

Session #2: Joy in Tough Times

Statement: Having known suffering himself including rejection by his community, Jesus walks with us in our own painful times. Shifting our perspective helps us to reframe the challenges and difficulties we face. By exploring how losses, setbacks, and failures might connect to meaningful opportunities for learning and growth and seeing them in the context of the big picture – our ongoing relationship with God – we can make more spaces for joy.

Scripture focus: Philippians 1:3-18

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

1. Learn about Paul's story of imprisonment and how, in the midst of his imprisonment he was able to be joyful.
2. Practice reframing.
3. Reexamine their definitions for joy and happiness.
4. Learn two practices to nurture their attitude of joy.
5. Have fun.

TIME	ACTIVITY	SUPPLIES
10 minutes	<p>Boo/Yay Game (younger group)</p> <p>This game will provide an opportunity for participants to reframe situations in a fun way.</p> <p>The object of this game is to turn bad situation (boo) into a good situation (yay) and back again to a bad situation followed by another good situation repeating this pattern as long as possible.</p> <p>As a group tell a story. Each person will contribute a sentence to the story. The story will begin with a bad situation. The next person who adds to the story will turn it around into something good. The next person adds something bad and the person after that shares something good. Continue in this fashion for as long as you can.</p> <p>When someone shares something bad, the group says "boo" in unison and at the same time, give two thumbs down. When someone shares something good, everyone says "yay" and waves their hands in the air at the same time.</p> <p>An example might be: "I got lost in the woods." (Boo! Thumbs down.) "But, suddenly I found a trail marker that would help me find my way back." (Yay! Wave hands in the air) "Then it started to rain." (Boo! Thumbs down.)</p>	

	<p>Ask a volunteer to start the story. Be prepared to start the story yourself (with a “boo”) if no one volunteers.</p> <p>If the story comes to a conclusion before everyone has had a chance to add to the story, start a new story. You may play Boo/Yay another again if time allows and there is interest in playing this game.</p> <p>Ask: <i>What was it like to resolve the bad situation with something good? Was it more challenging to come up with something negative or more challenging to come up with something positive?</i></p>	
10 – 15 minutes	<p>Reframe This! (older youth)</p> <p>Instruct everyone to find a buddy for this activity. One person in each of the pairs will be designated Negative Nelly/Ned and the other will be designated Positive Pam/Paul. Give everyone a sheet of paper and a pencil.</p> <p>Tell everyone to think about spending a day at an amusement park. Let them imagine what this might look like. Tell the Negative Nelly/Ned folks to write about their experience at the amusement park in a negative way. Everything they write about their experience should be negative. Positive Pam/Paul will write about their experience at the park in a positive way. Give them about three minutes to do this.</p> <p>After a couple of minutes tell the Negative Nellys/Neds to share their story with their partner. When they are done sharing, the Positive Pams/Pauls can share their story.</p> <p>Tell them that they will do this again, but to switch roles.</p> <p>Now ask them to write about going to church. Negative Nelly/Ned will write only negative things. Positive Pam/Paul will write only positive things. Again invite the pairs to share their stories.</p> <p>Total group share:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. What were some of the negative things that came up with the amusement park story? Positive things? What about the church experience?</i> <i>2. Which was easier to do – to frame things in a positive way or frame things in a negative way?</i> <i>3. Did you learn anything new about yourself when you did this exercise? If so, what did you learn?</i> <i>4. Which was more fun – sharing the negative stuff or the positive stuff?</i> <i>5. How did your body feel when you shared the negative stuff? Positive stuff?</i> 	

10 minutes	<p>Illusions (all ages)</p> <p>Break the group into two or three small groups. Tell the group that you will be giving them six pictures to look at. As a small group, tell them to identify the image they see in each. Each group selects a scribe who will write down the group's responses to all six images.</p> <p>When it appears that all the groups have completed this task call the total group together.</p> <p>Ask the total group what they saw in each image. How many groups two images for all six pictures? Were there any pictures where they couldn't see two images? Which ones? If anyone had difficulty seeing two images in each picture, invite someone to point them out.</p> <p>#1 – Old woman/young woman #2 – Duck/rabbit #3 – Face/the word liar written in cursive (turn sideways to see it) #4 – 2 faces in profile facing each other/vase #5 – Woman's face/saxophone player #6 – The word good/the word evil (negative space)</p> <p>Say: Sometimes in life, there are multiple ways to look at a situation. When we experience difficulties in life, sometimes we think there's only one way to look at our problems. And yet, like these illusions, when</p>	<p>Copies of six illusions</p> <p>Paper and pencil for everyone</p>
5 minutes	<p>Learning about Negative Bias</p> <p>Ask the group if they've heard of the term, "negative bias." If yes, ask what they know about it.</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: <i>On any given day we have a range of experiences. There may be good things that happen, but there are also causes of worry and stress. As humans, we naturally focus on what's wrong. This is called our negativity bias, meaning that we tend to notice negative things more than the good things.</i></p> <p><i>This tendency goes all the way back to the beginning of human history when we were concerned with basic survival. Paying attention to possible dangers kept us alive.</i></p> <p><i>Today we still use this tendency to help us stay safe. But our negativity bias means that we often overlook the good things around us. These good things can be big or small, from a significant event to something as simple as a nice cup of hot chocolate. When we notice more of the good things as well as the bad, it helps create a healthier emotional balance. In fact, learning to be grateful for what's good can bring lots of benefits.</i></p>	

	<p><i>Studies show that people who write down what they are grateful for each day feel happier, get better sleep, and are also less likely to experience depression. Research shows that it takes at least three positive thoughts to outweigh one negative thought. The brain is like Velcro for the negative experiences but it's like Teflon for the positive ones.</i></p>	
	<p>Joy Practice #3: Practice Reframing</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: Here's how to get started with reframing unhelpful thoughts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pay attention to the discouraging thought. 2. Question the thought without judging it. Ask if it is helpful or true? What other questions might you ask about your discouraging thought? 3. Replace the unhelpful thought with a more helpful one. 4. No matter what you're dealing with, know that Jesus walks with you. <p>Example: (negative) I am sad that I don't have many friends. People must not like me.</p> <p>(positive) I have some friends, so I know I can make more. It might just take some time.</p> <p>On a chalkboard or sheet of newsprint, make two columns. On the left hand side, write the word Unhelpful Thoughts. On the right hand side write the word Helpful Thoughts.</p> <p>Ask the group to think of some unhelpful thoughts they've had. They might want to think about what's going on at school or in church or what they think about themselves. Have they brainstorm a list of these unhelpful thoughts and write them in the left hand column.</p> <p>Now take a look at the first thing on the list. Ask the students to reframe this in helpful way. In the "helpful" column write down their ideas. Continue to look at all the unhelpful thoughts and convert them to helpful thoughts instead.</p> <p>Ask: What was it like to do this exercise? Was activity difficult to do? How did it feel to convert the unhelpful thoughts into helpful ones? Is this something you could see yourself doing when those unhelpful thoughts creep into your mind?</p>	<p>Newsprint/marker or</p> <p>Chalkboard/chalk</p> <p>Card stock cut into 3x3" pieces, 1 piece per person</p> <p>Scissors – a couple of pairs to share</p> <p>Cross pattern</p>

	<p>Help them to reframe by helping them to remember that Jesus walks with them no matter what circumstances they face. Nothing will separate them from the love of God (see Romans!)</p> <p>Distribute a 3x3" piece of card stock to each person. Give them a cross pattern and tell them to trace it in the center of the card stock they've been given, and then, cut out the traced pattern. When everyone is done, tell them to hold the paper in front of them so that they can see through the cross. Tell them that if they are faced with a difficulty, they might want to pull out this cross and remember to look at their problems with the eyes of faith. This may serve as a reminder that Jesus is with them at all times.</p>	
5 minutes	<p>Joy Practice #4: Practicing Gratitude</p> <p>Say: <i>Another way to address the negativity bias is to make a list of things you are grateful for. This is something you might want to try to do at the end of each day – start a gratitude journal and write down at least three things for which you are grateful for.</i></p> <p>As a group they can practice naming things for which they are grateful with the following activity. Blow up a balloon. The goal is to keep the balloon from touching the ground. Whenever someone taps the balloon to keep it airborne, they are to name something for which they are grateful. Continue until everyone has had at least one chance to name something for which they are grateful.</p> <p>To make it more lively, you might consider using two or three balloons!</p>	Balloon blown up
10 minutes	<p>Sherlock (younger group; optional for older group)</p> <p>To begin this game, everyone should sit in a circle. The game begins when one person is selected as "Sherlock," and they will be the detective for that round. Each round, "Sherlock" will spend 30 seconds examining everyone in the group, then they will leave the area. While they're gone, a major change will take place within the group. For example, a person in the group will put a jacket on or take it off. Two people might change places. One person could put their hair in a ponytail or take it down. All that matters is that the change is easily noticeable. A change can take place among one person in the group or multiple people can join in. For example, everyone in the group could untie their shoes for a round.</p> <p>After the change is made, "Sherlock" returns and attempts to guess the change. If they don't have a major clue within a minute, the group can decide if they want to give a hint.</p> <p>Play this for a couple of rounds making sure that a different person is selected to be "Sherlock" for each of the rounds.</p>	

	<p>Conclude the game by saying something like: <i>Now I'm going to ask you all to play detectives as we read another portion of Paul's letter to the Philippians.</i></p>	
5 minutes	<p>Paul's Letter to the Philippians</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: <i>Paul was in prison several times. He was a Christian in the time of the Roman Empire. During one particular time when he was in prison, he wrote a letter to the Christian community in Philippi. In prison, the conditions were no doubt very poor. Dark, cold. Paul may have been beaten. And yet he wrote this letter. As you listen to this, what feelings does it evoke? Can you find any evidence of Paul reframing his situation?</i></p> <p>Tell them to read Philippians 1:3-18 silently and as they do, to think about the kind of feelings this passage evokes. They might imagine how Paul saying this directly to them. Then ask for a volunteer to read this passage aloud to the group using a voice and intonation that seems appropriate to the tone of the letter.</p> <p><i>I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.</i></p> <p><i>I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.</i></p> <p><i>Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.</i></p>	

	<p>Ask:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. What feelings does this part of Paul's letter evoke? (joy, gratitude, love)</i> <i>2. Where do you think he gets his attitude of joy? Are there any clues in this passage? (his faith in Jesus)</i> <i>3. How did his attitude of joy affect those around him in prison? (people became fearless, more confident in talking about their faith)</i> <i>4. What evidence is there that Paul reframed his difficult situation? (his imprisonment actually helped him to spread the gospel)</i> <i>5. From the tone of Paul's letter would you say that Paul was feeling happy or that he had an attitude of joy? Explain.</i> <i>6. How is happiness different than joy?</i> 	
5 minutes	<p>Happiness vs. Joy</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: <i>Happiness can be had by anyone in the right circumstances. Eating a slice of cake, for example might make someone happy. But, when the cake gets moldy there's no reason to feel happy! Happiness is dependent on circumstances. It is temporary. It is an emotion.</i></p> <p>Ask participants to share a time when they felt happy. What made them feel happy? Did the happiness last for a moment? A day? A month? Longer?</p> <p>Say: <i>Joy is a permanent outlook on life. It's an attitude or state of mind. Joy is something that runs deeper within ourselves. It is not a fleeting feeling.</i></p> <p>Ask: <i>Is it possible to live through a difficult, sad, or painful experience and maintain an attitude of joy? Can anyone share an example?</i></p> <p>Don't be concerned if no one thinks this is possible. Just encourage the group to think about this – and to be attentive to possible situations where this could be possible.</p>	
15 – 20 minutes	<p>Discussion (older group)</p> <p>Share the following questions in pairs – or if your group prefers, you can discuss these questions in the total group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>What unexpected event has troubled you in your life?</i> <i>How can you find in your current situation?</i> <i>What opportunities might be present? (Use Paul's experience as an example – how he was able to find an opportunity during his imprisonment).</i> 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who in your life encourages you when you are going through a tough time? What do they encourage you to do?</i> <p>Close your time together with the following prayer or one like it: <i>Joy-giver—who created joy, defines joy, is joy—meet us in our times of sadness and discouragement, and comfort us with your presence. Help us see what’s good in our lives, and in the world. Lead us to gratitude for all your good gifts. As we navigate the difficulties in our lives and the stuff that hurts remind us that real joy, your joy, is with us every step of the way. Amen.</i></p>	
20 minutes	<p>Joy in Tough Times (younger group)</p> <p>Participants will make a collage of things that trouble them personally. It could be a difficult relationship with a friend or family member. It could be something painful that is happening at school or something they see in the community or world. Tell them to use the magazines and newspapers available to make a collage that symbolizes the “tough times” they are experiencing or are noticing in the world around them.</p> <p>Give them each a sheet of heavy paper on which to make their collage. Tell them they have 15 minutes to make their collage. At the end of that time, give everyone a marker and tell them to write any of the following quotes that speak of joy overtop their collage. If they have another biblical quote in mind they can use that instead. Here are some suggestions:</p> <p>Psalm 16:11 You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.</p> <p>Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.</p> <p>Romans 12:12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.</p> <p>Psalm 5:11 But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, so that those who love your name may exult in you.</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: <i>You might want to hang up your poster at home in a prominent spot to remind you that even though there may be an undercurrent of difficult things that we face in life, the rising up over it all is the joy we can have</i></p>	<p>Newspaper</p> <p>Old magazines</p> <p>Markers</p> <p>Glue sticks</p> <p>Heavy paper (8x11 or larger for each participant)</p>

in knowing that God loves us and is with us always, in good times and bad, no matter what.

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