Bible Study: Participant Notes
The Joy of Faith
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?

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Q: Read Job 8:21; Psalm 4:7; 36:8. Where is joy found?

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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?

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

A: __________________________________________________________________________________________
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THE JOY OF WORSHIP

Q: Read Psalm 42:1-4; 43:3-4; 46:4; 71:23; 100; Luke 24:52. Why does worship evoke joy?

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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: __________________________________________________________________________________________
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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?

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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.
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THE JOY OF WORK

A: __________________________________________________________________________________________
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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: __________________________________________________________________________________________
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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?

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

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.

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: 

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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.”