

J O Y

Choosing

By Heather R. Elizabeth Fowler

Dear Sisters in Christ,

As with most of the Bible studies I write, I need this. I love the idea that not one of the studies I've written was my idea. A song, a pastor's message, a single word from a friend; the Holy Spirit has used many different avenues to tell me about my next study. That process is one of my biggest joys.

This study, *Choosing Joy*, came about while I was leading another study, *The Greatest Moment in History*. We were studying Holy Week: Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. I came upon Hebrews 12:2, "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (NIV) I sat there in awe. How could Jesus have joy in the cross? It occurred to me that Jesus didn't have joy in the cross as we sometimes see joy. He was able to leap over the cross and have joy in what came after the cross, as well as, what came because of the cross. He was able to have joy in obeying His Father in Heaven, in His return home, and in the love He was able to show creation. As I read, and comprehended the beauty of joy, I instantly knew two things. One, I wanted that kind of joy. Two, this was the topic of my next study.

After choosing (or being given) the topic of the study, Jesus usually floods my heart with ideas. I get as excited as a child with a new toy. I have learned, however, that I need to take a deep breath and study first. After studying, and consulting with my pastor, Luke McKinnon, I came up with the name for the study: *Choosing Joy*. That "-ing" at the end of "choose" is important. We are given joy as a gift from the Holy Spirit, but it is our privilege and responsibility to choose to grab onto it every day. I wish I could choose joy once and then it always be there in abundant supply, but it doesn't work that way. Choosing joy is a constant decision throughout my day and my life. It isn't an emotion that depends on circumstances, it is a gift we choose to grasp onto. So, join me in choosing joy. This study will help us all see how we can rise above our circumstances to seeing, experiencing, enjoying and choosing joy.

So, are you ready? This is a six week study divided into three parts with five different activities to complete each week. Each activity will only take

approximately fifteen minutes to finish. Part 1 is “What is joy?” Part 2 is “The origins of joy.” Part 3 is “Maintaining our grasp on joy.” Most days will include a joy moment. This will help us all see the joy that surrounds us. It will enable us to start seeing the joy that has always been there.

This study can be done all alone: between you, your Savior and a great cup of coffee. I would urge you, however, to get a group of friends and study the Word together. It is awesome to hear different perspectives on the same verse. The groups I’ve been blessed to be a part of have become precious friends and sisters in my life.

Let’s get started. It is my prayer that at the end of this study we will all have a better understanding of not only what joy is, but where it comes from, and how to maintain that grasp. Let’s dive into the Word together and tap into the joy of which our precious Savior gave us an endless supply.

With all my love,

Heather

Part 1:
What is
Joy?

Week 1

Day 1

What is joy?

I am looking forward to writing this study because I have a problem maintaining my grasp on joy. Just last night, I knew my son had an online quiz in a class he is working hard at in college. I texted him and asked how it was going and he texted back, “terrible.” Immediately I went into worry mode. This is a mode Jesus and I have been working on me releasing, but last night it was there. I know this is not a place Jesus wants me to stay so I instantly started giving it to Him. In the privacy of my den, I got on my knees and prayed. I prayed for my son and his quiz, but I also asked forgiveness for my ever-present worry and asked for help leaping over this moment with faith. I instantly got a picture of my sweet son graduating from college in his cap and gown. What a sweet gift from my Savior. I want to make sure you understand - happiness and joy often coexist together, but joy can exist without happiness. Last night, I had joy in what God is accomplishing with my son, but I would be lying if I said I had happiness. I was able to go on, get things done and relax on my Sunday evening. Happiness was not a part of my night, but joy was - absolutely. (And Jesus probably had a chuckle on my behalf because Collin got a 93% on the quiz.)

Let’s dive into Scripture and see what it tells us about joy. Joy comes from the Lord. Psalm 16:11 says, “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” (NIV) To be clear, it says “You [God] will fill me with joy.” The question remains; what is the true definition? How does joy compare to happiness?

I have searched several Christian dictionaries and found many different definitions, but in order to be exact, I prefer to use Scripture to define it. Galatians 5:22-23 says that joy is a fruit of the spirit. The fruit of an apple tree is an apple. That means that an apple comes from, and is of, the apple tree. Therefore, if the Fruit of the Spirit is joy, then joy can be defined as, “of God, coming from the Holy Spirit.”

How does that compare to happiness? Joyous people can experience happiness. The key to godly joy is that it is internal and eternal. It is not dependent on circumstances. Joyous people can be at peace without being happy. Hebrews 12:2 explains that, because of the joy that Jesus had in His heart, He was able to look past what He was going to have to endure on the cross and anticipate the joy of being with, and obeying, His Heavenly Father.

Furthermore, James 1:2-4 explains that joy leads to perseverance, which helps us want for nothing. In other words, joy helps us to be perfectly content with what we are given in life. Happiness comes from outside stimuli. Happiness in itself is not wrong, but shouldn't be confused with godly joy. Psalm 63:3-7 explains that God will give us many blessings including His love and help in times of difficulty. Happiness is found in the blessings we receive. In effect, it is external.

To put it in a modern day context, if you got a raise at work, a believer and a non-believer would both be happy. For the believer, who has the gift of Holy Spirit, he understands where the gift comes from, so he would have happiness and joy. The non-believer would be happy, but it would not be eternal. The non-believer would be proud of their hard work and motivated to keep working hard in hopes of the next raise, instead of having true joy for the gift in front of him given by Jesus.

Friends, let's dig deep and find the joy in our lives. The next few questions will help you dig into Scripture and your life in order to start seeing and grasping joy, despite your circumstances.

1. In Hebrews 12:2, it says that "in the joy set before Him [Jesus], He endured the cross." Read the verse and allow yourself to sit with it for a moment. Explore and record in the space below, what was "set before Him?" This will help us start to understand how Jesus could find joy and how, through Him, we can leap over the troubled times in our hearts and still experience joy in the moment.

Personal reflection: Is there a difficult event in your life that happened in the past or is currently happening, in which you would like to see, "the joy set before you"? Explain here:

In this first day of the first week of Bible study, record one thing that you can count as joy from the difficult event above.

2. Read John 16:22-24. We tend to use the words, “in Jesus’ name we pray, amen,” as almost a tag line to prayer, but they mean so much more. These words mean that we are coming before God on the merits of Jesus, and as His ambassador. It means that on our own we don’t have merit and as His Ambassadors we are coming before the Father for the purpose of the one who sent us. So if I come to God the Father in Jesus’ name, what does it mean when John 16:24 says, “Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete”? (NIV)

Week 1
Day 2
Observations

Read John 15:10-17. Joy is so connected to love, and these verses go into this connection. Read and start to pull out and ponder words, context, or visual references that the Holy Spirit places on your heart.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 1

Day 3

SOAP

Read and SOAP Romans 12:12

Scripture: (Re-write the Scripture in the space below.)

Observation: (After reading the text, which detail(s) stands out to you?)

Application: (Using the observations you found, how can you apply them to your life?)

Prayer: (Using your application above, write your prayer.)

Today's JOY moment:

Week 1

Day 4

Reading and Alone Time with our Savior

Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

As we discussed, Jesus was able to look past the horror of the cross and have joy in His heart, because of what was “set before Him”. Allow yourself to be still with the Lord and ask Him to reveal to you a time you have been through, or are going through that was difficult. Then ask Him to show you the joy that came from it. If you are currently going through a difficult time, ask Jesus to help you leap over the trouble to see the joy set before you.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 1
Day 5
Building Joy

After prayer and consideration of what you learned in the last five days, use the space below to write one thing you will do this week to help you build joy.

Today's JOY moment:

Part 2:
The Origins
of Joy

Week 2

Day 1

Joy is a Gift from God

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness,
Gentleness, Self-control

Most of us probably recognize the words above as the Fruit of the Spirit. Let's look at these famous verses in Galatians.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

What first occurred to me as I read this verse is what it doesn't say. It is the "fruit of the Spirit," not the "fruits of the Spirit." Take your time and let that idea wash over you. I have to admit that I have always looked at this verse as a fruit tree with various different fruit to choose from. If I was hungry for an apple, I chose an apple from the tree, but if a peach looked better, I chose a peach. That isn't what this verse is saying. This tree, given to us by the Holy Spirit, is full of one fruit, which has nine characteristics. We receive all nine characteristics of the Spirit's fruit, all at once and in full measure, when we become believers. When we need joy, it is already there waiting for us, and so is love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

If we look at this verse in context, Paul is writing this letter to the church in Galatia. The people of this church were battling the idea of living through obedience to the law, versus living through the power of faith in Jesus Christ. As people of the Jewish faith, they lived trying to obey the laws of the Old Testament. As new believers, they were having difficulty distinguishing between their previous beliefs and their new beliefs in grace by faith. In essence, they were slaves to the law. Paul is explaining in the book of Galatians

that, as a believer, living a life of faith in Jesus Christ is to live a life of freedom in the Holy Spirit as children of the Living God. Therefore, these nine character traits are not new moral laws that need to be kept, they are the result of a life lived through faith in Jesus and a heart that is being led by the Holy Spirit.

So what does this have to do with your life? To be frank, I think a lot of us tend to work at living the Christian life we think we are supposed to live. We try to have peace in the face of adversity, we try to show love when we would rather be self-serving, and we try to have joy when we are sad. This type of intentional living is fine, when done with the intention of aligning ourselves with Jesus. But what if I told you that the Spirit has already given us the character traits we need, within ourselves, for when a problem exists, when a decision needs to be made, or when we need to see things through the eyes of faith. Joy is among the traits of the fruit of the Spirit; as such, all we have to do to experience joy is to start seeing it in our life.

We recently had the opportunity to see the joy in our life when my son spilled hot oil down his leg. As we sat in the emergency room waiting to see the burn unit doctor, we decided to plug into the supply of joy we've been given by the Holy Spirit. We discussed all of the reasons we could, and should, count this as joy. We decided that the oil went down his leg instead of other parts of his body that would have caused more problems. We reflected upon how special it was that our pastor had visited and prayed with us as we waited in the hospital room. We saw the waiting room full of friends and family supporting us. We were blessed to have a friend, who is a nurse, help us get the initial help we needed. The above reasons were only the beginning of the joy moments we experienced that day. By the time he was released and we got home, we were filled with joy. Days later, in reflecting upon that day, the most awesome part of the entire event was realizing that not only was our joy tank full that night, so was our love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The blessings that night were unexplainable, yet overwhelming. In our family, we call that a "God thing."

This week, it is my hope that we will all see the gift joy is, not only to the church of Galatia, but also to us today.

1. Read Matthew 7:15-17 and Matthew 21:18-19. Both of these verses refer to a tree without good fruit. Looking back at the Galatians verse above, list the opposite of each fruit of the Spirit characteristic to list what bad fruit looks like. I believe that everyone reading this study wants to possess good fruit, but sometimes it helps to see what the opposite looks like to truly get the idea of what we do want to possess. I've given you an example for "love."

Love	<u>hate</u>	Joy	_____
Peace	_____	Patience	_____
Kindness	_____	Goodness	_____
Faithfulness	_____	Gentleness	_____

Self-Control _____

2. Personal opinion question: I've heard it said that every characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit builds upon itself to bring into view the next characteristic. For example, when we have, and show, love to others, we have joy. When joy is an intentional part of our life, we have peace...etc. Do you agree or disagree?

Think through a time when love was a part of your life in a big way. Did the trickle effect occur? Explain.

Week 2

Day 2

Observations

In the introduction, we discussed joy being one of the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. Read John 15:1-9. These verses speak of Jesus being the vine and God the Father being the vinedresser. With the discovery of joy being one characteristic of fruit, read these verses in John. Record and contrast the two passages. Before you are finished with the exercise, I would like you to bring verse two of this passage to the Lord and ask Him which branches He is taking away and which branches He is pruning. This might be uncomfortable, but keep in mind that He does this so that we can bear more fruit.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 2

Day 3

SOAP

Read Psalms 4:5-8

SOAP Psalms 4:7

Scripture: (Re-write the Scripture in the space below.)

Observation: (After reading the text, which detail(s) stands out to you?)

Application: (Using the observations you found, how can you apply them to your life?)

Prayer: (Using your application above, write your prayer.)

Today's JOY moment:

Week 2

Day 4

Alone Time with our Savior

Prayerfully consider a recent time in your life when things didn't seem to go according to your plan. Let our living Redeemer show you those things in the experience that can be considered joy. Don't speed through this process. Let the joy moments in the event wash over you and fill you with His precious presence. Now reflect upon the other eight characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. Which ones can you feel in your heart?

Today's JOY moment:

Week 2
Day 5
Building Joy

After prayer and consideration of what you learned in the last five days, use the space below to write one thing you will do this week to help you build joy.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 3

Day 1

Joy Builds Upon the Power of God

I'll ask you the same question that was asked of me a few years ago. If you are truly honest, why do you love God? When I was asked that question, I started thinking of the countless things He has done for me from the moment I was born. The next question hit me deep in my soul. Now take away all of the things He has done for you and tell me, why do you love God? I sat there dumbfounded. This question had never occurred to me. I sat there for a while, contemplating my answer, and then put it on a shelf. I would figure that out later. Only a few days later, God put a situation in my life that would require me to answer that very question.

My son suffers from a chronic illness. We were given the opportunity to see a famed doctor in Phoenix, and were all very excited for the opportunity to see this extremely well educated man. We traveled a day to get to Phoenix and were prepared to stay for a week for tests he might want to perform. That morning, our hopes and expectations were high. He was nice, yet matter-of-fact, and asked us many questions, "Do you know that 50,000 people per year die for no apparent reason from this condition? Do you know that your son cannot be a typical college student? He will always have to take precautions that others don't." He informed us of details of our son's illness that we didn't know before, which was, at times, difficult to hear, but very informative. After about an hour and a half, the famed doctor leaned back, interlaced his fingers behind his head and said, "Well, I say let's just keep doing what you are doing. I don't see that any changes need to be made. I'll see you in one year."

I feel like I sat in my chair for a month trying to grapple with what had just happened. We left feeling quite disappointed. "That was it?" I then had one of "those" conversations with God. "Why did You have us come all this way for that experience? I don't get it, God." Then the question from a few days prior filled my heart, "Why do you love Me?" Nailed. I was nailed. My human heart was shown clearly in that moment. I was placing my love for my Heavenly Dad in the things He did for me, not in Who He is. The rest of our short trip was filled with awesome discussions regarding this lesson. As a family, we discussed who our God is, and how we can love Him more completely. We discussed His justice, His truth, His compassion, His love, and yes, His power.

We can find complete joy in our Heavenly Father's power. When we have one of those moments when our joy tank is low, we must first remind ourselves about where our joy begins. It

begins through the power of God. This power raised our Savior from the tomb. This power helped Peter walk on water, and this power is accomplishing amazing things in our lives as children of the Most High. This power is the source of a never-ending supply of joy. When we start relying on that power, we build trust in God, and that trust relieves us of the worry and fear that builds upon itself. The more we trust, the less worry has room in our hearts. With complete trust in Jesus, worry is gone and joy is complete.

1. I want you to reflect on the story of Joseph. It is one of my favorite stories in the Bible that exemplifies the power of God. There are times when I need to know that the power of God works all things for my good (Romans 8:28). When I need to see my God in action, this story helps me grasp joy in a profound way. It shows me, no matter how often I read it, that God is in control, that He loves me, and that He will create a good thing in my life. It is this knowledge that brings me hope, comfort, trust, and great joy. If you are familiar with the story of Joseph in the Old Testament, read Genesis 45:1-8. If you want to read the entire story, read Genesis 37-50. If you have never read the whole story, I highly recommend taking the time to do so.

What are some things that went wrong in Joseph's life?

What are some things that went well in Joseph's life?

What did God turn around for good that Joseph's brother's meant for evil?

In Joseph's lifetime, what did God accomplish through this whole situation?

If you play it out to modern day, what did the power of God accomplish through the selfish and horrific act perpetrated by Joseph's brothers?

Personal reflection: If the power of God can save Egypt, and create and protect the nation of Israel, even today, how can this bring joy to you?

Week 3

Day 2

Observations

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9. These verses explain a great deal about how the power of God is inexplicably and completely linked to our joy.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 3

Day 3

SOAP

Read and SOAP Isaiah 9:3

Scripture: (Re-write the Scripture in the space below.)

Observation: (After reading the text, which detail(s) stands out to you?)

Application: (Using the observations you found, how can you apply them to your life?)

Prayer: (Using your application above, write your prayer.)

Today's JOY moment:

Week 3

Day 4

Alone Time with our Savior

Spend time alone with your Savior. Be still and hear your precious Lord, as He floods your mind and your heart with the moments in which He displayed His power in your life. Write a small description of at least five different times that you can lock into your heart and remember, so that when your joy tank is low you can grasp onto these stories, find hope, and build joy for the future.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Today's JOY moment:

Week 3
Day 5
Building Joy

After prayer and consideration of what you learned in the last five days, use the space below to write one thing you will do this week to help you build joy.

Today's JOY moment:

Part 3: Grasping Joy

Week 4

Day 1

Joy Matures as We Align with God

I've often heard the word "freedom" in conjunction with our relationship with Jesus and our life as Christians, but what does this really mean? You see, I came to the party a little later in life. I became a Christian at the age of twenty-three. As a child and teenager, I circled around the faith. I (thought I) understood the faith but just didn't "buy" into it. As a new believer, I chose not to hide behind my immaturity, but embrace it. I felt the confidence to ask the basic questions. Almost three decades later, I am still fascinated by the words that slip off my tongue, that I have to remind myself to stop and study. One of those words is "freedom."

After taking the time to work through the word, I've decided upon a definition. Freedom is living the life you are meant to live. With this freedom comes insurmountable joy. This is the kind of freedom that, despite your circumstances, no one can take away. So, what is the life we were meant to live? Easy, we were created for relationship with the living God. From the Garden of Eden to this very day, we exist for intimacy with the Creator of the Universe.

How do we gain the intimacy that leads to freedom? We align ourselves with our Savior. The definition of align is to bring into cooperation with a particular group or cause. Underneath that definition, there is another definition dealing with radio frequencies. At first I skipped over it, but think this through; isn't this what our relationship to Christ is supposed to look like?

"To adjust two or more components of an electronic circuit to improve the response over a frequency band."

I see myself as a little girl playing outside with a transistor radio. I turn on the radio and then very carefully adjust the knobs in order to clearly hear the station I am searching for. That radio station, just like our Lord, is coming in clear and loud, but we need to adjust our thinking and our heart to clearly hear Him. Oh the joy when we do! This week we will learn to do just that.

Now we need to bring freedom, alignment, and joy together. The first step into freedom comes when you give your heart to Christ and ask Him to lead you through life. That decision sometimes seems complicated, but far from it. You are simply waking up to your own depravity and realizing

that you can't successfully accomplish life on your own. When Jesus died on the cross and rose three days later, the war between good and evil was over, yet there are still battles to be fought. When you wave the white flag of surrender, your Savior scoops you up into His arms, and loves on you for the rest of your life. You are free from the horrific effects of sin, you are free from trying to be perfect, and you are free to live life with the joy our living Lord intended.

Finally, putting ourselves in alignment with Jesus is a life-long journey. The further I travel down this road, the better I understand my Redeemer. The better I understand Him, the more I trust Him, and the more I trust Him, the more control I hand Him. I am living a more free life than I have ever lived, and there is one reason for that. I have grown to understand Him, to know His voice, and to trust Him with my life. I know that my Savior, Jesus, works for [my] good... who [has] been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28, NIV). Freedom and joy come when I trust Him with a trip to the emergency room, when I trust Him with financial problems, and when I trust Him with the lives of those I love.

So when the joy Jesus freely gives, seems out of reach, spend time with Him, study His word, talk to Him, and be still at the foot of His throne. The time you spend with Him will help you adjust the knobs of the joy He gives, so that your heart can be calm and joyful, even when your life seems like a tornado has hit. Now *THAT*, my sister, is freedom, and *THAT* is joy!

1. Read James 1:2-4. Verse 2 says that we should consider the troubles in our lives to be joy. Why? What do trials help us through?

Write James 1:2-4 in the space below:

These verses build upon each other. Let's look at our Lord's building blocks.

Have joy when you experience _____

Trials do what to our faith? _____

Tests of our faith builds what? _____

Endurance, when it has its full effect, does what to our faith? _____

This mature and complete faith helps us lack what? _____

So, if you go from the first of these verses to the last, they culminate in being able to fill in this blank: Joy helps us lack _____.

Finally, I would like you to do a short word study. Central in this verse is the word endurance. Look up the word in a concordance, find the definition, and consider the times that you have had endurance in your faith. How did it mature your faith?

How did this joy in your life (seen in our examination of James 1:2-4) begin with learning about and getting closer to God?

Week 4

Day 2

Observations

Read John 4:7-42. This is the story of the woman at the well. I think this story has everything we have been talking about: freedom, alignment, and joy. Many times I give you fewer verses and we dig deeply into them. Today, I would like you to read this story, as if for the first time. Let your heart be there for the conversation between Jesus and the woman. Find her joy.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 4

Day 3

SOAP

Read and SOAP Romans 15:13.

Scripture: (Re-write the Scripture in the space below.)

Observation: (After reading the text, which detail(s) stands out to you?)

Application: (Using the observations you found, how can you apply them to your life?)

Prayer: (Using your application above, write your prayer.)

Today's JOY moment:

Week 4

Day 4

Reading and Alone Time with our Savior

Read Colossians 1:9-14. This passage talks about living life filled with the knowledge and wisdom that Jesus provides through our life-long journey with Him. I think so often that our life's faith journey is a series of steps. When we go through something difficult and learn from it, we are able to take a small step up. Every difficulty we face, and learn through, gives us a new perspective of our faith. Every step of faith teaches us more about our Heavenly Dad. Through each experience, through every step, our faith and our trust grow. Today, I would like you to look down the staircase of the faith journey you have taken with Jesus. Go down to one of the bottom steps and compare it to the most recent step you've taken. How much have you learned between that first difficulty as a Christian and now? When you were on that first step, would you have been able to handle the step you just took? This evidence of your faith should bring you great joy. Talk to Jesus about the joy He is wanting for your life and record the answer He gives.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 4
Day 5
Building Joy

Our day five activity for weeks four, five, and six will look a little different. I want you to walk away from this study with a firm idea of what to do whenever your joy tank gets low and when you need help grasping onto the joy that the Holy Spirit provides. After prayer and consideration of what you learned in the last five days, use the space below to write one thing you will do to align yourself with God and gain the joy He wants you to have.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 5

Day 1

Joy is Built upon Praise

I've heard it said that you can't praise Jesus and think about something else at the same time. Well, unfortunately, I'm proof that maybe you can. While singing toward the end of church recently I realized that I was singing every word of the song, yet I was also thinking about what I had to finish at home later that day. What I will conclude from the situation is that I was singing, but maybe I wasn't praising. When you truly praise Jesus, it takes over every drop of your being. Pure, hand-up, heart-open, and cup-runneeth-over type praise is the essence of joy.

There are a couple of songs on Christian radio right now that bring me to that type of joy almost instantly. One of those songs is "Joy" by For King and Country. In one hour, I heard the song on the radio, found the music video, sent the link of the video to my daughter, and played it for myself as I was walking through Target. I literally danced out of that store. I'm sure there were people staring, but I was experiencing the joy that changes hearts and brightens lives.

When your joy tank is low, start telling Jesus what you are thankful for in your life, roll down the windows in your car, turn on Christian music, turn up the volume on the radio and sing. Sing like Jesus is right next to you. Sing so loud that the car next to you starts turning their radio dial looking for your song. Sing with so much joy that you are dancing in your seat. Sing as if your life depends on it. Because, you know what? Life will have moments of happiness, but life without joy isn't life at all.

When you are finished, I can almost guarantee you, your joy tank will be in a different place than it was before you started. In Luke 10:38-42, Jesus tells Martha, "'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'" (NIV) Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet and love, learn from, and praise Him. When you do the same, the Spirit will not deny you the joy that He intends for you. Joy is waiting; praise Him!

1. Read 1 Chronicles 16:8-9 and Romans 12:1. Both of these verses tell us what praise consists of. Record below what you discover.

2. From Romans 12:1 above, how do you give your body as a living sacrifice? Feel free to look at other Bible verses to help you develop your answer.

3. It is easy to praise God for the many things He *does* for us. It is trickier to praise God for who He *is*. Read Psalm 99:1-9. This passage gives us many reasons why we can, and should, worship our creator for who He is.

Personal reflection: from the list you developed above, what is one reason to worship God that connects with you? Why?

Week 5

Day 2

Observations

Read Exodus 15:1-22. Most of these verses are a song that was written and sung after the Israelites escape from Egypt. In your observations today I would like you to reflect upon the power of God. Write down the things that God did for the Israelites and the joy they must have felt. Then I would like you to reflect upon the joy that begins to build within you, because of the power of God that you see in these verses.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 5

Day 3

SOAP

Read Psalm 30:1-12.

SOAP: Psalm 30:11-12.

Scripture: (Re-write the scripture in the space below.)

Observation: (After reading the text, which detail(s) stands out to you?)

Application: (Using the observations you found, how can you apply them to your life?)

Prayer: (Using your application above, write your prayer.)

Today's JOY moment:

Week 5

Day 4

Reading and Alone time with our Savior

Today, I'm going to ask that your alone time with Jesus be a little different. It is my firm belief that singing praises to the Lord changes us. It brings energy where there was tiredness, and joy where there was despondency. First, read Isaiah 35:10. Praise changes our chemical make-up. Next, I want you to record exactly how you are feeling right now. It is important to include Jesus in every step of this process. Have Him help you put your mood into words. Then comes the fun part; find a praise song and sing it. If you listen to Christian music all of the time, and know exactly where you are going and what you are doing, great. If you don't, I'll tell you my favorites. There are two songs out right now that instantly lift me up and they are both about joy (go figure). One of them is "Joy" by the group, For King and Country. The other song is "Old Church Choir," by Zach Williams. Play the song, find the lyrics and sing along. There are music videos for many awesome Christian songs on the internet. Find a few and SING. When you are finished, record your mood. I guarantee that it is different than when you began.

My current mood:

The songs I chose:

My mood after praising Jesus:

Today's JOY moment:

Week 5

Day 5

Building Joy

Our day five activity for this week will look a little different. I want you to walk away from this study with a firm idea of what to do whenever your joy tank gets low, and when you need help grasping onto the joy the Holy Spirit provides. After prayer and consideration of what you learned in the last five days, use the space below to write one thing you will do to praise God and gain the joy that He wants you to have.

Today's JOY moment:

Week 6

Day 1

Joy is a Choice

You may not realize it, but perhaps you are at a fork in the road. One path takes you down the road of worldly happiness, and the other path takes you down a road that is filled with God-given joy. There are many people who understand Jesus' teachings and agree with the ideal, but have not taken the ultimate step from *agreer* to *believer*. At the end of this lesson, I am going to ask you to make a decision regarding which path you are going to take, or have taken.

The first choice follows the path the world paves. It is dependent upon our circumstances, and even more so on our feelings. I was a business/marketing major in college. I was taught that the price you can charge for an item was based upon the demand for that item. The higher the demand, the more you can charge for the item. The factor that drives up demand is a perceived need for the product. Advertising, therefore, is designed to make you think you need a certain piece of merchandise, so that more people want it. The company can charge more for products in high demand, and therefore, the company becomes financially successful. Just like the price of a product is driven by our perceived need for it, our happiness can be equally driven by our perceived need of the things that this world offers. This might be a great thing for our free enterprise democracy, but it can be disastrous to our God-given joy.

The other path is that of a sold-out believer in Christ. Being a sold-out believer in Jesus involves your heartfelt desire to follow God's path to the point that your life, time, priorities, money, commitments, and how you treat people, shows Jesus to others. Notice I did not say that you must show perfection in these areas in order to be sold-out. You must, however, have the heartfelt desire to do so. There are many people, who are well-meaning believers in Jesus who have not resolved to become sold-out. This resolution is what brings the kind of joy that is beyond circumstances, feelings, or the world.

I don't think there is a soul reading this who would say, "I want the worldly happiness path please". It is my belief that those participating in this study love Jesus, and have a strong desire to follow Him through life. What I am saying is that most of us Christians, myself included, have difficulty not allowing circumstances to dictate our joy. It is possible that you have not before considered that joy is something we can choose with intentionality. This study, and specifically this chapter, brings what you have learned to a point of decision. This isn't a problem to solve, it is a

decision to resolve. To solve a dilemma is to bring it to completion. However, to resolve is to make a determined decision on a course of action for future impact. This, my friend, is the crux of this entire Bible study. This week, I am asking you to resolve to become sold-out for Jesus, and hence, find the well-spring of joy that God designed for you. Joy is a day-to-day, situation-to-situation, and minute-by-minute choice. This fork in the road is your opportunity to finally, completely, and intentionally choose the path of God-given joy.

So what is your choice? If living as a sold-out believer in Christ sounds intimidating, and you want to stay where you are, I understand your trepidation. Yet allow me a moment to explain what choosing the other path could look like.

I decided a while back to make the switch I'm asking you to make. My resolution was precipitated by me being sick and tired of worrying. Even when things were going right, I was worried about the next thing that could go wrong, and what I would do to solve that problem. By doing this, I thought I was being a good, proactive wife and mother. What it did was rob me of years of joy and intimacy with my Savior.

When I resolved to become sold-out, I adopted a phrase, "God's got this". That phrase, and the resolution it accompanied, changed my faith, and my life. I started simply. I took notes in church. That simple move transformed me from a hearer of the Word, to a student who sat at the feet of Jesus. Then, there was a trickle effect. I started worshipping Jesus with my whole heart. Whether it was during my quiet time, or singing praise songs, my heart opened to Jesus like no other time in my life. I went on my first international mission, and I started writing Bible studies. The small changes I made at the beginning changed, gently yet dramatically, my desires to be His desires for me.

I am certainly not perfect. When bad things happen, my first reaction is usually some form of "Mrs. Fix-it syndrome" mixed with a little panic. But now, I have learned to quickly spot it and look at the Holy Spirit at the banquet table on top of the hill in front of me. As He looks right at me, His smile warms my soul and propels me forward. He is waving His hand, telling me to keep moving. The words "Come on, I've got this" fills my soul, and the next thing I usually feel is Jesus' hand intertwined in mine. That, my friends, is joy that is unexplainable and incomparable. Come join me in choosing joy.

1. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. This well-known passage explains how to know that you are walking the path God wants you to walk. What three things do we need to do, in order to release our life of fear and worry, and gain God-given joy?

2. Personal reflection: Read Ephesians 4:21-24. This passage speaks of putting off the old self and putting on the new self. This is speaking of the self before knowing Christ versus who you are now as a child of God. Hallelujah, we cannot lose our salvation, however it is important to realize that every morning is the start of a new day in Christ. It is my desire that in each new day I am given I will find the joy that day holds. With that in mind, I ask you to reflect on what your "old self" of five weeks ago looked like, versus what the "new self" looks like today.

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3. Read Romans 12:2. This passage tells us to be transformed by the “renewing of [our] mind”. (NIV) What does that look like, and how can that help us gain a life filled with joy?
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Week 6

Day 2

Observations

Today, I would like you to read and observe 2 Corinthians 6:1-10. It is the perfect passage to reflect upon as we finish this study. When we make the decision to move from agreeing with Jesus to intentionally living life believing in Him we gain everything. What does this passage specifically say we will gain and how can it help us live a joy-filled life?

Today's JOY moment:

Week 6

Day 3

SOAP

Read and SOAP Psalm 16:11

Scripture: (Re-write the Scripture in the space below.)

Observation: (After reading the text, which detail(s) stands out to you?)

Application: (Using the observations you found, how can you apply them to your life?)

Prayer: (Using your application above, write your prayer.)

Today's JOY moment:

Week 6

Day 4

Alone Time with our Savior

I would like you to reflect upon the life you have lived, as a Christian, up to this point, versus the one you will live after this study, filled with joy. Spend time with Jesus, and allow Him to help you see the hope that lies in this path. What did He show you? What are you looking forward to seeing and experiencing as you find the joy in your life that is not dependent upon circumstances? Are you ready to trust Him?

Today's JOY moment:

Week 6

Day 5

Building Joy

Our day five activity for this week will look a little different. I want you to walk away from this study with a firm idea of what to do whenever your joy tank gets low, and when you need help grasping onto the joy that the Holy Spirit provides. After prayer and consideration of what you learned in the last six weeks, use the space below to write the three steps we discussed in weeks four, five, and six. As you now know, week six involves making a decision to intentionally live a joy-filled life. With the guidance of your Savior, what do you choose? Remember, this is not a salvation decision; this is a decision on whether or not you will move from *agreer* to *believer* (in Jesus), and possibly one step further, to *active builder* of joy. What do you choose?

When I need help grasping joy I will:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Today, I choose the following path of joy for my life from here forward:

Today's JOY moment:
