

SMALL GROUPS

LIFE IS BETTER TOGETHER

Stand Alone Week 3: “HOW TO EXPERIENCE SOME JOY IN DIFFICULT SEASONS”

ICEBREAKER |

What is the worst advice you've ever gotten?

INTRODUCTION |

Whenever you're going through a difficult season, you may get some advice from people. Hopefully, it's good advice. But a lot of times it's just bad. "Get over it" doesn't really help someone going through a breakup. And "Calm down" won't help anyone who's stressed out. But there is one piece of advice that seems to work every time. It's like a miracle cure! And it's called joy. In this discussion, we will look at three proven ways to experience some joy in the middle of your most difficult seasons.

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Before we dig into the proven tips to experience joy, let's look at what it is that robs us of our joy. Joy is a gift from God. But there are times when it's taken from us.

The 4 most common joy stealers are:

1. Pain
2. Pressures
3. Problems
4. People

You might feel guilty any time you find yourself the victim of "joy theft." You could think, "What's wrong with me? I shouldn't let this bother me!" But even the most spiritual person can suffer stolen joy. Take a look at this long list of joy stealers in Paul's life:

I've worked much harder, been jailed more often, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death's door time after time. I've been flogged five times with the Jews' thirty-nine lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times, and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day. In hard traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storm, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers. I've known drudgery and hard labor, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, naked to the weather.

2 Corinthians 11:23-27 (MSG)

Wow! What a list. I'm sure we can all find something there that we relate to. But we can find much more that we haven't gone through.

In your life, which one of the 4 most common joy stealers seems to take your joy most often? (Pain, Pressures, Problems, or People)

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Now, let's look at three proven tips to restore our joy. When it's been robbed from us, we need to know how to get it back.

First, let's say this out loud: **"I Won't Let PEOPLE Steal My Joy"**

That's much easier said than done, right? But again, Paul faced a lot of opposition that he had to deal with. He didn't ignore them. Instead, he took what they did with a grain of salt. Let's look at one of those times that someone tried to steal his joy:

It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. Philippians 1:15-16 (NLT)

Some in his life were actively trying to upset Paul. But others were being true friends. He could have allowed his enemies to harm him. Instead, he made a conscious effort to keep his joy.

The guiding truth is that you don't need anyone else's approval to be happy. Those who were trying to hurt Paul disagreed with his doctrine, maligned his ministry, and got riled up by his results. And what did Paul say? **"So what."**

Whenever you face opposition, remember that they don't have a say in whether you are joyful or not.

Share a time when someone else stole your joy. How did you respond to it? How might you have handled it better?

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The next tip in experiencing joy in difficult seasons is (say it out loud together):

“I Will Look for the GOOD God is Bringing Out of the BAD.”

Paul teaches us all about this ideal when he wrote to the Philippians:

I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.

Philippians 1:12 (NLT)

Context is important in this situation. Remember what the “*everything that has happened to me*” is? He was thrown in prison! He was falsely accused! He was wrongly arrested! But still, he saw how God was moving behind the scenes. Even locked behind bars, he was able to share the gospel with others.

Often times, we talk about finding a “silver lining” in the dark clouds. But the truth is, there is no silver lining with God. Instead, He turns the entire cloud from darkness to light! We don’t need to search for a few good things happening. We should expect God to turn around everything for our good!

How does God bring out good from bad around us? (Example, A trip to the ER ends with us praying for someone else, A neighbor gets mad at us but then later becomes our best friend, our character grows, we grow closer to God, etc.)

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Finally, here's the last tip to experience joy (say this out loud together):

"I Will Focus on Serving God's PURPOSES Not My PROBLEMS."

You might know the phrase, "You are what you eat." But you are also what you think. And you will think about what you focus on. Rather than spend your entire day dwelling on your problems, focus on serving God's purposes and put that in front of you.

For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ...Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith.
Philippians 1:21, 25 (NLT)

Joy comes from serving. New Hope is reaching more people than ever before. That means the need for volunteers is high. If you aren't currently serving, this season is a great time to start! In fact, why not try out a place of service over the next four weeks in one of these areas:

Online or Remotely:

Online Chat Host
Administration/Scheduling
Misc. Projects
Creative Media/Social Media

In Person (REGAL CINEMAS):

Kid Zone
Attendance Counters
Camera Operator
Sanitizing Team
Stage
Ushers

You can **text "New Helper" to 45777** or just visit the website today!

If you aren't currently serving, which place of service do you think will fit you best? If you are serving, name one way you have gotten joy from focusing on God's purposes.

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This week, you are likely to experience some difficulty. But you have the choice to experience joy as well. Just remember these three tips:

- "I Won't Let PEOPLE Steal My Joy"
- "I Will Look for the GOOD God is Bringing Out of the BAD."
- "I Will Focus on Seeing God's PURPOSE Not on My PROBLEMS."

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving us a reason to be glad. You are the author of a life that is content in whatever the circumstance. You are the cause of all of our joy. When we face difficulties, remind us that Your Holy Spirit is available in our lives to help revive us and prepare us for better days ahead! In Jesus' name we pray, amen!

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1: *My heart rejoices in the Lord! The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because You rescued me. No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides You; there is no Rock like our God.*

1 Samuel 2:1-2 (NLT)

Day 2: *Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let those who love Your salvation continually say, "God is great!"*

Psalm 70:4 (CSB)

Day 3: *Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.*

2 Corinthians 6:10 (NLT)

Day 4: *Dear friends, don't be surprised or shocked that you are going through testing that is like walking through fire. Be glad for the chance to suffer as Christ suffered. It will prepare you for even greater happiness when He makes His glorious return.*

1 Peter 4:12-13 (CEV)

Day 5: *Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

John 16:24 (NIV)

