

LIFE Group Leader Handout

December 6, 2020

Finding Joy

Pastor Bob Snider

Scripture--Philippians 4:2-7

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Main Idea--Prayer Produces Peace Which Brings Joy

Differences between joy and happiness--

- Happiness depends on circumstances, joy transcends circumstances
- True joy is a spiritual thing, not a personal predisposition

Rejoice in the Lord--always. There is no exception to this command.

Three questions when we are in conflict with another believer--

- Is this conflict a matter of Biblical conviction? If not, let it go.
- Is this conflict a matter of eternal importance? If not, let it go.
- Is this a matter on which Christians must agree? If not, let it go.

Let your reasonableness (gentleness) be evident to all. Do not be overly rigorous. Flex! This is especially true when we are exercising our rights.

Anxiety kills joy. God's antidote for anxiety is prayer. Prayer--

- Is not informing God--he knows all
- IS relational--we can come to God messy
- IS to be made with thanksgiving--our God is a faithful God

Anxiety comes when we focus on the future. God has only given us today. Children today need parents who model consistency.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)*

Application--

- Is there a relational conflict that God addressed to you as you heard this message? How did the three questions above help you to frame this conflict in a Scriptural manner?
- What worries/anxieties came to mind during this message? How will applying this truth produce peace which leads to joy?

Looking for Life Change

How do small groups aid in the process of transformation?

by Jenn Peppers and Tara Miller

Transformation is our goal in small groups. At the same time, it is something that is not up to us. God is the author of transformation. We cannot, by following certain steps or doing the right thing, bring about transformation in our own life or the lives of others. The most we can do is simply be open to it—to put ourselves, and our groups, in the best position possible for God to do his work. Deep transformation is possible for people in small-group community, but skills and spiritual maturity on the part of the facilitator are often the vehicles the Spirit chooses to use to get us there.

Transformation is the end; skills are the bridge that helps us cross the chasm to get there. As facilitators, we develop skills and maturity to maintain openness to our own transformation and—potentially—to be used by God as an agent of transformation in the lives of others. Given the lack of a formula, we cannot make transformation happen. We lack that power. But we can open the door and invite God in. So following are a few scattered thoughts about how facilitators can help their groups try to maintain a posture of openness to the transformation that God will bring about if and when he chooses. Here are some ways to try to maintain an openness to what God may be doing.

Engage in Personal Transformation

First, we need to engage in our own transformation. We need to notice how God may be speaking to us and to engage in our own transformational opportunities in order to take notice of the opportunities in the lives of others.

- *Spend time in prayer.* Since God is the sole source of transformation, we need to ask him to do his work in us. Prayer will help bring about a posture of openness, both individual and corporate.
- *Take time to reflect.* We don't often take the time necessary to be transformed in our culture—we have an inordinate fear of free time. Without taking the time to reflect on our experiences, it's unlikely we'll gain wisdom from those experiences, much less transformation. Small groups provide the somewhat unique opportunity in our culture as a place to process with a group of people rather than in isolation or one-on-one. They provide space for reflection—take advantage of that.
- *Be in deeper community with others.* Transformation rarely happens in isolation, but it's also less likely in a large group. It often takes a small community, an inner circle, to help us see what's going on in and around us.

Express the Spirit of Christ

- *Show grace.* When a storm comes, it's a very different experience being shown grace instead of judgment. That's easy to say, but much harder to live out. Look back on your own life at your time of greatest failure and ask what it would have been like to have been shown grace at that point, and what it would have been like to have been shown judgment. What would have been different? Grace in the face of failure is one of the most powerful experiences of God that we'll ever experience.
- *Show faith in others.* Believe that God is at work in others' lives, even when you can't see it. Be patient and know that anything is possible. See yourself as one that walks alongside others rather than dragging them along like an unwilling donkey.
- *Be curious.* Listen carefully as you read Scripture, pray, engage in conversations and ask questions. What might God want to reveal of himself? Or what might he be revealing about ourselves that we need to see?
- *Show love.* Many people have experienced God in less-than-perfect small groups and in less-than-perfect churches, because love was shown. When a group cares about people and cares about God, God will show up.

Cultivate Awareness

- *Become aware of opportunities for transformation.* There are certain times when we are more open to change and movement than usual. Sometimes it's during a major life crisis, like a move or a breakup. Whatever the circumstance, be aware that sometimes those circumstances can propel us toward increased dependence on God. Watch for those opportunities and encourage people to engage with God as they weather the storm.
- *Stay in touch with our experience.* We can tap into our own transformational experience to help others. This does not mean shifting the focus to ourselves or our own experiences—for God often works in very different ways with different people—but simply being in touch with our own stories brings renewed empathy and understanding as we engage with others.
- *Be aware of our own sin.* An awareness of what we are capable of goes a long way. We all stand in need of grace and transformation. Pride does nothing but stand in the way. As facilitators, our modeling humility, honesty and awareness of our own sin will open the way for others to do so as well. The group is a reflection of the facilitator. If the group members hear the facilitator talking about his or her sin and struggles (not in generalities), they are more likely to regard the group as a safe place and open up about their own struggles.