

Session #3: Living Joy

Statement: Inspired by the Holy Spirit we can live out our joy in our daily lives through the compassion and generosity we share with others and all creation

Scripture focus: Philippians 4:4-7

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

1. Consider what it might look like to “rejoice in the Lord always.”
2. Try different practices that may be useful in “rejoicing in the Lord always.”
3. Select a joy practice they want to work on when they get home.

TIME	ACTIVITY	SUPPLIES
10 minutes	<p>Philippians 4:4-7</p> <p>Perhaps one the most well-known verses from Philippians is Philippians 4:4-7, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” If you know the song lead them in singing it together. Or, perhaps a young person in the group knows it and would feel comfortable teaching and leading the singing of the song.</p> <p>Ask: <i>Does anyone know where you can find these words in the Bible?</i> They most likely will guess correctly that it is found in the book of Philippians. Tell them that they will be focusing on these verses today.</p> <p>Read the Philippians 4:4-7 together aloud:</p> <p>“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”</p> <p>Ask: <i>What does it look like to “rejoice in the Lord always?” Break into small groups of two to three persons and give the groups time to consider this question. After a couple of minutes call the groups back together and have each group report back their responses to this question.</i></p> <p>Say: <i>In our time together so far, we’ve tried a few joy practices. Today we are going to try a few more joy practices. Some of these activities can enhance our attitude of joy – and are ways to “rejoice in the Lord always.”</i></p>	<p>Bibles or Philippians 4:4-7 printed out for each participant</p>

10 minutes

Joy Practice #5: Practice Mindfulness

Say the following, or something like this using your own words:

Every day our mind rattles with thoughts dwelling in the past, worrying about the future, or stressing about all we need to do. This practice is about allowing your mind to be present right here and now which can help us feel calmer.

We all have some experience with being in the moment whether it's listening to a favorite song or appreciating the beauty of nature. And the good news is you can actively create more of these mindful moments in your daily life.

But, with our hectic lives and busy minds we find ourselves constantly distracted. This is where mindfulness comes in. Living more mindfully is about choosing what we pay attention to.

Research shows that practicing mindfulness in your daily life can help reduce stress and improve your physical and mental health. One great way to simply focus on your breathing.

We're going to give this a try right now.

Directions:

Sitting in silence with our eyes closed for a minute can be hard if it's not something we are used to, but you may find that after trying this several times, it will become more natural to sit in silence.

Let's give it a try now. Get into a comfortable position. For some of you, lying on the floor may be comfortable. Some of you may prefer to sit comfortably on a chair with your feet on the ground. Choose a position that you can be comfortable in for one minute.

We are going to focus on our breathing as we do this practice. Pay attention to your breathing in and out and notice what's happening in your body. Where do you feel the air as you breathe in? Where do you feel the air as you breath out? Do you notice it in your nose, in your throat, in the rising and falling of your chest?

Let's try this now. Close your eyes and relax your muscles. Take a slow, deep breath in (pause) and a slow deep breath out (pause). Just concentrate on your breathing until I call time in one minute. Breathe in (pause), breath out (pause). If other thoughts come into your mind, just acknowledge them and then go back to concentrating on your breathing.

After one minute call time and ask:

What was that experience like? Was it difficult? Easy? Too long? Too short? What sensations did you have?

	<p>Do this again, but this time participants will sit in silence for five minutes. Tell that this time when they inhale and exhale – instead of focusing on their breathing, to think reflect on the words from Psalm 46, “Be still and know that I am God.” Think of this phrase as they breathe in and out. Remind them that when other thoughts intrude to simply acknowledge them and then return to the mantra, “Be still and know that I am God.”</p> <p>After five minutes call time and ask: <i>How did this experience compare to the last one? Was it difficult to practice mindfulness for five minutes? What was your experience like? How do you feel now? Is this a practice you are already doing? If not, is this a practice you would like to try again sometime? Why or why not?</i></p>	
10 minutes	<p>Joy Practice #6: Self-Compassion</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: <i>God created you and God doesn't make junk! None of us are perfect and we all mess up from time to time. Sometimes we can be very hard on ourselves. Our inner critic often tells us we are not good enough. Or we compare ourselves unfavorably to others who appear to be happier. So we beat ourselves up and feel inadequate. If you've ever felt like this, you're not alone.</i></p> <p><i>In this practice you will learn how to talk kindly to yourself. This might seem unusual to you at first, but compassionate self-talk really works. Research shows that self-compassion can increase your confidence and enhance your resilience. It can support your relationships and help your overall well-being.</i></p> <p><i>Let's try this practice.</i></p> <p>Give everyone a sheet of paper and a pencil. Tell them to them to think of something they've been hard on themselves about. Maybe it's something they felt they should have done differently and their inner critic is saying, “you're not good enough.” Maybe it's something they feel they've failed at.</p> <p>Tell them to imagine someone they love who is dealing with the same issue. What would they say to support this person? How would they want them to feel?</p> <p>Tell the group to write a letter to this person to share what they would like to say to support them. Give participants a couple of minutes to write their letter.</p> <p>After they've written the letter say: Turn those same warm feelings inward and read what you've written only this time address it to yourself.</p>	Paper for each person pencil

	<p>Give them a minute to do this.</p> <p>Ask: What was this experience like? Was it difficult to do? What was it like to write to someone you care about? How did you feel when you read that letter as if someone else was writing this to you?</p>	
10 minutes	<p>Joy Practice #7: Resilience</p> <p>Let the group know that they are now going to try another joy practice – resilience. In many ways it’s very much like reframing.</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: <i>We all face difficulties like health problems, school or work stress, relationship issues....These can be hard and it’s only natural that we struggle. So, if you are struggling right now, remember it’s okay to not be okay.</i></p> <p><i>It really helps our resilience to focus on things we <u>can</u> do rather than the things outside our control. We often can’t change what happens to us but we can choose how we respond. There are many choices we can make to boost our resilience:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We can tell a friend about it. A problem shared is a problem halved.</i> • <i>We can look for a silver lining even if it’s small.</i> • <i>We can take a positive pause to do something we enjoy.</i> • <i>We can hand over our problems to God, trusting that God will be with us no matter what.</i> <p><i>Taking your mind off the issues helps you return later, feeling refreshed.</i></p> <p><i>Think about Paul while he was in prison. Was he resilient? In what way? What did he focus on while he was in prison? How did that affect his attitude?</i></p> <p>For this practice, participants can use the reverse side of the letter they wrote in the self-compassion practice.</p> <p>Directions: Tell them to take a deep breath and then to think of something currently causing them stress. Take a moment to recognize that this feels hard. Try the following four methods of practicing resilience.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First, on the reverse side of the paper they just used, tell them to write down the name of someone they can talk with about their stressful situation. How will they reach out to this person? What might they imagine telling this person about their situation? Doing this is one way that may help them become more resilient. 	<p>The reverse side of the paper they were given for the previous exercise</p> <p>Pencils</p>

	<p>2. Next, tell the group to think about a possible silver lining in their situation. If they can, tell them to write this down below the above step.</p> <p>3. Next, tell them to draw a picture or write in words what they might do to take a pause when they are involved in something stressful. What do they enjoy doing that might provide them with a “positive pause?”</p> <p>4. Finally, instruct the group to write a letter to God below the practices listed above. What would they like to tell God about their stressful or difficult situation? What would they like to ask of God? Tell them to save this letter to God and look at it from time to time. What will they discover about their situation a week later? A month later? A year later?</p> <p>(Keep in mind there may be some who aren’t feeling stress at the moment – and that’s okay. But, knowing about this practice may come in handy for them some day).</p> <p>After they’ve had some time to write their responses to these questions, see if anyone would like to share. Sometimes it helps to share because what one person shares may be helpful to another. However, don’t pressure anyone to do so.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <p>What was it like to think about a person they might want to talk with about their problem? Is it something they can see themselves doing? Was anyone able to come up with a possible silver lining? If so, was that helpful? In what way was it helpful or not helpful? What was it like to think about an activity they might do when they need a “positive pause?” Would anyone like to share their “positive pause” activity? Was it easy or difficult to write a letter to God? Is this something they might try? Why or why not? Which of the four methods of practicing resilience do they see themselves most likely to do?</p>	
10 minutes	<p>Revisiting Joy Practice #2: Do For Others</p> <p>Tell them that it is now the time when secret angels will be revealed but before that happens, there is one more practice they can do that involves doing for others.</p> <p>Say the following, or something like this using your own words: Approach life with an attitude of kindness and discover the joy that comes with it. Joy is something that exists in our relationship to others. When we do kind things for others, it activates the areas of our brain associated with pleasure, social connection, and trust.</p> <p>Studies show that spending money on others makes people happier than treating themselves. But, it doesn’t have to involve money. There are all kinds of ways to be kind.</p>	

	<p><i>If we look at Paul's letter to the Philippians we can see how Paul is thinking of others and their circumstances and is not dwelling on himself and his imprisonment.</i></p> <p><i>So before we reveal our secret angels we are going to try this prayer. Say to yourselves. If you feel comfortable, you can close your eyes while saying this prayer (pause after each sentence so they can say the sentence to themselves inwardly):</i></p> <p>May I be safe. May I be joyful. May I be healthy. May I live with ease.</p> <p><i>Now think of the person for whom you are their secret angel, say their name to yourself silently by inserting their name in the same sentences:</i></p> <p>May ____ be safe. May ____ be joyful. May ____ be healthy. May ____ live with ease.</p> <p><i>Now we are going to expand this further. This time as you think of these sentence prayers, think of a particular group of people or creatures – maybe classmates or people gathered here or maybe God's creation.</i></p> <p>May ____ be safe. May ____ be joyful. May ____ be healthy. May ____ live with ease.</p> <p><i>Finally say this prayer to yourself and this time include all beings everywhere – those known and unknown to you:</i></p> <p>May ____ be safe. May ____ be joyful. May ____ be healthy. May ____ live with ease.</p> <p><i>If you really want to stretch yourself with this practice, you might want to include the name of someone you don't like! What would it feel like to lift up this prayer using their name?</i></p>	
10 minutes	<p>Reveal Secret Angels</p> <p>Ask a volunteer to see if they can guess their secret angel. Why do they think this person was their secret angel? What kindness did this person show them? Ask the "real" secret angel to reveal themselves. Invite the secret angel to share what they did to show kindness to their person. Continue in this way until all secret angels are revealed.</p>	
5 minutes	<p>Joy Practices - review</p> <p>See if the group can name or describe all the joy practices they've tried during their time together. They were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connecting with People (thinking about a relationship they want to nurture and a plan to make that happen) 	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Do for Others (secret angels; prayer for well-being) 3. Reframing (turning unhelpful thoughts into helpful ones) 4. Gratitude (naming things for which they are grateful) 5. Mindfulness (breathing exercise/mantra) 6. Self-Compassion (letter to friend/self) 7. Resilience (making a plan to share a stress with someone) <p>Which of these practices did they find most helpful? Least helpful.</p> <p>Invite them to pick one of the practices they would like to try when they get back home.</p>	
<p>5 minutes</p>	<p>Rejoice!</p> <p>Close your time together by reading Philippians 4:4-7 together again followed by an invitation to share things for which they are grateful relating to their time together this weekend. Start by saying, “Dear God we are grateful for...” and let them share their responses – one by one. Close by saying “And all God’s people said, Amen!”)</p>	