



SESSION 5 - HIDDEN JOY

Breaking the hard ground of misaligned focus & spiritual lack LEADER'S NOTES

The biblical picture of joy is confidence in who God is, rather than control over circumstances. In Galatians 5 Paul names joy as a fruit of the Spirit. This matters, because fruit is not produced through effort but grows through connection to its source. Joy, then, grows as we remain rooted in God's presence. Paul is writing to a church that has begun to rely on self-effort and self-interest rather than trust in the Spirit. Paul's point is simple and searching: different ways of living produce different kinds of fruit. Joy does not disappear because God withholds it, but because other patterns of living have begun to take its place. Joy is not found in what we have, but in who we behold. So when we neglect time with God, the fruits of his Spirit are also neglected. Spiritual dryness doesn't mean God is far; it means we've stopped drawing from 'the well'.

Spend some time reflecting on and studying **Galatians 5:13-26** together, inviting God into this space.

Reflection point: What does the current fruit of your life (character, reactions, decisions) reflect about what or who is driving it?

Joy can become hidden in different ways. For some it is shaken suddenly by circumstance, for others it fades more gradually as substitutes take the place of God's presence. Joy sometimes becomes harder to recognise because our focus has shifted or the heart has been wounded. This session invites us to notice this with honesty and compassion, trusting that God is already drawing us back to him as our source of true joy.

IN NEHEMIAH 8:10 GOD'S PEOPLE ARE REMINDED, 'THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH'.

This moment in Nehemiah 8:10 follows a season of deep upheaval and loss. The people had returned from exile to a damaged city and the long, unfinished work of rebuilding their lives. As the Law was read aloud, many began to weep, overwhelmed by what had been lost and how far they had drifted from God. It was into this moment of vulnerability that they were invited to receive the joy of the Lord – not as denial of grief or forced happiness, but as strength for the rebuilding ahead. The people are not told to wait for joy until the city is rebuilt or their grief has passed. This joy does not erase sorrow but becomes the steady assurance that God is with them as they rebuild. God's joy is fuel – it doesn't remove suffering but it does transform how we walk through it. Joy anchors us in God's goodness and truth, even when life is uncertain.

JOY



Leaders, you may wish to watch this video before the session, to benefit from further understanding of the context and climate of Nehemiah: bibleproject.com/ezra-nehemiah

Spend some time discussing/reflecting on these questions:

- Where might your understanding of joy have become shaped more by circumstances or feelings than by your relationship with God?
- What draws your attention away from God the most in this season, and how might that be affecting your awareness of his presence?

Throughout the Bible, joy is also expressed through praise and celebration. This kind of joy is not naïve or shallow. It does not deny suffering or pretend that life is easy. Instead, it flows from recognising who God is and responding with gratitude and praise, even when life remains uncertain or painful. Scripture shows us people who weep and worship, grieve and rejoice, often in the same breath. Rooted in God rather than circumstance, joy remains a gift held by the Spirit, given to strengthen us as we continue to walk with him.

Psalm 42:5 (NIV) ‘Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.’

Psalm 121:1-2 (ESV) ‘I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord...’

Sometimes a posture of praise and worship needs to birth from a decision, not a feeling. When we give thanks amidst unanswered prayers, when we sing songs of praise though we feel downcast, when we lift our eyes from our circumstances to the Lord and speak out the unchanging truth of his word, we will receive all we need from our provider in spiritual abundance. This is where true joy is found.

Spend some time discussing/reflecting on this question:

- When joy has felt distant or muted, how do you tend to respond, and what might it look like to return your attention to God rather than relying on familiar patterns?



Breaking the ground that hides joy

Allow time for the Holy Spirit to renew joy – below are some ideas of how to facilitate this time, direct as appropriate for your group.

- Divide into pairs and pray for one another.
- Pray as a group into different areas covered this session: battling the flesh (division, anger), a growing desire to be in God’s presence, a cultivation of his fruits, healing in the circumstances which have stolen joy, etc.
- People may want to write out the Scriptures that are the ‘opposite’ of how they feel or they may wish to do a deeper Bible study on one of the above passages and meditate on the word.

JOY



SESSION 5 - HIDDEN JOY

JOURNAL



'You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy'
Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

The biblical picture of joy is confidence in who God is, rather than control over circumstances. Joy is located in God's presence. It is shaped by trust and attentiveness and is the fruit of a life oriented towards God.

In Galatians 5 Paul names joy as a fruit of the Spirit. This matters, because fruit is not produced through effort but grows through connection to its source. Joy, then, grows as we remain rooted in God's presence. Joy is not found in what we have, but in who we behold. So when we neglect time with God, the fruits of his Spirit are also neglected. Spiritual dryness doesn't mean God is far; it means we've stopped drawing from 'the well'.



Read Galatians 5:13-26: write down any thoughts, key phrases and revelations from this passage, inviting God into this space.

JOY



Reflection point: What does the current fruit of your life (character, reactions, decisions) reflect about what or who is driving it?

What is the context that God is speaking into?

 'The joy of the Lord is
your strength'
Nehemiah 8:10

What does this mean for us today?

Reflect:

- Where might your understanding of joy have become shaped more by circumstances or feelings than by your relationship with God?
- What draws your attention away from God the most in this season, and how might that be affecting your awareness of his presence?



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