



unshakeable
joy!

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



real life catholic

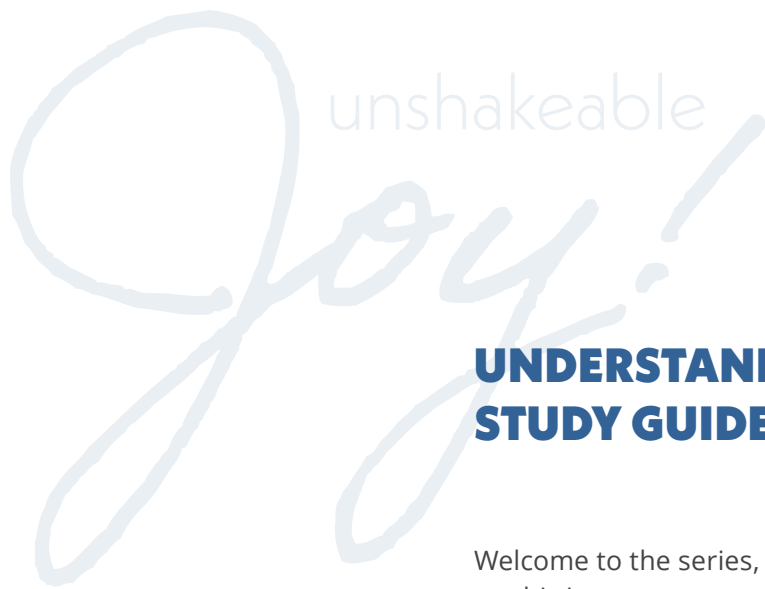


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UNDERSTANDING AND USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

Welcome to the series, *Unshakeable Joy!* We're so glad you've joined us on this journey.

Here are the nuts and bolts of this study guide:

CONNECTING TOGETHER

This reminds us to ask each other that simple question, "How're you doing?" It gives each person a chance to share life from the last time you were together, to share how you've grown as you've engaged with Unbreakable Joy each day, and is the key to building true friendship (Sirach 6:14 - 17).

MAIN THEME & AND VERSE(S)

There is a main theme and key scripture verse (or more) for each session.

SIMPLE SUMMARY

Each session includes a simple summary of the video lessons. If it works for your group, watch the last video lesson from a Session together and follow along with the outline. Look back through the outline during your discussion when it helps. The outline is not meant to be read out loud during your group; rather, it is meant to be a jog to memory to help your group have meaningful conversations. Ideally, everyone in your group will have engaged the material each day before you get together.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each session includes a few questions for group discussion. They are meant to be a guide to get the conversation started in your group - don't feel like you need to ask every question in this section! They are suggestions, not a formula. As long as you're having meaningful conversation, you're on the right track. Also, feel free to adjust the questions to fit the needs of your group, at your time.

PUTTING IT TO PRACTICE

Since we become what we repeatedly do, we must choose our habits wisely. Each session will help you close the gap between what you know and what you do.

PRAYER

At the end of each session are suggestions for your group prayer. Don't skip this: a Christian stands and falls with prayer...our minds were made for prayer, and it is a precondition for any level of holiness.



SESSION 1: THE CALL

CONNECTING TOGETHER

Be sure everyone has a chance to introduce themselves and to share a bit about their hopes for this Advent retreat. Check in on how people are really doing...and listen for how they're growing (or not) in their faith.

When people think of "joy" they think of many different things: what do you think joy is?

MAIN THEME & VERSE(S)

We're created for JOY! This session we contemplate the longing in our own hearts for joy, and the connection of that longing to God. And that connection makes sense. After all, the God who created us with a desire for joy must have something to do with the fulfillment of that desire!

1 Corinthians 2:9—*"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."*

***“God has a vision for you.
An end. A purpose. He wants
you to live a life full of His
blessings and joy.”***

John 15:11

SIMPLE SUMMARY

Finding the joy you're looking for starts with asking yourself Jesus' first question to humanity in the Gospel of John.

What are you _____?

You have to see life as _____.

Only a joy-filled view of life will give you lasting _____.

Faith is a _____ story.

Four Parts of Unshakeable Joy:

1. What you're really looking for out of life: **THE CALL**
2. Why the Christian worldview makes life so good: **THE STORY**
3. How to make that vision for life yours: **THE LIFE**
4. And the end result of all this: **UNSHAKEABLE JOY**

Form the habit of lifting your mind up to things above, and seeing your everyday life in light of the best (and truest) story ever told - so that you can have a joy that doesn't depend on a change in your circumstances, but a change in you!

*Man is more himself when
joy is the fundamental
thing in him and grief
the superficial.*

G. K. Chesterton

What does Cardinal Cantalamessa say are...

The Two Desires of the Heart:

- 1.
- 2.

The Three Levels of Greatness:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Freedom is found in the third level of greatness!

Repent: Metanoia.....Change Your Thinking! Turn (around) to the Light.

That's what the path to holiness is all about: fulfilling the deepest dreams and desires in your heart for JOY. That's also why sin isn't just about breaking a few rules, but breaking our own souls. God asks us not to sin, not for His benefit but for ours - because sin impedes the joy we long for.

***I have told you
these things so that
my joy may be in
you and your joy
may be complete.***

John 15:11

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you **really** believe you're created for a life of joy? You might go to Church all the time, but when it comes to your dreams of happiness, do you think of God? And do you care that He might have a vision and purpose for YOU?
2. What's holding you back from leading life to the fullest? What do you see in yourself that resists really trying?
3. How satisfied do you imagine you'd be if - at the end of your life - you look back and realize that through all the adversity, all the troubles, you lived life fully, full of joy? How do you imagine that'd impact those around you?

PUTTING IT TO PRACTICE

Resist a joy-draining faith that's based on a belief that God only loves us conditionally. This coming week, challenge yourself to:

- Rest for one minute each day in silence, thinking of God looking at you with great love.
- Pray, receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- Stop labeling yourself in light of sins and failures, but in light of God's love for you. If this is a particular challenge for you, consider going through Chris' I AM__ program to help you rewrite your name and reroute your life.

Which of these Putting It To Practice challenges will be hardest to do? Why?

PRAYER

As you close in prayer, start by thanking God for what you are most grateful for today.

Then ask God to reveal to you how He is inviting you to grow in your awareness of how He fills you with His love.

Finally, ask God for the courage to examine the role joy has played or not played in your life so that you may be more open to the journey ahead.

BEFORE LEAVING

If someone was absent from the group, ask for a volunteer to call, text or email that person and let them know they were missed. We all want to know people care about us.



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SESSION 2: THE STORY

CONNECTING TOGETHER

Be sure to welcome anyone who is new to your group this week. Check in on how people are really doing...and listen for how they're growing (or not) in their faith. What has helped?

Engage the theme this session with a heart of gratitude. You'll unlock the secret to true friendship.

MAIN THEME & VERSE(S)

A frame isn't something you look at...it's something you look through. And a good frame doesn't shrink your view of reality. It expands it. That photo of a little flower at the base of the alps opens your heart and mind to something new and beautiful about the whole mountain range!

That's what the Gospel does for us. The word Gospel comes from the Old English phrase gód spel that means "good story." Not only is the message of the Gospel a good story, it's the best story ever told! And the message of the Gospel isn't something we're just supposed to look at but, like a frame, through, at all of life. It opens our hearts and minds up to the fact that life is beautiful and good, because it's a love story.

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."—1 Thessalonians 5:18.

***A God on the cross!
That is all my theology.***

Jean Lacordaire

***In a word, it is for this love
that we are all created.***

St. John of the Cross

SIMPLE SUMMARY

God is _____.

This love story is about His _____ for you.

**He who does not
love does not know
God; for God is love.**

1 John 4:8

"So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."—1 John 4:16

"Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you. This first proclamation is called 'first' not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first...because it is...the one which we must hear again and again in different ways."—Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium

**Christianity doesn't
start with telling
people what they
must do. It starts
with telling people
what God did for us.**

Cardinal Cantalamessa

You can _____ ...no matter what.

If you missed that point, you just missed the point of the cross. And if you've already started over but keep defining yourself in light of your worst sin from the past, you're missing the point of the cross too. He came to make you new.

*This faith isn't about your love for him but his love for you.
It's crucial that we get that right.*

**For God so loved
the world that
he gave his only
Son, that whoever
believes in him
should not perish
but have eternal life.**

John 3:16

One approach to God leads to spiritual _____;
the other, to a sort of spiritual _____.

The Bible reveals that your life is an “Eternal Love Story.” Imagine the freedom and joy of knowing THAT is the REAL story of your life? Imagine going through life with the inner freedom of a child who knows he or she is infinitely and unconditionally loved. How would that impact the way you experience life? That’s what God’s dream is for you.

Being Christian does not mean being one who conquers; but, being one who lets himself be _____ out of love.

That’s the model God is laying out for you and me, and it’s the only path to unshakeable and eternal joy. The strength, power, and wealth personified by the world’s heroes don’t deliver joy. The little way, the path of the meek, of the self-giving - that is the path to the joy Jesus said he came to provide.

Reasons we don’t make our lives about Jesus (but, keep Him as just a part):

- Maybe we’re afraid he’s gonna take something from us.
- Or the life he’s offering isn’t as good as our favorite sin.
- Or we feel unsafe exposing our heart to anyone.
- Or we might become religious fanatics!

The pursuit of _____ isn’t just about adding pious practices to your day.

It’s also not about submitting to _____ rules.

It’s about letting LOVE conquer you.

It’s about claiming your new name, in His light.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you suffer from the burden of perfectionism; or, can you say with the Psalmist, "You have set my heart free!" (Psalm 119)? By what frame of mind do you see yourself?

2. What is preventing you - right now, in your life - from living the path of the meek, of the self-giving, the little way of the Christian? Be honest.

What do you want to DO about that? Have you considered putting an actual plan or new habit in place to help you change?

3. Your life is a story. What's its title? Who's the author? If the world's story is the drama of a decision against God...do you have the courage to make your story a decision for Him? What does that mean for penning your autobiography?

PUTTING IT TO PRACTICE

Frame your mind with faith: *"Be transformed by the renewal of your mind"* (Romans 12:2). Allow everything you see, everything you hear... everything you observe...to be transformed by the Light of Faith.

- Spend intimate prayer with God daily.
- Challenge your perceptions: all of creation is like a mirror through which God speaks to you. Slow down. Pay attention. Listen.
- Pay special attention to those closest to you. Notice - if even for a slight moment - just how profoundly they reflect God's love. Give thanks for them.
- Pray for your enemies.
- Give thanks to God. Every day. It can be as simple as turning your mind to Him and saying: "Thank you, Lord!" Let that simple act transform your mind.
- Serve others in some specific way.

Which of these Putting It To Practice challenges will be hardest to do? Why?

PRAYER

As you close in prayer, start by thanking God for the people in your life who reveal the Gospel to you.

Then ask God to reveal to you how He is inviting you to frame your mindset - and your day-to-day life - with faith.

Finally, ask God for the courage to take the first steps in giving everything you are back to God and sharing your faith with those in your life.

BEFORE LEAVING

If someone was absent from the group, ask for a volunteer to call, text or email that person and let them know they were missed. We all want to know people care about us.



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SESSION 3: THE LIFE (NOW WHAT?)

CONNECTING TOGETHER

Be sure to welcome anyone who is new to your group this week. Check in on how people are really doing...and listen for how they're growing (or not) in their faith. What has helped?

Share an experience since the last session that demonstrates true friendship to you.

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11

MAIN THEME & VERSE(S)

You didn't earn your physical body. But you can grow in health or neglect that body through your own choices. The same is true about the life of God in you.

God shares his very life with us. It's a free gift. And that gift is eternal joy that begins now. But, while you can't earn it, you can grow in it or neglect it...living an amazing life so often comes down to making times for those simple things you know you need to do to live the life you were made for.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.”—Matthew 6: 25-33

SIMPLE SUMMARY

To be holy is to be fully _____.

Holiness isn't a duty but a _____.
God is holy. To be holy is to be united to God, to Jesus.

The two ways to be united to Christ are _____
and _____.

When it comes to faith...do you ask WHY, or do you ask
_____?

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation."
—Romans 5: 8 - 11

Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.

Mother Teresa

“Any relationship includes rules, rituals, reasons, and responsibilities. But if you reduce the relationship to those things, all you’re left with is a resentment-inspiring burden.”

Challenge yourself to pray this way daily:

The ACTS Prayer

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

The path of Christian purification entails leaving sin, but it isn’t just about leaving sin. It’s about making room for God, room for Love, and room for unshakable joy! Sin is all the “stuff” that gets in the way of that.

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

C.S. Lewis

“Love your enemies”—Matthew 5:44. This is perhaps the most extreme thing Jesus commanded us to do. But if you want to REALLY prepare the way for God in your heart, and to experience the joy of total interior freedom, you have to let go of ALL resentment.

We all go through life with an awareness of “something bigger” that frames our minds. It’s how we see life itself. And it shapes how we perceive the experiences that life consists of.

The Christian life offers a better way to frame your life than any other.

How does one begin to live a life that is outward-focused?

1. Give God the reigns. Start every day by offering your life to God. “God, I give you my work, prayers, joys, and sacrifices of this day. I give you my hopes, dreams, and priorities today. Take it all, and lead me where you will.”
2. Worship. Don’t just pray, remembering your needs. Spend time in praise, remembering the greatness of God and your ultimate destination in Him.
3. Be intentional about doing the small acts of service you have to do every day anyway...but doing them with great love.

***I am the Way, and
the Truth, and
the Life...***

John 14:6

If you want “next level” joy, stop dreaming about what you can get and start dreaming about what you can give.

Jesus himself said: *‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’*—Acts 20:35. And, as it turns out (by His design!), living for others—for others’ sake—has a byproduct of joy!

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

- Feed the hungry.
- Visit the imprisoned.
- Bury the dead.
- Clothe the naked.
- Care for the sick.
- Shelter the homeless.
- Offer drink to the thirsty.

SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

- Instruct the ignorant.
- Counsel the doubtful.
- Admonish the sinner.
- Bear wrongs patiently.
- Forgive offenses willingly.
- Comfort the sorrowful.
- Pray for the living and the dead.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A great thinker once said that the most perfect record is the one that cannot be recognized as a record when it's playing. This is true of people too. We are most perfect not when we aim for our own perfection, but when we aim at the music we want to play through us. What's holding back the music from playing through you?
2. What holds you back from making a complete decision for Love - from giving yourself entirely to Christ? What do YOU seek (John 1:38)?
3. Do you measure your life in Christ by the things you do, or by God in you? Be real in your answer, and ask yourself, "Why?"

PUTTING IT TO PRACTICE

This week, think of a way to be intentional about the service you give others. Make a plan for the service. Put it in your calendar. It could be small secret sacrifices you do for members of your family, or a formal partnership with a service organization. Either way, it's about getting outside of yourself and looking at how the gifts God has given you are for the benefit of others. Pivot to making service rather than success your goal.

Pray the A.C.T.S. way daily.

Which of these Putting It To Practice challenges will be hardest to do? Why?

PRAYER

As you close in prayer, start by thanking God for the people in your life that bring you joy.

Then ask God to reveal to you how He is inviting you to grow in your friendships. Where are you being called to be vulnerable?

Finally, ask God for the courage to take the first steps in pursuing intentional, Godly friendships based on your journey towards holiness.

BEFORE LEAVING

If someone was absent from the group, ask for a volunteer to call, text or email that person and let them know they were missed. We all want to know people care about us.



SESSION 4: UNSHAKEABLE JOY (THE RESULT)

CONNECTING TOGETHER

Be sure to welcome anyone who is new to your group this week. Check in on how people are really doing...and listen for how they're growing (or not) in their faith. What has helped?

Last week you were asked to think of a way to be intentional about the service you give others...to make a plan for the service. Did you do it? If you did: was it something you'd do again? If you didn't, why not?

MAIN THEME & VERSE(S)

The Joy of the Lord goes deeper than passing feelings. It's a spiritual disposition that can sustain us even in the midst of sadness, tragedy, and life's disappointments.

Love and joy are indivisible. They were created for one another. It is God's joy to give.

And it's not something we experience when all of life's battles are won. It's the strength we need to enter those battles in the first place.

As Nehemiah said to the people of God before they headed home to rebuild their fallen city: ***"The Joy of the Lord MUST BE your strength"*** —Nehemiah 8:10.

SIMPLE SUMMARY

Sure, he could have stayed hidden behind the veil of space and time—an undefinable force—but Love wants _____ intimacy with us.

He could have come riding on the clouds, lightning bolts and all, one of the Zeus-like gods we'd always dreamt up. But he didn't come to wow us. Love comes to _____ us.

He didn't come looking for our submission. He came looking for our hearts. Love comes to us as a _____ ...as plain as bread.

Joy doesn't depend on a change in your circumstances, it's dependent on a change in _____.

The choppy surface of the sea doesn't disturb an anchor. Hurricanes and tidal waves and persecutions and job loss and cancer and (insert your waves here) can't rob your hope when it's anchored in the Love that is God. The tattered pages of your life can't rob your sense of story when they're bound by the Gospel. And that's why all the things life throws at us can make us sad on the natural level, but they can't rob the deeper, spiritual joy in a Christian soul.

The tomb at Calvary has become the cradle of the new humanity on its journey to true happiness.

John Paul II

Jesus promised, *“No one will take away your joy”*—John 16:22.
Because the world can’t take what it didn’t give you.

The “Sermon on the Mount” marks out the map of this journey.

The eight Beatitudes are the road signs that show the way.

It is an uphill path...but he has walked it before us.

It is by walking with Christ that we can achieve joy, true joy!

*These things I
have spoken to
you, that my joy
may be in you,
and that your joy
may be full.*

John 15:11

*He who follows
me will not walk in
darkness.*

John 8:12

The 8 Beatitudes Jesus laid out as the way to begin living radically in the joy-inducing Love Story of the Kingdom of God are:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
- Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.
- Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.
- Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
- Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
- Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 5:3-12

Unshakeable joy:

- Transcends passing moods and circumstances.
- You can experience even alongside sadness.
- Comes from having your eyes on heaven even when your feet are in the mud!
- Nothing in this world can take from you.
- Never ends.

It is, in a word, the joy of holiness.

“Joy isn’t the absence of pain, it’s the presence of Jesus.”—Fr. Joseph Hersch

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Ask yourself: why me? Did you think of negative things? Or did you think of your blessings? Think of your blessings now: does doing so encourage a sense of gratitude in you? That's a clue to joy!
2. Knowing God has to be our first priority. What's standing in the way of making that a reality in your life? What one way will help you live the only Way?
3. Think back to what seems to have spoken to you the most during this program. What's the one main thing YOU need to remember to help you really live the life you were made for?

PUTTING IT TO PRACTICE

Get a new journal and in the front cover write down the practical ways you are going to make JOY a priority in your daily life this next year. (Yes, men, you too.) Write them down not just in a vague way, but using the tools you learned from your time together to get at concrete actions to take every day to ensure JOY radiates from you.

Write down specific answers to these questions:

1. What will your prayer life look like? You can experience the joy of the Lord through prayer.
2. Who will you surround yourself with? You can experience the fact of joy through loving - and being loved by - others.
3. What will your attitude be toward service? You can experience the joy of the Lord by bringing it in glad service to others.
4. How will you frequent the sacraments? You will experience the joy of the Lord in His presence.

SHARE these goals with an accountability partner and hold each other accountable through this next year by revisiting these goals frequently. And do that...with JOY!

PRAYER

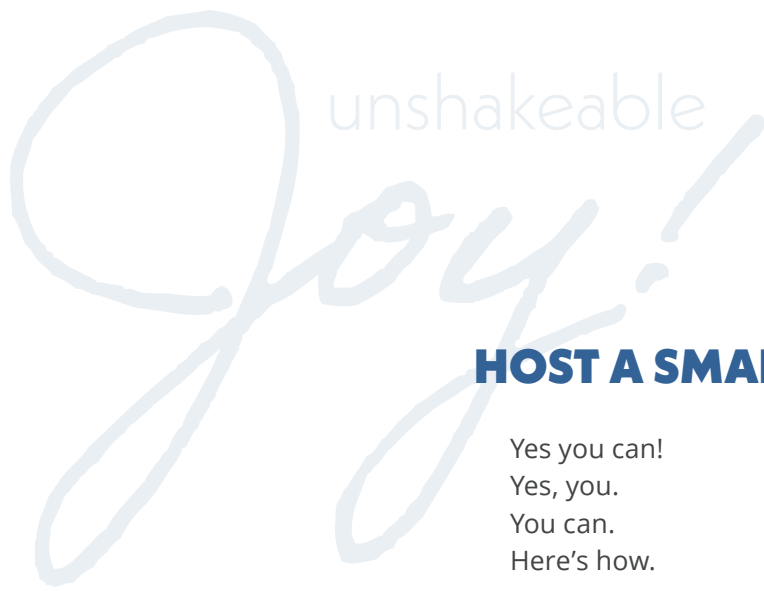
As you close in prayer, start by thanking God for what you are most grateful for today (and try to be specific).

Then ask God to give you the strength to abandon yourself into His hands...to anchor your hope in the ocean of His mercy...and to accept all that He reveals to you, for you.

Finally, ask God for the courage to share the gift of your best self with the world!

BEFORE LEAVING

If someone was absent from the group...call, text or email that person to let them know they were missed. And to let them know you look forward to connecting.



HOST A SMALL GROUP ON YOUR OWN

Yes you can!
Yes, you.
You can.
Here's how.

***There is no ONE
right way to do
small groups.***

INVITE AND INCLUDE OTHERS

Just invite someone (or, some several one's), and include them. Seems simple right? Well, it is. Life isn't meant to be lived alone. That's why the following is meant to help you invite and include others in your journey to Unshakeable Joy: after all shouldn't others live that kind of joy too!?

So why not be a host of a small group yourself? To be a host in this sense is simple: just invite some others to go on this journey with you. You don't have to be any kind of expert. You just have to be willing. And have the courage to put yourself out there for your God.

***Small groups are
not just beneficial,
they're biblical. From
Moses (Exodus 18:13-
26), to the Apostles
(Acts 2:42), meeting
together in small
groups encourages
one another in the
faith (Hebrews 10:25).***

The Cheetos Principle to Invitation

STEP 1: Go to the grocery store and buy some Spicy Cheetos.

STEP 2: Call a friend/neighbor/co-worker and say: "Hey. I've got some Spicy Cheetos. You should come over and have some with me."...don't worry, they'll come, because...Spicy Cheetos!

STEP 3: Eat some Spicy Cheetos (be sure to share some with your friend/neighbor/co-worker), and then - at some point - say, "Hey brother/sister, not only are these Spicy Cheetos really good; but, how ARE you? As in, really...how're you doing?"

STEP 4: Listen - really listen - and love on your friend.

STEP 5: Then DO this small group program! We've written it for you!

The point is...inviting someone to spend time with you is simple. Don't over-complicate it!

If you have two friends, you can start a group (Matthew 18:20). You don't need training. There are no formal requirements. You just need to lean into a certain generosity of spirit, and to have a heart for others.

Some Ways to Invite Others

- Shoot them a text.
- Send an email.
- Leave a brief message on the Facebook account.
- Send an e-card.
- Call them!
- Or, actually invite them face-to-face!

FEAR NOT

Fear keeps a lot of people from starting faith communities, and from sharing their faith in general. Don't let your fear mug your aspirations! *Cast your fear on Christ and let Him transform it* (1 Peter 5:7). This is your ONE life: live it well. Live it boldly!

There are three main worldly fears that keep people from saying YES to Christ's call in their lives and they are in direct opposition to the three evangelical counsels.

- Fear of not getting their needs met...what do you need to give up for the Kingdom? (*poverty*)
- Fear of not belonging..who do we really want to belong to any way? (*chastity*)
- Fear of losing control...do we trust God's will for our lives? (*obedience*)

All other fears can be drawn back to these three. The Devil even tried to tempt Christ with these in the desert (Matthew 4: 1-11). Don't let the devil keep you down! If you are feeling that tug to be in a small group, ask the Holy Spirit to flood your heart with courage and invite a friend.

FEARS AROUND STARTING, HOSTING OR JOINING A SMALL GROUP

- ***My house isn't clean enough...***neither are the homes of your friends, believe me.
- ***I don't have the right gifts...***share the responsibilities, talk to a few friends and work together to share the load.
- ***What if no one says yes?...***Keep asking, they might be overwhelmed with life. Ask if there is something you can do to make life easier.
- ***I don't know how to manage conversations...***You don't need to! Who wants a "managed" conversation anyway? God desires us to be real with one another: He'll equip you...if you let Him.
- ***I don't know enough...***Who does? It's OK not to know. Your role isn't to provide answers, to educate, or even to furnish information...answers to questions can always be looked up. While no question is off-limits, your role is better understood as someone who wants to help facilitate faith-filled conversations. Trust God enough to let Him guide the conversation.
- ***I don't live like others in my parish...***People didn't all live the same in the early Church. When we love each other, we don't judge each other by the size or style of our homes. St. Paul tells us that he learned the secret of being hungry and well-fed. We too can learn to live according to our circumstances with humility (Phil 4:12)!



CREATING THE EXPERIENCE

ROOM SETUP

Everything in your room communicates a tone and feeling. Try to arrange things so people feel comfortable, and are able to look at one another face-to-face when talking. Food and something to drink are always welcome. We suggest re-discovering the joys of a pot-luck! The more you can make a room feel like home for someone else, the more comfortable your group will be and the more likely others will feel happy there.

HOW TO BE...AND BEHAVE

One of the primary reasons a person wants to engage in a small group discussion is to be heard...and that means meaningful conversation. So try to be mindful of that. Here are some ways to help:

1. When you get started, open each session with getting a sense from others about how they're really doing. Check in with them. Greet people at the door with a smile to set the tone right away. Be friendly and be yourself...you have permission!

2. Don't do all the talking...help facilitate the conversation rather than dominate it. Cast a vision for a conversation, don't kill it. Your role isn't to educate or furnish information. That is talking to people. Strive to talk with them instead. Give them the space to be heard. Consider writing down things you want to share on your own paper and holding the thought. Give conversation...time.

Have enough love in you to really ask and listen to the answers to three simple questions: "What's going on in your life? What's God doing in your life? How can I pray for you?"

3. **Be comfortable with silence and uncertainty.** Meaningful conversations require some level of silence: it's where thought often occurs (not everyone is an exterior processor of their thoughts), and it's the space in which the thunder of God's still, small voice of hope is very often heard (1 Kings 19 1-18).

4. **Be a good listener.** A good listener is quick to listen (James 1:19). A good listener is an active listener. A good listener listens with his or her eyes as well ears. *"If you love to listen, you will receive; and if you pay attention, you will be wise"* (Sirach 6:33).

5. **Encourage everyone to be involved in the conversation by listening well and involving others** (but don't insist everyone must speak!). If your group is too big for everyone to be involved in the conversation, break it up into multiple groups. And let people wander between groups as their interests dictate.

6. **Don't rush!** The point is not to get through any certain volume of material. The point is to take the time together to let God reveal the purpose of a conversation (which very often results in people finding their life's purpose in His plan).

7. **Pray.** Pray before anyone arrives so you can welcome them well. Pray before anyone leaves so you leave in His presence. And pray between meetings for one another's intentions. Prayer is not the place to hold back.

Don't be shy about asking people to share their conversion stories (just give them some notice!). While not everyone will feel they have one, they are a powerful reminder of God's grace in our lives.

Remember—you don't need to have all the answers to host this study. Hosting is about helping others have helpful conversations about faith. If that happens, it's a win!

HAVE A COMMUNICATION PLAN

Help people continue the experience by checking-in with the people in your group throughout the time between when you get together.

1. Send a text message to everyone in your group. Let them know you're praying for them. Just because.
2. Send a text message to anyone who couldn't make it. Let them know you missed them! And let them know you look forward to seeing them next time.
3. Send a text to at least one person in your group and ask them what you can pray about for them.
4. Post a message on your social media page. Post a message on their social media page. Let folks know how much you enjoy their company! And how much you look forward to spending more time with them.
5. Email your group every week (if you meet weekly), with a reminder of when your small group is next meeting, and where, and any other information they may need (e.g., "You all bring something else to eat, I've got the Spicy Cheetos!").

A NOTE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALL GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

We don't think we can say it better than Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas did in their book *Activate*:

Most of the people...are looking for social relationships. They want to meet casual friends. They are looking for some people to hang out with, because they know instinctively that within that group of people they're likely to meet someone they want to get personal with and invite into their inner circle. Then, from that inner circle, they can decide who they want to be in intimate relationship with. Instead of being forced into contrived familiarity, they just want to be given an opportunity to connect with new people so that deeper relationships can develop naturally.

Allow casual friendships to develop without feeling a need to force intimacy.

Most (parish) leaders have made two critical mistakes in trying to help people connect. First, we have undersold the importance of basic friendships and social relationships to overall spiritual health. Second, we have oversold the importance of personal and intimate relationships—and we have tried to force our small group members into such relationships, even though groups are naturally structured to accommodate social, not personal or intimate, connections. People simply do not get personal or intimate in groups of eight to fifteen people. They socialize in groups of eight to fifteen people. When we try to force more intimate relationships in our groups, we scare and alienate many potential group members, especially men. No man is going to sign up for a group if he thinks he is going to have to let people he doesn't know that well into his personal business. But men (and women) will sign up for groups where they can meet new friends, connect with God, and hang out socially.



unshakeable

ANSWER KEY

SESSION ONE: THE CALL

(Simple Summary- Page 4)

What are you looking for?

You have to see life as something amazing.

Only a joy-filled view of life will give you lasting joy.

Faith is a love story.

(Simple Summary- Page 5)

The Two Desires of the Heart are...

1. Happiness
2. Success and Self Realization

The Three Levels of Greatness are...

1. Body and Material Level: Rich, Beautiful, Strong
2. Intelligence: Literature, Arts, Science
3. Holiness/Sanctity: Jesus is the summit!

SESSION TWO: THE STORY

(Simple Summary- Page 9)

God is Love.

This love story is about His love for you.

You can start over...no matter what.

(Simple Summary- Page 10)

One approach to God leads to spiritual freedom; the other, to a sort of spiritual misery.

Being Christian does not mean being one who conquers; but, being one who lets himself be conquered out of love.

(Simple Summary- Page 11)

The pursuit of holiness isn't just about adding pious practices to your day.

It's also not about submitting to arbitrary rules.

SESSION THREE: THE LIFE (NOW WHAT?)

(Simple Summary- Page 15)

To be holy is to be fully alive.

Holiness isn't a duty but a gift.

The two ways to be united to Christ are the sacraments and faith.

When it comes to faith...do you ask WHY, or do you ask WHO?

(Simple Summary- Page 16)

THE ACTS PRAYER

-Adoration

-Confession

-Thanksgiving

-Supplication

SESSION FOUR: UNSHAKEABLE JOY (THE RESULT)

(Simple Summary- Page 21)

Love wants intimacy with us.

Love comes to woo us.

Love comes to us as a servant...as plain as bread.

Joy doesn't depend on a change in your circumstances, it's dependent on a change in you.

NOTES

NOTES

UNSHAKEABLE JOY PARTICIPANT ROSTER

NAME	EMAIL	PHONE