

Rejoice in God's Mercy

PSALM 30

2



GOAL

Youth unpack what the Bible says about receiving God's mercy and learn how this awareness can lead to deeper joy in their lives.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Gracious God, help me and everyone who gathers in this group today to take joy in the mercy of Jesus Christ.

THIS SESSION

The causes of human pain are many: some of our own making, some simply part of the natural order, some brought about by others. No matter what kind of pain we are feeling—illness, guilt, injustice, grief, loss, fear, hunger, helplessness, shame, poverty, or something else—our ability to experience joy is dulled by pain. God does not will us to suffer; in these moments of deep pain, God provides some of our most valuable moments of joy. In this session, we reflect on how we have received God's mercy—individually and collectively—and how this leads us to joy even in painful moments.

THE BIBLE STORY

In both individual and communal ways, the psalms are filled with moments of joy that come from receiving God's mercy. Psalm 30 especially resonates with those who have suffered deeply and found new life: "Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (vv. 4–5). This psalm also reminds us that, even in times of grief, we can rediscover the joy that God alone can give: "You have turned my mourning into dancing; . . . and clothed me with joy" (v. 11). Psalm 30 invites us to recall and savor those times when we have needed God's mercy and received it with joy.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

This session will challenge participants to see how God's joy persists, even when we might not expect to find it. Youth will explore how God's mercy can bring about joy in the midst of injustice, illness, and suffering. Joy is found not only when all is right and well in our lives; God's joyful light also perseveres during overwhelming darkness.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Word Association" (p. 16): Prepare a sheet of newsprint with the heading "What words come to mind when you think of God's joy?" Post it on the wall of your space. Save the sheet of newsprint for use in session 4.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Thinking Forward and Looking Back" (p. 17): Obtain the *Practice Joy* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 1 Set).
- "Notes of Encouragement" (p. 18): Ask your pastor or congregational care leader to provide a list of members who might appreciate receiving a note of encouragement from the youth of your church. This might include those dealing with a recent struggle, such as a medical procedure or loss of a loved one, or it may be someone who is socially isolated.

GETTING STARTED

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- Copies of Resource Page 1
 - Pens or pencils
 - Prepared newsprint

WORD ASSOCIATION

C AT

As participants arrive, hand them a copy of Resource Page 1 and have them write as many possible responses as they can for the prompt, “What words come to mind when you think of God’s joy?” Inform participants that they may respond by writing words or drawing pictures on their Resource Page. Once everyone has had a chance to complete their responses, ask for volunteers to read their responses aloud while you record them on a sheet of newsprint. Place a checkmark or dot next to responses that are repeated. When you have recorded all responses, ask the group to:

- Note which responses appeared the most
- Note which responses are similar
- Decide whether the responses are mainly positive, negative, or neutral in tone

Share with youth that today’s session will focus on how God’s mercy can offer us joy even in the midst of terrible circumstances. We will explore how even words like *suffering* and *oppression* have a relationship with God’s joy.

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- Bibles or copies of Philippians 4:4–6

SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER

QC

Explain that you are opening each session with a time for Scripture and prayer to prepare for your time together. Provide each participant with a Bible or a copy of the Scripture text. Form two groups and have one group read Philippians 4:4 and the other group read Philippians 4:5. Read verse 6 in unison. To close, pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

God, we are grateful that your joy comes to us, not just in moments when all is well in the world, but even in our darkest times. Help us to see how your mercy offers us reasons to rejoice in the midst of uncertainty and fear. Amen.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Copies of Resource Page 2

AMAZING GRACE

M C

“Amazing Grace” is one of the most well-known hymns in the church today. However, not everyone is aware of the story behind this beloved piece of music. Have students join with a partner or in groups of three and invite participants to take turns reading about the history of the hymn’s author, John Newton, and the events that inspired him to write this familiar song. Once they finish reading, have youth respond to the reflection questions on Resource Page 2 with their partners. After several minutes, invite a representative from each group to share their responses with the larger group.

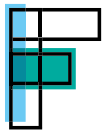
Remind participants that, while God does not will our suffering, it is precisely when God comes to us in our deep pain that we experience some of our most valuable moments of joy.

THINKING FORWARD AND LOOKING BACK

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Gather around the *Practice Joy* infographic poster and give participants a few minutes to get acquainted with it. Explain that youth will explore this poster at each session to discuss the current session's focus and review past discussions and how they relate to the infographic. Invite youth to focus on the images and texts that relate to today's theme, "Rejoice in God's Mercy," and ask them to imagine what this session will explore.

Practice Joy infographic poster



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

WHAT DOES GOD'S MERCY DO?

CT AT C

Invite youth to form pairs. Distribute paper, a pen, and a Bible to each pair. Have one person from each pair slowly read Psalm 30 aloud to their partner. As they are reading, have their partners make a list of all of God's actions in this passage.

Gather participants back into a large group and ask for a volunteer from each pair to share the actions of God they identified. As a group, consider the following questions:

- ➔ What does *mercy* mean in this Scripture passage?
- ➔ What does it mean to be "restored . . . to life from . . . the Pit" (v. 3; both literally and figuratively)?
- ➔ How does God offer the psalmist and us joy in times of grief and suffering?

Bibles
 Paper and pens

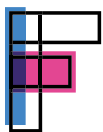
IN YOUR OWN WORDS

QC AT

Distribute copies of Resource Page 3. Ask participants to rewrite a portion of Psalm 30 in their own words. If youth are struggling with how to start, ask them to begin by choosing a few of the verses that really stand out to them and rewrite these verses in language they would use with their friends in everyday conversation.

Once everyone has had a chance to write out a few verses, ask for volunteers to share their version. Ask if anyone can imagine a scenario in which it might be helpful to offer these words to a friend going through a difficult time. Discuss how the words of this psalm offer hope to someone who is struggling.

Copies of Resource Page 3
 Pens or pencils



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

JESUS OFFERS MERCY

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Tell youth that, throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus offered mercy and joy to many who were struggling. Invite participants to form groups of three. Distribute copies of Resource Page 4 and assign one of the Gospel stories to each small group. Have each group read their assigned story and name how Jesus brought about joy through acts of mercy, even in unhappy circumstances.

Bibles
 Copies of Resource Page 4

Once everyone has had a chance to explore their story, bring everyone together and have each group share their reflections. As a large group, discuss:

- ➔ How does mercy bring joy, even in difficult times?
- ➔ Does anyone have a personal example they would like to share of a time when God's mercy brought joy to someone who was struggling?

Internet-connected device

GOD'S MERCY IN TIMES OF DISASTER

CT C S

Most churches offer financial gifts to organizations that assist with the ongoing needs of local, national, and international communities. The same is true when unexpected disasters, like tornadoes or hurricanes, strike. Churches will often take a special offering to raise funds for disaster relief. Show the YouTube video "Not Just a Dollar" (bit.ly/FMNotJust, 1:27), made by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Help youth consider how these financial gifts translate into acts of mercy that can provide for specific needs for those facing disaster. After watching the video, use the following questions to process together:

- ➔ How does this group use financial gifts to share God's mercy?
- ➔ How does this ministry bring about God's joy in moments of devastation?
- ➔ How have you seen your church community work to provide support during difficult times? How have you seen those close to you show God's mercy?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

ACTING OUT MERCY

D AT CT

Have youth form small groups of three or four. Challenge participants to think of a modern-day scenario in which God's mercy brings about joy in difficult circumstances. If participants are having trouble getting started, invite them to brainstorm common struggles youth face (*family problems, friendship problems, struggles with academics or social dynamics*). Ask them to think of ways that youth might find God's mercy through the words or actions of family members, friends, teachers, or church leaders. Have each group work together to create a short, 60–90-second skit to showcase their scenario.

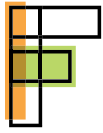
Once each group has had some time to prepare their skit, have them act it out for the other participants. Ask the audience for each skit to identify how they see God's mercy providing joy to the ones struggling in the scene.

- Notecards, envelopes, and stamps
- List of church member names and addresses

NOTES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

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Encourage youth to reflect on all you have discussed about God's mercy and how it can bring joy in the midst of uncertain times. Invite youth to choose a verse from Psalm 30 or another text that might offer a reminder of God's joy. Assign each participant a church member to write to; invite them to share their verse and a short note, signing it with either their name or "from your church family." Have participants address and stamp the notes and gather them together to be mailed.



FOLLOWING JESUS

RECEIVING GOD'S MERCY IN THE WEEK AHEAD



- Notecards or slips of paper
- Bowl or basket

Challenge youth to think of a situation in their lives where they are in need of God's mercy right now (*a strained friendship, a problem at home or school*). Ask youth to write this situation down on a slip of paper and place their responses in a basket or bowl. Explain that these will not be shared aloud with the group, but that you will read them and pray for them throughout the week. Gather all of the prayer requests together, then form a circle with your youth and place the prayer requests in the middle. Close with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God of mercy, we place before you now the concerns of our hearts and ask that, until we meet again, you would reveal your light in our darkness. Help us to receive your mercy with joy and see how you are at work in the world, even in the most difficult circumstances. We give thanks to you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

“What words come to mind when you think of God’s joy?”
(use words or pictures to share your responses)

JOY



Amazing Grace

History

John Newton was born in London, England, in 1725. His mother died when he was very young, and his father, a sea captain, took John to sea with him when he was only eleven years old. Through his experiences working on ships, Newton became acquainted with slavery. He worked on the ships that would capture human beings in West Africa and take them to ports where they were bought and sold. Newton is said to have experienced a spiritual conversion during a horrific storm at sea. Convinced that the ship was going to sink, he cried out to God for help, and eventually the ship made it safely to shore.

Although he did not experience an immediate shift in his attitude toward slavery, Newton eventually renounced the slave trade and later (in 1788) wrote a pamphlet called “Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade” where he described the inhumane treatment of enslaved persons and the terrible conditions of the ships that carried them. The pamphlet became so popular that it was reprinted multiple times and given to every member of the British parliament. Newton, who had once been a slave trader himself, was now an abolitionist fighting for an end to the slave trade and fairer treatment of all God’s children.

Lyrics:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I’m found,
was blind, but now I see.

’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
We have already come.
’Tis grace hath brought us safe thus far.
and grace will lead us home

The Lord has promised good to me;
his word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
than when we first begun.¹

Reflection Questions:

- ➔ What are some of the ways John Newton received God’s mercy in his life?
- ➔ How might the song “Amazing Grace” offer joy to someone going through difficult times?
- ➔ Is there a particular line or two in this hymn that is most meaningful to you? Why?

1. John Newton, “Amazing Grace,” in *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), #649.

Rewriting Psalm 30

Psalm 30 (NRSV)	Psalm 30 (My Version)
<p>I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me.</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>As for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall never be moved.”</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>By your favor, O LORD, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed.</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>To you, O LORD, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication:</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>“What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my helper!”</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,</p>	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.</p>	<hr/> <hr/>

Read your assigned passage and discuss the following questions:

- ➔ Who is in need of God's mercy in this passage?
- ➔ How does Jesus offer this mercy, and where do we see joy in this story?

John 11:1-44
Jesus Raises Lazarus
from the Dead

Mark 5:21-43
Jairus's Daughter and the
Woman Who Touched Jesus' Cloak

Luke 9:10-17
Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

John 20:24-29
Jesus Appears to
Doubting Thomas

