What details of God's celebrations come as a surprise?

When I read about the festivals previously, I missed the joy in the celebrations, the choice foods and music. I also missed that everyone in the country was invited to the celebration, including the aliens living among the Hebrews.

- b. What are the traditions that help you celebrate joy?

Discussion varies.

5. Paul wrote to the Philippian Church, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" There are many ways to rejoice in the Lord. Recounting all our benefits is one way Paul used in his letter to the Romans. Read Romans 5:1-11 and identify the many blessings we have in Christ.

Ro 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Ro 5:3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Ro 5:5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Ro 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Ro 5:7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

Ro 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ro 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Ro 5:10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Ro 5:11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

- a. Verse 1a **Justification**
 - b. Verse 1b **Peace**
 - c. Verse 2a **Faith**
 - d. Verse 2b **Hope**
 - e. Verse 3 **Suffering, perseverance**
 - f. Verse 4 **Character and hope**
 - g. Verse 5 **The Holy Spirit**
 - h. Verse 9 **Salvation from wrath**
 - i. Verses 10, 11 **Reconciliation**
6. In Romans 5:1-11 Paul recounts blessings all Christians share in Christ. Given your life and faith experience, what would you include in your reasons for joy in Christ?

My joy has been found in second chances (or more). Failures and loss have led to joy and restoration.

7. The Psalmist exclaimed, “This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice in it.” Having joy while suffering or during trials can be difficult to understand, but a true test of joy is having it “in spite of” circumstances, not “if conditions change.” Peter and Paul took joy in the faith of the churches, the fruit of their ministry, while writing their final letters from prison before their execution. Read the following passages and discuss why the gospel writers looked at persecution and trials with joy.
- a. James 1:2-4, Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
 - b. 1 Peter 1:6-7, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire —may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

- c. Romans 8:16-17, The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs —heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
- d. 2 Timothy 1:8-9, So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.
- e. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Possessing joy in the face of trials and suffering requires hope in something greater than personal happiness. The disciples had joy in their suffering for Christ because it showed their unity with him. They encouraged the believers to persevere in their persecution for Christ because they knew their faith would be strengthened and rewarded with eternal life.

- 8. Our Lord was a man of sorrows, but he also knew joy. Read the following verses and discuss the sources of Christ’s joy.
 - a. Mt 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Jesus’ joy was **preaching the good news and healing the sick.**

- b. Jn 15:8 **This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.** ⁹ **“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.** ¹⁰ **If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.** ¹¹ **I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**

Jesus’ joy was found in **loving his disciples, for their love for each other and God. His joy was that his disciples would glorify God by bearing the fruit of making disciples and proclaiming salvation through faith in Christ.**

- c. Jn 17:6 **“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.**
 Jn 17:7 **Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.**
 Jn 17:8 **For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.**

Jn 17:9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

Jn 17:10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them.

Jn 17:11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.

Jn 17:12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

Jn 17:13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

Jesus’ joy was **knowing the disciples believed everything Jesus taught them and that they were in unity with him and each other to do the will of God as he had done.**

9. Sometimes we feel distant from Christ. Often, this distance is because we are not obedient in our actions or calling. Each of us is called by Christ and given unique gifts of service in God’s kingdom that God has prepared to bless others and bring us joy. Read the following and consider the joy in your calling.

f. Jn 15:9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

Jn 15:10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.

Jn 15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

g. Jn 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit —fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ^r

Jn 15:17 This is my command: Love each other.

h. Mt 6:19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

i. Mt 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my

Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Mt 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Mt 25:37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’

Mt 25:38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?’

Mt 25:39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

Mt 25:40 “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

1) When have you experienced the joy of being fruitful for Christ?

2) How do you serve others because of your love for Christ?

Closing Prayer, The Servant Song by Richard Gillard

Will you let me be your servant,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
We are trav'lers on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.

Will you let me be your servant,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too.