



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (10 minutes)

Watch a short video about “Anne” which demonstrates how each part of what she considers to be a “normal, boring life” has the potential to be part of God’s kingdom in many ways. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVKbvE-HQeI>

How does this inspire you?



Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Sometimes we can think that Jesus has little to say about joy or happiness. Yet, while He was prophesied to be a “man of sorrows”, fully aware of the world’s pain, he was also foretold to be “anointed with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” In other words, the most joyful person alive! And while Jesus experienced the full force of evil and sadness, it was in the context of knowing that joy was set before Him – that joy had the last word.



In his life we see the joyful character of God in the extravagance of His first miracle, making water into the best wine. It was in creating this celebration that He “revealed God’s glory.” We regularly read about Jesus parties, eating and drinking to the extent that he’s accused of being a “glutton and drunkard” (Matt 11: 19). He wasn’t these things, but the point was He was so celebratory that He created that impression. He told His disciples that His joy would be in them, and that it would be complete – literally “full to the brim”. (John 15). God wants disciples to be as joyful as Him – the God who announced at creation “It is good!” again and again.

Whereas pleasure is responding to something in the moment, and is temporary, joy is a deeper commitment that comes through ways we live and attitudes we have. While it’s possible for this joy to come upon us unexpectedly as a gift, there are ways God gives us to cultivate joy in our lives.

In a specific sense, God called His people to worship Him through festivals and celebrations. For example, three times a year they were to celebrate for seven days. They were to spend a tenth of their income on one celebration and make sure it was accompanied by strong drink! (Deuteronomy 14: 22-27). While as Christians we might not obey that joyful command so accurately, there are a number of celebrations and feast days spread throughout each year for the same reason – the most famous being Easter and Christmas. The more important ones have a long period of preparation.

In a general way, God calls us to worship and celebrate by giving thanks in all circumstances, and at all times. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say: rejoice,” Paul wrote from prison.

It’s important to say that some people have a genetically more cheerful character than others. Worship and celebration is not about pretending to be a different person. Nevertheless, numerous writers affirm that worshipping God by choosing to be thankful and to celebrate opens us up to being more joyful. William Law: “If anyone would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and perfection, he must tell you to make a rule to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you.” Henry Allen Ironside: “Thanksgiving is the enemy of discontent and dissatisfaction.”

Thanksgiving stops us from taking ourselves too seriously and opens up space for God. It reminds us that life is a gift. It helps correct ways in which we see God negatively and instead expresses our trust in God’s goodness. Thanksgiving is the least selfish prayer. As William Temple wrote, “The ... act of Thanksgiving is ... quite selfless. It is akin to love. All our love to God is in response to his love for us.”

Finding God in the ordinary things of life grows in us as we remember **He has created every aspect of life**. In his book “No Splits” Steve Shaw gives a down-to-earth example of what this feels like. He describes how even laying a table for dinner with friends can be a joyful response to God, as he handles all the “ingredients” of God’s creation in a holy way. He reflects on how choosing whom to invite can become an opportunity for discipleship, how the choices about food can involve fairness and justice, how making the table look good reflects God’s glory...

He is asking three things in doing this. What is a dinner party called to be in God’s world? How does it serve God and creation? Finally, how do all the small decisions help to open up all the different elements involved to proclaim the life of God’s kingdom?

Celtic Christians, with their emphasis on heaven overlapping with earth, have a long history of celebrating God in the ordinary things of life. This prayer, by Bruce Prewer, in a Celtic style, offers a farmer’s daily work to God:

Bless, Lord God, my little plot of land,
and the strength with which I’m tilling it,
bless the seed I’m carefully planting,
and the prayers I’m sowing with it.

Bless the seasons that are coming,
and the sunshine and the rain.
Bless the days and shortening nights,
and the hopes of my small barn.

Bless, O Father of good giving,
Bless, O Son of redeeming.
Bless, O Spirit of the living,
Bless, O Holy Three all-loving.

Discuss: How could my daily activity be an opportunity for joy and thanksgiving?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Psalm 95 - an expression of joy.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?

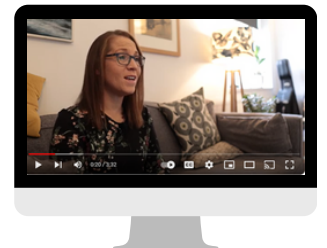


Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/cz6SCn0pxxQ>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)



Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and joy are in his dwelling place.
Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come before him.
Worship the Lord in the splendor of his[e] holiness.
Tremble before him, all the earth!
The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.
Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let them say among the nations, “The Lord reigns!”
Let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them!
Let the trees of the forest sing,
let them sing for joy before the Lord,
for he comes to judge the earth.
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.
Amen.

From 1 Chronicles 16



Joy in everyday life



Sometimes we can think that Jesus has little to say about joy or happiness. Yet, while He was prophesied to be a “man of sorrows”, fully aware of the world’s pain, he was also foretold to be “anointed with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” In other words, the most joyful person alive! And while Jesus experienced the full force of evil and sadness, it was in the context of knowing that joy was set before Him – that joy had the last word.

In his life we see the joyful character of God in the **extravagance of His first miracle**, making water into the best wine. It was in creating this celebration that He “**revealed God’s glory.**” We regularly read about Jesus parties, eating and drinking to the extent that he’s accused of being a “glutton and drunkard” (Matt 11: 19). He wasn’t these things, but the point was He was so celebratory that He created that impression. He told His disciples that **His joy would be in them, and that it would be complete** – literally “full to the brim”. (John 15). God wants disciples to be as joyful as Him – the God who announced at creation “It is good!” again and again.

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