

# Ode to Joy

Nov. 25, 2018

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: Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You

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

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1. Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,  
God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flow'rs before Thee,  
Op'ning to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;  
Drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness,  
Fill us with the light of day!
2. All Thy works with joy surround Thee,  
Earth and heav'n reflect Thy rays,  
Stars and angels sing around Thee,  
Center of unbroken praise.  
Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
Flow'ry meadow, flashing sea,  
Singing bird and flowing fountain  
Call us to rejoice in Thee.
3. Thou art giving and forgiving,  
Ever blessing, ever blest,  
Wellspring of the joy of living,  
Ocean depth of happy rest!  
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother,  
All who live in love are Thine;  
Teach us how to love each other,  
Lift us to the joy divine.
4. Mortals, join the happy chorus,  
Which the morning stars began;  
Father love is reigning o'er us,  
Brother love binds man to man.  
Ever singing, march we onward,  
Victors in the midst of strife,  
Joyful music leads us Sunward  
In the triumph song of life.

## Icebreaker

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What are you thankful for and why?

Text for Discussion: Ecclesiastes 2:24-25; 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7

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Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

## Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

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We mere mortals live in an ever-changing, unpredictable world. Our lives are fleeting, and our time here will often be painful and unfair, rife with doubt and disappointment. For all these sobering truths, Ecclesiastes says we're called to find joy in the present moment. But how? What is the path to joy?

The modern cultural mindset is very clear about its answer: To find contentment, we must follow our own desires. Whether we seek pleasure, wealth, power or prestige, happiness will be found so long as we want it enough and achieve our heart's desires. But the writer of Ecclesiastes has been down each of those roads – further than any of us ever will – and he assures us that no lasting joy will ever be found in them. Contentment will never come through gain, and the world's way will never lead to life.

Contentment is an inward condition of our souls – learning to be grateful for what we already have, as well as surrendering to God's wisdom and delighting in it. This posture makes joy in the present possible. When we no longer live seeking to justify ourselves and recognize that we already live under God's approval, we become grateful for all we used to take for granted. Receiving grace elicits a life of gratitude.

Gratitude isn't simply a feeling; it's a choice and an ethic. We choose to give thanks for the good things we already have, because joy is the fruit of a surrendered and grateful heart. Joy is both God's gift and a divine obligation. It requires us to stop all of our busyness and to engage with God, acknowledging the lack of joy we feel, and then praying earnestly for Him to grant it. Everything is grace... but the posture of depending on God takes effort. We must embrace our calling to be grateful people.

But for some reason, it's hard to sustain a habit of thanksgiving. We slump into states of entitlement and ungratefulness far too easily, as if we have a bias toward negativity. We're well aware of any challenges we encounter, while routinely overlooking what helps us along the way. This resentment and envy quashes any gratitude residing in our hearts.

What is the antidote? Cultivating a habit of gratitude. Our mindset must be that we are training ourselves – not merely trying – because what we seek is not a result of willpower but of practice. The world will never be enough for us without Jesus. But with Him, we can learn live with a content spirit, no matter what our circumstances. The Lord is our portion, and because of Him, we will not be left wanting. So, what are some practical ways we can train ourselves to be joyful?

Set a daily ritual. This can prayer before meals or sharing and giving thanks for the emotional highs and lows of our days while sharing a meal with others. Another great ritual is to spend time in prayerful confession and gratitude before bed.

Write it down. Journaling is a wonderful way to be still and count our blessings. Another option is to make a regular practice of writing thank you notes.

Daily rituals, whatever they are, have a gradual effect on who we are becoming. So the question we must ask ourselves is whether those we are practicing are slowly, by the grace of God, transforming us into the man or woman we want to be? God loves us as we are, but we are not yet what we can be. It is God who works in us according to His good pleasure. So let us begin from the position of already being approved, training ourselves to be grateful that we might become joyful and content in our loving Father.

## 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.)*

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**What questions does the book of Ecclesiastes ask to which Jesus is the answer?**

## 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.)*

- Of all of the verses we just read which phrases mean the most to you and why?
  - Ecclesiastes is not meant to not depress us but to set us free from the vain anxieties of life. How have you found this statement to be true?
- Ecclesiastes 9:7 says, "Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do." What does it look like to live out of a posture of "already approved"?
  - Explain why we are "already approved" and how knowing this increases our gratitude, joy, and contentment.
- What questions does the book of Ecclesiastes ask to which Jesus is the answer?
  - How can we make pursuing a habit of gratitude and joy not a "toiling under the sun" pursuit but rather a response to Jesus and the Gospel?
  - Explain how joy is both a gift and an obligation.
  - What can you choose to give thanks for and trust God in today?
  - Name ways you can slow down enough to enjoy and be grateful for God's gifts to you.
- What is your biggest takeaway from the book of Ecclesiastes?
  - What difference has it made in your life?

## Prayer

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Confess to God and to each other, any joylessness. Pray earnestly that God would give you the gift of JOY and help you build a habit of gratitude.

## Experiment of the week

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

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For the next month, as a family or with some friends use a concordance to do a Bible study on how often God's people are called to give thanks and for what they are to be thankful. Make lists of your discoveries, journal your reflections and life applications, and discuss with others.