

Series Based Bible Study



Vineyard Columbus

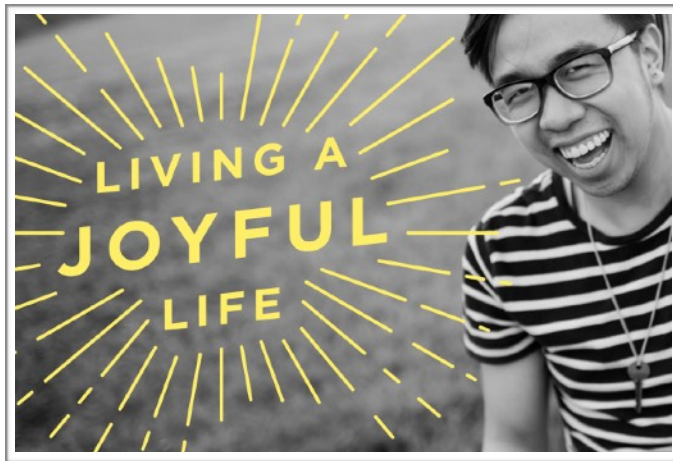
August 2017

Living A Joyful Life

A Vineyard Columbus Small Group Study Series

Series Description

In the 1977 film *Annie Hall*, Alvy Singer (played by Woody Allen) breaks up with his girlfriend while standing on a busy New York street. He starts walking and wondering out loud about the ingredients of a happy romance until he bumps into a seemingly happy couple. “You look like a very happy couple,” Alvy says. “How do you account for it?” The woman replies, “I am very shallow, and empty, and I have no ideas and nothing interesting to say.” The man beside her completes the conversation with, “And I’m exactly the same way.” That’s how most people think about joy. If you are joyful, it must be because you are blind to suffering or willfully ignoring the injustice around you. It’s easy to deny the idea of joy as mere blindness or delusion. But God offers joy to the most clear-eyed realists among us. In this series, we will answer the tough question about joy: Is JOY attainable for the broken, the beaten-down, and the weary?



This guide offers four weeks for your small group to work through. At Vineyard Columbus, we encourage your group to use this study as one component of your time together. We truly believe that disciples of Jesus will mature best when they

engage in corporate worship, prayer ministry, practicing the prophetic, studying the Bible, serving our neighbors, community, church, and fellowshiping together. This study only covers one of those aspects, the Bible. Suggestions and ideas will be posited to aid the leader regarding the other areas. We pray this will be helpful to your group as you explore “Living a Joyful Life”.

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How to use this Study Series

Leaders are encouraged to briefly look over all studies before you teach or hand them out to alternative teachers within the group. ***There is a summary of Ministry Ideas from the entire series in the back. The ministry ideas are meant to build upon each other whenever possible and some ideas will take longer planning than others. Reading the full arch of Ministry Ideas before you start the series as a small group may provide a much richer and fuller experience.***

Having all studies provided at the start of a sermon series will give leaders the opportunity to give studies to potential teachers or co-leaders weeks ahead of time. Our prayer is that many more disciples of Jesus will feel comfortable sharing and leading others in discussion during small group. If you have any questions, please email us at: smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org

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Week 1



Joy in God's Goodness

Psalm 126, James 1:2-7, Galatians 5:22-25, John 15:11-13

Tips: These questions are meant to get the group thinking and spark discussion, so don't rush through them or attempt to get a solid answer for each one. Don't be afraid to wait for a while to see who speaks, and remember, there are no wrong opinions.

Before the Lesson:

For those of us who participated in the Fully Alive Lent Series we did this year, let's return to the foundation of that season: "The glory of God is a person fully alive." In this series, and especially this session, we will discover that joy is a byproduct, a consequence of living a life fully alive in Christ. Beware the temptation to trivialize joy to a fleeting feeling or something reserved for the silly and foolish. God's kingdom is characterized by joy! The scriptures are full of reflections of deep joy in God's people, for they held on to truth beyond what could be seen or felt. We've lost our connection to joy, and as Christians we certainly aren't often characterized by it. As leaders of God's people in any way, we must desire joy

to be characteristic of us, and allow it to overflow to those around us, for it is a contagious infection. If you can, take a moment alone before your group begins and engage in a posture of humility before God, and ask for him to grant you more joy. We are going to walk through multiple scriptures (fairly quickly) with our groups in order to get a wide view of having real “joy in God’s goodness” in multiple ways.

Starting the Lesson:

Joy is truly immensely difficult to define. Try doing it right now. Can you come up with anything succinct? If we all wrote our definitions down chances are not one would be totally like another. Over the course of history, and especially Christian and Jewish history, joy and its cultivation and articulation have been at the foundation of human experience. Most of us may not realize that because it has become such a non-issue for our world today. The irony is, having lost its true essence of a state of being and a deep spontaneous emotion, it has become something we often inadvertently make our chief aim, and in so doing miss out completely. We just want to be happy, we say, but we don’t know how. We may not answer that tonight, but we will have a better understanding of how God loves to graciously give joy to his people, and how walking with him produces the essence of joy in us that will sustain us.

Starter Questions:

Can you think of someone whom you would describe as joyful? Would you mind sharing a little about them and what makes them that way?

Psalm 126

1 When the Lord restored the
fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who
dreamed.

2 Our mouths were filled with
laughter,
our tongues with songs of
joy.

Then it was said among the
nations,
"The Lord has done great
things for them."

3 The Lord has done great
things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

4 Restore our fortunes, Lord,
like streams in the Negev.

5 Those who sow with tears
will reap with songs of joy.

6 Those who go out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with them.

How would you define a "good" life?

What does "goodness" look like?

Opening Prayer:

In your prayer, ask God to slow the hearts and minds of everyone in the group, and allow you to be present with God and with one another. Thank God for his grace and generosity in your life, even if it may be hard to see right now. Pray for an openness to receive and embrace God's goodness.

Let's jump in, shall we?

We are talking a lot about joy in these next few weeks, and specifically those aspects of Living a Joyful Life. To begin, let's look at a quote from a pastor, author, and the translator of The Message bible, Eugene Peterson.

"The joy that develops in the Christian way of discipleship is an overflow of spirits that comes from feeling good not about yourself but about God." – Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

In this group, we'll dive into three different aspects of having joy in the goodness of God, and how they each affect our lives.

Joy in God's Provisional Goodness

Scripture:

Psalm 126

Ask a member of your group to read the scripture aloud, and thank them when they finish.

Discussion Questions:

David is referring here to the Exodus from the brutal tyranny of the Egyptians, the story that runs through the heart of the entire bible. It was something that seemed eternal for them, the slavery and low-level life they were living, but out of nowhere God showed up and miraculously overthrew their oppressors. It changed their lives completely, and became a focal point of their worship history.

- As you read this psalm, where is your mind wandering? Do you picture or feel anything? If so, what?
 - I think of contentment and soft smiling when I hear “we were like those who dreamed”; huge groups of people dancing and partying in celebration
- In this psalm David is certainly looking backward in his story to find joy in God’s goodness. How does God show his goodness in this psalm?
 - Releasing them from captivity; providing for legitimate, basic needs – like giving water for the streams
- Have you ever looked back on your life and reflected on how God has provided for you or shown you goodness in some way? Could we take a second to do that now? Please share!

In the moment of experiencing something so good, the joy we feel is spontaneous, and sometimes feels like an eruption from within us!

David and the people of Israel were filled with joy, singing songs of joy, and agreeing wholeheartedly that God had done great things for them! But notice what's next in the Psalm.

- How does the Psalm take a slight turn in verses 4 through 6?
 - He makes a plea to God to “restore our fortunes”; it could even be seen as a small bit of confidence in the hope that God will make all things good and new, especially for those who've experienced pain and heartache
- What does this say about living in the joy of God's goodness?
 - God does not promise there to be no pain, but he does say that he will be with us, and he declares that we will be free, healed, and made new – all in small succession as we walk with him and in fullness when his kingdom is renewed or we enter into after this life

Pastor and author Rick Warren says it this way:

“Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.”

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Galatians 5:22-25

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Joy in God's Pruning Goodness

Scripture:

James 1:2-7

Ask someone from your group to read these verses aloud, and thank them when they finish.

Galatians 5:22-25

Ask someone from your group to read these verses aloud, and thank them when they finish.

Discussion Questions:

This seems a bit countercultural, doesn't it? It's almost ridiculous! Count it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds? Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires?

Joy must be something different, something deeper and more constant, than a spontaneous feeling.

- What do these verses tell us about the nature of having joy? What about the nature of God's goodness?
 - As much as it is a feeling, joy, in maturity, is a deep-seated ability to see the forest for the trees, to view the present circumstances in light of a larger reality of life being held in God's hands. God's goodness, in these verses, is shown as both his intimate dealing with us in the most beneficial and holy ways – even if we don't enjoy it – and as the practical overflow in our daily lives.

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

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

- How many of us, when corrected by a trusted parent, coach, mentor, or teacher has maybe not enjoyed it in the moment, but realized that the ultimate goal of that person giving you that specific correction is for our good, for our growth, or for our greater benefit in some way? How many of us can look at something difficult or particularly burdensome that we've gone through and in hindsight see the goodness of that experience?

God's goodness often works in this way. We see also in scripture that "the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in" (Proverbs 3:12) and "blessed is the one you discipline, Lord...you grant them relief from days of trouble" (Psalm 94:12-13).

Let's look at one last aspect of God's goodness before we end.

Joy in God's Sacrificial Goodness

Scripture Reading:

John 15:11-13

Ask someone from your group to read these verses aloud, and thank them when they finish.

Discussion Questions:

- Why did Jesus tell this to his disciples?
 - "So that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

- What is the joy of Jesus? What do you believe his joy is?
 - Joy is this oneness with God that cannot be removed; an obedience to the Father that is built on love, sharing in that beautiful design of community and grace and goodness; he joyfully obeyed God all the way to the end, because he knew him to be worth it.

This was the day before Jesus was betrayed, beaten, and crucified. Without hesitation, knowing where he was headed, he was full of joy and wanted his disciples to experience and own that same joy within them.

We have all the laws, all the rules and regulations, but Jesus gives us one thing to follow: “Love each other as I have loved you.”

- As he also says, there is no greater love than this. When someone loves you at the expense of him or herself, not foolishly but willingly and sacrificially, what kind of response does that conjure in you?
 - Deep gratitude, a sense of your value and worth, the desire to express that same love in return
- When someone has taken care of something for you without you asking for it or expecting it, something that brought you fear, anxiety, worry, or stress, what is a normal or common reaction?
 - Joy! Thankfulness and excitement, gratitude for not having to deal with that thing

God's goodness in this form does in some ways overshadow all other forms, because it was sacrifice in the beginning to make us, sacrifice to bear with us in life, and it's sacrifice in the end to save and redeem us. But in all things for us he does so joyfully, and desires our joy as well.

Miroslav Volf, professor and theologian at Yale Divinity School, says that joy is not an all-or-nothing affair.

“It is neither a matter of having a perfect joy or no joy at all, nor is it a matter of joy either overriding all our emotions or of it being entirely absent. Whether joy is intense or gentle, simple or complex, episodic or enduring, joy is mostly partial and overlaps with other emotions. As the experience of joy at a funeral of one who lived life well attests, we can rejoice and grieve at the same time.”

Joy, in its fullness, requires us to hold the tension, just as we do with the kingdom of God – here now but not fully realized.

Living a joyful life has to be rooted on this – “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Ministry Time Application:

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Take a moment (3-5 minutes) to rest in God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit to be more present with your group, and for everyone to be more aware of his presence. Be thankful for God's word and for what was shared in your group, and ask God to slow everyone's hearts and minds, and for his voice to speak clearly to each person.

In that time, ask:

What does goodness look like?

When has God shown his goodness to you?

Where are you in need of God to show you his goodness?

When the time is up, bring the group back together to share (if comfortable) what they experienced. Depending on your group size, break into smaller groups to pray or pray aloud together as a whole to close.

Option 2:

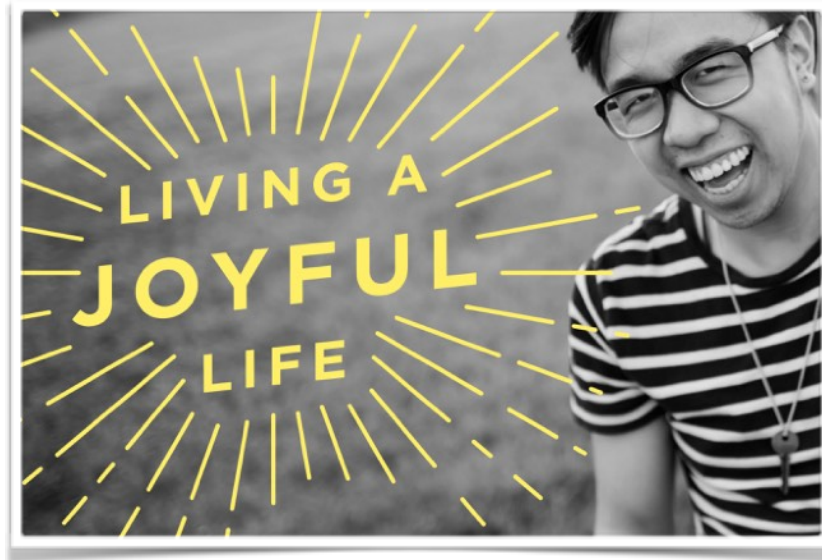
In 30-60 seconds, have everyone write down what they are thinking about, or what thought has lingered in their mind throughout the group. No judgment and no particular expectation for what that may be. Break down into groups of two to

share those things and talk about them. Pray for one another in those groups if you feel comfortable.

Leader, ensure the whole process takes no more than 10 minutes. Set your phone or watch to confirm. This is to promote direct communication and focus.

Reconvene the group and pray a blessing to end.

Week 2



The Joy of God's Presence

Psalm 139:1-12

Tips:

There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Remember to pause between questions. Waiting for people will help you identify quiet personalities in your group.

Prep for Ministry Time (Option 1):

In one of the prayer prompts this week, we encourage you to pray with your group Psalm 139: 1-12. Since not everyone in the group may have a Bible or have the same translation, it may help to print out the passage so that everyone can pray it in unison.

Before the Lesson:

While we do not know for certain who wrote Psalm 139, tradition has attributed the psalm to David. This psalm is usually categorized as an independent Lament, which means that a single person is crying out to God for help or in complaint. The latter part of this psalm (which we will not discuss in this study) contains the regular convention of the psalmist asking for the Lord to see

1 You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.

2 You know when I sit and when I
rise;
you perceive my thoughts from
afar.

3 You discern my going out and my
lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.

5 You hem me in behind and
before,
and you lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful
for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your
presence?

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are
there;
if I make my bed in the depths,
you are there.

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the
sea,

10 even there your hand will guide
me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will
hide me
and the light become night
around me,"

12 even the darkness will not be
dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

and punish the wicked, who are doing evil to the psalmist. The psalmist believes that God will protect them because of the assurances outlined in the passages we will cover. Namely, the psalmist believes that God knows them intimately and is present with them wherever they go.

Starting the Lesson:

This lesson is part of a series of lessons taken from the Bible on the topic of authentic joy. Nobody would make the claim that life is easy. And because life is challenging, it can be tempting to become cynical—to think that only the most fortunate or naïve among us can be joyful. But a consistent theme in Scripture is that God offers us a joy that is not limited by our circumstances. It is a joy that is available to the broken and the weary.

In this lesson, we will specifically consider how the presence of God offers us joy as we read from Psalm 139.

Starter Questions:

Can you name someone that when you spend time with them, you know you will have a good time? Someone who you love to do most things with? What do you enjoy doing with them and what do they add to the experience?

Name something that you would rather do with someone else instead of by yourself. What about doing that thing with someone else makes it better?

Notes

Opening Prayer:

Pray for God to speak to each person, to give each person more courage and depth, and to open your hearts to receive whatever he has for you.

Scripture: Depending on the willingness of the members of the group to read aloud, you may want to call on one or several readers.

Discussion Questions

- According to vv. 1-6, what does God know about us? What does the psalmist tell us about God?
 - God has “searched us” and knows us. He knows us, and knows what we do from sun up to sun down. He knows us so well that he knows what we will say. The psalmist says that God lays His hand on them, and God’s knowledge is too lofty to them to obtain.
- In v. 1, the psalmist states that God has searched them. What do you think the psalmist means when they say “you have searched me”?
 - This language indicates that God is not simply a disengaged observer. Not only does God see and know our actions, but He actively searches us. No stone is left unturned. He wants to know our actions, our thoughts, our hopes, and our pains so much that He breaks out the figurative magnifying glass and examines us.

Tips:

When people partner up in pairs to pray, it will build trust and intimacy over time. This is a great way to have your group improve overall discussion. The more people you end up trusting in your group, the more open your discussion time will be.

- In v. 5 the psalmist says that God has put His hand on them? What might that mean? Have you ever felt God lay His hand on you?
 - There is room for some interpretation, but there is certainly an indication of comfort and presence here. God is affectionately assuring the psalmist that they are seen and cared for. Allow your group members to share times God has made His presence known and comforted them.
- What might be a brief synopsis of vv. 7-12?
 - There is nowhere we can go that God is not with us. While this is a “simple” concept, the psalmist poetically expresses the profundity of God’s presence. No matter how isolated, distant, or invisible we may feel, God is right beside us. There is no place we can go where our prayers to Him are unheard.
- How did the psalmist feel about God’s presence being inescapable? How do you feel about God’s presence being inescapable?
 - The psalmist was glad that they could not escape God, and God’s presence offered them a sense of safety and hope. Your group members may share the psalmist’s sentiments, or, they may be somewhat uncomfortable that

God sees and knows everything.
Encourage them that it is good that
God sees us as we are and loves us so
much.

- How does God's supernatural knowledge help us when we talk to Him?
 - God sees our needs and our hopes, and invites our prayers of petition. God knows how we think, our personalities, and our inclinations, and knows how we feel about the circumstances we are going through. And God knows our sins, and we have no need to hide them from Him, but we can lay them bare before Him and experience real and freeing forgiveness from them.
- Based on the placement of this Psalm, it is likely that the Hebrew people, during their exile in Babylon, were comforted when reading about God's nearness to them. Even when they were completely uprooted from their homes, alone and isolated, God's presence offered them hope and joy. How can this Psalm about God's presence speak to those who feel isolated or distant now?
 - There can be any number of circumstances where God's presence could be a comfort. This may be a good opportunity to lead your group to share times when they or someone close to them was experiencing a

truly difficult or isolated
 circumstance where God was a
 comfort or could offer joy.

Read together John 20: 11-16

11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

- What was Mary initially feeling as she visits the tomb?
 - She was weeping from grief over the death of her friend and Rabbi. She was likely unsure what came next in her life now that the man who had been discipling her was dead. And she

was further grieved that Jesus had been taken from the tomb.

- How did Mary react when she realized it was Jesus speaking to her? What emotions do you imagine she felt?
 - It's likely that she felt overwhelming joy. How elated she must have been to look at the face of Jesus who was killed and buried days ago. Jesus' living presence turned her mourning into joy.
- If you were in Mary's position, how would you have reacted to seeing Jesus' alive, standing there beside you?
 - This is a subjective question, but it should be fun to have your group imagine how they would respond. This exercise may help them feel in a fresh way what Mary might have felt.
- For Mary, the presence of Jesus made all the difference in the world. The fact that He was there with her, alive, turned her grief to praise and her fear to comfort. Does the knowledge that the Living God is present with you always have this kind of affect on you? Why or why not?
 - This would be a good time to reflect with your group on how the presence of the Holy Spirit can bring light to our darkness, relieve our anxieties, and offer us true joy. Think about

how God's nearness can have the kind of impact on you that it had on Mary.

Ministry Time Application:

Please thoughtfully choose one of the two options below based on what would be most effective and helpful for your group.

Option 1:

The psalms have often been prayed aloud by groups of believers. Pray Psalm 139: 1-12 together as a group. Then have your group prayerfully reflect on the passage, and invite the Holy Spirit to lead them to a verse or two that He would use to speak to them as they meditate.

Option 2:

Invite the Holy Spirit to show your group members a time or a season where they felt the present hand of God on them—a time when God saw them and comforted them or spoke to them through the encouragement or care of others. Or, if they are currently experiencing a season of isolation, pain, or disappointment, pray individually, or for each other, that God would make His presence and love evident now. Pray that the joy God offers open-handedly would be felt in a real a meaningful way.

Week 3



Joy in God's Justice

Psalm 51:1-16

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through, so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Before the Lesson:

This week's lesson tackles the concepts of justice and mercy, as seen through the lens of David's prayer in Psalm 51, a poem/song written as a response to an event in David's life and may require further context. A short summary of the story of David and Bathsheba is included in the group introduction below, but you may want to read and familiarize yourself with the full story in 2 Samuel 11:1-12:29 before today's discussion.

Starting the Lesson:

Is it possible to find joy in the midst of sin and correction? In order to answer that question, we'll be studying Psalm 51, written by David in response to being called out for his wrongdoing after committing adultery with Bathsheba. In the infamous story told in 2 Samuel

Bible Verses:

Psalm 51:1-16

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing
love;
according to your great
compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my
sin.
- 3 For I know my
transgressions,
and my sin is always before
me.
- 4 Against you, you only, have I
sinned
and done what is evil in
your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you
judge.
- 5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my
mother conceived me.
- 6 Yet you desired faithfulness
even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in
that secret place.
- 7 Cleanse me with hyssop,
and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be
whiter than snow.
- 8 Let me hear joy and
gladness;
let the bones you have
crushed rejoice.
- 9 Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

11, King David goes up to his roof during a sleepless night, sees a beautiful woman bathing, and has her brought to him so he can sleep with her. When she gets pregnant, he tries to cover up his transgression by bringing her soldier husband home; when that doesn't work, he has the man killed in battle so he can take Bathsheba as his wife. The prophet Nathan comes to David with a word from God and rebukes him in a way that leads the king to recognize his wrongs. This psalm was written after Nathan's confrontation as David cried out to God.

Starter Questions:

Have you ever done something you regretted, and wondered if you could be forgiven? What emotions did you feel in that situation (despair, desolation, fear, etc.)?

Do you believe people should get their just deserts? Why or why not?

Opening Prayer:

Thank God for those that have come to group today, and that they might come to find joy even when God confronts broken and sinful places in our lives.

Scripture:

Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

- In verse 1, what is David asking God for?
 - Mercy, and to have his transgressions blotted out

10 Create in me a pure heart,
O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit
within me.

11 Do not cast me from your
presence
or take your Holy Spirit
from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of
your salvation
and grant me a willing
spirit, to sustain me.

13 Then I will teach
transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn
back to you.

14 Deliver me from the guilt
of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of
your righteousness.

15 Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare
your praise.

16 You do not delight in
sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in
burnt offerings.

- Have you ever done something wrong and felt as if you deserved to be forgiven? Maybe you thought you had done so many good things — or so few bad things — that you were entitled to a “get out of jail free” card that would automatically forgive you for your wrong? If so, why do you think you felt that way?
- Does David appeal to God for forgiveness because he thinks he deserves it, or for another reason?
 - No, he appeals to God according to his unending love and compassion
- In the first section of this psalm (v. 1-2), David asks God to show him mercy. What does David do in the second section (v. 3-6)?
 - He acknowledges and confesses his sins

In verse 4, David confesses that he has sinned against God by “doing what is evil” and going against God’s will. One of the first steps in gaining forgiveness is to acknowledge that you have done something to hurt another person.

- In your experience, do you find it easy or hard to admit that you’ve done wrong and hurt someone? How does this extend to your confessions to God?

Confession can be a painful exercise — after all, no one likes admitting they’re wrong! — but confession has been an important part of the church for many years, in different capacities.

- Why do you think confession is important, both to David as he wrote this psalm and to God as he extends his mercy and forgiveness?
- The third section of this psalm (v. 7-12) speaks to restoration after forgiveness. What sorts of things does David request from God in this passage?
 - To be cleaned, to have joy and gladness, healing, to have his sins removed from God's sight, to have a pure heart, to have a steadfast spirit, to not be removed from the Spirit, to feel the joy of salvation once more, to be a willing spirit, to be sustained
- Which of these requests do you resonate with? When you come before God and ask for forgiveness, which of these things do you most want from him? Does it change? Or do you long for all of them?

In his commentary on this passage, preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote, "When we deal seriously with our sin, God will deal gently with us. When we hate what the Lord hates, he will soon make an end of it, to our joy and peace."

- What do you think it means to take our sins seriously? Do you think that is something the church as a whole (or you, as an individual) are good at doing?
- Have you had an experience where you dealt with sin in your life seriously and head-on, and God responded with gentleness and compassion? Is there a story you'd like to share?

Notes

- Spurgeon stated in the quote above that joy and peace will come when the things the Lord hates come to an end — and surely he hates when we rebel against him and his plans for us; so it is possible for joy to be found as God brings justice and forgiveness. Have you seen this to be true, and found joy after a season of confession and correction?
- In the fourth section of this passage (v. 13-16), how does David say that he will act in response to being forgiven?
 - He will teach transgressors God's ways, sing of his righteousness, declare his praise
- Do you respond to being forgiven with praise and singing? If not, how do you think it would change your outlook towards forgiveness and mercy if you did?
- By definition, justice is the administering of a deserved punishment, while mercy is the compassionate pardoning of punishment. Both are reactions to a wrong and both are good. Although we may lean toward always wanting mercy for ourselves and justice for everyone else, both are right and good in the sight of God.

In 2006, a man with a gun stormed a small Amish school in rural Pennsylvania, shooting and killing multiple children before taking his own life. In the wake of the tragedy, the community responded in a way that startled the world: with gestures of forgiveness. They attended the killer's funeral service and collected money for his widow and children. When they could have —

Notes

understandably — angrily called out for justice, they instead showed love and mercy.

It is also true that racism, slavery, and near eradication of Native Americans are all things we know require movements of justice to repair for the sake of present and our future. It is good and right to work for just treatment of all people who are made in the image of God. Likewise, when we see the sin of exploitation of women, girls and boys in the sex trade, it is good for us to work, act, and pursue justice for the victims. Justice is something that we work for, even if imperfectly, here and now.

- What are some ways in which we as a community or as individuals can better practice mercy? What are ways that we as a small group can support justice in our city and state?

The life and death of Jesus proves God justly dealt with sin. By justice being fulfilled in the one place, mercy is possible in another. We also know that God will make all wrongs right and justice will reign in the fullness of God's Kingdom. God wants us to work for justice and also extend mercy. God wants us to have joy when an injustice like slavery is outlawed. God wants to experience joy when unfair business practices that burden the poor are reversed. God wants us to experience joy when those who exploit others for their gain are stopped and experience consequences. Justice in this life is something that is right, good, and should bring us joy!

- What are some areas you would love to see experience justice in our city?

- What are some areas you would love to see experience justice in our state? Our world? Who is experiencing injustice that God might have you intervene and intercede for?
- We know that justice is good. Repentance is good. Mercy is good. Forgiveness is good. What guides you when you have all these options in front of you in the midst of a wrong committed against you?

As we close, let's return to the question from the introduction:

- Is it possible to find joy in the midst of sin and correction? Is there joy in God's justice?

In this psalm, we listen in as David asks for mercy, confesses his sin, speaks of restoration and describes how he will act differently because of it. It shows us that the path from sin to justice may not be easy, but ends with a renewed spirit — and restored joy.

Ministry Time Application

Option 1:

The beauty of God's mercy is that it is available to everyone, no matter what the transgression. In the story of David we see a man who had done many despicable things, including adultery, murder, and telling lies, and yet because he confessed his sins and turned to God he was granted forgiveness. He recognized that God's love is unfailing and compassion is great — great enough to overcome anything he had done wrong. Is there something in your life that you need to confess to God and seek forgiveness for? Spend some time praying and/or journaling today admitting to the Lord what you have done wrong, asking for his mercy, and praising him for his power to make you clean again.

Option 2:

A companion to Psalm 51 is Psalm 32, also written by David, that expresses what he experienced after confessing his sin to God and receiving mercy and forgiveness. For today's ministry time, have someone in your group re-read Psalm 51 aloud, followed by another group member reading Psalm 32. What parallels do you notice between the two passages? What verses can you point to in Psalm 32 that show the joy David experienced from God's justice? Take note of one of these verses and refer to it throughout the following week as you look for instances of joy in times of justice.

Week 4



Joy In Our Future

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Tip: The starter questions are meant to get the group thinking and spark discussion, so don't rush through them or attempt to get a solid answer for each one. Don't be afraid to wait for a while to see who speaks; and remember, there are no wrong opinions.

Prep for Ministry Time (Option 1):

Scraps of paper/index cards and writing utensils required.

Before the Lesson:

Paul wrote the letter of 2 Corinthians about 55 AD. The central theme of the letter is strength in weakness. He specifically addresses the power of the Holy Spirit in his own life of difficulty. In this week's passage, Paul focuses in on the believers' present struggles in contrast to the hope of eternal glory that all Christians look forward to.

Starting the Lesson:

2 Corinthians 4:6-18

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.

In this series, we've been talking about the tough question about joy: Is JOY attainable for the broken, the beaten-down, and the weary? This week we're going to look at Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and how we can have joy for our future in spite of our current circumstances.

Starter Questions:

Dr. Brené [pronounced like Renee] Brown talks a lot about how people are afraid to experience true joy because we are always expecting something bad to happen that will take away our joy.

Can you relate to Brené Brown? Share about a time when something great happened in your life and whether worries came to steal your joy or if you were able to remain joyful for what happened.

Opening Prayer:

Ask God to bless your discussion time and show your group how he gives us hope and joy for the future.

Scripture:

Read through the passage twice as a group. Choose at least 2 people in the group to read the full passage aloud, or split it into 2 parts, vs. 6-12 & 13-18

Discussion Questions:

- What is the central theme of this passage?
 - Allow discussion on this, but help the group get to a general conclusion that God's power is made known through our human weakness.

15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- What is Paul talking about in verse 10 when he says “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus”?
 - We continuously suffer pain and harm in our earthly bodies, and we will inevitably die.
- What does this passage tell us about God?
 - God wants to work in our lives, God is far more powerful than our weakness, God hasn't abandoned us to our weaknesses but is right there with us
- What is God's plan according to verses 14-15?
 - Jesus' death and resurrection was for our benefit, so that we would be reunited with God, and God will raise us from the dead just as he did Jesus, and we will get to experience his glory ourselves when the time comes.
- Does this passage feel hopeful? Why or why not?
 - Give some time for discussion here.
- How does understanding this passage affect how we live as Christians?
 - We can be thankful for what Jesus did, we know that any suffering going on in our lives is temporary, and that we have a future hope that is already at work in our lives.
- Our series theme is joy. Where do you see joy at work in Paul's words in this chapter?

- Give everyone an opportunity to respond.
- What can we be joyful about regarding our future as Kingdom Loving Christians?
 - We will be in the presence of God for eternity! We get to share not just in Jesus' suffering but in his resurrection and glory. God is with us, and already working in our lives in a powerful way.
- Application: How are you investing in your/others' future that will bring joy to you and God?
 - Give time to respond. For those who feel they aren't doing anything, be encouraging. If you know the people in your group well enough, you may make suggestions if they can't come up with something.

Ministry Time Application:

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Scraps of paper/index cards and writing utensils required.

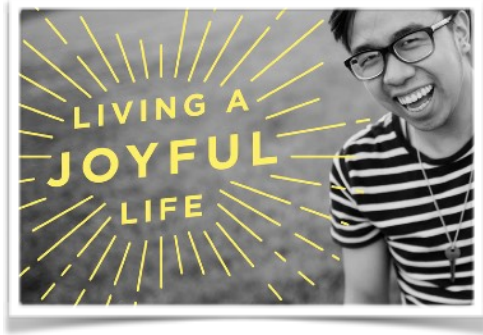
Going back to our opening question, one of the ways that Brené Brown says we can keep our joy intact is by practicing the spiritual discipline of Gratitude. Take about 3 minutes to silently reflect on what you are grateful for, and write down some of those things. Be specific. Use your prayer time as a group to give thanks aloud for the things you've written down.

Option 2:

Before breaking into groups, take 2 minutes to sit quietly before God with this thought: Think about a person in your life who is not walking with Jesus — maybe they were at some point, maybe they have always been far from God.

Break up into pairs* or smaller groups and pray for the person you were thinking of. Tell your group to pray specifically about the person God brought to their mind, if they're comfortable sharing details.

*Pairs are better for some, because it's easier to disclose more intimate details to one person than to a larger group, and some people aren't as comfortable praying aloud in big groups.



Ministry Time

Series: Living a Joyful Life

Read through all of the Ministry Time ideas for each week before you begin teaching through the series. This will help you plan and pray for stronger impact! Blessings!

Week 1:

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Take a moment (3-5 minutes) to rest in God's presence. Ask the Holy Spirit to be more present with your group, and for everyone to be more aware of his presence. Be thankful for God's word and for what was shared in your group, and ask God to slow everyone's hearts and minds, and for his voice to speak clearly to each person.

In that time, ask:

What does goodness look like?

When has God shown his goodness to you?

Where are you in need of God to show you his goodness?

When the time is up, bring the group back together to share (if comfortable) what they experienced.

Depending on your group size, break into smaller groups to pray or pray aloud together as a whole to close.

Option 2:

In 30-60 seconds, have everyone write down what they are thinking about, or what thought has lingered in their mind throughout the group. No judgment and no particular expectation for what that may be. Break down into groups of two to share those things and talk about them. Pray for one another in those groups if you feel comfortable.

Leader, ensure the whole process takes no more than 10 minutes. Set your phone or watch to confirm. This is to promote direct communication and focus.

Reconvene the group and pray a blessing to end.

Week 2:

Please thoughtfully choose one of the two options below based on what would be most effective and helpful for your group.

Option 1:

The psalms have often been prayed aloud by groups of believers. Pray Psalm 139: 1-12 together as a group. Then have your group prayerfully reflect on the passage, and invite the Holy Spirit to lead them to a verse or two that He would use to speak to them as they meditate.

Option 2:

Invite the Holy Spirit to show your group members a time or a season where they felt the present hand of God on them—a time when God saw them and comforted them or spoke to them through the

encouragement or care of others. Or, if they are currently experiencing a season of isolation, pain, or disappointment, pray individually, or for each other, that God would make His presence and love evident now. Pray that the joy God offers open-handedly would be felt in a real a meaningful way.

Week 3:

Option 1:

The beauty of God's mercy is that it is available to everyone, no matter what the transgression. In the story of David we see a man who had done many despicable things, including adultery, murder, and telling lies, and yet because he confessed his sins and turned to God he was granted forgiveness. He recognized that God's love is unfailing and compassion is great — great enough to overcome anything he had done wrong. Is there something in your life that you need to confess to God and seek forgiveness for? Spend some time praying and/or journaling today admitting to the Lord what you have done wrong, asking for his mercy, and praising him for his power to make you clean again.

Option 2:

A companion to Psalm 51 is Psalm 32, also written by David, that expresses what he experienced after confessing his sin to God and receiving mercy and forgiveness. For today's ministry time, have someone in your group re-read Psalm 51 aloud, followed by another group member reading Psalm 32. What parallels do you notice between the two passages? What verses can you

point to in Psalm 32 that show the joy David experienced from God's justice? Take note of one of these verses and refer to it throughout the following week as you look for instances of joy in times of justice.

Week 4:

Based on the people and overall feel of your group, select which option you feel fits best.

Option 1:

Scraps of paper/index cards and writing utensils required.

Going back to our opening question, one of the ways that Brené Brown says we can keep our joy intact is by practicing the spiritual discipline of Gratitude. Take about 3 minutes to silently reflect on what you are grateful for, and write down some of those things. Be specific. Use your prayer time as a group to give thanks aloud for the things you've written down.

Option 2:

Before breaking into groups, take 2 minutes to sit quietly before God with this thought: Think about a person in your life who is not walking with Jesus—maybe they were at some point, maybe they have always been far from God.

Break up into pairs* or smaller groups and pray for the person you were thinking of. Tell your group to pray

specifically about the person God brought to their mind, if they're comfortable sharing details.

*Pairs are better for some, because it's easier to disclose more intimate details to one person than to a larger group, and some people aren't as comfortable praying aloud in big groups.