



**Looking Inwards** (15 mins)  
*Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



**Looking Outwards** (15 mins)  
*Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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HG112: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season  
**JOY: Love's Strength**

John 15:9-17 & Philippians 4:4-7

Home Group Study Notes

11 October 2015 - Alison Hunter



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.*



**Welcome** (10 mins)  
*Ice Breaker*

When you introduce yourself to others, how do you describe yourself? What are the four or five words you usually use to tell people who you are? Explain your answer.



**Looking Upwards** (10 mins)  
*Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



## Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: What does the word 'Joy' mean to you?

2: Is it possible to rejoice always (Phil 4:4)? Is this realistic or idealistic?

3: What is the importance of 'guarding your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus' (Phil 4:7). Read also 1 Peter 1:3-9). What does this mean?

His commandments are not burdensome, they bring the deep joy of knowing you have done the right thing. Obedience bears fruit – it is shown in our character and our love for one another. Our love for one another is the visible and living demonstration of God's love for the world; this is why it is so important that we keep his commands. The reputation of the church should be our love and care for one another, we should be known for how we treat each other. Do we, in all that we do, show love for one another?

King David felt a loss of joy after he committed adultery with Bathsheba. This was only restored through repentance. In Psalm 51 we see his heartfelt repentance in his prayer to God and also him asking; 'Restore me to the joy of your salvation' (v12). David Wilkerson, the famous preacher and author of 'The Cross and the Switchblade' says: "Most Christians never associate joy with repentance. But repentance is actually the mother of all joy in Jesus. Without it, there can be no joy. Yet any believer or congregation who walks in repentance will be flooded with the joy of the Lord." (David Wilkerson Copyright © 2000 by World Challenge) It is impossible to maintain the joy of the Lord if sin is habitually present in our lives. Similarly it is impossible to maintain joy if we are harbouring unforgiveness. We have been forgiven much by God and we are commanded to forgive others. Unforgiveness in our hearts only hurts ourselves and affects our relationship with Jesus. We need to walk daily with Jesus, and daily rejoice in the knowledge of him and his salvation. We do this by spending time with him in prayer. Our hearts will naturally want to wander off and they allow us to be distracted by anything and everything. But prayer is so important.

Finally, we need to spend time reading the bible and taking the scriptures seriously. If the Joy of the Lord is to be our strength then we need to hunger for God's word. The word of God is like a mirror, it is only when we read it that we see who we really are, and understand our deepest need. How much time do we spend letting God's word's infiltrate our soul and his holiness pierce our heart?

**Conclusion:** The bible tells us that true joy is not dependent upon our circumstances. It is a gift from God. It is derived from his love and manifests itself in an internal peace within us. Joy cannot be stimulated by any external factor, nor is it at the mercy of any. It is only through our reconciliation with God through the work of Jesus on the cross and by being brought into a right relationship with him that we can experience joy. Jesus is the true source of joy. Our hearts are fickle and go after fleeting pleasures which will never ultimately fulfil us. We look for peace, security and happiness in all kinds of places. Why do we so often neglect to look in the one place where joy can be found? Jesus longs to spend more time with us. He calls us 'friends'. He longs for us to be full and overflowing with joy. He longs to restore us when we truly repent of our sin. He longs to heal our hearts of the hurts that we have experienced. He longs to equip us to be able to forgive. He is more loving, and more merciful than we can comprehend. If we want to experience joy in our lives, we need to let him in.

*"The joy of the Lord is your strength"*

Nehemiah 8:10

It is this relationship with the living God that sustains him and gives him peace and contentment whether things are going well or not so well. Paul knew the source of true joy. Do we know it? Because we are deceiving ourselves if we think we will find it in anything else. If your heart finds the true source of joy, it will enable you to cope with whatever life throws at you without having to escape from it. God doesn't always take us out of the circumstances we are in; rather he equips us with the supernatural gift of joy to be able to cope with them.

We were made to be in a loving relationship with God but because of the fall, because Adam and Eve wanted independence from God, that perfect harmonious relationship was broken by sin. But God in his love for us has provided the way back. Through the cross and ONLY through the cross can we receive forgiveness for our sins and be reconciled to our heavenly Father. When we really grasp what Jesus has done for us, taking our place, and bearing the punishment of our sin for us and paying the price so that we don't have to, it is life changing. It is impossible not to feel that joy of knowing you are a sinner saved by God's grace alone. That reconciliation, making peace *with* God, allows us to feel the peace *of* God. The fullness joy is having that deep sense of the presence of God in our lives, which paradoxically means that we can often feel more joy in difficult circumstances, when we are suffering or facing really tough times, I've often heard people say that when they have really been suffering that's when they felt the closest to Jesus. It is because in our weakness we are brought to total dependency on him.

C Davis (Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Elwell, W.A., et al 2001(ed)) says: "From a psychological perspective one cannot experience joy while being preoccupied with one's own security, pleasure or self-interest. Freedom from inhibitions comes when one is caught up in something great enough to give meaning and purpose to all of life and to every relationship. God alone is the only adequate centre for human existence, and he alone can enable us to experience life with joyous spontaneity and to relate to others with love." True joy comes from God alone.

**6. The Secret of Joy:** How can we maintain our joy? Joy is very closely associated with love in Paul's list of the fruits of the spirit. As we have seen, joy flows from love. **So we maintain our joy by abiding in Jesus' love.** (Read John 15:9-17). So what is it to remain in Jesus' love? Put simply, it is obedience. Jesus says to abide in my love is to keep my commandments. Jesus kept his Father's commandments. He was perfectly obedient. Jesus asks us to follow him in the same way. But he is no dictator; he is not just giving us commands for the sake of it. Nothing could be further from the truth. He wants the best for us, he wants us to flourish. Jesus does not call us servants, but *friends*. This is such an intimate thing to say. It implies closeness and loyalty. To be friends with Jesus brings with it a responsibility and a privilege. What kind of friendship do we have with Jesus? Are we close to him? Are we loyal? Let us be clear on this, **our friendship with Jesus is not one we earn by obedience, but a friendship we express by obedience.**

As his love abides in us and we abide in his love, we respond by obeying him, and the result of such loving obedience is complete joy (v11) "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete".

**4:** Why do you think Jesus believes it is so important for us to remain in his love (John 15:9)?

**5:** How can there be joy in repentance?

**6:** Is the joy of the Lord your strength? Are there any barriers in your own life that may be preventing you from experiencing the fullness of the Lord's joy?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG112: Fruit That Is Never Out Of Season **JOY: Love's Strength**

John 15:9-17 & Philippians 4:4-7

Home Group Sermon Notes

11 October 2015 - Alison Hunter

**1. Introduction:** We might describe joy as a feeling of happiness or Contentment, or maybe it is to be found in the experience of pleasure. Some might say that what brings them joy is leading a 'fulfilled' life, experiencing new things, or the birth of children or grandchildren. These are certainly things we would rejoice in. The apostle Paul, is writing his letter to the Philippian church from prison, so he is in a situation where he wouldn't circumstantially have what we would call joy. And yet in that context he is exhorting the Philippian Christians to rejoice (v4) "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" He says it twice so it must be important. It is because he wants us to understand that joy is possible independent of our circumstances. He says *rejoice always*.

Life changes all the time. Things happen that are beyond our control. So often our feelings of joy are based upon how our life is going. If we are well and healthy in our bodies, and getting what we want out of life either *in work* or *through relationships*, in *achieving our goals*, or *acquiring new experiences* then we are happy. But in this fallen world things don't always go the way we would like them to, so if our joy were dependent upon our circumstances it would surely be impossible to be joyful *always*.

**2. What is Joy?** *Biblical joy is different to circumstantial happiness.* It is much much deeper than that. This joy is not limited by, nor tied solely to external circumstances. This joy is a gift of God – *an inner reality*, something that we experience internally and therefore it can be experienced even in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances - and isn't that what all of us deep down are really looking for?

Externally it demonstrates itself in gentleness (v5) "Let your gentleness be evident to all". It is a poise under pressure if you like, an ability to be able to cope with whatever life throws at you. It means to have a gentle spirit. A spirit that is fair minded, reasonable, charitable, willing to yield one's own rights but without sacrificing the truth. It is not retaliatory. Basically it is graciousness. Therefore joy is inextricably linked to peace (v7) "And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus". The peace of God is a state of heart and mind – the feeling of being settled. It is freedom from worry and anxiety. It is important to make a distinction here – What Paul is not talking about is some form of stoicism, that whole 'keep calm and carry on' mantra that we see on a variety of things (t-shirts, mug, notebooks etc). Paul is not talking about this stiff upper lip, let's not talk about it but keep pressing on attitude.

This philosophy basically says you might be miserable but just will yourself on and pretend it's all ok. This is not what Paul is talking about.

**4. The Search for Joy:** Hedonism is the philosophy that underpins life for many people, we live to maximize our pleasure. As part of the team of street pastors who go out on the high street on Friday and Saturday nights, we encounter a lot of young people who just seem to be living for the weekend when they can go out, get drunk, take drugs and have sex. The problem with this is that no amount of pleasures will ever bring us true joy, because they are fleeting and unsustainable. C. S. Lewis, in his book "Surprised by Joy" which tells of his conversion from atheism to Christianity says this about joy: "I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world". That is because Joy is a delight in life that runs deeper, much deeper than mere pleasure or a feeling of happiness. He hits the nail on the head when he says: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*).

Here in the western world we are constantly bombarded with adverts selling us a million different ideas of what happiness is. They are everywhere; on the television, in magazines, on the internet, on billboards. We can't get away from them. We are constantly being told if we have this or that, or look a certain way, be a certain dress size then we'll be happy. If we live in a nice house, have 2.4 children, drive a certain car it will make us happy. We may experience a feeling of happiness if we have those things certainly, but this is not joy. Our emotions can so easily peak and trough following the pattern of the external factors in our lives. The joy Paul is talking about is independent of external circumstances. It is an internal state of being and one which all of us deeply long for. But herein lies the problem. In our search for this joy our hearts chase after all kinds of things. We constantly try to escape from the true source of joy. Think about what your heart is attached to. Is it your career, your achievements, your relationships? If our hearts are attached to our job or our performance our emotions will rise and fall with it. It is the same with relationships, if we base our peace and security and happiness in them then it's fine when they are going well but what happens when they don't go so well? We cannot focus our joy on our relationships. Naturally our hearts want to, and I am not saying relationships are wrong or bad for us, they're not, they are great, but we cannot rely on them to be our source of joy.

**5. The Source of Joy:** The true sense of joy that we are longing for can only be found in one place and that is *in a relationship with the living God through Christ Jesus*. Paul tells us; "guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:7). True joy is a quality of life and not simply a fleeting emotion, it is grounded in God himself and is derived from him. This is how Paul can say (in Philippians 4:11&12) "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in *any* and *every* situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." Paul rejoices in his relationship with Jesus. Not in his circumstances.