



Advent 2020 Bible Study (Preparation for Advent)

“The themes of Advent--hope, peace, love and joy--are themes that are universal in the human experience. Everybody’s got hope. Everybody is looking for peace,” he said. “We focus on the particular story of Christ but lift up the universal theme. Everybody from the homeless person to the person living in a single-room apartment to those who are well off has those hopes and yearnings for peace--and can experience the joy of Christmas.” (Unknown source)

Session 3 – JOY Shepherds Candle – “*Be not afraid*”

Focus Passage: Psalm 27:14

“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

Prayer for Joy: *Gracious God, You call us to you because you love us. We trust in the story of God's faithfulness and enter once more into the abundance of life that God offers; and that joy will be born anew in us. Amen.*

Joy Definition:

Noun: *a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.*

Verb: *rejoice; rejoicing*

What does joy mean in the Bible? Having joy includes feeling good cheer and a vibrant happiness. But joy, in its fuller, spiritual meaning of expressing God's goodness, involves more. It is a deep-rooted, inspired happiness. "The joy of the Lord is your strength".

What is the difference between joy and happy? *Happiness is an emotion in which one experiences feelings ranging from contentment and satisfaction to bliss and intense pleasure. Joy is a stronger, less common feeling than happiness; witnessing or achieving selflessness to the point of personal sacrifice frequently triggers the emotion of joy; spiritual experiences, caring for others, gratitude, thankfulness; inward peace and contentment. The difference here is we are looking at your level of “Authentic Joy” which is not dependent on outside circumstances.*

If this statement is true – describe one experience of happiness and one experience of joy. Details are important!

A short survey to evaluate your level of joy – *just for fun!* (excerpt from a questionnaire by Dr. Madan Kataria – *How Joyous Am I?*) Rate each question on a scale from 1 to 7; with 1 being ‘I never feel this’ to 7 ‘I feel this strongly almost all the time’. When you answer a question, answer with what applies to you most of the time; not just this day.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Again, a **reminder this was for fun!** It isn't the total score that matters, it is whether or not you resonated with some of the questions! What were some of your thoughts while "taking" the survey?

An additional note: You *alone* are responsible for your authentic joy. You are *not* responsible for someone else's happiness OR joy – they are. Just a fleeting thought – are *you* trying to be someone's joy or happiness? Are *you* trying to make someone else responsible for your happiness or joy? Any thoughts about this?

The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World (2016) by Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Carlton Abrams, they begin with "We are such fragile creatures and it is from this weakness, not despite it, that we discover the possibility of true joy." What does this statement mean to you?

Lastly, they describe the 8 Pillars of Joy:

1. Perspective – There are many different angles ...
2. Humility – I tried to look humble and modest, but ...
3. Humor – Laughter is much better ...
4. Acceptance – The only place where change can begin ...
5. Forgiveness – Freeing ourselves from the Past ...
6. Gratitude – I am fortunate to be alive ...
7. Compassion – Something we want to become ...
8. Generosity – We are filled with Joy ...

If you could select one for which you are having the most trouble right now, what would it be? _____

Describe how you would **begin** to work on this characteristic?

Philippians 4:4-6

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: **Rejoice!** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Encouragement to do before Session 4 on Love:

- ☞ Pray the JOY prayer every morning.
- ☞ Recite the focus scripture for this series: Psalm 27:14 “*Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*” OR recite it personally: “*I will wait for the Lord, I will be strong and take heart and I will wait for the Lord.*”
- ☞ Continue writing your story adding a paragraph or two of your thoughts, feelings, or events regarding Joy from today’s work. Refer to your notes from the Serenity Prayer to see if there is an ah-ha moment or thoughts that you want to add to this story. You are always welcome to use something new that the Holy Spirit brings to mind.

A Few Tips on How to Feel Happiness and Joy
by Chris Bastian

Is There a Relationship Between Happiness and Joy?

Yes and No. Joy is something that lasts. Happiness is something that is temporary. Joy is an inner, conscious belief. Happiness is external. Joy brings with it a feeling of contentment when someone is in the middle of a life storm. Happiness is not present in a life storm. A person's genetic baseline level of happiness is fixed on the personality style in which they were born and can increase over time. People can receive the internal feeling consistent joy by practicing behaviors and techniques.

1. **Choosing to Smile** and consciously deciding to have a good day induces endorphins and other uplifting chemicals in the brain. Nothing can dampen your mood when you know the techniques involving how to bring on joy. Everyone can indeed develop inner joy. Using these techniques can bring on temporary happiness, however practice frequently throughout the day and on a daily basis will increase that baseline happiness level and bring about the more consistent feeling of Joy.
2. **Meditation and Imagining** that you have received something you wish for will improve happiness which is of short duration. However, it is important to avoid mixing this fantasy with reality. Imagining or wishing you had something is very temporary. With practice, meditation and becoming mindful in the spiritual sense will bring about lasting joy.
3. **Positive Thinking** or making it your goal to think positive often brings happiness to the surface quickly. Adopting a positive attitude can indeed improve the mood and bring on temporary happiness. Regardless of the problem, situation, or circumstance, people do get to choose whether they want to feel happy and joyful, or depressed and sad. The key is to practice this technique and make it a daily goal. Practice recognizing the simple delights in life.

4. **Feeling Grateful** about what you do have is a deeper emotion and consciously practicing or focusing on what you have in life will increase that baseline level and bring on the lasting feeling of joy. Feeling grateful for your health, employment, family, friends, home, etc., basically makes people feel content.
5. **Notice Immediate Surroundings** Stop and become aware of the positive aspects of your life. Most will find plenty of evidence that happiness is sometimes hidden in many areas, people just have to be aware. Consistently stopping and noticing the positive pieces of the immediate surroundings will consistently increase awareness and increase that baseline level to feel consistent joy. Stop....Ask yourself, “What is pleasurable about this moment”?
6. **Become Active and Support** a cause that you really believe is worthy. Or become active on a smaller scale by practicing random acts of kindness. Helping others increases the endorphin like chemicals in the brain. Becoming active in a cause helps people feel in control or empowered, especially when facing a difficult life challenge.

