



**21 DAYS OF**

**JOY**

**SMALL GROUP GUIDE**



## ICEBREAKER

Think back to being a kid—what activity or moment brought you pure joy? (Examples: a memorable birthday party, going to the beach with friends, going to Disneyland with the family, etc.)

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus said He came so we could have **life to the fullest** (John 10:10). Yet we all face things that drain our joy—guilt, habits we can't break, regret, pressure, secret battles, or shame. We often try to fill the empty places in our hearts with temporary or shallow "joys," but only Jesus can bring us true joy. This week, we'll explore how sin can steal our joy and how Jesus restores it.

## READ |

*"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think..."*  
— Romans 12:2 (NLT)

Pursuing the life God designed for us is far more satisfying than chasing the world's idea of "joy." When we allow God to renew our thinking and see life from His perspective, we begin to experience the kind of joy and purpose Scripture describes—lasting joy that steadies and strengthens us no matter what season of life we're in.

**When have you tried to follow your own plans and ended up frustrated or unfulfilled?** (Examples: Choosing a career, continuing a habit based on what felt right at the moment, etc.) **What may be different if you focused on pursuing God's ways instead?**

## READ |

*"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation."*  
— Psalm 51:10, 12 (NIV)

After his failure, David doesn't simply ask God to forgive him, but asks God to restore his joy. Joy is often one of the first things we lose when we drift from God, and one of the first things He restores when we return to Him. When we come to God honestly, He clears the places in our hearts that have grown heavy or confused and restores the joy that comes from knowing we are forgiven, accepted, and loved by Him.

**Where do you need God to restore joy in your life again?** (Examples: in your relationship with God, or in a stressful area of your life, like at work or at home, etc.)

## READ |

*"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven... When I kept silent, my bones wasted away... Then I confessed... and You forgave me."*  
— Psalm 32:1–5 (NLT)

In this Psalm, David describes sin not just as breaking rules, but as something that destroys us from the inside out, grinding away at our joy. Hiding sin may feel easier at first, but the burden will

expand over time until it consumes us. By surrendering our sins to God and asking for forgiveness, Jesus lifts the weight and restores the life we were meant to live—one full of peace and joy.

**Can you think of a time when keeping something inside made life heavier than it needed to be?**  
(Examples: unresolved family conflict, addiction, stressing out instead of trusting God fully, etc.)

## WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This year, let's start with a clean slate. Choose **one step** you'll practice this week to protect your joy.

- Confess something to God and ask for forgiveness
- Set a boundary to keep yourself from sinning again
- Ask a friend to pray for you and keep you accountable

## CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for coming to give us life to the fullest. Help us recognize what steals our joy, and give us the courage to surrender those things to You. Please renew our hearts, rebuild our minds, and restore our joy. Thank you for the new beginnings you offer us. In Jesus' name, amen.

## MAKE TIME TO BE IN GOD'S WORD

Doing your daily devotions is an excellent way to record, process, and share what God is teaching you on a personal level. One helpful method is using the "S.O.A.P." approach to engage with each scripture:

- S - Scripture**
- O - Observation**
- A - Application**
- P - Prayer**

## DAILY DEVOTION SCRIPTURES

**Day 1:** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.  
—**John 10:10 (NLT)**

**Day 2:** Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!  
—**Psalms 32:10-11 (NLT)**

**Day 3:** Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord.  
— **Acts 3:19-20 (NLT)**

**Day 4:** Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.  
— **Romans 8:13 (NIV)**

**Day 5:** Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.  
— **James 5:16 (MSG)**

## ICEBREAKER

What's one small thing that makes you happy in the moment, and one thing that brings you deeper, lasting joy? (*Example: Scrolling social media or watching a quick show versus spending quality time with your family or friends, etc.*)

## INTRODUCTION

God wants us to experience joy that lasts, even when life feels heavy. Joy doesn't depend on our circumstances, but comes from God's Spirit working in our hearts. This week, we'll explore how choosing joy is a daily decision, how gratitude & prayer help us, and how it shapes the way we live.

## READ |

*"He has sent Me... to comfort all who mourn, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness..."* —Isaiah 61:1-4 (NKJV)

Philippians 4:4 says *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"* Paul isn't just *suggesting* that we choose joy—he writes it as a *command*. Choosing joy even when life feels heavy requires us to release control and bring our worries to God, trusting Him to guide our steps. Even when we feel capable of handling things on our own, letting Him lead allows His peace—even when it doesn't make sense—to guard our hearts and minds, filling us with deep, lasting joy. Trusting God isn't about denying the difficulty, but trusting Him to bring beauty and hope in the midst of the brokenness.

**Can you think of a time when you felt God's joy even in a hard situation?** (*Examples: feeling peace after a loss, comfort during stress, or hope in a difficult season.*)

## READ |

God's will for our lives includes cultivating an attitude of gratitude. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, we are instructed to "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." Gratitude helps align our hearts with God's will, reminding us that He is present and at work even when life is difficult. When we choose thankfulness, it protects our joy from being drained by our circumstances. As we rejoice, pray, and give thanks, God blesses us with a deep, steady joy that isn't dependent on how things are going, but on who He is.

**What is one small way you could choose joy today with an attitude of gratitude?** (*Examples: thanking God for something you often overlook, taking a moment to pray, etc.*)

## READ |

*"...sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."* — 2 Corinthians 6:10 (NLT)

Paul teaches that joy isn't just a feeling we keep inside, but a way of living that shows up even in the midst of hardship. We can be sorrowful, tired, or lacking, yet still choose to rejoice because our joy comes from God, not our circumstances. But God's joy is meant to be shared: by encouraging others, giving generously, serving faithfully, or sharing hope. When we let God fill us with His Spirit, our joy becomes contagious, blessing others even when our own lives feel limited.

**Have you ever noticed someone staying joyful in hard times? What impact did it have on you or others?**

## **WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

This week, pick one way to intentionally choose joy each day:

- Turn a worry into a short prayer and hand it to God
- Meditate on a verse about joy for 1–2 minutes (see the Daily Devotion Scriptures below)
- Keep a gratitude journal of 3 things God has given you each day

## **CLOSE IN PRAYER**

Dear Jesus, thank You for coming to bring joy that lasts. Help us see that joy is not dependent on our circumstances, but on You. Teach us to pray, to trust, and to rely on You every day. Fill our hearts with Your peace and joy, and help us share that joy with others. In Jesus' name, amen.

## **DAILY DEVOTION SCRIPTURES**

**Day 1:** Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. — **Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)**

**Day 2:** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. — **Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)**

**Day 3:** Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. — **1 Peter 1:8-9 (NIV)**

**Day 4:** You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand. — **Psalms 16:11 (NIV)**

**Day 5:** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. — **Romans 15:13 (NIV)**

## TALK IT OVER

# REVIVING THE JOY IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

### ICEBREAKER

Who is one person in your life that consistently brings you joy, and why?

### INTRODUCTION

Relationships can either lift us up or drain us. God wants us to experience healthy, life-giving connections, but that takes wisdom and intentionality. This week, we'll explore "relational killjoys"—things that quietly destroy joy in relationships—and how to replace them with godly responses.

### READ |

Whether it's a marriage, a friendship, or a business partnership, even the best relationships have challenges—disagreements, misunderstandings, disappointments, sickness, and bad days. But joy can exist even when things aren't perfect if we surrender the relationship to God. We can't control the other person, but we can control our choice to trust God and focus on Him. When we do, He works in us and our relationships.

**What does it mean to you to surrender your relationship to God, and how can you do that more this week?** (Examples: *instead of snapping back at someone who offended you, let it go and let God handle it; choosing to listen instead of arguing to be right all the time; etc.*)

### READ |

Many of us unknowingly let these three things steal the joy from our relationships: **selfishness, resentment, and fear**. Each of these can steal the pleasure of connecting with those we love, but none are impossible to overcome if we take it to God in prayer. Sometimes He will ask us to speak up, and sometimes He will ask us to hold our tongue, but diving into scripture and being consistent with prayer will help reveal to you how God wants you to proceed.

**Think of one of your relationships that is struggling right now. Which of these three "killjoys" do you need to work on with God this week?** (Examples: *"I might be a little selfish by putting my own needs above my spouse's sometimes", "I fear my daughter is becoming too independent, so I might be too hard on her," etc.*)

### READ |

The key to joy in relationships is learning to focus on the right things. Instead of asking, "What can I get?" we learn to ask, "How can I give?" True, godly love is about giving, not receiving. As Paul wrote, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4) In this way, God can do His most transformative work in you, and in those around you.

**How can you shift your mindset from "how does this relationship benefit me?" to "how can I benefit this relationship?"** (Examples: *speaking highly of a coworker to those in authority; cooking dinner for the family even if it's not normally your job; etc.*)

## WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This week, pick one intentional step to transform your relationships:

- **Give without expecting:** Compliment, help, or listen more this week.
- **Forgive small hurts:** Let go of resentment and surrender it to God.
- **Pray before reacting:** Ask God to guide your words in tense moments.
- **Discuss with your Small Group when you will be meeting next, after this series.**

## CLOSE IN PRAYER

Dear Jesus, help us recognize the ways selfishness, fear, and resentment steal joy from our relationships. Teach us to give, forgive, and trust You in every interaction. Fill us with Your Spirit, so our lives become a reflection of Your love and peace. Help us shine Your joy even when life and relationships feel hard. In Jesus' name, amen.

## DAILY DEVOTION SCRIPTURES

**Day 1:** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

— **Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)**

**Day 2:** Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

— **Colossians 3:13 (NLT)**

**Day 3:** There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

— **1 John 4:18 (ESV)**

**Day 4:** But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

— **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

**Day 5:** When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God...

— **Isaiah 43:2-3a (NLT)**