



CALVARY
TUSCALOOSA

TEACHING PLAN
DECEMBER 16, 2018



GOD PROVIDES JOY

LUKE 1:11-17

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TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Luke 1:11-17. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: God provides joy both now and forever through Jesus Christ.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: Followers of Christ should understand the biblical definition of joy and its role in the life of the Christian.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: It was Jesus' joy to go to the cross that sinful man might be reconciled to God, Who is holy (Hebrews 12:2).

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- 1 How might an unbelieving person define joy?
- 2 According to non-believers, how can a person be a joyful, happy person?

The world's conception of joy is very different than the Christian's joy. One distinction is the fact that Christian joy isn't based on changing circumstances. Consider this account of the joy of early Christians in Rome:

*One of the marks of the early Christians was their joy in God as they lived in a hard world. According to one archaeologist, the apartment buildings of ancient Rome were so shoddily built that 'the city was constantly filled with the noise of buildings collapsing or being torn down to prevent it; and the tenants of an [apartment] lived in constant expectation of its coming down on their heads.'*¹

*That was the setting in which the Roman Christian raised their families. The classical world was not all gleaming marble and flowing white togas and sumptuous banquets. It was messy. The streets of Rome were steeped in darkness after nightfall. There was no medical care as we know it, no inoculations for children, no retirement benefits, no air-conditioning, no refrigeration. But the early Christians, living in that world, stood out because God gave them a gift from beyond that world. Overflowing acceptance through the cross, God's presence in their hearts, practical wisdom for daily life, and endless enjoyment of him in heaven— isn't that enough to make people happy? They thought so.*²

Let's look a bit closer at the biblical concept of joy.

ALTERNATE INTRODUCTION

What is the difference between joy and happiness?

What is necessary to have true joy?

If we had to sum up the Christian message in one word, this would be it: Joy! Joy encompasses concepts such as peace and hope, but goes much further. Our joy is generated by the Holy Spirit, as He causes us to see the beauty and goodness of the person and work of Christ.

People throughout history and across all cultures have pursued joy. However, worldly joy and happiness have generally been defined as good luck and favorable external circumstances.

These are two very different conceptions of joy. Let's look a bit closer at what the Bible has to say about joy.

1. Jerome Carcopino. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940.
2. Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. and R. Kent Hughes. *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners, Preaching the Word*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005.

UNDERSTANDING

Notes:

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

The world's view of joy is quite different than the biblical view of this pillar of Christian living. The Greek word for joy (*chara*) is found around 70 times in the New Testament. It refers to a feeling of gladness that is rooted in a spiritual reality. Biblical joy isn't simply the result of favorable circumstances or an elevated human emotion. Joy is a gift from God to His children. Further, rejoicing is a command for followers of Jesus.

We could say with reasonable assurance that the pursuit of joy is the undergirding for most of human activity in the world throughout history. Christians have access to true, lasting joy in Christ. But, we don't seek Christ simply as a means to get joy. If it were so, we would be treasuring the gift instead of the Giver. We would be using Jesus for the gifts He can give. It's subtle, but deadly. Pursuit of Christ yields the fruit of joy, but only when Christ remains the objective and treasure.

Let's look at what Scripture says about the role of joy in the Christian's life.

> Have a volunteer read Luke 1:11-17 and Philippians 4:4.

11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear

you a son, and you are to give him the name John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. 16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

NOTES:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

The angel told Zechariah not to be afraid and then told him that he would have joy. This statement was pregnant with meaning because Zechariah not only was going to have a son, but this son would pave the way for the One who would bring joy to all who would believe and repent.

- Why is rejoicing the only proper response for those who truly understand the gospel? What might a lack of joy indicate about one's understanding or value of the gospel?

We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord. What a wonderful command! It's true that the fallen world in which we live is replete with reasons to be worried, fearful, and disturbed. However, these negative factors are no excuse for not rejoicing. Paul told the believers in Philippi, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). The joy that Paul insisted upon isn't one that is dependent upon external circumstances but one that is firmly rooted in the Lord, based on faith in the sovereign King who is always available, even in times of trouble.

- Why is it important that this rejoicing be continual as stated by Paul in Philippians 4:4?

Notes:

It seems obvious that the commands of God should always be obeyed, but there is a difficulty in maintaining a continual spirit of joy. Are we supposed to constantly try to drum up a happy feeling, no matter what is going on around us? The flaw in this thinking is that joy is much greater than a “happy feeling,” though emotion is certainly a part of it. The command to rejoice can and should be obeyed in every circumstance. Even in adversity, conflict, and suffering, Christians are commanded to be joyful. This is possible because joy isn’t tethered to favorable circumstances, but in Christ.

- Would you say joy is something you produce in your own heart? Where does true joy come from?
- What are some ways that we all try to manufacture joy? Why do these efforts ultimately fall short?

Joy is a supernatural gift from God to His children. We are commanded to exercise joy, but we are unable to manufacture it. Joy isn’t something that we can just make happen any more than we can produce hope or peace out of thin air by the force of our wills. We are unable to produce joy, because it needs soil in which to take root. If there were something meritorious in ourselves, then maybe we could be joyful on the basis of our own selves, but this isn’t the case. Real, lasting joy for the sinner must take root in the good soil of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The joy that Paul commanded us to exercise is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Part of the Spirit's work in us, in the process of sanctification, is producing characteristics of godliness, all of which are most fully displayed in Jesus. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that stirs up true joy in Jesus for the believer.

Notes:

> Have a volunteer read Philippians 4:8.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

- According to this verse, how is the joy commanded in Philippians 4:4 produced?

The Holy Spirit produces joy in us by causing us to see the grace, truth, and beauty in Jesus. It is impossible to rejoice in the Lord without contemplating and meditating upon the Lord. So, we take concrete steps to consider and think about the gospel. This paves the way for the Holy Spirit's work to produce fruit in our lives. We preach the gospel to ourselves and meditate on the great work of the cross.

- What specific things should occupy our minds in order to rejoice?

When we truly see who Christ is and what He has done, our hearts rejoice. The Holy Spirit bears the fruit of joy by causing us to see the beauty of Christ in the truths of the gospel. When we contemplate the fact that we have been declared righteous, that Christ's very righteousness has been imputed to us, and that we have been adopted into God's family then what else is there to do than to leap with joy? God's favors of grace toward us lead to rejoicing.

APPLICATION

Notes:

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- 1 Would most people say you are a joyful person? Why or why not?
- 2 What makes you joyful? Is your joy based on favorable external conditions or something deeper?
- 3 How can you put yourself in a place to allow the Holy Spirit to generate joy in you? What does the gospel have to do with joy?

PRAY

Pray and thank God that true joy is found in Him and not just our temporary circumstances. Pray for greater joy in Jesus and a life that exhibits rejoicing in Him.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - Where do you feel in need of joy currently?
 - How does the gospel speak to this need?
- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- > The challenge to memorize Luke 1:13-14.

LUKE 1:11-17

1:11. Zechariah was visited by an angel of the Lord. This represents the heavenly council bringing God's news to God's people, revealing what God is about to do (see Gen. 16:7-11; Exod. 3:2; Num. 22:21-35; Judg. 6:21; 13:20; 1 Sam. 3; Isa. 6). Zechariah expected to see God's messenger about as much as we do. The angel stood in the holy place beside the altar where Zechariah served and prayed.

Notes:

1:12. Zechariah responded to the angel just as we would and as biblical characters usually did—with pulse-stopping fear and hair-raising terror. The thought must have entered his mind, What have I done to deserve this?

1:13. God's angel responded in words God always used to announce salvation to the prophets: Do not be afraid. Now Zechariah could listen. The angel could deliver God's message: your prayer has been heard. Which prayer? The one I am now praying for the people and the nation? Yes, in a way, but really, No! God is answering your personal prayer. The one you and Elizabeth have uttered for years, the one you think has passed you by. You will be a father. You will name your son John.

1:14. The angel gave Zechariah no time to reply. He must hear the heart of the message. This will be no ordinary son. He will be a son who delights you and brings joy to your life. Here Luke raised a theme he would repeat often as he wrote Luke and Acts. Joy, not fear, is God's desire for his people. God's work brings joy to us and lets us delight in the life he gives. A firstborn son is reason for joy for any parent. This firstborn son was special: Many will rejoice because of his birth. John's birth would inject a note of joy into world history. Reading about it should bring joy to us as we contemplate God's work in our lives.

1:15. The picture is not yet fully clear. What is so special about this promised son to parents beyond childbearing age? He will meet God's standards for greatness. One thing will set his life apart from his peers. Priests like Zechariah could not drink alcoholic drinks while serving in the temple (Lev. 10:9). John would never follow his father's footsteps into the temple, but he would take this part of their priestly life as his permanent lifestyle. In this he would be like the devoted Nazirites (Num. 6:1-21), but in other ways he would not.

Notes:

God laid out specific instructions to set the Savior's forerunner off from all other people. One thing above all would set him apart: he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. As we read Luke's writings we will notice how the Holy Spirit works with John, with Jesus, and with the early church. Luke is the Gospel of the Spirit. John was the servant of the Spirit. John would never know a minute without the Spirit, for the Spirit filled him in his mother's womb. Just as God called Jeremiah to be a prophet before he saw the light of day (Jer. 1:5), so John was set apart for God's special service before the first day of his life.

1:16. The Spirit came not for honor but for mission. John would call many people of Israel back to God. God has to begin his work of revival and renewal among people who think they already belong to him. The remainder of Luke's Gospel will feature people opposing John and Jesus—people who claim to be examples for God's people. The priest's task was to turn many people from sin (Mal. 2:6), so naturally the promised new Elijah, the Savior's forerunner, would have the same mission (Mal. 4:5-6). John could not be a missionary to the nations. Israel first had to hear God's message of repentance and conversion.

1:17. John had one major mission: to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. To do this he had

to live in God's presence, assume the role of the new Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6), and unite families in God's way of righteous living. The Savior cannot come to a people fighting and feuding and disobeying all that God has taught.

Notes:

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-8

4:4. Again Paul returns to the key theme of this letter: joy. He calls believers to rejoice at all times and repeats the call for emphasis. This includes the bad times as well as the good (compare Jas. 1:2-5). Christians should be known as joyful people. Such joy resides not in circumstances or positive attitudes toward life. Joy reigns in the heart only when Christ is Lord of life. Joy is always in the Lord.

4:5. A practical way to have joy is by exhibiting gentleness to all. This lets the church and world see that you belong to the Lord. The Greek word *epieikeus* means "yielding, gentle, kind." It includes the ability to go beyond the letter of the law in treating others, to provide something beside strict justice. It does not insist on personal rights or privileges. Christ embodied such gentleness in his dealing with all people (2 Cor. 10:1; compare 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:18). Why should we surrender personal rights for others? The Lord is near. In both time and space, God is available to us. He is not far removed in heaven but present in our hearts to hear and relate to us. His nearness also means he knows us and what we are. In time, God is near, for he is coming again. Then we will receive our rewards for living like Christ rather than like the world.

4:6. Joy replaces anxiety in life, so Paul advises the Philippians not to be anxious about anything. The cure for anxiety? Prayer! Worry and anxiety come from focusing on your circumstances such as imprisonment or persecution which Paul and the

Philippians faced. Anxiety or worry doesn't accomplish anything, but prayer does (Jas. 5:16). Jesus warned against worry which demonstrates a lack of trust in God (Matt. 6:25-34).

Notes:

4:7. The peace of God comes from prayer involving both asking God for earthly needs and thanking God for his presence and provision. The expression appears only here in the New Testament. God's peace reflects the divine character, which lives in serenity, totally separate from all anxiety and worry. Such peace is like a squad of Roman soldiers standing guard and protecting you from worry and fret. Such peace is not a dream of the human mind. The human mind cannot even comprehend this kind of peace, wholeness, and quiet confidence. Such peace protects the two organs of worry— heart and mind that produce feelings and thoughts. Such protection is real, available in Christ Jesus. Those who do not trust and commit their life to Christ have no hope for peace.

4:8. Continuing his strong imperative style, Paul suggested what should occupy our minds rather than anxiety and worry. Paul understood the influence of one's thoughts on one's life. Right thinking is the first step toward righteous living. What is right thinking? It is thinking devoted to life's higher goods and virtues. Thus Paul picked up a practice from secular writers of his day and listed a catalog of virtues that should occupy the mind. Such virtues are not limited to the Christian community but are recognized even by pagan cultures.

True is that which corresponds to reality. Anxiety comes when false ideas and unreal circumstances occupy the mind instead of truth. Ultimately, thinking on the truth is thinking on Jesus, who is the truth (John 14:6; Eph. 4:21). Noble refers to lofty, majestic, awesome things, things that lift the mind above the world's dirt and scandal. Right refers to that which is fair to all parties involved,

that which fulfills all obligations and debts. Thinking right thoughts steers one away from quarrels and dissensions to think of the needs and rights of the other party. Pure casts its net of meaning over all of life from sexual acts to noble thoughts to moral and ritual readiness for worship. Thinking on the pure leads one away from sin and shame and toward God and worship. Lovely is a rare word referring to things that attract, please, and win other people's admiration and affection. Such thoughts bring people together in peace rather than separating them in fighting and feuding. Admirable is something worthy of praise or approval, that which deserves a good reputation. Pondering ways to protect one's moral and spiritual image in the community leads away from worries about circumstances and possessions that project a different image to the community and which thinking cannot change.

Notes:

The catalog of virtues Paul sums up in two words: excellent and praiseworthy. The first encompasses what is best in every area of life, the philosophical good for which every person should strive. Here it is especially the ethical best a person can achieve. The second term refers to that which deserves human praise. The catalog of virtues thus reflects the best life a person can live and the best reputation a person can thereby achieve in the community.

Finally, in this verse, Paul gets to his point: think on these things. That, joined with prayer will relieve all anxieties and lead one to praise God and live life the way he desires.