

FIGHT  
BACK WITH  
JOY



CELEBRATE MORE. REGRET LESS.  
STARE DOWN YOUR GREATEST FEARS.

Margaret Feinberg

CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED AUTHOR OF *WONDERSTRUCK*

Published by LifeWay Press®

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## MEET THE AUTHOR

### MARGARET FEINBERG

A self-described “hot mess,” Margaret Feinberg is a popular Bible teacher at churches and leading conferences such as Catalyst, Thrive, and Women of Joy. She was recently named one of the 50 women most shaping the church and culture by *Christianity Today* and one of the “30 Voices” who will help lead the church in the next decade. Her books, including *The Organic God*, *The Sacred Echo*, *Scouting the Divine*, and *Wonderstruck*, as well as their corresponding Bible studies have sold nearly a million copies and have received extensive national media coverage from CNN, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. She lives in Morrison,

Colorado, with her husband, Leif, and their superpup, Hershey. She believes some of the best days are spent in her jammies, laughing, and being silly.

#### **Now that you’ve read the official bio, here’s the kick off your shoes and drink iced tea on the back porch version:**

Margaret spends most mornings with her good friends coffee and God. Without coffee, mornings would be difficult. Without God, life would be impossible.

You’ll often find Margaret (puppy-in-tow) adventuring outdoors—she enjoys hiking, river rafting, and scanning the night sky for the Northern Lights and shooting stars.

She boasts an exceptionally dry sense of humor that she attributes to her Jewish father. Little known secret: he was recently inducted into the Surfer’s Hall of Fame, and her mom earned her captain’s license for 60-ton ships.

Married to Leif for more than a decade, Margaret’s known for losing things like her sunglasses on her head, keys in her hand, and her phone for the 12th time in the same day. Always up for an adventure, Margaret is known to drive 50 miles to chase down a food truck and snag Groupons for river rafting on a whim. She prefers watching comedies and laughing until her tummy aches to doing sit ups.

One of her greatest joys is hearing from her readers. So, become her friend on Facebook. Follow her on Twitter or Instagram @mafeinberg. Check out her website at [www.margaretfeinberg.com](http://www.margaretfeinberg.com).

# *DEAR GROUP MEMBER,*

**SEVERAL YEARS AGO** I felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to go on a personal journey to lay hold of more joy in my life. I dug into Scripture, researching the hundreds of passages on joy, happiness, rejoicing, merriment, and more.

Thrilled about all I was learning, I was putting the finishing touches on a book when I received the news of a difficult diagnosis. Plunged into a world of greater pain and suffering than I'd ever known, I had to scrap the project. Up until then, I had been searching for joy in the relatively good times of life, now I had to find joy amidst darkness and agony.

No one signs up for that assignment. No one.

Against all odds, I've found my capacity for joy expanding, and I've discovered something quite startling:

Joy is far more than I ever thought or had been taught. It's a more dynamic, forceful weapon than most of us realize. When we fight back with joy, we lean into the very presence of God—the One who fill us with joy, even on our most deflated days.

The prophet Isaiah alludes to such a mysterious discovery when he declares God's promise in Isaiah 45:3 (HCSB<sup>1</sup>), "I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches from secret places, so that you may know that I, Yahweh, the God of Israel call you by your name." And what God promised to Cyrus years ago is true for us, too.

No matter who you are or what your situation—whether your life is marked by cloudless skies and serene seas or a torrential downpour and darkness—I believe God through the power of the Holy Spirit will do a robust work in your life through this study.

Nothing I've ever written has cost me more. My name, Margaret, means *pearl*, one who is shaped by adversity to reflect the glory of God.

My hope and prayer is that this book and Bible study do just that. May the Lord be glorified in my weakness. May you be drawn closer to Jesus. May you find yourself in awe of God's goodness no matter what you're facing.

I love you. I'm praying for you. It's a privilege to study the Bible alongside you. Thank you for joining me to fight back with joy.

Much love,  
Margaret

# DEAR LEADER,

**I AM SO GRATEFUL FOR YOU!** I wish I were with you right now to give you a huge hug and whisper thank you in your ear. Thank you for taking the time to lead participants through this book and Bible study called *Fight Back With Joy*. You are busy. Your time is precious and limited. You're pulled in many different directions. Yet here you are willing to step out in faith and courageously serve others as they grow closer to Christ. I give God thanks for you. And I can't wait to hear how He awakens you to the joyful, playful side of His character in the weeks ahead.

Know that our team, my hubby Leif, and I have all been praying for you. We've asked God to speak to you, guide you, encourage you, and equip you. We're praying that the great Joy-Giver, our amazing God, will show up in your gatherings, unleash His transforming power through the homework, and flood each participant's heart until they can't help but frolic in His presence.

I've also asked God that your joy reservoirs will overflow, too, and that as you pour out, you'll find yourself splashing in God's goodness. Drop us a note at [joy@margaretfeinberg.com](mailto:joy@margaretfeinberg.com) and let us know when your group is meeting. We want to pray for you and your participants during this time.

Thank you, sweet friend, for being courageous enough to lead others deeper in their relationship with Jesus. I can't wait to meet you and give you that big hug in person. May you be filled with joy and equipped to fight back with joy because you know beyond a shadow of doubt the battle has already been won.

Blessings,  
Margaret

**P. S.** The book *Fight Back With Joy* is not required for participation in this Bible study, but you may want to recommend group members pick up an electronic, audio, or paperback copy to get the most out of the experience. This is especially true for those facing a crisis of their own, whether that's a diagnosis similar to Margaret's or something completely different.

# *LEADER'S GUIDE*



THIS BRIEF LEADER'S GUIDE is designed to help you take participants through the *Fight Back With Joy* book and Bible study. As you prepare for this study, go ahead and watch several of the video sessions ahead of time so that you'll have a feel for the study's direction.

In the Leader's Kit, you'll find a copy of the *Fight Back With Joy* book. Reading the book in advance will prepare you for leading the study and provide you with additional insights and background. The book is not required for participants, but you may want to recommend group members pick up an electronic, audio, or paperback copy to get the most out of their experience.

As you prepare for each session, here's a basic outline of what to expect:



### EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY

Depending on the amount of time you have to meet together and the resources available, you'll want to begin the session with the experiential activity. You will find these activities on the group page that begins each session. This interactive icebreaker is designed to be a trigger for group engagement and help move people toward the ideas explored in the teaching. You'll always want to read ahead to the following week's activity to see what's needed and how participants may be able to contribute.



### HOMEWORK GROUP DISCUSSION

Next in each session (with the exception of the first and last) you will lead the group to review the homework from the previous session. Encourage participants to share what they're learning and how the Holy Spirit is at work in their lives.



### PLAY SESSION VIDEO

After you've finished the homework discussion, it's time to play the video. The teaching presentations will range from 20-30 minutes.



### NOTES

Each notes page includes key statements from that week's teaching. Encourage participants to fill in the blanks and jot down notes, questions, and details as they watch the video.



### VIDEO DISCUSSION

Dive into the video discussion questions next. Based on the amount of time your group meets, you may need to prayerfully consider which questions are best suited for your group and their needs. Don't feel as though you need to ask every question. Rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance on any additional questions or follow-up that needs to be asked as the discussion progresses.



### CLOSING PRAYER

Always save time for prayer before you close. Ask the Holy Spirit to open everyone's eyes and hearts to receive the gift of joy in greater measure.

Thank you, again, for leading this Bible study. I pray that you begin experiencing the joy of God in fresh, new ways.

SESSION ONE

*SECRETS  
OF  
JOYFUL  
PEOPLE*



# GROUP

GETTING STARTED: (10-15 minutes)

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## SESSION ONE: SECRETS OF JOYFUL PEOPLE

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### EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY: BUILD A PARTY HAT

#### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Several sheets of colored paper for each person
  - Assorted stickers
  - Markers
  - Tape
  - A stapler
  - Ribbon
- 1 Invite each person to decorate a party hat. The design can take any shape or form, so invite participants to be wildly creative. Use ribbon to accent or to create a tie to keep the hat atop the head. Add stickers. Use colors to embellish.
  - 2 Write words or draw pictures of things that bring joy. This can include anything: people in their lives, encouraging words, activities, memories, gifts, interactions. Ask participants to cover their party hats with sources of joy. When they've completed their hats, ask them to place them atop their heads.
  - 3 Discuss the following:
    - Briefly share what was drawn or written on each hat.*
    - Where are some of the places you've looked for joy and found it?*
    - Where are some of the places you've looked for joy and not found it?*
    - Reflect on what everyone shared. What are some of the most common sources of joy among the group?*

 PLAY THE SESSION ONE VIDEO: [18:25]

Follow along with Margaret and fill in the blanks for each statement below. Take additional notes in the space provided when you hear something that resonates with you.

Joy emanates out of the abiding sense of \_\_\_\_\_ .

Tactic 1. Marinate in the truth of \_\_\_\_\_ .

Tactic 2. Live on high alert that \_\_\_\_\_ .

Tactic 3. Bravely believe \_\_\_\_\_ .

## VIDEO DISCUSSION

- 1 Turn to page 168. Over the next six weeks, we're asking God to expand our capacity to experience joy. One of the ways to do this is to make daily entries in the Joy Bomb Journal. Begin today by listing three joy bombs in your life. Consider sharing with the group if your responses are different from the experiential activity.
- 2 I list some of the less than desirable declarations I had been making in my life. What declarations have you been unintentionally making with your life?
- 3 Invite someone to read John 15:11 aloud. When was the last time you prayed for God to give you more joy? What prevents you from praying for joy more often?
- 4 When you look at Scripture, *joy* is "a spectrum of emotions, actions, and responses that include gladness, cheer, happiness, merriment, delighting, dancing, shouting, exulting, rejoicing, laughing, playing, brightening, blessing and being blessed, taking pleasure in, and being well pleased." Which among these come most naturally to you? Which are more difficult?
- 5 Joy emanates out of the abiding sense of God's fierce love for us. On a scale of 1-10, how much joy do you have right now? On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your awareness of God's fierce love for you? Do you see any connection? Why or why not?
- 6 In what situation in your life do you most need to say, "God loves me. God is here. God is for me."?

## CLOSING PRAYER

As you close in prayer ask:

- God to expand each participant's capacity for joy;
- the Holy Spirit to awaken a deep sense of God's fierce love;
- that each participant would be able to recognize and joyfully receive all the good gifts God gives each day.

# AWAKEN TO GOD'S FIERCE LOVE

## THIS WEEK:

If you're following along in the book, read chapters ".000 Why We Live Joyless Lives" and ".001 A Choice That Changed Everything" and dive into the five days of homework to prepare for the next gathering.

"How much joy do you have in your life?"

The abrupt question caught me off guard. If someone, anyone, but my long-time friend, Olivia, had asked I would have recoiled, but even her most penetrating questions are always bubble-wrapped in so much love.

My index finger took a few spins around the thick edge of my empty coffee mug as I thought of my response. Possibilities waved about like a broken sprinkler head.

Glancing up at Olivia's tender eyes, I knew she'd wait as long as needed for an answer, a characteristic that made me adore our friendship all the more.

My eyes fluttered about the café in search of an honest answer.

"On a scale of 1 to 10, I'm a 3," I confessed.

"Why do you think it's such a low score?" she probed.

## NOTABLE:

Filming for *Fight Back With Joy* video sessions took place in a lovely rented home in Nashville, Tennessee.

Reasons flickered in my mind and started flowing like melted wax. "Some days I feel isolated. Others I am discouraged too easily. I feel restless and stuck."

Olivia reflected so much grace in her response.

"Joy is a gift God wants to expand in your life," she said. "You can be more joyful tomorrow than you are today."

Her words echoed deep and true inside me:

"Joy is a gift."

“You can be more joyful tomorrow than you are today.”

As we begin, I want to tenderly look in your eyes and ask the same question Olivia asked me:

How much joy do you have in your life? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your level of joy today? Circle the number below.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Sometimes it’s hard to be honest with ourselves. When I said the number 3 aloud, my face scrunched. No one wants to be a 3. I’d much rather be an 11! Or 12!

But I had to make a candid assessment of where I was before I could journey to where God wanted me to be.

Thanks to Olivia and her gentle prodding, along with a few other *sacred echoes*, I began a journey to lay hold of a deeper, more abundant joy than I had ever experienced before.

Until then, I believed joy would naturally flourish in my life without any effort or work. Somehow joy would abound with each passing day. But if anything, my joy was slipping away.

As I began to explore joy, I soon recognized the close connection between love and joy. Whenever love walks in the room, joy is close behind. If love brings chips, then joy adds guacamole. They travel together, camp together, have sleepovers together. The reason we can experience joy is because of God’s fierce love. Joy flows out of God’s affection for us. That’s why I’m convinced:

## JOY EMANATES OUT OF THE ABIDING SENSE OF GOD’S FIERCE LOVE FOR US.

One of the foundational ways we can begin to grow in joy is by spending time grounding ourselves in the truth of God’s tremendous love for us. We need to spelunk the depths, probe the widths, and scale the heights of His affection for us. This is the surest path to joy.

GOD’S FIERCE LOVE → JOY

My hunch is that you desire God’s love to break into your life in a fresh, vibrant way, too. Perhaps, like me, you ache for the uncontainable love of God to fill you, saturate you, and overflow in such a way that it drips out of you everywhere you go. When you have that abiding sense of God’s fierce love—a love that will



### NOTABLE:

A sacred echo is the repetitive nature of God’s voice in your life. Often when God speaks, He will say the same thing again and again. See 1 Kings 19.

carry you through every circumstance, challenge, and battle you face—you can't help but experience more joy.

For me, Psalm 90:14 (NIV<sup>1</sup>) has become a personal prayer: "Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days." This verse even sparked a spiritual discipline of sorts. I began spending time each morning reading over Scripture that grounded me in the wild affection of God. I rummaged through translations that used the most vibrant, passionate, soul-stirring language to describe God's affection and collected a list of verses about God's love. In the deepest parts of my soul, I needed to awaken to the fierce love of my Heavenly Father.

Below are a handful of passages that whispered hope into the depths of my spirit, courage into the recesses of my heart, and deep joy into my weary bones.

Will you take a few minutes each day this week to read through the following passages? Even as you're moving onto other homework lessons, dog-ear this page and ground yourself in the truth of God's fierce love for you again and again.

**+ BONUS ACTIVITY:**

Spend time committing Psalm 16:11 to memory this week. You'll find a flash card on page 193.

Before you read, ask the Holy Spirit to awaken a deeper sense of God's affection for you. As you read, add your name in the underlined spaces. Circle key phrases. \*Star meaningful words. Place the date by any passage you sense God is specifically speaking to you on a particular day. Consider committing a few or all to memory.

I've never quit loving you, \_\_\_\_\_ and never will. Expect love, love, and more love!

**JEREMIAH 31:3, MSG<sup>2</sup>**

The mountains and hills may crumble, but my love for you, \_\_\_\_\_, will never end.

**ISAIAH 54:10, GNT<sup>3</sup>**

I paid a huge price for you, \_\_\_\_\_ ...  
That's how much you mean to me! That's how much I love you! I'd sell off the whole world to get you back, trade the creation just for you.

**ISAIAH 43:4, MSG**

The LORD your God is with you; the mighty One will save you.



He will rejoice over you. You, \_\_\_\_\_ will rest in his love; he will sing and be joyful about you.

**ZEPHANIAH 3:17, NCV<sup>4</sup>**

But you, O Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness for \_\_\_\_\_.

**PSALM 86:15, NLT<sup>5</sup>**

GOD's loyal love couldn't have run out, his merciful love for \_\_\_\_\_ couldn't have dried up. They're created new every morning.

**LAMENTATIONS 3:22, MSG**

But God demonstrates his own love for \_\_\_\_\_ in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**ROMANS 5:8, NIV**


What marvelous love the Father has extended to \_\_\_\_\_! Just look at it—we're called children of God!

**1 JOHN 3:1, MSG**

I've loved you, \_\_\_\_\_, the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love.

**JOHN 15:9, MSG**

No matter how joyful you are today, God has even more joy waiting for you. My hope and prayer is that through this first week of homework, you'll ground yourself in the fierce love of God. With each passing day, may you become more intentional about choosing joy, pursuing joy, and activating joy in your life.

 **CLOSING PRAYER:** Spend time asking God to expand your capacity to experience His joy. With each passing page and session, ask God to deepen the abiding sense of His fierce love for you.

 **QUOTABLE:**

"No man truly has joy unless he lives in love." —Thomas Aquinas, Italian priest<sup>6</sup>

 **BONUS ACTIVITY:**

If you'd like to see the full Scripture list that Margaret used, email [joy@margaretfeinberg.com](mailto:joy@margaretfeinberg.com).

## *ORIGINATED IN GOD, DEMONSTRATED IN CHRIST*

The tiny fingers of a newborn clutch onto the tip of your pinky. Generations of friends and family gather around. A child in black tap shoes, three sizes too big, dances with wild abandon, bringing back memories of when you used to frolic that way. Plates of roasted chicken with steamed vegetables are savored alongside loved ones in God's living room under the stars. Cheeks ache from too much sidesplitting laughter. When you tuck yourself in bed, you know you've truly lived.

These are the moments when the soul seems to breathe, when blood returns to our white-knuckled lives, when we begin to dream that such moments aren't exceptions but meant to surge through our everyday.

What water is to parched lips, joy is to the spirit.

### **+** BONUS ACTIVITY:

Remember, joy emanates out of the abiding sense of God's fierce love for you. As you start today's lesson, will you take a few minutes to read through the passages found in Day One that speak of God's fierce love for you?

Circle the items below that bring you joy:

- Yummy food
- Hanging with friends
- Spending time with family
- Checking items off your to-do list
- Praying
- Decorating your house
- Planning a party
- Exercising
- Spending time outdoors
- Studying the Bible
- A good night's sleep
- Giving a gift
- A hug from someone you love
- Other:

My friend, Troy, has a daughter who is a 6-year-old ball of hilarity. She's constantly cackling with delight. One night at bedtime, Troy remembers her praying:

"God, tomorrow may we have gladness and get the energy up."

Troy's first thought was, *Who prays like that?*

Perhaps we all should.

In her beautiful, 6-year-old way, this precious child was praying for more joy.

She was asking God to shower her family with more cheer and vitality. Troy wasn't the only one smiling at his daughter's prayer. I suspect God was, too.

**When was the last time you prayed for God to give you more joy?**

If you're like me, you may be hesitant to pray for joy, because, well, it can feel a little self-indulgent. Most of us wouldn't think twice about praying to become more holy or righteous, but asking for joy can feel hedonistic. Yet I believe God takes delight when we abound in joy, because He is the source of all joy.

In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

PSALM 16:11, KJV<sup>7</sup>

**In whom and where is joy found according to this passage?**

In alluding to God's right hand, the author is anthropomorphizing God (giving Him human-like characteristics). The right hand signifies power throughout Scripture. Jesus is seated at God's right hand (see Col. 3:1; Acts 2:33). True joy and pleasure are found in Christ.

The psalmists reveal that the quest for joy is not just an option made available to us but something we are commanded to pursue.

**What is the condition of receiving the desires of your heart according to Psalm 37:4?**

**What is the longing expressed in Psalm 63:1?**

**How is this longing fulfilled in Psalm 36:8?**

Do you see the heart cry of the psalmists? We are called to seek and obey God, but we are also called to enjoy God and partake in the most satisfying pleasure

imaginable—a joy that can only be found in Him. We are meant to live in such a way that God’s pleasure becomes second nature. Indeed, joy is the hearty echo of God’s great love for us.

When we find our joy in God, we bring Him glory. That’s a fancy-pants, theological way of saying that every day you walk in joy, you put a smile on your Heavenly Papa’s face.

God is so wildly generous with His joy that He doesn’t keep it all to Himself. He desires to share it with us. God wants His joy to become our joy.

In fact, an abundance of joy is a powerful witness to the beauty of a relationship with God.

 **NOTABLE:**

The Old Testament teaches us that joy stems from God the Father (see Isa. 9:3). Jesus connects Himself to the same virtue in John 15:11 using possessive language. He says “My” joy, not “joy like mine.” Paul speaks of joy in Galatians 5 as a fruit of the Spirit. The fact that joy is tied to all three persons of the Trinity underscores its importance in the life of a Christian.

Perhaps the greatest demonstration of the joy God wants to share with us is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

God’s only Son crashed into our world with an angel broadcasting,

“I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”

**LUKE 2:10, NIV**

Before leaving our world, Jesus endowed the disciples with the promise:

“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

**JOHN 15:11, NASB<sup>8</sup>**

Jesus arrives in joy, departs in joy, and calls us to great joy through unbroken fellowship with Him. The gospel is an invitation to experience more of God’s joy in our lives—not just when we get to heaven, but beginning here, now, today.

**Pause and ask God to increase your desire and capacity to experience more of the joy that He wants to give you. Write your prayer below.**


**Dear Heavenly Papa ...**

You and I are called to a life marked by gladness (see Ps. 67:4), rejoicing (see Phil. 4:4), blessedness (see Jer. 17:7), happiness (see Ps. 146:5), and much, much more! As children of God, we are meant to radiate God's joy and leave a well-littered trail of divine affection and delight wherever we go.

**WE ARE MEANT TO DO MORE THAN MIMIC JESUS;  
WE ARE TO MANIFEST HIM.**

**Do you tend to mimic Jesus or manifest Him wherever you go?  
Which do you think will have a more long-lasting impact? Explain.**

My hope and prayer is that your heart will awaken anew to the pleasure that is originated in God and demonstrated in Christ. And that you will become a disciple of Jesus whose life is marked by the joyfulness and playfulness of your Heavenly Father rather than drudgery or duty.

 **CLOSING PRAYER:** Spend time thanking God for His abundant joy. Give thanks for the generosity He showed you in sending His Son, Jesus. Ask Him to help you manifest Christ's joy wherever you go today.

### DAY THREE

## *CELEBRATE THE BEAUTIFUL SPECTRUM OF JOY*

A few years ago, Leif and I needed to purchase a vehicle. For most people, purchasing a car is straightforward. But when your best friend and hubby is 6'8", the process becomes much more complex—especially when you're looking for a fuel efficient, smaller vehicle.

Captain Tall, as I like to call him, scrunched into more than one hundred cars. He attended the Denver Auto Show and spent countless Saturdays with friends visiting dealerships and used car lots. In the end, our decision boiled down to either a Smart Car or a Volkswagen. Believe it or not, he fit in both!

We chose the Volkswagen.

Now something strange happened once we purchased our first Volkswagen.

### **QUOTABLE:**

"The infinite happiness of the Father consists in the enjoyment of His Son." —Jonathan Edwards, theologian<sup>9</sup>

### **QUOTABLE:**

"We want to pull a lever and see the world change. Political involvement is not the issue; the joy of God is the issue. Remember, the joy of God is the state of flourishing in mind, heart, and life that Christians experience by the Holy Spirit. We've been so anxious to influence society in the past century that we've ended up going after a lot of shortcuts. For some it's politics, for some it's education, for some it's evangelism. We've been pulling a lot of levers. The common thread is that we're pulling these levers so hard, we leave no space for people to encounter the joy of God." —Dr. Greg Forster, Director of the Kern Family Foundation<sup>10</sup>

Maybe you've experienced it. Every time we drove on the highway, Volkswagens surrounded us. Every parking lot overflowed with them. We'd never seen so many Volkswagens in our lives. These cars were everywhere!

**Describe a time you had something like this happen to you.**

 **NOTABLE:**

Q: Why didn't Noah go fishing?

A: He only had two worms.

Q: How does Moses make his coffee?

A: Hebrews it.

Q: How do we know Peter was a rich fisherman?

A: By his net income.

Psychologists describe this as the Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon. It occurs whenever a word, name, or item that has come to your attention seems to appear in high frequency.

Perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised that when I started choosing, pursuing, and activating joy, the word appeared everywhere—especially when I read the Bible. Little references to joy I'd never noticed before began popping off pages.

Just this morning, I sat wonderstruck by the "thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly" described in Hebrews 12:22 (NIV). What a holy ruckus! Can you imagine the singing, dancing, exulting, and playfulness in this heavenly scene?

Joy didn't just zing as I read the Bible; those three letters appeared at the mall, in my favorite coffee shop, even on television ads. Joy is everywhere—on coffee mugs, t-shirts, home décor—even on my dish soap.

**Where have you seen the word joy pop up since you started this Bible study?**

What I've been observing, and maybe you've noticed it too, is that our culture seems to be confused about joy. It's one of those words that has been hijacked by marketers, overused, and even transformed into a cliché.

When I'm curious about what our culture thinks of something specific, I search the word or idea on Google images. This afternoon, I typed in the word *joy*. Two primary images popped up. First, the word *joy* appeared in all kinds of colorful designs including some yummy looking cookies.

The second type of image was people mid-leap as if they were in one of those old Toyota commercials where a person jumps and shouts "Toy-ota!"

I chuckled.

Our culture associates joy with the word *joy* (which isn't helpful) as well as an impossible-to-maintain bounciness.

**How would you define joy?**

**How do you think culture has influenced your definition?**

Over the last few years, as I've dug into Scripture, I've become convinced that God wants to give us a richer, deeper, fuller understanding of joy than we realize. The joy God has for us is grander than any single emotion, action, or response.

To embrace the fullness of joy that God has for us, we need to broaden, rather than narrow, our understanding of joy. When you look at Scripture:

JOY INVOLVES A SPECTRUM OF EMOTIONS, ACTIONS, AND RESPONSES THAT INCLUDE GLADNESS, CHEER, HAPPINESS, MERRIMENT, DELIGHTING, DANCING, SHOUTING, EXULTING, REJOICING, LAUGHING, PLAYING, BRIGHTENING, BLESSING AND BEING BLESSED, TAKING PLEASURE IN, AND BEING WELL-PLEASSED.

Each of these expressions is rooted in Scripture—either in God's response to His creation (including us) or our response to God. Much like a spectrum of colors, joy is varied and beautiful. Some joys are expressed verbally; others are nonverbal. Some joys are visible to the eye; others are invisible but still profound, real, and transformative.

Our response to the joy God gives may be loud and include laughter, shouting (also known as whooping it up!), and rejoicing. Or it may be more subdued and include the brightening of the face, the deep sense of being blessed, and the pleasure found in being God's beloved child.



**QUOTABLE:**

"I believe what God has in mind, and what the Bible really says, is that joy is a real emotion. God commands us to feel happy, feel joy, feel good. To feel the real emotions of joy. Not all the time, of course, not in every season or at every moment—God is not interested in plastic Christians. But somehow, the good feeling of joy should be something that defines who we are. We should be people who live in this place of real, emotional joy. What God has in mind is not a redefinition of joy, but a redefinition of us." —Matthew Elliot, writer and theologian<sup>11</sup>

**Underline the different expressions of joy found in each of the following passages. Then circle the words that best describe the expression, whether it's verbal or nonverbal, visible or invisible. Note that some passages may have more than one joyful expression.**

Example:

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

**PSALM 100:1, NIV**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.

**ISAIAH 60:5, NIV**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

**GENESIS 30:13, NIV**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

**PSALM 119:24, NIV**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God; Yes, let them rejoice with gladness.

**PSALM 68:3, NASB**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

Those who look to Him are radiant with joy; their faces will never be ashamed.

**PSALM 34:5, HCSB**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

Surely you have granted him unending blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.

**PSALM 21:6, NIV**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**



**QUOTABLE:**

"Joy and laughter are the gifts of living in the presence of God and trusting that tomorrow is not worth worrying about." —Henri Nouwen, author<sup>12</sup>



All the days of the oppressed are wretched,  
but the cheerful heart has a continual feast.

**PROVERBS 15:15, NIV**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

“Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt,  
O virgin of Israel!  
Again you will take up your tambourines,  
And go forth to the dances of the merry-makers.”

**JEREMIAH 31:4, NASB**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

When the LORD brought back the captive ones of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter;  
and our tongue with joyful shouting;  
Then they said among the nations,  
“The LORD has done great things for them.”  
The LORD has done great things for us;  
We are glad.

**PSALM 126:1-3, NASB**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of  
yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

**LUKE 15:32, NIV**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

**PSALM 147:11, ESV<sup>13</sup>**

**Verbal or Nonverbal**

**Visible or Invisible**

Throughout this study, we’re going to look at many passages about joy, but I wanted to give you a bird’s-eye view of some expressions of joy. Why? Because broadening your understanding of joy will expand your capacity to experience joy.



**NOTABLE:**

Throughout the Old Testament we see the Hebrew word *asher* used to describe a person who is pronounced “happy” or “blessed.” This word is often used within the context of the flourishing of God’s people: “Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD” (Ps. 144:15, KJV).

Reflecting on these Scriptures, maybe you realize it's been far too long since you shouted for joy, threw a celebration, picked up a musical instrument (even if it's just a spoon and cooking pan for a homemade drum), or felt your heart swell with holy delight.

Seeing all the different biblical expressions of joy—verbal and nonverbal, visible and invisible—may prompt you to experience some new ones in the weeks ahead.

Place a check ✓ by the expressions of joy that come easily for you.

Place a star \* by the expressions of joy that are more challenging.

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gladness                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheer       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happiness                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Merriment   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Delighting                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Dancing     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shouting                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Exulting    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rejoicing                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Laughing    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playing                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Brightening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blessing/being blessed                |                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking pleasure in/being well-pleased |                                      |

 **QUOTABLE:**

"Is anyone happy?  
Let them sing songs  
of praise."

—James 5:13, NIV

Growing up in the church, I was taught from a young age that joy is a deep and remaining friend, but happiness was a far more circumstantial acquaintance. Happiness was persnickety about coming to the party of life. If the appetizers weren't fabulous or the right people weren't in the room, then happiness would disappear out the back door like a fickle friend. Happiness wasn't to be trusted or celebrated.

But passages like James 5:13 instruct us that when we are happy, we are to give praise to God. In other words, happiness issues us a holy call to worship. In 2 Corinthians 7:13, we glimpse Paul rejoicing because Titus is happy. These and other verses began challenging my narrow thinking.

I realized I had spent a lot of years thinking I just needed joy and not happiness.

**Have you ever met someone who is truly joyful and completely unhappy?**

## How about someone busting at the seams with happiness but maintaining zero joy?

As children of God, could our circumstances be any better? We have so many reasons to be ebullient. We are drenched in the mercies, grace, and love of God.

I long for all the joy and happiness and blessedness and delight and merriment and celebration that God wants to give me as His child. I want the fullness of the pleasures at God's right hand and the fullness of joy found in Christ.

My hunch is that you do, too.


That's why from time to time we need to do a prayer checkup to see if there are ways we may be neglecting opportunities for greater joy, happiness, and celebration. Here are a few that I've recognized.

**Place a checkmark beside those you can relate to:**

- I allow myself to be too busy.
- I focus more on tasks than people.
- I say no to an invitation to a dinner party or celebration.
- I hold back from making time to sing and praise.
- I resist making space for new people in my life.
- I allow pain and discouragement to shape my responses.
- I settle for that which would make me feel better rather than my best.

**Will you take a moment to ask God to reveal any places in your heart where you've said no to joy, happiness, or celebration?**

Let's make a commitment together that we will seek God for all the ways He wants to fill us with joy, happiness, and delight. That we will be people whose lives are marked by celebration because we're loved fiercely by God.

 **CLOSING PRAYER:** Continue to ask God to reveal any areas where you're missing out on the fullness of joy that He wants to give you. Ask Him to supernaturally allow you to experience more of His joy than you've ever experienced before.

## UNWRAP CREATIONAL AND REDEMPTIVE GIFTS

Let's start this lesson with The Good Gift Giver Quiz.

Select the answers that best describe you:

**The gifts you most love giving are:**

- A. Highly personal and packaged in themed wrapping paper with a matching ribbon and card;
- B. A blend of fun and practical;
- C. Always accompanied by the receipt so the person can return it if he or she doesn't like or need it.

**You are most likely to do your Christmas shopping:**

- A. Throughout the year when you find the perfect items;
- B. Any time after Black Friday;
- C. Online two weeks before Christmas.

**The most common response when someone unwraps your gift is:**

- A. "Wow! You really know me."
- B. "Ha-ha—you're funny."
- C. "That's exactly what I needed."

### BONUS ACTIVITY:

Gift giving is one of the five love languages as described in *The Five Love Languages* by Gary D. Chapman. This is a great resource for people of all ages.

If you answered mostly A's, you're an extravagant giver. You love to go over the top and express your affection for others through the presents you select and give.

If you answered mostly B's, you're a generous giver. You love to think about what people need, but you also want to bring a smile to their face when they open the gift.

If you answered mostly C's, you're a thoughtful giver. You love to use gifts as opportunities to meet real needs and make sure people receive what they'd like and enjoy.

**Which kind of giver are you? What are your favorite kinds of gifts to receive?**

## What kind of connections exist between the gifts you enjoy receiving and the gifts you enjoy giving?

All of us have different styles in the way we select, wrap, and give gifts. I tend to be more of a thoughtful gifter. I try to include the gift receipts so the item can be returned. To me, gift cards aren't impersonal, but a way to ensure friends receive their absolute favorite items. Most of my gifts look like a 9-year-old wrapped them. That's why I tend to stick to gift bags and tissue paper or, when possible, ask the store to gift wrap for me.

Though my gifts are humble and imperfect offerings, they are signs of my love and affection. Like most gifts, they are given with the hope that the item, or the thoughtfulness behind the item, will bring comfort, delight, and joy.

When it comes to giving good gifts, no one is more extraordinary or extravagant than God. James 1:17 (NIV) tells us:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Every. Last. One.

## WHEN IT COMES TO DOLING OUT HAPPINESS AND JOY, GOD IS ANYTHING BUT STINGY.

Unlike our gifts, which are sometimes imperfect or ill-timed, all of God's gifts are jam-packed with His goodness and stamped with perfection. Our God is so generous that He gives good gifts to all of humanity. These are called *creational gifts* because they are part of every human life. Each one of these joy bombs has the capacity to generate joy and happiness.

In the following passages, circle the creational gifts of God that bring joy and happiness. Note that some passages will mention more than one good gift of God.

He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,  
And vegetation for the labor of man,  
So that he may bring forth food from the earth,  
And wine which makes man's heart glad,

So that he may make his face glisten with oil,  
And food which sustains man's heart.

**PSALM 104:14-15, NASB**

He gives the childless woman a family,  
making her a happy mother.

**PSALM 113:9, NLT**

Children are a gift from the LORD.

**PSALM 127:3, NLT**

An encouraging word cheers a person up.

**PROVERBS 12:25, NLT**

And people should eat and drink and enjoy the  
fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God.

**ECCLESIASTES 3:13, NLT**

You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will  
rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at  
the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder.

**ISAIAH 9:3, NLT**

**Now go back through this verse and place a star ✨ by each of these wondrous creational gifts of God that you've experienced.**

In addition to the encouraging words of others, delicious meals with friends, and delight of seeing kids play on a lazy Saturday, I've experienced countless creational gifts of God. Joy bombs are going off all over the place.

Right now I'm watching the radiant splash of colors as the sun casts its last rays and dips below the horizon. A cool sip of water refreshes my parched lips. I take my next breath. Every moment I'm experiencing the richness of the creational gifts of God.

**What are three creational gifts of God you're experiencing right now?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**+** **BONUS ACTIVITY:**  
Some of God's more unusual creational gifts are still being discovered today. Check out the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History's Ocean Portal online to see photos of mysterious and spectacular deep sea creatures. Visit [www.ocean.si.edu/deep-sea](http://www.ocean.si.edu/deep-sea).

## What are three of your favorite creational gifts of God?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Four of my all-time favorite creation gifts include the gift of belly laughter, a strong cup of morning coffee, the hush of an empty walking trail, and the cuddle of a pup. God fashioned all these for which I'm mighty grateful.

Some Christians like to say they're the only ones who have experienced true joy. Not only do such statements make believers sound arrogant and judgmental, but worse, such declarations portray God as stingy with His good gifts. Scripture reveals God as so ridiculously generous that He gives good gifts to *all* people. God throws joy bombs at everyone. This is a living testimony to the goodness, generosity, and love of our Heavenly Father.

That said, as we dig deeper into Scripture we discover those who enter into a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, are promised a new dimension of life and joy—even more joy bombs. They begin to receive something called *redemptive gifts*.

**In the following passages, circle the redemptive gifts of God that bring happiness and joy. Note that some passages will mention more than one good gift of God.**

I will exalt you, LORD, for you rescued me.  
You refused to let my enemies triumph over me.  
O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you restored my health.  
You brought me up from the grave, O LORD.  
You kept me from falling into the pit of death.

**PSALM 30:1-3, NLT**

Oh, what joy for those  
whose disobedience is forgiven,  
whose sin is put out of sight!

**PSALM 32:1, NLT**

Restore to me the joy of your salvation.

**PSALM 51:12, NLT**

### NOTABLE:

It's worth noting that a wide variety of God's good gifts have the capacity to generate joy and delight in our lives. Perhaps you also noticed that the gifts often involve relationship with others either directly or implicitly. Joy is often generated as we live life with each other.

Your laws are my treasure;  
they are my heart's delight.

**PSALM 119:111, NLT**

Let all the people of Jerusalem shout his praise with joy!  
For great is the Holy One of Israel who lives among you.

**ISAIAH 12:6, NLT**

When I discovered your words, I devoured them.  
They are my joy and my heart's delight,  
for I bear your name,  
O LORD God of Heaven's Armies.

**JEREMIAH 15:16, NLT**

**Now go back through this list and place a star ✨ by each of these wondrous redemptive gifts of God that you've experienced.**

If you've come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, our generous God doesn't just shower you with creational gifts, He pours out redemptive gifts on you as well. You can experience the joy and delight that comes with experiencing salvation, forgiveness, restoration, redemption, God's Word, His presence, and the promise of heaven.

I don't know about you, but I'm bubbling with thanks for the many redemptive gifts of God. As I sit here, I'm so thankful for the grace and mercy that God has shown me over the years. I find comfort and joy in the many promises of God—including His promise that the work He has begun in me He will bring to completion (see Phil. 1:6). I'm appreciative of God's salvation, redemption, goodness ... the list could run a mile long.

**What are three redemptive gifts of God you've experienced?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**What three redemptive gifts of God are you most thankful for?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

 **NOTABLE:**

Some scholars have gone as far as to describe God's joy as the glue that holds the universe together. Psalm 104:31 (NIV) boldly declares, "May the glory of the LORD endure forever: may the LORD rejoice in his works". Scholar William P. Brown says this passage reflects a "frightful" possibility: "[If] the creator were to stop enjoying creation, the cosmos would suffer collapse ... The possibility of cosmic demise in the psalm is attributed not to divine wrath against a resistant or hostile creation but to something seemingly more benign, namely, to God's abstaining from joy."<sup>14</sup> What a mind-bending thought! All of creation isn't just born in joy but is sustained by the joy of God. This makes God's joy foundational and essential to everything that was, is, and will be.



I believe that as followers of Jesus we are meant to live palms up, ready to receive God's generosity—both in creational gifts and redemptive gifts—each and every day. We're meant to live wide-eyed for all the joy bombs God is tossing at us. All the while, we know that even the most wondrous gifts are only foretastes of what we will experience when we live in heaven and spend eternity with Him.

How do we begin to unwrap more of these good gifts of God in our lives? I believe we can find guidance in Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 (MSG). Underline any phrases that are particularly helpful to you as you read:

After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! God deals out joy in the present, the now. It's useless to brood over how long we might live.

Right now, our joy-giving God is filling our lives with good gifts—presents that are meant to bring joy, delight, and laughter. Some of these gifts are creational. Some are redemptive. All are insignias of God's fierce love for us. Our response should be one of abundant gratitude and obedience to Him.

If we want to experience more joy, then we need to heighten our attention to the gifts our good and generous God is giving us in the midst of every day. We need to spend time each day observing the moments or circumstances where we experience joy. We must pay attention to where we are and whom we're with. When is God tossing joy bombs into our lives and we aren't even noticing?

That's why I want you to join me in jotting down your joy discoveries each day. One of the best ways to abound in joy is to keep track of all the good gifts God is giving you.

On page 168, you'll find the Joy Bomb Journal. This is a space where I'm inviting you to write down three things that bring you joy each day. These can be creational gifts like the fiery shades of a sunrise, the tender grip of an infant, or the ability to take one more breath. All are gifts of God.



#### NOTABLE:

The author of Ecclesiastes believes that life is meaningless unless centered upon God. He uses the word *vanity* 33 times to refer to the emptiness of life if God isn't included, a reminder that every gift we experience comes from God. This call to enjoyment is to turn our eyes to the great Gift-Giver in thanksgiving.

Or perhaps this is a day when you're experiencing a heightened awareness of some of the redemptive gifts of God. Maybe right now you could do a little dance at the thought of being called a child of God. Perhaps you've read a Scripture that breathed life into your weary soul. Or maybe you sense the freedom that comes with asking for forgiveness. All of these are gifts of God, too.

**Turn to the Joy Bomb Journal and write down at least three things God has given you today that bring you joy. Each of these is an insignia of just how much you are fiercely loved by God. Take a few moments to give thanks to God for each one.**



**CLOSING PRAYER:** Spend time thanking God for being so generous in the good gifts He gives all of humanity and His children. Thank God for being a Joy-Giver.

## DAY FIVE



### NOTABLE:

God wired your body to benefit from laughter. A good old-fashioned giggle releases chemicals in your brain that equip your body to better handle stress and pain.

## *PRACTICE EVERY DAY JOY*

Friend, I have to be honest with you. I feel like I've been pushing you hard through this week's homework. Or maybe I've just been pushing myself hard! In this first session, we've covered some major ground.

We've been looking at how many of us don't live in the fullness of joy because we don't understand what joy is, whom it comes from, how much joy is available to us, and where to look for it.

I think it's appropriate to finish off this week with some fun. Let's kick off our shoes, pop some popcorn, crack open our favorite soda, seltzer, or tea, and just talk about living more joyful lives.

Remember that joy is a spectrum of emotions, actions, and responses. Sometimes we feel joyful, sometimes we don't.

**REGARDLESS OF HOW WE FEEL, WE CAN STILL CHOOSE TO ACT AND RESPOND IN JOY.**

Recently I saw a sign that declared: "Introverts unite separately in your own homes."

I busted out laughing.

Whether you consider yourself an introvert or an extrovert, a quiet person or more of the party pants type, we can unite and splash joy everywhere we go.

Let's be honest: you're gonna splash something wherever you go. Why not make it joy? Don't believe me? Consider these verses from Proverbs:

It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman

**PROVERBS 21:9, NASB**

A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike.

**PROVERBS 27:15, NASB**

Yikes! We become contentious any time we allow a disagreement or dispute to escalate to the point it causes disruption—to our workplace, our family, our children. Contention slips in when we become more concerned with winning the argument than finding a solution. Contention will drive us toward being right rather than righteous. We all fall into this at one time or another. We splash something other than joy.

**When was the last time you were, *ahem*, contentious? How did your attitude impact the lives of those you work and live with?**

 **BONUS ACTIVITY:**

If you put your finger in your ear and scratch, it sounds just like Pac-Man.

Rather than living like a dark storm cloud, as children of God, we're created to cheer our way through the streets heralding the arrival of God's kingdom. We're meant to pound at the door of every human heart with hilarity and celebration until the last prodigal crosses heaven's threshold, the last hardened heart is rent, and the last older brother finally plucks his fingers from his ears.

## **7 WAYS TO LITTER THE WORLD WITH JOY TODAY**

1 **SMILE AT THE PEOPLE YOU SEE.** A recent study found that smiling can increase our happiness level and make us more productive<sup>15</sup>, but the grin must be genuine. Start in your own home. Smile at your roommate. Your spouse. Your kids. Allow your eyes to light up, your hidden teeth to show. Look each person in the eyes. Remember that you're beaming the joy of God to them. You're reflecting the delight of your Heavenly Father.

 **QUOTABLE:**

“Humor is a difficult concept. It is not logical.” —Savak in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*<sup>16</sup>

2 **RADIATE GRACE.** When you see a coworker, spouse, or child make a mistake, do something clumsy, or break something valuable, rather than become angry, bring levity to the situation with laughter and compassion. Help them clean up the mess with a big smile and verbally affirm the person’s value and worth.

3 **SING OR HUM THROUGHOUT THE DAY.** All of creation is joined as a holy chorus giving praise to God. You can join in right now, wherever you are. Turn on the radio. Plug in the iPod. Hum to yourself. Offer joyful praise to God.

4 **PLACE AN EXCLAMATION POINT ON TODAY.** Don’t let this be another average day. Pause for a moment and consider what simple acts you can do to make today special for you and those you love. You don’t need much time or money. Pick wildflowers or gather some fresh tree branches and place them in a vase on the table. Light a few candles. Pull out the white Christmas tree lights and hang them around your living room. Set out the fancy dishes. Wear your favorite shirt. God has placed the exclamation point of His love on your life. Do something to reflect that exclamation point, loving Him back by celebrating this day He has made.

5 **WRITE A NOTE OF BLESSING TO SOMEONE YOU LOVE.** If you need a fresh infusion of joy, then bless someone else. Grab a notecard and start jotting down all the things you appreciate about the person. Feel the gratitude well up in your heart. Then pop that notecard in the mail and spread the joy.

6 **DO SOMETHING YOU LOVE.** Most people I know aren’t guilty of spending too much time doing what they love; they’re guilty of doing it far too little. God has gifted and wired you for specific activities that renew your joy, fill you with delight, and remind you of His love. One of my great joys is hiking. When I experience creation, gratitude abounds in my heart, and I come home a much happier person than when I left (just ask Leif!). What is your joy-filling activity? Are you an outdoors person, a coffee shop connoisseur? Do you love shopping with friends, settling down with a great book, or cooking a new recipe? Do the activity that God uniquely wired you to thoroughly enjoy and give Him thanks for it while you’re doing it. Celebrate your Creator.

 **NOTABLE:**

God designed us so that laughter triggers the body to release more endorphins, which send dopamine to the brain. The brain ends up feeling more pleasure, which can help improve the immune system’s functions and alter brain wave activity, positively affecting memory and recall.

7 **STRIKE UP A CONVERSATION WITH A STRANGER.** A recent study at a Chicago train station asked commuters to participate in a simple experiment. One group was asked to talk to the stranger who sat next to them. The other group was instructed to keep to themselves. By the end of the ride, the commuters who spoke to a stranger reported a more positive experience—even though most had predicted the ride would be more pleasant if they sat quiet and alone.<sup>17</sup> Research is beginning to reveal what I suspect God knew a long time ago—namely, that interacting with strangers helps us feel happier and more connected. Instead of keeping to yourself, say “hello” and strike up a conversation with those around you.

**What would you add as another idea to litter the world with joy?**

**Place a star ✱ by the activities you can commit to do today. Place a circle ○ by the ones you can commit to do over the next week.**

Fun, life-giving practices like these are essential to your faith. Why? The joy you radiate in the midst of your everyday life is a witness to the goodness of God. When you walk in greater amounts of joy, people are naturally drawn to you and, more importantly, to Jesus in you.

**When was the last time you laughed so hard your belly ached?  
Why do you think you don't laugh this hard more often?**

Some people think that joy shines brightest on the darkest of days. But if we don't learn to radiate joy on our brightest days, then how can we beam bright when the lights go out?

This is the day to begin choosing joy, pursuing joy, and activating joy.

And, sweet friend, you don't want to miss our next gathering as we begin to discover that more than whimsy, joy is a weapon we use to fight life's battles.

**♥ CLOSING PRAYER:** Spend some time asking God to empower you to walk with greater levity and become a person who beams joy wherever you go. Ask God for opportunities to infuse laughter, humor, and hope each day.

**+ BONUS ACTIVITY:**

Create a joy basket. Collect items that brought you joy as a child and still place a smile on your face today—a sketch pad, bubbles, sidewalk chalk, silly putty, a booklet of word games. Tuck in some of your favorite passages on joy. The next time you're feeling blue, take some time to play and reflect on the goodness of God.

**+ BONUS ACTIVITY:**

When you need a hearty laugh, what website, book, or movie do you turn to? Share your answers with us at [joy@margaretfenberg.com](mailto:joy@margaretfenberg.com). We're compiling a list of suggested resources.