

Session #1: Joy in the Gift of Relationships

Statement: God our creator has given us the gift of relationships. Our relationship with God grounds us in joy and is lived out in our relationships with others and all God's creation.

Scripture focus: Philippians 2:1-5

Objectives: As a result of this session, participants will:

1. Get to know one another.
2. Define happiness and joy.
3. Get a general overview of Paul's letter to the Philippians.
4. Try some practices that may help nurture their attitude of joy.
5. Reflect on their relationships with God and others as sources of joy.
6. Have fun

TIME	ACTIVITY	SUPPLIES
10-20 minutes	<p>Icebreakers</p> <p><i>Icebreakers are an important part of your small group. In addition to helping participants get to know one another's names, icebreakers are helpful in forming relationships.</i></p> <p>A. Name Aerobics</p> <p>Have the group stand and form a circle. An adult leader will demonstrate how to do this activity. The adult introduces themselves saying their first and last name while, at the same time, with each syllable of the name provides some kind of movement.</p> <p>Example: "Jonathan Smith" – Jon-a-than-Smith – would require four distinct movements. Have each person in the group repeat the person's name in unison while also mimicking the actions they performed.</p> <p>Continue around the circle so that everyone introduces them in the same way with the total group mimicking the actions after each introduction.</p> <p>Optional: As you go around the circle, repeat the motions of the person preceding the person who is going to introduce themselves next before that person shares their name and motions. (Person B repeats Person A's name and motions; Person C repeats Person B's name and motions).</p> <p>B. Baby If You Love Me Won't You Please Just Smile?</p> <p>Instruct the group to sit in a circle. Ask for a volunteer to start off this game. This person stands in the middle of the circle. The object of this game is for the person in the center ("it") to get someone in the circle to break a smile or laugh. This person approaches someone in the circle and says, "Baby, if you love me won't you please just smile?" The person who</p>	

	<p>is approached has to respond – without laughing or smiling with the sentence, “Baby, I love you but I just can’t smile.” The only rule is that “it” cannot touch the person that “it” is addressing. If the person breaks a smile or laughs, that person becomes “it.” If this person does not break a smile, “it” approaches another person in the circle and tries to get that person to laugh.</p>	
<p>10 minutes</p>	<p>Bible Pictionary</p> <p>Before you play this game, prepare the list of phrases (see supply column) making sure to leave several spaces between each phrase. Divide your group into two or three teams. Give each team several pieces of paper and a pencil. An adult leader should sit in a chair equidistant from the groups. The leader holds the list with phrases and keeps them hidden.</p> <p>For the first round, each team selects someone in their group to draw the first phrase. All persons who are selected to draw (one person per team) goes to the adult leader and gets the first phrase from the leader at the same time. These team members run back to their group and draw pictures to help their team guess the phrase. They may NOT use words/letters/numbers. When a team member guesses the phrase correctly, that person runs to the adult leader to get the next phrase. Only when a team guesses a phrase do they send a team member to get the next word. This person then draws a picture until a teammate guesses the phrase correctly and then that person gets the next word, etc.</p> <p>The game ends when a team guesses all ten phrases correctly.</p> <p>At the conclusion of the game say: <i>This weekend we are focusing on joy. If you think about all the phrases you’ve guessed, there is an element of joy in each of them – from God creating the world to loving our neighbors as ourselves to Jesus’ resurrection. So let’s take our first look at joy.</i></p>	<p>A piece of paper with the following phrases listed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For God so loved the world 2. Five loaves and two fishes 3. Jesus calms the storm 4. Creation of the world 5. Jesus heals the blind man 6. Jesus turns water into wine 7. Jesus washes the disciples feet 8. Jesus’ resurrection 9. Love your neighbor as yourself 10. The birth of Jesus <p>Paper pencils</p>
<p>15 to 20 minutes</p>	<p>Defining Joy</p> <p>Give each person one of the sticky notes (everyone gets the same color). Tell them to sit quietly a moment and to think of the word “happy.” What comes to their minds when they think of this word? After a little time of silence, invite each person to write down their definition of happiness on their sticky note.</p> <p>Distribute the second sticky note to everyone. This time tell them to think of the word “joy.” What comes to their minds when they think of this word? Again, after a little moment of silence, invite them to write down their definition of joy on their sticky note.</p> <p>When everyone has written down their definitions tell them to find a partner and to listen to each other as they share their definitions. Tell</p>	<p>2 different colored sticky notes for each person</p> <p>Pencil for each person</p>

	<p>them to pay attention because they will introduce their partner in the next step by sharing what they heard them say. Give them about 1 minute each to share their definitions.</p> <p>After a couple of minutes, invite the pairs to find another pair with whom to share their definitions. When they get into a group of four, each partner will introduce their partner by name to the couple that joined them and will share what they heard their partner say about happiness and joy. Allow roughly 3 minutes for this sharing. In these small groups, did they discover any differences or similarities in their definitions?</p> <p>In the total group ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Were there any surprises?</i> • <i>Did anyone learn something and if yes, what did they learn?</i> • <i>After you heard someone else’s definition for joy or happiness did you want to change your definition?</i> • <i>Would anyone like to share their definition of joy with the total group? Their definition of happiness?</i> • <i>Is there a difference between happiness and joy? If so, what, is that difference?</i> <p>If they have no response to the last question, that’s okay. They can sit with it for a while.</p> <p>Invite the group to put their joy sticky notes on one wall and their happiness sticky notes on another. Invite them to take a look sometime at the definitions other people wrote.</p>	
5 minutes	<p>The Fastest Quiz Game Ever</p> <p>Remind the group that they will be exploring joy this weekend and what it means.</p> <p>Ask: <i>Is joy the same as happiness? Can you feel joyful and sad at the same time?</i></p> <p>Say: <i>We are going to look at joy in some unexpected places and we will do this by looking at the most joyful book in the Bible.</i></p> <p>Play a short quiz game with the group to see how much they already know about joy and the Bible. They can play on the same Bible Pictionary teams.</p> <p>Distribute the three cards to each team (see supplies). Tell them that you will give them a question. There will be three possible responses (A, B, and C). As a team they should decide which is the correct answer – A, B, or C.</p>	<p>Three sheets of paper per team with A written large on one sheet, B on another and C on the third.</p> <p>Painters’ tape or masking tape</p> <hr/> <p>For emphasis (after the game), post the “Bible facts” sheets on a wall to reinforce some of the facts they uncovered during this game.</p> <p>After the first guess, for example, when you tell them that the correct</p>

	<p>Give them a few seconds to come to a decision for each question and when you call “time” each team should raise one of the sheets of paper with their answer.</p> <p>Here are the questions. The underlined answer is the correct answer:</p> <p>1. How many times do the words rejoice, joy, and joyful appear in the Bible? A. 225 <u>B. 420</u> C. 625</p> <p>2. Which book of the Bible uses the Greek words for joy/rejoice more than any other book in the Bible? A. <u>Philippians</u> B. Luke C. Genesis</p> <p>3. How many times do the words for joy/rejoice appear in the book of Philippians? A. <u>16</u> B. 32 C. 48</p> <p>4. Who wrote the book of Philippians? A. Jesus B. Philip <u>C. Paul</u></p> <p>5. What kind of writing is the book of Philippians?*</p> <p><u>A. a letter</u> B. a poem C. historical writing</p> <p><i>* After you share the correct answer tell them that this was a letter written to believers who lived in Philippi.</i></p> <p>6. Where was Paul when he wrote this letter? A. in Jerusalem B. at home <u>C. in jail</u></p> <p>Which team had the most correct answers? Were they surprised by any of the answers?</p> <p>Say: <i>We will be taking a look at the book of Philippians during our time together – a letter written to followers of Jesus who lived in Philippi. This book is known as the most joyful book in the Bible – which is surprising because Paul was in jail when he wrote it!</i></p>	<p>answer is “B,” post the sheet on which the words, “# times rejoice, joy, joyful appear in the Bible = 420” on the wall.</p> <p>Do the same for each of the remaining questions after they give you their response.</p>
<p>10 – 15 minutes</p>	<p>A First Look at Philippians</p> <p>Invite participants to open their Bibles (if they have them – or provide them with copies of the text on paper) Ask a volunteer to read this passage aloud and tell the group to pay close attention to what Paul is saying to the people of Philippi and what he says about joy.</p> <p><i>If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy</i></p>	<p>Bibles or copies of Philippians 2:1-5 on pieces of paper for each participant</p>

	<p><i>complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus....</i></p> <p>Ask</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does joy mean to Paul? (that believers be of the same mind, have love, be humble, treat others better than themselves, looking to the interests of others over personal interests) 2. Do you sense from Paul's letter that joy is something experienced alone or in relationships with others? Explain. 3. Do you have any other thoughts about joy? 	
<p>5-10 minutes</p>	<p>Joy Practice #1: Connect with People</p> <p>Say: <i>Each time we meet, some of our time will be spent taking a look at practices that enhance our attitude of joy.</i></p> <p><i>This session's joy practice will focus on connecting with others.</i></p> <p>Say the following or something like this using your own words: <i>As human beings, we are naturally social. We thrive when we feel connected to others. God created the gift of relationships. Studies show that people with supportive relationships have better overall health and well-being. But relationships can be hard. We all feel lonely or disconnected sometimes. So how do we nurture our connections?</i></p> <p>Ask the group to share some ways they can nurture their connections, their relationships.</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: <i>The best way to have a friend is to be a friend. Relationships take work and we need to develop our social fitness just like we need to work on our physical fitness.</i></p> <p><i>Think about the people in your life. Bring to mind one particular relationship that is important to you. What could you do in the coming week to nurture that relationship? Focus on a specific way – and when you will do this. Keep in mind that you can't control how the other person will respond, but the important thing is you are taking action and reminding them that you care.</i></p> <p>Distribute a piece of paper to each participant. Tell them to write down the name of a person whose relationship is important to them. Then, write in a sentence or two, a specific way they will nurture that relationship in the coming week. Tell them to be as specific as possible: what will they do, when will they do it?</p>	<p>Piece of paper for each person</p> <p>Pencils for everyone</p>

	<p>Give the group a couple of minutes to do this.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <p><i>Does anyone want to share their action plan with the group (they don't have to)? Is this something that you think will be easy to do or difficult to do? How do you think you will feel when you've followed through with your plan?</i></p>	
5 minutes	<p>Joy Practice #2: Do For Others</p> <p>Remind the group that Paul called on the people of Philippi to look to the welfare of others. This joy practice will focus on doing just that – showing kindness or looking to the welfare of someone here. They will be a “secret angel” for someone in the group. As a secret angel, they should look at ways to show kindnesses to the person who is assigned (in secret) to them.</p> <p>Directions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Put everyone's name on slips of paper into a container (hat/box) 2. Each person should pick out a name. This is the most important part: they have to keep it a secret. If they draw their own name, they should return it and take another slip of paper with another name on it. 3. Between now and the last session, they should think ways to show kindness to the person whose name they drew. It could be helping them out, giving a compliment, etc. 4. During the last session, names will be revealed. <p>Tell the group to pay attention to how they feel when they practice an act of kindness for someone.</p>	<p>Slips of paper Container (box, hat, etc) pencils</p>
5 minutes	<p>God's Relationship with Us</p> <p>Say:</p> <p>While relationships with others are important, more important still is God's relationship with us. In another letter that Paul wrote – this one to Christians living in Rome – Paul writes,</p> <p><i>“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”</i></p> <p>This is what gives Paul joy – and what can give us joy – knowing that nothing separates us from the love of Christ – nothing we do, nothing that others do to us. Nothing. God surrounds us with God's love in all times – good and bad.</p> <p>Close with a popcorn prayer. Tell them that at the end of the prayer you will say the words, “And all God's people say” and they will respond with a loud “Amen!” Start the prayer by saying, “God, we are thankful for...”</p>	

	Participants shout out their responses randomly – like popcorn! When it appears to quiet down, end the prayer with “And all God’s people say...”	
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