

Immersed in God's Word, ^{x2c} following Jesus – together

They took note that they had been with Jesus. ~ Acts 4:13



Always be joyful. Always keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV

To get ready for this week's theme of Joy as a foundational fruit of the Spirit, we share a few quotes from *4 Habits of Joy-filled People*:

"Joy helps you endure hardship well. Joy gives us the strength to deal with emotional pain. The idea of living with joy doesn't mean that we don't suffer or feel emotional pain. It doesn't even mean that we get past our emotional pain quickly. It means that despite the emotional pain we have, we can still find relational joy in the midst of the hard stuff." p. 10, *The 4 Habits*, Warner, Coursey

"Joy is a high-energy emotion related to knowing that someone is happy to see me. The relational happiness we feel when we experience spontaneous joy can also be experienced when we relive joyful moments from the past or anticipate joyful moments in the future."

LOVE
JOY
PEACE

p. 33, *The 4 Habits*, Warner, Coursey

May the Holy Spirit give us wisdom and understanding about joy, expanding not just our knowledge, but our experience of joy in the Lord – and among each other – daily.



Prayer for the Week (based on Isaiah 61:10):

I greatly rejoice in You Lord; my soul exults in having You as my God. You clothe me with garments of salvation – a robe of righteousness. Thank You for treasuring me – us as your people. Build our joy this week, mine, my family and friends, church, and community. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Monday, Jan 15 Theme: The Foundational Fruit of JOY



*Rejoice in hope,
be patient in tribulation,
be constant in prayer.*

Romans 12:12 ESV



Pondering Point: Here's a quote from friend Chris Coursey:

You have likely experienced the following description yourself: Immature people often change their personality depending on the emotion they feel. Others tend to walk around them on eggshells because of it. One of the characteristics of adult-level maturity is the ability to act like ourselves even under stress. The world needs more adults. We need more people who are running on the fuel of joy and handling their emotions with predictable stability. 125, *The 4 Habits*, Warner, Coursey

We add to that the extremely helpful (God-given) ability to handle difficulties without losing ourselves. Here is Jim Wilder:

Suffering well means that we go through difficulties in life without being traumatized and that we respond to each situation relationally. We were created as relational beings, but we forget that when reacting out of pain. In order to suffer well, we need maturity. All Christians are called to develop maturity. One of the main characteristics of a mature person is the ability to handle difficult emotions. Mature people are able to return to a state of calm from the six big emotions. Maturity rises to life's challenges rather than reacting from fear. Maturity allows us to live according to God's values, remembering that we are created in his image to do good works. Although life is not easy, we can still live by our values during challenging times.

27, *Joyful Journey*, WKLL



Prayer: Father God, remind us that joy does not require a lack of pain or difficulty, but the presence of You – and others – in the midst of all life's varied situations. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Micro-Group Connections in the Discipleship Lifestyle

[Jesus] got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. Luke 5:3



Micro-Group Moment (MGM): When Jesus stepped into Peter's boat, He walked into a pre-existing MG of Peter, James, and John –

fishing buddies. The Bible calls them *partners*, but it is the same church-y word in Greek that we use for “fellowship” (*koinonia*). What Jesus did was invite these pre-existing partners into a deeper spiritual journey as well.

This is a key understanding to the MG life of disciples. While we can be open to starting new relationships, more so we look to welcome Jesus into pre-existing fellowships (when and where the Holy Spirit directs). We may not be able to foster dozens of Small Groups, but we can be intentional about a few of the dozens of MGs that already exist in our current lives. We can, like Jesus, invite others into a deeper spiritual journey as well. These groups meet anywhere from weekly to monthly.

MGers:

siblings
spouse
parents
teammates
classmates
neighbors
friends
church folk
co-workers

less often:

pet-vet
gym rats
wait staff
clientele
hobbyists

- Are you open to letting Jesus use your life (boat) as a platform to teach or connect with others?
- Make a list of your current or past MGs that include teammates or partners. They may be based on work, like Peter, or hobbies like scouting, bowling, music, or book clubs. They could be family-, health- or sports-oriented. Share your list with a friend.

Tuesday, Jan 16: God's Mission in Luke 15:11-31

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them...

TRANSFORMATION
TUESDAYS

Luke 15:1-3



Pondering Point: Read Luke 15, specifically verses 11-31.

It serves as the *Saturday Story from God's Word* this week. The verses above, 1-3, set the context for **why** Jesus is sharing the following three parables. Think about whether Jesus, using parables involving lost situations, could transform the Pharisees muttering into marveling, changing their perspectives from sneering at sinners to celebrating with them as they return to God because of Jesus.

We know that many of the Pharisees and priests hardened their hearts toward Jesus, but certain verses acknowledge that others softened toward him: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38,39) and later a great number of priests (Acts 6:7). Apostle Paul, himself a Pharisee, became a tremendous witness of the Lordship of Jesus – with great joy for sinners who repented and turned to Jesus like he did. Jesus transformed even enemies with His life. How is he transforming you?



Prayer: Lord Jesus, as you have welcomed sinners and ate with them, I welcome You anew to walk with me through life, to sit with me in the midst of life's difficulties, and to lead me to repentance when necessary. Deliver me from muttering about others and instead celebrate whatever work you accomplish in people. Amen.

"Joy can also be found in our past and re-experienced when we remember joyful events from the past and allow ourselves to relive them in our minds. We can actually experience the same feelings of joy all over again."

34, *The 4 Habits*, Warner, Course

*For the joy set before him Jesus endured the cross,
scorning its shame,
and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Hebrews 12:2

**We are a joy to Jesus, who, for the joy set before Him,
endured the cross**



Pondering Point: This verse makes it apparent that part of the joy that inspired Jesus to persevere is you and me. Not just us of course – it was also the joy of Jesus to do the will of the Father. But don't you see that the will of the Father was to save us? And that drove Jesus to stay His course. You are a JOY to Jesus and to the Father. When you find that you are kicking yourself for messing up or acting the fool, remember this truth, let it bring a smile to your face, and let it give you solid biblical footing. You are LOVED and ENJOYED by God.

Check out Bible Project's video titled, Chara-Joy
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/chara-joy/>



Prayer for the day: Father God, I rejoice that I am a JOY to You! I rejoice that Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross so that we could become intimate allies in life. I love You Father. Thanks for loving me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The life of Jesus on earth, which culminated on the cross, modeled suffering well. It was evident in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus did not want to go through with His imminent death. He was in so much distress that He was sweating blood, yet He was still able to remain connected to the Father and think of the welfare of His disciples when the guards seized Him. Jesus did not change under pressure and exhibited the same thoughtfulness, forgiveness and compassion as before. His deep connection with the Father enabled Him to suffer well. God invites all of His followers to live our lives the same way as Christ. 27,28, *Joyful Journey, WKLL*

We write this to make our joy complete

~ Apostle John, 1 John 1:4



Pondering Point: One of Jesus joys was to bring us to God the Father; the Apostle John describes a similar joy for him and his fellow disciples. John's joy increases – is actually *completed* – when others share his joy of knowing Jesus, of following Jesus, of being in fellowship with the Father because of Jesus. I have known and celebrated such joy. Have you? Let's review the potential for joy being experienced, shared and "completed" as John describes it. Read 1 John 1:1-2:14 and see that such joy includes forgiveness, fellowship and love – with God and men. If time permits, check out Thrivetoday's **Skill 11: Return to Joy** on Youtube.



Review: Are you a joyful person? Does your sin rob you of joy? OR – Do you let God's forgiveness rob sin and shame of its hold on you, replacing it with joy in being forgiven and free from guilt? Do you enjoy fellowship time with God and others?



Repent if necessary of letting sin rob you of joy in the Lord. or of not sharing God-given joy with others, or diminishing joy of the Lord in others. You may need to repent of missing out on fellowshiping with God and others. Confess such sins knowing that *God is faithful and just and will forgive your sins and cleanse you of all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).



Return as necessary: Return to the light of God, rejoice over the forgiveness and fellowship that you have thanks to Jesus, and ask for the Holy Spirit's help to walk in the light, loving God as well as your brothers and sisters of the faith. Ask that the Spirit disperses all darkness within your heart, soul and mind.

The following prayer is part of a re-written set of lyrics based on the song *In the Garden*. I use it in my devotional time with God. The chorus reflects this desired sharing of what we at Hope called "contagious joy." Use these words to pray in this devotional time.

Prayer for the day: *Oh Lord walk with me, come and talk with me
Come and tell me I am Your own
Let the joy we share as we tarry here
Be joy Lord that others can know. Amen.*

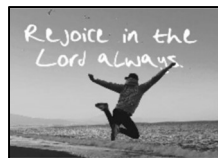


Friday, Jan 19:

Discipleship Point

**Worship
JOY.**

Philippians 4:4 NIV
*Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, rejoice!*



Pondering Point: There are many other “joys” to be had in life, but there is an inherent danger to many of them. See how the quote below resonates with your experience.

Low levels of joy make us vulnerable to artificial substitutes for the real thing. Addictions form as attachments to non-relational stimulants that usually create a sense of pleasure or momentary happiness. Thus my addiction makes me feel happy temporarily. It gives me a short-term pleasure boost that numbs my pain and replaces it with pleasure. The problem of course is that it doesn't last and it creates other problems that generally make my life worse than if I didn't have the addiction.

11, 4 Habits, Warner, Coursey

We introduced a book last November called *Joyful Journey* which, among other things, talked about journaling. That is the source of these words: “The beauty of Immanuel journaling is that it helps us become aware of God's presence during painful as well as joyful moments.... A tremendous amount of healing is available for anyone willing to engage regularly in Immanuel journaling.

54, Joyful Journey, WKLL



Discipleship Prayer: Father God, strengthen me to spurn lesser joys and instead rejoice in You Lord – always – again and again! Amen! In Jesus' name I will rejoice! Amen.

Saturday, Jan 20: Scripture's Story for the Week

Parable of the Lost Son(s) or Loving Father Luke 15:11-31



Pondering Point: Some of you might already know this parable and even memorized it at some level. But read it again – through the lens of where the prodigal Son turns for comfort or security rather than his father. Then note how the father in the story is already prepared to comfort his long-lost son at first sight. That is the heart, the spirit, the soul of God the Father. Too bad it wasn't the heart and soul and spirit of the older brother.

By the way, the son who wandered off “came to his senses.” He realized what he had available through his father back home. It is good to pause and think about our situation on a regular basis. The spiritual discipline known as *Examen* invites the Holy Spirit to lead a mental walk back through your day to look for, among other things, times for gratitude. We are training ourselves to find gratitude – which in turn brings out joy. Joy is a great bookend to our days.

“When we start our day with joy, it is easier to face the challenges we will meet throughout the day. When we know we will end our day in a place of joy and peace, sleep comes more easily and we do not dread life quite so much.” p. 20, *The 4 Habits*, Warner, Coursey



Prayer for the day: Father God, I want to reflect the heart, the spirit, and the soul seen in the Father of this parable of Jesus. Especially the unbridled joy at others “coming home.” Make me to be like You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



*I give everyone and everything to You God;
I give everyone and everything to You.*

Sunday, Jan 21: Call to worship God, to gather together

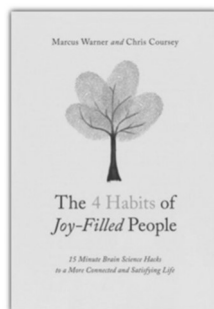
Romans 15:32 ESV *...by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.*



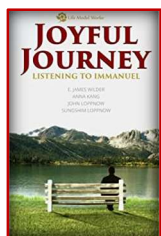
Pondering Point: I love the idea of gathering to be refreshed. Worship of course is a great time to do that, but so are midweek get-togethers for lunch, small group and just chatting. The very definition of joy (and peace) comes from being with others whom you enjoy.

“We all need times of high-energy joy and low-energy rest. Nurturing a rhythm means protecting ourselves from always having to be on. We can’t always be in a high-energy state. Sometimes we need alone time without a lot of noise or emotional demands and sometimes we need quiet time with just 1 or 2 other people where we can enjoy being together in a low-energy state.” 62,63, *The 4 Habits*, Warner, Coursey

Later he writes with Marcus Warner, “As Christians, we believe God wired us for joy and that He desires to share joy with us.” (179, *The 4 Habits of Joy-filled People*). They then quote John 15:11-12: *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*



These things referenced by Jesus likely connect to the teachings of that evening, but particularly the role of abiding in Jesus. This is a good verse to connect with a quote from Wilder’s *Joyful Journey*:



[JJQ] We cannot share all of ourselves or listen to everything God would share in one sitting. A vibrant relationship requires on-going interactions. Practically speaking, even in human relationships such as marriage, we have misunderstandings and must come back and ask clarifying questions. That is how

relationships grow and work, even with God. God works with our ability to understand. Sometimes He allows us to have supernatural insight into situations, but often we become more attuned to God as we grow and mature.

p. 20, *Joyful Journey*, Wilder, Kang, Loppnow, Loppnow



Prayer: Father God, I love the idea of being refreshed in worship, refreshed in relationships throughout the week.

Thank You for refreshment that comes through Your holy Spirit through Your Word and Sacraments, through our family and friends, through our church and community. May there be sources of living water welling up within us to refresh others in their joyful journeys as “well.” In Jesus' name I pray. Amen

