

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Psalm 67

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship.)

Read through Psalm 67 as a group and meditate on God's promises.

Icebreaker

If you were to write a book, what would it be about and why?

Text for Discussion: Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:8

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

The fact that we are mortal enables us to see the beauty and simple joys of our lives while we can. And for that very reason, we are called to rejoice and remember. We're not accustomed to thinking of joy as a command, but it isn't optional in the Bible. It is our duty, as seen throughout the Old Testament (*Deut 28:47, Ps 16:11, 37:4, 100:2, 118:24*) and the New (*James 1:2, 2 Cor 6:10, Phil 4:4, Rom 5:3, 1 Peter 4:13*). Jesus explains, "I have said these things to you that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full" (*John 15:11*). Yes, the ability to enjoy is God's gift, but we are responsible to God for what we make of His gifts.

God is the happiest Being in the universe. If we miss this, we have missed the heart of our Father: His joy. We are far too easily pleased in this life, so we fall short of our purpose: to glorify God by enjoying Him. Yes, we have a real and definite duty to be joyful. And it's not a vague call; nor is it joy on our terms. It's a call to learn to enjoy God, for in Him alone is the fullness of joy. God created us for His glory – that we might glorify Him by delighting in Him. And if it's true that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him, then what's at stake is the glory of God in our lives.

"The Bible puts joy in the non-optional category," writes John Ortberg. "Joy is a command. Joylessness is a serious sin, one that religious people are particularly prone to indulge in." We lack joy because we question whether God could really be so good as to intend good for us – or that His glory and our deepest happiness could be the same thing. We believe we know better what's needed to be happy. But the whole point of Ecclesiastes is to call us to rest in complete dependence on God. Then we can take hold of the joy found only in Christ. Then we will know that our pain cannot take the source of true joy away from us. Then, if we will let Him, God can use these seasons of suffering to drive us deeper and deeper into the well of joy, which is His presence.

What are some practical steps we can take if joy is absent from our lives?

Confess the sin of joylessness (Ps 61:2). It matters how we feel, so we must practice naming our emotions. It is a difficult but vital first step to acknowledge the coldness of our hearts.

Pray earnestly for God to restore our joy (Ecc 5:19). Joy is not only our responsibility; it is God's command. But whatever God commands, He will enable (Ps 51:12).

Persevere in faith. God will earnestly reward those who seek Him. Learning to abide in God is a fruit of the Spirit, but that fruit takes grit and perseverance. The only way to know we truly value God over the experience of joy is to keep obeying and seeking Him in seasons when we don't feel it.

Remember our creator (Ecc 12:1), delighting in His gifts. This is an active decision – habitual, deliberate, daily. We have exchanged the glory of our Creator for created things... and so we must remember our place.

Get to the heart of the Gospel (Ecc 9:7). Our Father is so good that He bound together His glory and our happiness. And so the first and primary business we ought to attend to every day is to have a soul truly happy in the Lord. If only we remember as John Newton said, “I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great savior,” we would be so much more kind. So much more compassionate. So much more charitable. And so much happier.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How does rejoicing and remembering our Creator affect our attitudes, actions, and affections?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- What are your initial thoughts on this passage?
- What two things should we do every day? (See 11:8 and 12:1)
 - Compare this to the most famous question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism - Question: What is the chief end of man? Answer: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
- Discuss the thought that rejoicing is both a moral obligation and a command from God. (See Psalm 16:11, 37:4, 118:24; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and others)
- What do you think is involved in remembering our Creator? (12:1)
 - Although we often forget to remember our Creator, what does He never forget? What is your response to this?
 - How does rejoicing and remembering our Creator affect our attitudes, actions, and affections?
- The Teacher tells us what old age is like in verses 12:1-7. Describe the kind of older person you want to be.
 - What can you do now to prepare you to be that person later?
 - What does the Teacher say about death in 12:8? How do you respond to this verse and why?
- Discuss the joy of Christ in Hebrews 12:1-2 and/or John 15:10-11.

Prayer

Augustine prayed, "Lord, command what You will, and give what You command." Spend some time in small groups confessing any joylessness you feel, and asking God to give you what he has commanded of you. Pray Ecclesiastes 5:20 for those in need of a deeper relationship with Christ that would bring them much needed joy.

Experiment of the week

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

Have a brainstorming session with one or two other people in the group. Discuss what makes you feel joy and how you could experience more joy in life. Talk about the points of resistance to experiencing joy more full and consistently and come up with a plan of accountability with one another.

Or... Check out The Hope for LA Website. As a family or group, make plans to visit a convalescent home to love and encourage the elderly.