

*1 Peter 1:8 NLT - 8 You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.
Romans 15:13 NLT - 13 I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.*

The joy Jesus offers is so much better than happiness we might find elsewhere. Peter describes it as glorious and inexpressible. But we can either choose to remain connected and obedient to Jesus our source of joy or we can rely on our own resources to attain a temporary happiness.

What would it cost us to attain the joy Jesus offers? How could we arrange our lives to remain connected to God's love and walk in obedience to His commandments?

WRAP-UP

Happiness is not the same as joy. It is only temporary, based on circumstances and emotion. But joy is found when we receive the love of God, and we trust and obey His commandments. When we are connected and abiding in God, His Holy Spirit fills us to overflowing with joy that transcends even the darkest moments of our lives.

MEMORY VERSE.

I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!

- John 15:11 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN) Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

Challenge – Watch for an opportunity to share the love of God in practical ways this week, after you have been filled up with God's love yourself.

“From Happiness to Joy”

Advent-Joy - #3

INTRODUCTION

At Christmastime we see the word joy popping up on cards, giftwrap, advertisements, even coffee mugs. But when we see “joy” do we equate it with happiness? Is there a difference? And when the bible talks about joy, what does that mean? Clearly the joy Jesus taught about is not found in a coffee mug. Let's shift our point of view from happiness to joy and listen to what Jesus says about how we can have real joy.

Ice Breaker

Do you know the lyrics to Joy to the World?

Key Passage

John 15:10-12 NLT - 10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! 12 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Happiness or Joy?

In our key passage (*John 15:10-12*) Jesus is addressing His disciples just before going to the cross. His message to them was a kind of final farewell. We see that He is giving them critical instructions, but also His blessing in this passage.

What words do you see repeated in the key passage? What do you find as the relationship between obedience, love, and joy?

Jesus specifically refers to “My joy”. We may tend to use the words happiness and joy interchangeably, but there is a difference. Happiness is our response to our circumstances. We are happy when we prosper, or we are blessed. But when things aren’t going well, we aren’t happy any longer. Sometimes, we can control circumstances in our lives to increase happiness but not always.

What are some things that make you happy? Are there things you avoid because they make you unhappy? Which of these circumstances tend to limit your happiness – relationships, finance, health, any others?

The word for joy(*chara*) is from the root for rejoice(*chairō*), and we see that Jesus’ joy is based on His love, which never changes. We can always choose joy and rejoice in God’s love. In fact, the joy that comes from God is boundless, and transcends our circumstances. We can and should choose to experience Jesus’ joy every day.

*“Arrange your life so that you are experiencing deep contentment, joy and confidence in your everyday life with God.”
– Dallas Willard –*

2. Vines and Fruit

So then, the questions we must ask is, “How do we experience the joy Jesus talks about?” We find the answer in the verses preceding our key passage.

John 15:4-9 NLT - 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. 5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. 9 "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.

Using the analogy of the vine and the branch, Jesus says we must stay connected to Him and His love, because apart from Him we are fruitless.

This statement may offend us. Am I truly useless apart from Jesus? The answer requires us to define what is valuable or fruitful in God’s economy. One place to answer that question is in the book of Galatians. Notice the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22 begins with love and joy.

Galatians 5:22-23 NLT - 22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Jesus says we are to remain in His love, and He commands us to love others as He loved us. We must begin with His love poured into us. If we are not filled with God’s love, we won’t be able to love other as we should.

When have you experienced Jesus’ love through another brother or sister? What are some of the ways we can extend God’s love to others? If we attempt to do this in our own power, without being connected to the source of love, what results might we expect?

3. Joy and God’s Love

Jesus is offering us the same love that exists between the Father and Son. This is a love that produces obedience based on faith and trust. We see this demonstrated at Gethsemane.

What confident expectation did Jesus hold that gave Him joy that surpassed the agony of the cross? To what does the Psalmist refer as our source of joy in Ps 16?

Hebrews 12:2 NLT - 2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

Psalm 16:11 NLT - 11 You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

The love of the Father produced joy that overcame the darkest moments of Jesus’ life as He faced the cross. That love enabled Him to experience joy. That love can produce abiding joy even in the darkest moments of our lives as well.