

TRANSFORMED

BEING EVERYTHING GOD WANTS ME TO BE

"Naturally Joyful"
January 29-February 4, 2012

PRAYER: Begin with a few moments of sharing thanks and praises in prayer.

Leaders, it's your call; you may choose to incorporate more information/scriptures as time allows for your small group lesson. **Reflection:** Everyone wants to be happy. If you ask people what their number one ambition in life is, most people will say, "I just want to be happy." We have this idea that we must be happy all the time. I must act happy. I must talk happy. I must smell happy. I certainly must look happy. And if I am not happy, I must fake it... put on a mask and remember that I am supposed to be having a great time. However, always having to appear happy creates stress. There are more people faking happiness than living reality. But not everything always works out according to the way we planned it. Some days are disasters. Let's be honest about it... joy is a choice!

Enjoy this Opener: *You know it's going to be a bad day when...*

1. *You wake up face down on the pavement.*
2. *You put your bra on backwards and it fits better.*
3. *You see a "60 Minutes News Team" waiting in your office.*
4. *Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles.*
5. *Your twin sister forgets your birthday.*
6. *Your horn goes off accidentally and remains stuck as you follow a group of Hell's Angels on the freeway.*

Is it possible to stay positive in a negative world? What can we do to remain optimistic when everything is falling apart?

This is where joy comes in. **Read:** Galatians 5:22; Philippians 4:4

What is the difference between joy and happiness, and why is the former preferable to the latter? (Happiness depends on happenings. Joy is different. It goes deeper. Joy is an attitude, a choice. Joy is an inside job and is not dependent on circumstances. It is your choice to rejoice.)

As Christians we can be the most joyful people in the world. Why? Romans 5 gives us three reasons.

Read: Romans 5:1-2

Paul explains that the result of experiencing the grace of God is that "we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." So for a Christian, no situation is completely hopeless. The first reason we have for being positive is Christians have hope!

Read: Romans 5:5a It has been said that a person can live forty days without food three days without water, eight minutes without air, but not one minute without hope. We have to have hope. Researches at Cornell University studied 25,000 prisoners of war from World War II. They concluded that a person can handle almost anything if he or she has hope.

Many people think they have hope but it's not based on anything solid. It is an artificial, pump-yourself-up hope. What are some wrong things people might put their hope in? (the stock market, their good looks, a big salary, a

nice job, good family.) And why would these things be wrong? (Things that are temporary can be taken away ~ and when they disappear, so does hope.)

Christians have a reason to be joyful. We can rejoice because we rejoice in hope.

Read: Roman 12:12

Paul is talking about our hope in Christ. The hope we have in Christ is the first reason we can rejoice, even in difficult situations.

Secondly, we can have joy because God has a purpose in every situation.

Read: Romans 5:3

Why does Paul say we rejoice "in" our suffering and not "because of" our suffering? (No one is excited or happy to suffer... however, for Christians we know that suffering has a purpose behind it. Joy is not the absence of suffering, but the presence of God. That is why Paul says we can rejoice in suffering because God is always with us. And He will never leave us. God has a purpose for allowing problems. And suffering can be productive! We have a perspective that non-Christians do not have, and our perspective always determines how we react to the events around us. When we learn to rejoice "in" the problem not "for" the problem, God uses it for good in our lives.)

Do you recall a time when you went through suffering, yet God made a way or you recognized that He was leading you through the suffering for a purpose?

Christians can be joyful in tough times because they always have hope and because God's purpose is always greater than any problem.

Read: Romans 5:11

Thirdly we can be joyful in any circumstances because God is always with those who believe in Him, no matter where we are or what we are facing.

Read: Isaiah 43:2

This scripture is saying that if you are a Believer, God is with you and nothing can overwhelm you. Nothing can destroy you. The devil can't, other people can't, and God won't. NO matter what you go through in life, you will never go through it alone. That is a reason to be joyful!

Plan for Action:

Joy is like a muscle. The more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes.

Here are four exercises that will help us develop inner joy.

1. Develop that attitude of gratitude. **Read:** Thessalonians 5:18; Psalm 28:7
2. Cultivate inner joy by giving. **Read:** Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:7
3. Develop inner joy through service. **Read:** Mark 8:35; Ephesians 6:7-8
4. Share Christ with others. Luke 15:10; Romans 10:1

Joy is learning to enjoy life in spite of problems. Joy is not the absence of suffering, but the presence of God.

To view the complete teaching from the Sunday services go to www.centralcommunity.org/media

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www.CentralCommunity.org | 6100 W. Maple St. | Wichita, KS 67209 | 316.943.1800