Bible Study: Leader’s Notes

The Joy of Faith
This year, Concordia Seminary has adopted as her theme: *Helpers for the Joy of Faith*. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, strives to prepare its students to work together with the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and their people to work for the joy of faith through Word and Sacrament ministry. However, the joy of faith can also be found in many places: family, work, the world. The objective of this bible study is to help participants identify and experience the joy of faith not only in Word and Sacrament ministry but also wherever the grace of God encounters His people. By identifying where the joy of faith is experienced, you can then help the participants to give thanks to God for this gift and to nourish this gift in others.

**OPENING PRAYER**

Most merciful God, You desire everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Grant that by the preaching of Your Gospel we may be given that wisdom that leads to salvation. By the working of Your Holy Spirit keep us attentive to all the teachings of Your Word. Enlighten our minds, control our wills, and purify our affections. Let Your Word be a light for our path that neither the pleasures nor the honors nor the pains of this life may turn away our thoughts from the fullness of life that is found only in You. Enable us in sincerity of heart to follow You, the only true God. By Your holy Word enlighten us with the sure and certain knowledge of Your truth that all who live in sin may be led to repentance; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.


**THE JOY OF FAITH**

With nearly 400 instances of the specific words of “joy” and “rejoicing,” joy is a major theme in Scripture. While words for joy are abundant and seem easy enough to translate, to understand precisely what is meant by them is much more difficult. There is something mysterious about the concept of joy that is not always easy to grasp or express.

C. S. Lewis called joy an “unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction.” He labels it “joy” and says that it “must be sharply distinguished both from happiness and from pleasure” (C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955], pages 17–18).

Q: What is the difference between happiness, pleasure and joy?

A: Accept responses. Help the participants discover that in the Christian faith, joy is fundamentally a way of looking at life that is rooted deep in faith and trust in God the Father who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection. Joy is a perception of reality that gives hope and endurance in affliction and temptation, or ease and prosperity. It enables us to see beyond any particular event, judged good or bad, to God who stands above all events and ultimately has control over all events, which will be consummated at Christ’s Return.
Q: Read Job 8:21; Psalm 4:7; 36:8. Where is true joy found?

A: Accept responses. Call attention to the fact that joy is not found by seeking it as an end in itself. It is given by God. Joy comes with God's presence (see 1 Chronicles 16:27 [David's Song of Thanks]; cf. Psalms 9:2; 16:5–11). In the New Testament that presence is identified with the presence and mission of Christ (Luke 1:44ff. [Mary Visits Elizabeth & Mary's Song]; 2:10 [The Shepherds and the Angels]; Luke 15ff.) and as the Holy Spirit (see Acts 13:52; Romans 15:13; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:18, 19; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).

Joy is something that happens when we experience God's presence and grace in the midst of life. It is a result of life with God. Today we will look at some of the places we experience this joy of faith and how we can work together for each other's joy (2 Corinthians 1:24).

THE JOY OF GOD’S WORD

Q: Read Psalm 19:7-9; Psalm 119:111, 161-168; and Jeremiah 15:16. How does digging into God's Word produce joy?


Ultimately, God's Word produces joy in our hearts because it centers on Jesus Christ, the one through whom God the Father “reconcile[d] to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:20). A familiar prayer of the church puts it well:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Q: What keeps us from experiencing the joy of God's Word? As individuals? As the Church?

A: Accept response a variety of responses: not enough time; misplaced priorities; lack of understanding; conflicting opinions; or guilt.

Q: How can we come to delight in the Word of God?

A: Accept responses. Highlight the need for prayer. Encourage the participants to ask God for the enlightening work of the Spirit and pray over promises describing God as our joy (Psalm 43:3–4; Psalm 16:11; Matthew 13:44; and 1 Peter 1:8). Also, encourage the participants to read Scripture with other Christians. Our redemption is from start to finish a group project (1 Cor. 12:12–13).

THE JOY OF WORSHIP

A: The psalmist longs for worship in God’s house because he desires God’s presence, preserving his life (Psalm 142:1-4). In worship, God, who is present everywhere, graciously reveals Himself for His people (Psalm 43:3-4). God is a source of never-ending refreshment or inner strength (Psalm 46:4). In worship, we receive the gifts of God – the presence of Christ in Word, Water and Meal – that “make glad” by bringing forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In worship, we are connected to Christ and His gifts. In the New Testament, the early Christians received the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples (Acts 13:52) with joy, joyfully performed miracles in the name of Christ (Acts 8:8), reported of the joyful conversion of the Gentiles after the preaching of the Word (Acts 15:3). Joy also characterizes the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:46).

Q: What moments in worship elicit joy for you?

A: Accept responses. Each moment of the liturgy connects us to the presence of the risen Christ. Worship also connects past and present with the eternal, the seen and the unseen, and the church militant with the church triumphant.

THE JOY OF SUFFERING

Q: Read James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5; and 1 Peter 4:13. How can suffering help us to discover joy?

A: In suffering, we can recognize our dependence on God. We confess our sins and, therefore, have every reason to be glad and rejoice in God’s gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. We also recognize that we are not in control. In all circumstances, good or bad, Christians call upon God and trust in His provision, acknowledging that all things happen “for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8).

We desperately want to find some means to insulate ourselves from such suffering and pain. We have to insulate ourselves from the hard truth that we are not in control. We are only a heartbeat away from crisis. This world, my world, that today seems so together, so safe, is not as secure as it seems.

Discovering joy in suffering is a long process of admitting that we are not in control, and then praying for the grace to let God be in control. That’s what faith is: trusting God to be our Father, letting our Creator finish what was begun in creation and continued through Christ’s redemption. The world is not in our hands, thank God!

Q: Have you experienced a time when you discovered joy in suffering? Explain.

A: Accept responses. Be sure to point out that we do not rejoice in suffering for suffering’s sake. Rather we trust that “for those who love God all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28).

THE JOY OF WORK


A: The good of your labor is a gift of God and an expression of His love toward His children. This is repeated in Ecclesiastes 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15, 9:7. Christians, by faith, can know that God is working in them and through them. There is also joy in work born out of a sense of acceptance of life’s limits. We can cherish the time we
have to work. We go down to death, along with most of our achievements, and yet that realization alone need not destroy the possibility of present enjoyments (9:7-10).

Let’s face it; most of the trouble we get into with our work is when we fail to keep work in its place. We become obsessive, presuming to secure ourselves through our work, making our work an idol. All of this mere “chasing after wind” comes to nothing. Better to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, the day-to-day routine, the rhythm of it all. There is joy in being part of the simple rhythms and routines of life. Having a job, having a reason to get up, a place to go, a role in God’s creation, is a gracious gift of God. In the Large Catechism, Luther wrote:

“If this truth could be impressed upon the poor people, a servant girl would dance for joy and praise and thank God; and with her careful work, for which she receives sustenance and wages, she would gain a treasure such as all who pass for the greatest saints do not have. Is it not a wonderful thing to be able to boast to yourself, ‘If I do my daily housework faithfully, that is better than the holiness and austere life of all the monks?’ You have the promise, moreover, that you will prosper and fare well in everything. How can you lead a more blessed or holy life, as far as your works are concerned? In the sight of God it is really faith that makes a person holy; faith alone serves Him, while our works serve the people. Here you have everything that is good—shelter and protection in the Lord and, what is more, a joyful conscience and a gracious God who will reward you a hundredfold.”

Q: How can you foster joy in your work? How could that joy transform the 9-5 routine?

A: Accept responses.

THE JOY OF CREATION

Q: Read Ps 89:12; 96:12; 98:6; Is 44:23; 49:13. When we rejoice in God’s care and provision, who joins in with us?

A: Accept responses. Even creation joins its voice in joy. “Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name” (Ps 89:12); “all the trees of the forest will sing for joy” (Ps 96:12); the mountains are called on to “sing together for joy” (Ps 98:6); and as God restores Israel, the heavens are called upon to sing and shout for joy (Is 44:23; 49:13).

Francis of Assisi, a Catholic monk and writer, penned a famous song, “The Canticle of the Creatures,” that highlights that all creation returns to God in praise and thanks:

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\text{Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and You give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor! Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.}
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Not only does creation find joy in God, but God also delights in His creation. All that God creates is good (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), and God sums up the whole of His creation with the words “very good” (v 31). Dallas Willard, a Christian writer, observed, “God leads a very interesting life and is full of joy. Undoubtedly He is the most joyous being in the universe... We pay a lot of money to get a tank with a few tropical fish in it... but God has seas full of them, which He constantly enjoys.”

Q: What concrete steps might we take to rejoice with God’s good creation?
A: Accept responses. Such concrete steps could include: explore a national or state park, learning more about one particular species, bird, fish, or animal, or even plant a garden.

SUMMARY

At the end of his autobiography, C. S. Lewis captures the essence of joy both as a result of earthly life with Christ and as a foretaste of our eternal life with the Savior:

“[Joy] was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer ... When we are lost in the woods the sight of a signpost is a great matter. He who first sees it cries, ‘Look!’ the whole party gathers round and stares. But when we have found the road and are passing signposts every few miles, we shall not stop and stare. They will encourage us and we shall be grateful to the authority that set them up. But we shall not stop and stare, or not much; not on this road, though their pillars are of silver and their lettering of gold. ‘We would be at Jerusalem’ ” (Lewis, 238).

In other words, God has created us to desire not only happiness but also joy; and not only joy but also Himself. By offering Himself as the ransom price and delivering us from the punishment of death, Jesus has redeemed us from all our sin and guilt. We don't deserve this. God gives freely, and we gratefully receive in faith. The joy of faith assures us that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to the Father.

Moreover, in the baptismal waters we are united to Christ's life, and new life is brought to our thirsty souls. Since we live in the joy of faith — in God's Word, in worship, in work, in the world, and even in suffering — we can now enjoy each day as God's gift, using our joy time for the joy of others.

As Luther put it in the Small Catechism, all this God has accomplished “in order that I may be His, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we commit ourselves and all for whom we pray to Your care and blessing. Be gracious to us and defend us by Your power. Direct us by Your Spirit that we may daily grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior until we shall stand before You in the joy of everlasting glory; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.