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Joy

Happiness of the Heart



 **7-Session Bible Study**

Joy: Happiness of the Heart

A Good Book Guide

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Introduction

One of the Bible writers described God’s word as “a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105, NIV). God gave us the Bible to tell us about who he is and what he wants for us. He speaks through it by his Spirit and lights our way through life.

That means that we need to look carefully at the Bible and uncover its meaning—but we also need to apply what we’ve discovered to our lives.

Good Book Guides are designed to help you do just that. The sessions in this book are interactive and easy to lead. They’re perfect for use in groups or for personal study.

Let’s take a look at what is included in each session.

Talkabout: Every session starts with an ice-breaker question, designed to get people talking around a subject that links to the Bible study.

Investigate: These questions help you explore what the passage is about.

Apply: These questions are designed to get you thinking practically: what does this Bible teaching mean for you and your church?

Explore More: These optional sections help you to go deeper or to explore another part of the Bible which connects with the main passage.

Getting Personal: These sections are a chance for personal reflection. Some groups may feel comfortable discussing these, but you may prefer to look at them quietly as individuals instead—or leave them out.

Pray: Here, you’re invited to pray in the light of the truths and challenges you’ve seen in the study.

Each session is also designed to be easily split into two! Watch out for the **Apply** section that comes halfway through, and stop there if you haven’t got time to do the whole thing in one go.

In the back of the book, you’ll find a **Leader’s Guide**, which provides helpful notes on every question, along with everything else that group leaders need in order to facilitate a great session and help the group uncover the riches of God’s light-giving word.

Why Study Joy?

A guide to *joy*? Can there be such a thing? Isn't the experience of joy in fact rather like hiccupping—there's no sure-fire way to make or help ourselves do it or feel it? It just happens. So, if joy is only a spontaneous reaction to a delightful situation, and our circumstances are not delightful, how are we meant to rejoice?

But God's word takes a different view. Many times the Old Testament exhorts God's people to shout, sing and celebrate God, his deeds and his words with joy. And joy is constantly called for and expected in the lives of Jesus' followers, and on display even as they endure tough situations.

These seven studies take readers on a Bible journey through the Christian life—from first understanding God's revelation to us in his word, through the repentance and faith that bring us into the kingdom of God, and then looking at our redeemed relationships with the Lord and with his people, as well as our redeemed experience of trials and suffering in this world, to the hope promised to all who persevere faithfully to the end—all the while showing us the whys and hows of cultivating deep and resilient joy in all circumstances.

Beginning with Paul's counterintuitive instruction to the Christians at Philippi to rejoice in the Lord always, these studies have been written in the prayerful hope that each reader will be strengthened to gladly obey this "impossible" command as they faithfully follow the only one who can give us everlasting joy.

1

The Command to Rejoice

Philippians 3:17 – 4:9

Talkabout

1. Think of a time when you rejoiced about something. Briefly describe it. How did you feel? How did you express those feelings? What was the reason? Do you feel that joy now? How long did it last?

Investigate

Philippians 4:4 is one of the best-known Bible verses about being joyful. It's found towards the end of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, which had been established as a result of his visit there with Silas (see Acts 16).

 **Read Philippians 3:17 – 4:9**

DICTIONARY

Brothers and sisters (3:17): fellow Christians.

Their glory (v 19): what they prize most.

Crown (4:1): a garland, often of laurel leaves, awarded in ancient Greece to a winning athlete.

Whose names are in the book of life (v 3): those who through faith belong to Christ (Revelation 13:8) and will be saved from God's wrath on the day of judgment (20:11-15).

Transcends (Philippians 4:7): goes beyond; trumps.

2. Reread Philippians 4:4. This is not a request, a suggestion or even strong advice. It's a command! Given the subject, why might some people find this surprising or difficult?

- What does this tell us about how Paul views rejoicing?

3. What are believers to rejoice in here? And how much?

- How are the reason for our joy and the frequency of our joy connected?

4. What does Paul instruct his readers to do both at the beginning and the end of this passage (3:17; 4:9)?

- Paul's command to rejoice comes between these two instructions to follow his example, and the rest of the letter mentions his joy in a variety of difficult circumstances (see Explore More). How could this change our view of rejoicing?

5. What situation in Philippi does Paul highlight immediately before he commands the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord (4:2-3)? And what problem does he mention following that command (v 6)?

- Clearly the situation in Philippi wasn't perfect or easy. So what do these verses tell us about how Paul views joy?

- If we are anxious about our lack of joy, what should we do?

Explore More | OPTIONAL

Paul's letter tells us a lot about both the causes of his joy and the obstacles to rejoicing that he faced.

- What specific things is Paul rejoicing in as he writes to the Philippians?
 - 1:4-6
 - 1:18
 - 2:16-17
 - 4:10, 15-18
- What obstacles to rejoicing is Paul facing (or has he faced) as he writes? And what emotions could these situations generate that could threaten to undermine Paul's joy?
 - 1:12-14, 20
 - 1:15, 17
 - 3:2, 18
 - 4:12-15

Apply

6. What is it that most gives you joy? And how permanent is that joy?
Could it be described as rejoicing in the Lord?

- What have you learned so far in Philippians that would help you to grow in rejoicing in the Lord always?

Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

Reflect on who Jesus is and what he does for his people.

“The Lord Jesus Christ ... by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

“The Lord is near.” (4:5)

“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” (4:19)

Which of those truths gives you most joy?

Investigate

We’ve seen that Paul commands believers to rejoice. That may feel like a tall order! Let’s look at some verses that show us how it’s possible.

7. Read Galatians 5:22-23. What are the implications of Galatians 5:22 for how we think about joy as Christian believers?

- How does this make it possible to “rejoice ... always”, even in hard circumstances (Philippians 4:4)?
8. Read Romans 8:5-6. Look at what Paul says about a believer’s mind. What similar things does he say about our minds in the Philippians passage?
- Philippians 3:18-21
- 4:8
9. How does all this (from questions 7 and 8) help us in following Paul’s command to “rejoice in the Lord always”? What should we seek to do if we want to rejoice more?
10. In the Bible, commands are given in the context of truth about God and promises from God. What truth (Philippians 4:5) and what promise (v 7) accompany this command?
- How are the two connected?

- What do we need to do that will enable us to rejoice in the Lord always?

Apply

11. How have you seen the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, especially in growing the fruit of joy in you?

Pray

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-19)

Spend time rejoicing in the Lord together, thanking and praising him for who he is and what he has done.

Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to grow joy and gratitude in you so that you will rejoice in the Lord always.