



grow groups



Week 12: The Source of Joy

Isaiah 35:1-10

GOAL:

To know our destination made possible by the God who comes to save us and to join with other believers in expressing our great joy and gladness.

CHECKLIST

- Prepare for your group meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members. This week, you may have new guests from the Christmas Store. You can affirm for them that this is a great day to check out what Grow Groups are like before we kick off again in January! Please be sure to include them in the visitor count and add their names in the notes of your attendance report.
- Spend time debriefing the semester and thanking God for his goodness.
- Encourage your group to participate in the Growth Guide devotions over the holidays.
- Close by giving the group any final words and a blessing.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Father, I confess that I am too familiar with the Land of Sighing and often desire to live there, although it is not what you desire for me. Thank you for being my redeemer, the God who has come in the person of Jesus to save all people from their sins. Help me understand your joy and choose that joy as a central part of my life with you. Amen.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

CONNECT, COORDINATE, & PRAY

As your meeting begins, allow group members to visit and catch up informally. After a few moments, lead the group through the following connecting activities:

Group Connection: *Remind the group that this is our last session for the fall. Encourage them to pray for and connect with each other over the break and be ready to start again the week of January 26!*

Relational Connection: *In this section, spend time catching up relationally. You might want to use an icebreaker question or share “highs and lows.”*

Spiritual Connection: *Ask your group the following two questions:*

- *Where have you seen God at work this week?*
- *In what specific areas do you need God to work this week?*

This is an opportunity to praise God for the good things happening and to ask for his help in our challenges. Our natural tendency will be to focus on our circumstances, and that’s ok. But this can also be related to our spiritual lives as well!

DISCUSS

- You are planning a trip and put the destination in your GPS. Three different routes appear. What are the determining factors that help you chose which route you will take?

Leaders: *Some of the responses might include the shortest time, the fewest turns, avoidance of toll roads, or the preference of your spouse. Life is a journey and the choices we make determine our destination and the people with whom we will travel.*

Read Isaiah 35:1-7

- Pastor John spoke of two different lands in his sermon. The first he called the Land of Sighing. What are some words to describe that land? What barriers do we erect with our sighing that keep us from God? What does consistently living in that land rob us of?

Leaders: *A desert can be a harsh place in which to survive. Lack of water creates a landscape that is dry and barren. Food can be scarce. Think of the John Wayne movies when a cowboy gets lost, cannot find water, and his horse dies. The sun beats down on him robbing him of energy. Without help, he doesn’t survive.*

Fear, anxiety, weariness, broken relationships, and stress are just a few words that describe the Land of Sighing. Our natural tendencies center on self-dependence. We try harder, work longer hours,

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listen to self-help podcasts, and whatever else we think will help us. The problem is that we are limited human beings. We are missing out on the unlimited spiritual blessings that God longs for us to receive. At its core, the Land of Sighing describes life apart from God. It robs us of his spiritual blessings of hope, peace, love, and particularly joy which is a key theme in this passage.

In Isaiah 35:4-6 the prophet uses poetic language to describe a spiritual condition in terms of a desert. Isaiah describes people who live in deserts of their own making. They have feeble hands, unsteady knees, and fearful hearts. People are blind and cannot see the way. They are deaf and unable to hear God's voice. They are lame and cannot walk in God's way. They are mute and unable to voice their prayers or praise to God. Our loving God never intended for his people to live in this land. The prophet declares God will come. He will come to save us. We see in Jesus the one Isaiah announced.

Read John 1:1-5, 14

- There is a way out of the Land of Sighing. It is found in the God who comes to save. The Apostle John begins his gospel by describing the coming of Jesus. Why did God choose to come to us in the person of his son?

Leaders: *A story is told of a man who found birds trying to fly through his window in the dead of winter. They would hit the glass and fall to the ground stunned. They were in peril of freezing if they couldn't recover. He wanted to rescue the birds but every attempt to capture them or guide them to safety only frightened them. Then he thought, "If only I could become one of them, perhaps they would trust me and follow me to a safe place."*

That's what God did in Jesus. He came as the Son of Man to save the lost and will come again one day to lead us home. The Apostle John writes that Jesus was with God in the beginning and is the Creator of all things. God took the initiative to show us who he is and then to deliver us from the desert to which we have condemned ourselves. His light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never overcome it.

If people are struggling to understand who God is, point them to Jesus. John 1:14 in The Message reads, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish." What Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 35:1-2 that the desert and parched land will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor our God was fulfilled in Jesus.

Paul wrote in Colossian 1:15 that "the Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." He told the Corinthian church that "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). John 3:16 is the gospel in one verse: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Those who had waited for the coming of the promised one had a hard time believing Jesus was that

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person. Even John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?” Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor’” (Matthew 11:3-5). Compare Matthew’s words to Isaiah 35:5-6.

Read Isaiah 35:8-10

- The second land Pastor John described was the Land of Joy. How does one get to the Land of Joy? What is joy? What is the source of joy for a follower of Jesus?

Leaders: *Isaiah 35 begins and ends talking about gladness and rejoicing in the God who has redeemed and restored his people. No longer do they live in the Land of Sighing. God has created a highway called The Way of Holiness which leads to the Land of Joy. Not everyone will walk on the “Way”. The unclean and wicked will not journey with the redeemed and the ones God has rescued.*

We learn in the New Testament that Jesus said of himself, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well” (John 14:6-7). First-century followers of Christ were called followers of the Way before they were known as Christians. The Way was not cultural practice or a religious obligation. Rather, it was complete and utter devotion to the person of Jesus.

As followers of the Way, we are people of joy. But what is it? Ask your group to define joy. Responses might include happiness, gladness, or excitement. A Google definition of joy is “a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.” This type of joy is fleeting if it is tied to feelings or circumstances.

Joy does include rejoicing and gladness, but a deeper understanding might be helpful to your group. Author and retired pastor Rick Warren describes joy this way. “Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.” Let’s look more closely at the three segments of his definition.

*“Joy is the **settled assurance** that God is in control of all the details of my life.” How does the word “settled” add emphasis to “assurance”? (See Romans 8:35-39)*

- *The holidays can be tough for many because we speak of joy/gladness, but someone has just lost their spouse, another has received a troubling diagnosis, a child is making poor choices, or the bank account is nearly empty. How can you be glad about any of that?*
- *Joy is not about our circumstances. It is about God and our faith in the one who came to save. In Romans 8:35-49, Paul speaks of different circumstances that could separate us from God if we allowed them to. Knowing that God will never leave us or forsake us fills us with a gladness that he is in control.*

*“Joy . . . is the **quiet confidence** that ultimately everything is going to be alright.” What is the relationship between faith and joy? (See Hebrews 11:6; Romans 15:13)*

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- *Everything we are talking about is based on the relationship we have with God through faith in Christ. We please God when we believe he exists and rewards those who seek him. As we trust in him, he fills us with all joy and peace.*
- *Ask someone to describe a time when they had a quiet confidence that everything would be alright.*

*“Joy . . . is the **determined choice** to praise God in every situation.” If joy is not related to our circumstances, then what is our part in experiencing joy? (See James 1:2; Galatians 5:22-23)*

- *Joy is a choice. James speaks of difficult times as a time to praise God because those times test our faith and help us persevere. Perseverance leads to maturity in which we lack nothing.*
 - *Our life with God produces the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, and peace are the first characteristics found in Galatians 5:22. They are named in a certain order on purpose because they relate to our life with God. They are present in our lives because the Spirit dwells in those who have chosen to follow Jesus and produces the fruit.*
- Living with joy doesn't come naturally. We are much more accustomed to the Land of Sighing than the Land of Joy. What can connect us to the source of joy?

Leaders: Brainstorm with your group, and then encourage one another to pursue these practices. Here are a few ideas:

- **Prayer** – *Being in God's presence to listen and learn from him helps grow our relationship. Knowing God hears us, responds to our prayers gives us the assurance we need that he is in control.*
- **Scripture** – *God's word unfolds more of who he is and how to follow him. The promises of God we find in Scripture help us know what God is doing and will do in our lives. We can trust the promises because the one who made the promise is trustworthy. This grows our confidence in him.*
- **Fellowship of the Spirit** – *Because we find our life in the Spirit, we are to walk with him in our daily lives. By making this choice, we know that God is with us in every part of our lives. We recognize more clearly his work in us and through us. This intentional and determined choice makes a huge difference in the highs and lows of living.*
- **Living in community with other believers** – *What role does the VRBC community play in helping us live out the joy we find in Christ? How can you help someone else understand and choose joy? We are meant for community and find encouragement, support, and guidance as we share our lives with one another. A new believer is beginning life with God and needs help in understanding more fully what this new life looks like. Our very lives are the testimony that others benefit from as we live with joy that is describe above.*

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PRAY

- Give thanks for the blessing of knowing Christ and experiencing joy.
- Ask God to show you ways to share your joy in him with those who need encouragement, comfort, and peace this Christmas.
- Pray for those who have yet to find the Land of Joy and ask the Lord to use you to point them toward him.

CLOSING BENEDICTION

After you pray, give any final thoughts you need to share and close with a brief word of blessing from Romans 15:13:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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