

Practice Joy in All Times

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-6

4

GOAL

Youth combine the ideas of savoring God’s glory, rejoicing in God’s blessings to us, and rejoicing in others’ blessings. They recognize that these practices remind us of God’s promise of hope for the future.

- 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

God of joy, may all that we do and say in this session today fill us with bright hope for what is to come.

THIS SESSION

There are times in everyone’s life when joy feels impossible. Whether from our own errors, the choices of others, or the systems around us, the present can feel grim at best; at its worst, the future shows no end in sight. It is precisely then that our practice of joy—savoring God’s glory, rejoicing in God’s blessings to us, and rejoicing in others’ blessings—bears its greatest fruit: hope for the future.

THE BIBLE STORY

When Paul is writing his letter to the church in Philippi, he is imprisoned because of his faith and has no expectation to be set free. Still, he urges the Christian community in Philippi to rejoice. By focusing on the evidence of God’s past blessings and current presence instead of their distress, Paul inspires the people to find peace that will carry them into the future.

This passage also invites us to remember that God’s blessings are not in just the past or the present. We are urged to wonder about what God desires for us in the future. By savoring joy in God’s glorious presence, rejoicing in God’s blessings to us, and rejoicing in others’ blessings, we gain trust that there is joy still to come.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Throughout these sessions, youth have been encouraged to consider how joy is not just a feeling but also an act of faith. By acknowledging that there are times in everyone’s life when joy is difficult to come by, youth will be challenged to consider how the practices of joy equip us to hope for a future filled with promise and new life. Even as we endure difficult moments in our lives, anticipating such a future reminds us of God’s promise for all the joy that is yet to come.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Putting It Together” (p. 34): Post the three sheets of newsprint used in the “Getting Started” activities from sessions 1, 2, and 3.

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Thinking Forward and Looking Back” (p. 34): Obtain the *Practice Joy* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 1 Set).
- “Agape Meal” (p. 36): Prepare food for the Agape meal. This practice is similar to but not the same as the Lord’s Supper. If you want to observe the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as a closing activity for this series, consult with your pastor to receive proper permissions.
- “Practice Joy in All Times” (p. 36): Prepare a sheet of newsprint with the words “Practice Joy in All Times” across the top.

GETTING STARTED

- Newsprint from sessions 1, 2, and 3
- Markers

PUTTING IT TOGETHER C

As participants arrive, give them a marker and invite them to visit each of the sheets of newsprint from your previous sessions, posted around your space, and write down anything they can remember about each of the previous sessions on these sheets of newsprint. This may include a Scripture verse, discussion topics, or major take-aways.

Once everyone in your group has arrived and had a chance to look over each of the sheets of newsprint, gather as a group and review what they recall. Begin with session 1, and see if the group can remember any other important moments from previous sessions. Explain that, in this final session, your group will bring all of these concepts together to understand how practicing joy can offer hope in God's promises for the future.

- Bibles or copies of Philippians 4:4–6

SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER QC

Provide each participant with a Bible or a copy of the Scripture text. Have everyone take turns reading Philippians 4:4–6 one word at a time. After reading, pray this prayer or one of your choosing:

God, we give thanks for the ways we have learned to see joy in your creation, understand your mercy toward us, and the way you bless others. Today we ask that you help us see how all these things cultivate joy in our lives that can offer us hope in times when joy is hard to find.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Internet-connected device

PRACTICING JOY IN GOD'S PROMISE C T

Show the YouTube movie “Fred Rogers: Look for the Helpers” (bit.ly/FMFredRogers, :57). Invite youth to form small groups of three. Ask participants to look at the newsprint summaries you created in the “Putting It Together” activity and process together using the following questions:

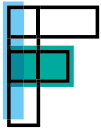
- ➔ How does this quotation from Fred Rogers embody what we have been learning about God's joy?
- ➔ How does the image of helpers in the midst of tragedy lead us to savor God's presence, rejoice in God's mercy to us and others, and offer hope for the future?

After groups have had some time to discuss, gather together as a large group and ask for representatives of each group to share their insights.

- *Practice Joy* infographic poster

THINKING FORWARD AND LOOKING BACK C

Gather at the *Practice Joy* infographic poster to discuss the current session's focus and review past discussions. Invite youth to focus on the images and texts that relate to the theme, “Practice Joy in All Times,” and ask them to imagine what this session will explore.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

PAUL IN PHILIPPI

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Throughout the four sessions of this series the group has used today's Scripture passage, Philippians 4:4–6, as part of the opening ritual. Have a volunteer read this passage aloud one more time and invite participants to revisit Paul's message to "Rejoice in the Lord always!" Then, ask youth to imagine where Paul was or what he was doing when he wrote these words. Have them draw a picture of what they think might have inspired Paul at this moment. Once they have finished, have participants share their drawings. Ask the group to note any similarities among the illustrations. Are the scenes uplifting? Inspiring?

Inform youth that Paul actually wrote this letter while he was in prison. At the time of his writing, Paul did not know whether he would live through this experience. Discuss the following questions together:

- ➔ How does the knowledge that Paul wrote the words "Rejoice in the Lord always!" while in prison change our understanding of this passage?
- ➔ Why do you think Paul was able to rejoice even when he found himself in terrible circumstances?

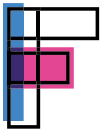
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- Bibles
 - Paper
 - Colored pencils or markers

EMPTY TOMB

QC C

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and share with participants that John 20:11–18 is often read at Easter. In this passage, we find Mary weeping after Jesus' crucifixion. However, in the midst of her struggle, she encounters the risen Jesus, and the entire tone of the passage changes. Have participants find a comfortable spot on their own where they can read through the version provided on the Resource Page and answer the questions provided. Once everyone has had time to respond, bring everyone together and ask for volunteers to share their responses.

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- Bibles
 - Copies of Resource Page 1



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

NEWS OF HOPE

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While Paul's story about finding joy in God's promises even during his time in prison may seem like an ancient tale, it is in fact a story that we can still find in the news today. Show the YouTube clip "Anthony Ray Hinton Exonerated after 30 Years on Death Row" (bit.ly/FMExonerated, 5:34). Encourage youth to pay close attention to how Hinton talks about the role of *joy* in his horrific experience of being unjustly imprisoned. After you have watched the video, discuss the following questions as a group:

- ➔ How was Hinton able to find joy, even before he was freed from prison?
- ➔ What does Hinton have to say about bitterness, hatred, and faith?
- ➔ What lessons can we take away from Hinton's experience of finding joy in the promises of God?

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- Internet-connected device



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Bibles
- Magazines and/or newspapers
- Scissors
- Glue
- Paper

COLLAGE OF JOY

A C

Have participants open their Bibles to Philippians 4:4–6. Form pairs and invite youth to work together to find words and images in the magazines and newspapers provided that they can use to create a collage that reflects what this passage means to them. They may choose images that bring them joy or images that represent the struggles that God’s joy has helped them overcome. When everyone has had time to work on their collages, ask for volunteers to share the images, words, and symbols they have chosen.

- A simple meal or snack for your Agape meal (bread, crackers, donuts, juice, water, fruit)
- Copies of Resource Page 2

AGAPE MEAL

AT C X

Distribute copies of Resource Page 2 and share the concept of an Agape meal with your group. Ask for four volunteers to serve as readers of the liturgy as you share the meal together. When you have finished, process together using the following questions:



Be mindful of any food allergies participants may have.

- ➔ How do we find joy in practices like eating meals together?
- ➔ Why do you think Jesus chose as teaching opportunities the times the disciples gathered around tables to share food and drink?
- ➔ How is an Agape meal like communion? How is it different?



FOLLOWING JESUS

- Newsprint
- Markers

PRACTICE JOY IN ALL TIMES

C CT

Return to the three sheets of newsprint from “Putting It Together” at the beginning of the session. Post the fourth sheet titled “Practice Joy in All Times.” Ask for volunteers to name the most memorable lessons from today’s session and have a volunteer write these on the newsprint. Revisiting all four sheets, ask each participant to name one idea or concept that has been most meaningful to them about the practice of joy in these four sessions. Have the same volunteer write these choices on the newsprint as well. Close by praying the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, we pray that as we leave this space today you would continue to help each of us practice joy. Remind us to pause and savor your creation and your presence in our lives. Help us to celebrate your mercies toward us and our neighbors. Help us to remember your promises when we are struggling—may they bring us joy, always. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

<p style="text-align: center;">Jesus Appears to Mary John 20:11–18 (Common English Bible)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">What is Mary feeling at each moment in the story?</p>
<p>¹¹Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Example: sadness, fear</p>
<p>¹²She saw two angels dressed in white, seated where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and one at the foot. ¹³The angels asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”</p>	
<p>She replied, “They have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where they’ve put him.” ¹⁴As soon as she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn’t know it was Jesus.</p>	
<p>¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.”</p>	
<p>¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabbouni” (which means <i>Teacher</i>).</p>	
<p>¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Don’t hold on to me, for I haven’t yet gone up to my Father. Go to my brothers and sisters and tell them, ‘I’m going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”</p>	
<p>¹⁸Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, “I’ve seen the Lord.” Then she told them what he said to her.</p>	

Questions for Reflection:

- ➔ Have you ever been in a situation where you felt the way Mary did in this story?
- ➔ How does Jesus remind Mary of God’s promise in this story? How do we see her find joy in this promise?
- ➔ How might God’s promise offer us a reason to rejoice even when we are in the midst of grief and fear?

Agape Meal

Introduction

An Agape meal is a Christian fellowship meal that recalls the meals Jesus shared with disciples during his ministry, expressing the *koinonia* (community, sharing, fellowship) enjoyed by the family of Christ. It is not the same as Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper.

The Agape meal has often been held on occasions when the celebration of the Lord's Supper would be inappropriate: where there is no one present authorized to administer the sacrament, when persons of different denominations are present who do not feel free to take Holy Communion together, when there is a desire for a more informal and spontaneous sharing than the communion ritual, or at a full meal or some other setting where it would be difficult to adapt the Lord's Supper.¹

Liturgy for Your Agape Meal:

Reader 1: "O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who take refuge in him."—Psalm 34:8

Reader 2: God's Spirit calls all of us together to rejoice in God's mercy to us and God's mercy toward others. When we do this, we find joy in God's promise of Christ's kingdom that is to come. As we savor this Agape meal, may it help us to remember to savor God's constant presence in our lives.

(Each participant should serve their neighbor by passing around the snacks and drinks you have provided.)

Reader 3: As we share this meal together, we are reminded of all the times Jesus shared food and drink with his disciples, calling them together and sustaining them with not just food but also the love and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Reader 4: Bless this meal we have shared and our time together. May we be strengthened as disciples of Christ, ready to share this joy as we go out into a world longing to hear good news.

All: Amen.



1. See "The Love Feast," Discipleship Ministries, The United Methodist Church, www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-love-feast.