

A Different Kind of *Christmas*

Group Discussion Guide

Thinking about cultivating joy

Have you ever felt that the Lord asked you to do something that was “beyond you”? If so, what was it?

Read Mark 3:1-5. What did Jesus command of the man with the withered hand?

Why did Jesus call him to stretch out his withered hand?

Apparently, with this seemingly impossible command came all the resources of heaven necessary for the man to not only obey the command but experience his healing. With the command came all the enablement; the man only needed to give in to the call.

Now look at Philippians 4:4 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16. How do these calls from the Lord through Paul strike you? What is the Spirit insisting we do?

What do you think it means to “rejoice in the Lord always”?

Why do we, sometimes, hold back from responding to this call? What keeps us from truly giving in to joy in Jesus?

Thinking about what this means for your joy

How would it change the way you viewed your journey with Jesus if you realized that Jesus insists that we find and taste and experience joy in our relationship with Him?

How would it change the way you walked with Jesus day by day if you realized that with every call He gives, He provides all the resources necessary to give in to that call—even the call to “rejoice in the Lord always”?



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Thinking about Joy at Christmas

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Leader's Guide for Discussion

Thinking about cultivating joy

As we explored in last week's discussion, joy is, at the core, the feeling or experience we have when we either anticipate or have what we value. The greater the value, the more the joy. When we are "enjoying" what we want, we taste joy. And that seems to be part of Jesus' understanding of how we are to pursue life with Him.

In the short parable from Matthew 13 we talked about last week, Jesus likens life with Him (life "in the kingdom of heaven") to finding "treasure" (something of great value) and doing all one can to have that treasure (which is where "joy" is tasted). The parable underscores the rightness of pursuing life with Jesus for the joy!

One of the critical things to realize in our pursuit of joy in Jesus is that joy is not to be considered optional—as if some Christians can and do have joy and for others it is a take-it-or-leave-it add-on. In the passages looked at this week, in Paul's letters (under the inspiration of the Spirit), we are commanded to "rejoice!" And that call is not a call to "act happy" but to really feel and express sincere joy in Jesus.

In beginning, by thinking about the things Jesus calls us to that are "beyond us," hopefully it will become clear that Jesus often calls us to what we are incapable of in ourselves. Without His call, we wouldn't! That is certainly the case with the man with the withered hand we look at from Mark 3:1-5. And the point? That the call to rejoice in Jesus comes with the power and resources of heaven to enable us to genuinely experience and feel joy—if we are willing to give in to the command. Remember, joy is one dimension of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Joy is part of the gift God gives; but if we resist the call and hold back from giving in to joy, we won't fully experience it.

As long as we think that experiencing joy in Jesus is optional, we will likely settle for a less than joy-filled life. Once we see that we are commanded to have joy in Jesus, we are open to the possibility that God will, by grace and through the Spirit, so work in us that we will taste joy!

How might our lives be different if we believed that this was part of Jesus' call to us? We might ask for joy, we might cultivate it when we do sense it, we might bask in the moments when we taste it . . . we might actually pursue Jesus with the thought that finding Him will result in real, heart-felt joy.



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