

Living Joy Small Group Guide



Discussion questions are offered beneath each chapter. In place of them, you might also simply want to use the following as a guide for each week's discussion.

Have everyone share:

- 1.** How they are doing in general.
- 2.** How they did with the challenge last week.
- 3.** What struck or changed them as they read that week's chapter in preparation for the group.
- 4.** How they might need prayer in living joy in the week ahead.

Then wrap by up praying for each person and the need they gave voice to.

If there's left over time or you need more help facilitating discussion, dive into the questions offered for each week.

There's no right or wrong way to do this. The goal is simply to build holy, supportive, life-giving friendships!



Introduction/Got Joy?

“Metanoia, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

- Matthew 3:2

Discussion Questions

1. On a scale of 1-10 how joyful would you say you are?
2. What do you hope to get from this book?
3. What’s the difference between spiritual joy and passing happiness?
4. If anything, what “thing” (a person, a dream coming to pass, money, etc.) do you look to a little too much for happiness?
5. What is one time you experienced or witnessed spiritual joy that ran deeper than passing circumstances?

Challenge

1. EXAMINE

Really ask yourself, what changeable things do you have a disordered attachment to for your happiness? (What things leave you thinking, “I’m happy if…” or “I’ll be joyful when…”)

2. SURRENDER

Pray out loud, Lord, I surrender my need for X to make me happy to you. You are the source of all joy. Help me to mean that prayer. Help me to find more stability and a lasting peace and joy in you and in the way you call me to be, regardless of people or circumstances in my life.

Pray the Litany of Trust ([Clickable Link Here](#))

3. CONTEMPLATE

Read Ephesians or Philippians, maybe just a chapter a day, and think about the joy Paul had while writing this in prison in the direst circumstances of his life.

Take It To Prayer

Place yourself in the presence of Jesus. He stands before you and says, “Change your thinking!” What is it about the way you think that he wants you to change?

Rule 1: Give Thanks

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

- 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you were overwhelmed with gratitude.
2. St. Paul gives us a powerful example of gratitude in the face of suffering. When things in your life are difficult, do you find gratitude difficult? How would it help in those times to give thanks anyway?
3. Do you devote prayer time to giving thanks in a disciplined way? Or was Chris' challenge in Rule 1 new for you?
4. Solanus Casey said, “Be sure, if the enemy of our souls is pleased at anything in us it is ingratitude—of whatever kind.” Where, in your life, are you failing at gratitude?
5. How would more gratitude help and heal difficult relationships in your life?

Challenge

1. Count your “grateful” each morning. (Start this week by writing down as many as you can think of.)
2. Let trials “trigger” your gratitude. Start practicing this: Every time you feel annoyed pray in praise and thanksgiving.
3. Say thank you often. Start the practice with 5 times a day. (Try this: Maybe put a pen mark on each finger till they're all tipped with ink!)

Take It To Prayer

Write a list out of as many things you can think of that you're grateful for. Spend a moment on each one thanking God, and then texting a few people on that list to express gratitude for the gift they are.

Rule 2: Practice Silence

“See how nature—trees, flowers, grass—grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence. . . . We need silence to be able to touch souls.”

- St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a time when you have experienced profound silence. Describe how you felt.
2. Do you regularly spend time in silence—no music, podcasts, or even social media? Could you make a plan for how to cultivate more silence in your schedule?
3. What is your go to media “addiction”? Do you generally feel happier afterwards?
4. Chesterton said the world is dry, not for lack of wonders, but for lack of wonder. What things stir up wonder in you? Do you spend enough time in awe and wonder of things like family, friends, prayer, nature?
5. How would more silence improve your life?

Challenge

1. Stop. Breathe. Think. Take a minute to simply pay attention to the sights and sounds around you.
2. Put limits on your screen time. When will you stop looking at your screens every day? Or what screen limits will you give yourself on Sunday?
3. Be bored. In those moments when you might glance at your phone in a line at the store, just stand there.
4. Take a walk.

Take It To Prayer

Sit for a few moments this week in silence, praying the Jesus prayer. Breathe in “Jesus” and breathe out “mercy.”

Rule 3: Love Yourself

“The love with which a man loves himself is the form and root of friendship. For if we have friendship with others it is because we do unto them as we do unto ourselves.”

- St. Thomas Aquinas

Discussion Questions

1. The prerequisite of loving others is loving yourself. What does it mean to love yourself? How are you doing in that department?
2. What is an experience you had that lied to you about your dignity and worth?
3. What is an experience you had that revealed your dignity to you?
4. If you could put one name to it, which lie do you tell yourself the most? What single word/label would most effectively counteract that lie?
5. Are you taking care of your basic human needs? In the areas of rest, cleanliness, exercise, nutrition, how are you doing?

Challenge

1. Speak truth. Identify your primary lie. Renounce it out loud. Identify the truth you most need to hear that counteracts the lie. Look in the mirror and tell yourself!
2. Reflect on what ideals you have for yourself. Get intentional about rejecting them!
3. Make self-care a priority and do one concrete thing to treat yourself!

Take It To Prayer

Spend some time reflecting on Luke 5:1–11. Put yourself in Simon’s shoes. How would the gaze of Jesus feel? Is it uncomfortable? Do you welcome it?

Rule 4: Have Fun

“A sad nun is a bad nun ... I am more afraid of one unhappy sister than a crowd of evil spirits ... What would happen if we hid what little sense of humor we had? Let each of us humbly use this to cheer others.”

- St. Theresa of Avila

Discussion Questions

1. When did you start to lose the sense of “fun” you had as a child?
2. What’s the most fun you ever had?
3. Look over your weekly schedule. Is it all work and commitments? Do you have time for spontaneity?
4. Who helps you have fun? Who keeps you from taking yourself too seriously? (You can help any relationship out by talking about that, you know?!)
5. How can you bring joy to others by introducing fun into their life?

Challenge

1. Be silly! (Try telling a stupid joke.)
2. Do some quality fun with intentionality, and by that, I mean, make sure the goal is FUN. (If it’s not, you might find yourself way too stressed out after that round of golf or hour fishing!) It could be a favorite hobby or favorite book—one with no practical or work-related utility.
3. Find a way to “waste time” having fun with people you love.

Take It To Prayer

Place the things that weigh heaviest on your heart aside and ask God to help you find light and hope even in the midst of stress.

Rule 5: Engage Your Body in the Battle for Joy

“Remember that bodily exercise, when it is well ordered, as I have said, is also prayer by means of which you can please God our Lord.”

- St. Ignatius of Loyola

Discussion Questions

1. What posture helps you reflect your dignity as a child of God?
2. Why is it important to care for your body? (Forgive the obvious question...but sometimes it helps to talk about obvious things!)
3. Are your dignity and identity reflected in how you carry yourself? Why or why not?
4. How do you feel after you exercise? How do you incorporate exercise into your daily routine? If not, when and where will you start to?
5. Beyond exercise, what other ways can you engage your body in the battle for joy?

Challenge

1. Practice sitting and standing LIKE A BOSS.
2. Go ahead. Smile more.
3. Set when and where you plan to work out and just show up!
4. Do an examination of kitchen. Come up with 3 foods you need to get rid of.
5. Try to sleep more and reflect on how that impacts your overall mood.

Take It To Prayer

Spend some time thanking God for the gift of your body. Ask him if there are ways you can better care for it.

Rule 6: Make Friends

“Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter: whoever finds one has found a treasure.”

- Sirach 6:14

Discussion Questions

1. Think about the root system of Sequoias—how interlocking roots among trees makes them incredibly tall and strong. What is your friendship root system like? Do you put enough effort into friendships that make you stronger as a person?
2. Are you honest enough with your friends?
3. What examples of friendship do we see within the life of Christ?
4. Recall a powerful experience of friendship that brought you joy.
5. How do you challenge your own friends to be stronger, holier, and happier?

Challenge

1. Put in hard time. What do you need to do to invest in a friendship? Do it!
2. Be intimate. When you connect with a friend, be intentional about revealing your heart, and asking how he or she *really* is doing.
3. Be merciful, and let things go easily. Who do you need to forgive? Do it!

Take It To Prayer

Spend time in prayer thinking of Jesus' words “you are my friends” (John 15:14). Imagine what it was like for Jesus' apostles to simply hang out with him...and think about how he wants that relationship with YOU. Then spend a moment reflecting on how you can be more like the friend he was to his apostles—with all their imperfections.

Rule 7: Rest

“If God ‘rested and was refreshed’ on the seventh day, man too ought to ‘rest’ and should let others, especially the poor, ‘be refreshed.’ The sabbath brings everyday work to a halt and provides a respite.”

- Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 2172

Discussion Questions

1. Are you like the lamplighter in *The Little Prince*? If so, what can you do to change your work to enable you to rest more?
2. Look over your weekly routine. Is there a good balance between work, prayer, time for family and friends, and rest?
3. How do you honor the Sabbath? Do you?
4. Describe a time when you experienced the “eternal now”?
5. Name one leisurely—not lazy—thing you can do this week.

Challenge

1. Wage war on work, one day, every week. Truly practice the sabbath this week.
2. Savor moments. Stop and smell the roses in some small way each day.
3. Don’t rest lazily. Think of something you need to do to dive deep into quality recreation.

Take It To Prayer

Reflect on whether you’ve been experiencing true rest each week. Practice resting in the Lord.

Rule 8: Serve

“Never see a need without trying to do something about it.”

- St. Mary Mackillop

Discussion Questions

1. Make an honest assessment of how you determine happiness. Is it a little to “me” centered or “money/success” centered?
2. Think of a time when you made service a priority. What impact did it have on you and the people around you?
3. Share some simple, close to home ways that you can serve others.
4. What does dying to yourself mean? How is it different than being a doormat?
5. Rather than making your personal happiness your mission, who is one person you can really focus on making happier this week?

Challenge

1. Claim it. Out loud. Start each day by saying “Serviam! (I will serve!)”
2. Don’t just sit there. Do something. Find one doable, realistic act of service this week and commit to doing it.
3. Give money away.

Take It To Prayer

In John 1:38 Jesus says, “What do you seek?” Spend some time in prayer reflecting on his question and your answer.

Rule 9: Frame Your Mind with Faith

“I am coming to the living faith and conviction that—from God’s point of view—there is no (mere) chance and that the whole of my life, down to every detail, has been mapped out in God’s divine providence and makes complete and perfect sense in God’s all-seeing eyes.”

- St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you see your life through the frame of faith, or primarily through another “frame”? (Another way to ask this is: If your life were a story, what would the title be? Do you recognize that God is the author? Do you trust that the story is ultimately GOOD?)
2. Take stock of what beliefs play into your decision making. Do these beliefs lead you to joy, or do they take it away?
3. What role does faith play in your day? What faith practices are part of your daily routine?
4. Have you witnessed a friend or family member who was totally dedicated to Jesus and filled with faith? What was their life like? What was it like to be with them? How does faith make their personality and life *better*?
5. What can you do to grow in faith?

Challenge

1. Reject toxic faith. To begin, reflect on ways your faith might be tainted by an understanding of God as stern, angry, or a father with “performance based” love.
2. Then, spend a minute (literally, 60 seconds) in silence thinking about Jesus looking at you from the cross with great love. Do that 60 seconds in prayer daily, if you can— simply receiving love.
3. Make a decision for Love. Quiet your heart and, out loud, pray the prayer in Rule 9 entitled *Prayer to Receive Jesus into Your Life in a New and Deeper Way* (page 175).
4. Practice your faith. Find some devotional to increase your faith and do it!

Take It To Prayer

Take some time to pray with St. Paul’s words: “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

Jesus *is* the Journey

“Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort me and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.”

- St. Patrick

Discussion Questions

1. What is your biggest takeaway from Living Joy?
2. What rule for living joy do you foresee being the biggest challenge, moving forward?
3. Ultimately, the 9 rules for joy create space for the One who *is* our Joy. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and a sign of God’s presence. Share an experience of joy you’ve had in your relationship with Jesus.
4. God created you for eternal joy, and he wants you to think about that. (I know that because that’s why he revealed it! Thinking about heaven helps us get there, and increases our joy in the journey.) What do you think heaven will be like?
5. “The joy of the Lord must be your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10) was a rallying cry when the city of God was in ruins. How can God use your joy to rebuild and strengthen your personal life/dreams/family/Church/world?