

Prayer Ask God to allow the group to see the true joy that can only be found in serving others in the name of God.

II. Group Discussion Each number below includes a set of questions that relate to the scripture text. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement on an answer. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better.

Suffering and Joy

One of the unique aspects of Christian joy is that we can still experience joy in the midst of suffering. Sometimes our greatest joy comes after the most difficult times in our life. For example, the joy of children comes after pregnancy and childbirth. The Bible tells us again and again that following Jesus will bring difficult times, but in the midst of those times we will find true joy.

When have you experienced joy and pain at the same time?

Read James 1: 2-4

2 My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; ⁴and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

1. Describe ways that the faithful still experience trials today because of their faith.
2. If you have experienced trials because of your faith, then share that experience with the group.

Joy in the Lord

Read Psalm 63: 1-7 aloud

1. Where does the author of the Psalm say that joy can be found?

What are ways that you see people seeking for God?

Discuss a time in your life when you were seeking God, whether you knew it or not. What changed in your life when you found him or were reminded of His presence?

Tell of a time in your life when you experienced the steadfast love and joy of God and you had no other response than to praise him.

III. Cultivating Joy Practical suggestions and reflections to help participants connect the discussion to their daily lives. Challenge each person to try at least one of these each week.

Spend the first moments of the day thinking about the things that we need to get done for the day. What are the priorities? Too often we get busy before we consider the best way to use our time. Spend at least three mornings this week practicing this suggestion.

Spend the last few minutes of the day thanking God for the many blessings that we have received in our lives.

Find joy in the lives of children. Spend time during the week watching your children or children that you know. Notice the things that they do that bring you joy, and notice the things that bring them joy. Actually write those things down. What can you learn from them about joy.

IV. Other resources

The point – Philip Kenneson discusses the obstacles that keep us from achieving true joy. He quotes John Kavanaugh to describe the problem. Kavanaugh writes:

Friendship, intimacy, love, pride, happiness, and joy are actually the objects we buy and consume, much more so than the tubes, the liquor bottles, Cadillacs, and Buicks that promise them and bear their names. And since none of these deepest human hopes can be fulfilled in any product, the mere consumption of them is never enough; “more” of the product, or a “new improved” product,

is the only relief offered to our human longings. Thus the seller drives us to greater purchasing with even more extravagantly concocted promises: more commodities are the solutions to anxiety stimulated by media manipulation. Consumption, consequently, is not just an economic factor. It emerges as a “way of life.” It is an addiction.

We are taught from early ages to be consumers that deserve to get the best of everything. Several people who work as servers in restaurants dread Sundays more than any other day of the week. When church people come in to eat, they are usually the rudest customers they have. We bring the same attitudes with us to church. We want the best, the newest, the most cutting edge thing.

Kenneson says the main obstacles to joy are:

- ❖ Relentless pursuit of personal pleasure.
- ❖ Advertising.
- ❖ New is always better
- ❖ Fear of fear and anxiety. Examples insurance, medicine, etc.

Do you agree with Kenneson and Kavanaugh’s diagnosis?

What do you think are the obstacles to joy?

Prayer *Creative suggestions for group prayer*

Ask God to deepen our joy.

Seek God’s wisdom for not defining our joy by our stuff.

Praise God for the joys of this week.

Kid-friendly activity

An activity designed to help kids and adults connect the scripture to their lives. Works best when adults participate in the activity with the kids.

- ❖ Give the children several cardboard boxes and simply watch them play with them.
- ❖ The group can spend some time with the children decorating cookies. The process will of course be messy, but notice the fun and joy the kids have during the process.

Life on the vine: Joy

Small group guide based on

Life on the Vine, by Philip Kenneson (IVP, 1999. ISBN 0830822194)

www.saltandlightresources.com

By John Grant, Jon Camp, Trey Finley, and Ben Siburt

Theme: With so many different voices in culture telling us what true joy is, how do we define what Joy looks like among Christians?

In his book, *Life on the Vine*, Philip Kenneson shows that culture tells us that true joy is found in getting everything we want,. For Christians, true joy is found in serving the other out of our own selflessness.

This discussion guide will invite participants to consider how the fruit of joy functions in their lives.

Leadership tip: Laughter is one of the best sounds you will ever hear in a small group discussion. It means people are comfortable, which is a great situation for honest conversation. As a leader, do your part to encourage a positive, upbeat, maybe even playful mood throughout the meeting. Keep the discussion moving, but also keep it natural.

I. Relate *Use a few of these to introduce the theme and “break the ice.” No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage individuals through these questions.*

- ❖ Think about the commercials that you see on a regular basis. What things do they tell you that you need in order to have joy?
- ❖ What things in your life give you the most joy?
- ❖ What is that one thing that is missing in your life? What is the thing that if you just had it, then the majority of your anxiety would be gone?