

2026-01-25 Small Group Guide

Small Group Discussion Guide: "The Joy of the Lord is My Strength" Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by asking God to speak through His Word and give you fresh insight into finding joy even in difficult circumstances.

Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)

Share a time when you experienced unexpected joy in the middle of a difficult situation. What made that possible?

Key Scripture Passages

Hebrews 12:1-3 - Running the race with joy set before us

Luke 6:20-23 - Blessed are you who weep; leap for joy

Luke 8:11-15 - The parable of the sower

Nehemiah 8:1-12 - The joy of the Lord is your strength

Main Themes & Takeaways

1. Joy vs. Happiness

Joy is not dependent on our circumstances but on our relationship with God and His promises for our future.

Key Quote: "Jesus looked at the cross and had joy in it because he's looking beyond the cross... I'm looking beyond, and you don't even have to tell me what's yet to come. I just know I want to spend eternity with you, period."

2. The Holy Spirit's Role in Joy

The Holy Spirit empowers us to experience joy when situations don't look good—joy in spite of our circumstances.

Key Example: John the Baptist leaping in Elizabeth's womb with joy (Luke 1:39-44)

3. Faith Produces Joy

Without faith, it's impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Our joy comes from trusting God's unseen plans rather than our visible circumstances.

Key Quote: "What you intended for bad, God intended for good." (Joseph's story)

4. Worship in Response to God's Word

The Nehemiah 8 example shows radical, whole-hearted worship: standing for hours, faces to the ground, weeping, then celebrating.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Message (15 minutes)

The sermon contrasted "playing it safe" with "running it in." What does it look like in your daily life to "run it in" for God rather than play it safe?

The pastor mentioned that John the Baptist "leaped for joy" in the womb. How does this early example of Spirit-filled joy challenge our understanding of what's possible through the Holy Spirit?

In Luke 6:22-23, Jesus tells us to "leap for joy" when people hate, exclude, insult, and reject us. Why is this so counterintuitive? What would enable someone to actually do this?

Personal Reflection (15 minutes)

The sermon asked: "When does the world ever see you and me when things are going against us and they see us kicking up our heels and going, 'I'm just leaping for joy?'" How would you honestly answer this question about your own life?

The pastor shared about receiving hurtful criticism on Facebook right before preaching about joy. How do you typically respond when attacked or

criticized? What would it look like to respond with joy?

"The joy of the Lord is your strength" comes from Nehemiah 8:10. Can you identify a time when God's joy actually gave you strength? What was that experience like?

Going Deeper (15 minutes)

The Israelites in Nehemiah 8 wept when they heard God's Word, then were told to rejoice and celebrate. Why is there sometimes a need for brokenness before joy? Have you experienced this pattern?

The sermon emphasized that we often "give our life to the world" even after selling our soul to God. What are some practical ways we do this? What needs to change?

In the parable of the sower (Luke 8), some receive the word with joy but have no root and fall away in testing. What's the difference between shallow joy and deep, rooted joy?

Practical Application (15-20 minutes)

This Week's Challenge: Choose ONE to focus on

Option 1: Joy Inventory

Read through your Bible this week and highlight/underline every mention of "joy," "rejoice," or "gladness"

Keep a journal of what you discover

Share your findings with the group next week

Option 2: Circumstance vs. Faith Response

When something frustrating or difficult happens this week, pause before responding

Ask: "God, what do you want me to see beyond this circumstance?"

Practice saying, "I don't know what God's doing, but I know He's got this"

Report back on how this changed your perspective

Option 3: Radical Worship

Attend a worship service this week with the Nehemiah 8 attitude

Go expecting to be moved, not just to "get it over with"

Stand when others sit, raise your hands if you don't normally, or bow in prayer

Pray for others around you before focusing on yourself

Option 4: Sacrificial Giving

Look for an opportunity to give sacrificially to someone who has nothing prepared (like Nehemiah 8:10)

Do it anonymously if possible

Notice the joy that comes from giving rather than receiving

Group Discussion:

Which option speaks most to where you are right now?

What obstacles might prevent you from following through?

How can the group support and pray for you?

Prayer Time (10-15 minutes)

Prayer Focus Areas:

For Joy in Trials: Pray for anyone in the group facing difficult circumstances—that they would experience supernatural joy through the Holy Spirit

For Deeper Worship: Ask God to break through our comfortable patterns and help us worship with the passion of the Israelites in Nehemiah 8

For Faith Over Circumstances: Pray for the ability to see beyond present situations to God's eternal purposes

For Those Struggling: Lift up anyone who feels they've "fallen away" like the seed on rocky soil—that they would develop deep roots

Prayer Method:

Consider praying in groups of 2-3, allowing each person to share their specific need and have others pray for them directly.

Closing Reflection

Final Thought: "If Jesus could look at the cross and have joy in it because he's looking beyond the cross, God, I'm looking beyond, and you don't even have to tell me what's yet to come."

Memory Verse for the Week: "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.'" — Nehemiah 8:10

Before Next Week

Complete your chosen practical application

Read Nehemiah 8-9 for additional context

Come prepared to share one way you experienced or practiced joy this week

Bring your Bible with joy passages marked (if you chose Option 1)

Leader Notes

Be sensitive to those who may be going through genuinely difficult times—don't minimize their pain, but point them to the source of supernatural joy

Encourage authenticity—this topic can make people feel guilty if they're not "joyful enough"; emphasize that this is about growth, not performance

Share your own struggles with maintaining joy—vulnerability from the leader creates safety for others

Keep the focus on Christ, not on self-generated positive thinking

Celebrate small victories—if someone shares even a small step toward joy in trials, affirm them

"Rejoice always, pray continually, and in all things give thanks." — 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18