

Does God Want You to be Happy?

(A Christian Perspective on Overcoming Obstacles to Joy)

Study Guide

Chapter 1 – Fear

ICE BREAKER: What did you fear as a child that you no longer are afraid of?

THE STORY: The story is about the Author's bout with colon cancer. He refers to it as both "the best thing and the worst thing that has ever happened to me." Does anyone have a similar story that they would like to share about themselves or someone near to them?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 27, Paragraph 1:

I am afraid for my life! I am afraid that I will not have enough money to support my family! I am ill and afraid of suffering! I am afraid that I will not be able to provide properly for my kids' education, or for retirement. What will happen if I become disabled? I am afraid of the dark, the unknown, the unusual. I am afraid of heights, confined quarters, people!

Page 29, Paragraph 2:

In today's world, we often find ourselves fearful of what might happen in our jobs or in our daily lives, and we can't seem to shake it. Many people have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep as their minds dwell on these fears. Others have trouble enjoying the simple pleasures of life as they are worried about the budget, retirement, or other money matters. Living in fear of what *might* happen is not the natural state, and it is not a healthy way to live.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- What are you afraid of?
- What is your worst fear? Why?
- What should you do to overcome your fears?
- What do you actually do when you are afraid?
- What can be done to overcome fear?

How can the following impact fear?

- Study/Education
- Familiarity
- Sharing
- Prayer

SCRIPTURE (Read Aloud):

*But now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you,
O Israel, the one who formed you says,
“Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you.
I have called you by name; you are mine.
When you go through deep waters,
I will be with you. Isaiah 43:1 NLT*

- What does this verse mean?: “I have called you by name; you are mine.”
- In this verse Isaiah is quoting God speaking about the Jewish people. Can this also be interpreted as prophecy?

I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart, and the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid. John 14:27 NLT

- Why is this a gift the world cannot give?
- Who is eligible for this gift?
- Why are we as Christians still afraid?
- What should we do?
- What do you do?

REFLECTION:

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Psalm 23:3-5 KJV*

Can you relate a time when someone you knew was in those circumstances and truly felt that way?

- Will you feel that way?
- What does the empty tomb mean to you?

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Chapter 2 – Worry

ICE BREAKER: Have you ever thought back and laughed about what you had been worrying about?

THE STORY: The author was facing a serious financial crisis and was worrying himself sick. Then everything turned around almost overnight. Have you had a similar experience?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 42, Paragraph 1

One of my favorite sayings is, “You always worry about the wrong thing.” How often do we fret, worry, and lose sleep over something that never comes to pass? The fact is worry really does us no good what-so-ever. In fact, we know it is bad for our health. If we are concerned about something we should take action, and pray about it. Anxiety and worry are stressful, yet solve nothing. How much of your life have you spent worrying about bills, or first impressions, or political correctness, or interviews, or taxes, or grades, or health? If you really think about it, how beneficial was any of the worrying that you did in the past? The Bible is very clear on this. God wants us to rely on him and not to worry about what might come to pass.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- What do you worry about the most?
- Do you keep your worries to yourself?
- Why do we worry? Does worry itself ever solve anything?
- What are some techniques you use to stop worrying?

How can the following impact worry?

- Open discussion with an advisor or a loved one

- Logical evaluation of potentialities and outcomes
- Prayer

SCRIPTURE (Read aloud):

This is why I tell you: do not be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive, or about clothes for your body. After all, isn't life worth more than food? And isn't the body worth more than clothes? Look at the birds, they do not plant seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your Father in heaven takes care of them! Aren't you worth much more than birds? Can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?

And why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow: they do not work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that not even King Solomon with all his wealth had clothes as beautiful as one of these flowers. It is God who clothes the wild grass – that is here today and gone tomorrow, burned up in the oven. Won't he be all the more sure to clothe you? What little faith you have?

So do we start worrying: "Where will my food come from? Or my drink? Or my clothes?" (These are the things the pagans are always concerned about.) Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. Instead be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things. So do not worry about tomorrow; it will have enough worries of its own. There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings.

Matthew 6:25-34 GNT

- How does this relate to modern day living?
- Is it realistic in today's world not to worry?
- What should we be concerned about? How does concern differ from sorry?

REFLECTION:

In the parable of the four soils, Jesus uses the seed to represent the word of God, and reflects on how worry and worldly things impact us negatively:

The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear; but the worries and riches and pleasures of this life crowd in and choke them, and their fruit never ripens.

Luke 8:14 GNT

- Does wealth increase our propensity toward worry?
- Does poverty increase our propensity toward worry?

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Chapter 3 – Hatred

ICE BREAKER: What common activity do you really hate doing?

THE STORY: The author tells of a time when, as a child he told his mother that he hated her. Did you ever say, “I hate you!” to anyone? When? Why? Did you really mean it? How did you feel afterwards?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 52, Paragraph 1:

Hatred, even just saying the word, sounds harsh and evil. Unfortunately today’s world abounds with hatred. The clash between religions that we see exhibited in terrorism, book burning, racism, and other examples of intolerance, all illustrate how hatred is a part of our everyday lives. We even see it in the political division between the parties in America, and their inability to compromise or even try to see the other’s point of view. Clearly hatred leads to unhappiness, and repeatedly God is very clear that hatred towards others is never acceptable.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- Why does religious hatred seem to thrive?
- How can the many faces of hatred be overcome?
- Does anyone unknowingly foment hatred?

How can the following impact hatred that exists in the world?

- Knowledge and familiarity
- Christianity
- Moderate Islam
- Family values

SCRIPTURE (Read aloud):

You have heard it said, "Love your friends, hate your enemies." But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil. Why should God reward you if you only love the people who love you? Even the tax collectors do that! And if you speak only to your friends, have you done anything out of the ordinary? Even the pagans do that! Matthew 5:43-48 GNT

- Who would you consider "your (our) enemies" today?
- How hard is it to "love your enemies?"
- Why would Jesus make this change versus Old Testament thinking?
- How is this relevant in light of modern geo-political problems and terrorism?

REFLECTION:

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. Luke 6:27 GNT

- How hard is this to follow?
- How do you feel when you follow this direction?
- How do you feel when you don't?
- How does this relate to the Golden Rule?

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Chapter 4 – Loneliness

ICE BREAKER: Were you ever “lost” as a child? Or have you ever temporarily “lost” a child at a mall or amusement park or other public place?

THE STORY: The author tells of a time when he was overseas by himself and very sick. Although it was a short period of time he truly felt very much alone. Have you ever felt alone, or abandoned?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 63, Paragraph 1:

God will always be there for and with us regardless of who else might abandon us. King Saul had chosen David to be his successor, but later changed his mind and put out a contract on David’s life. David had to run, and spent long periods hiding in the caves near the Dead Sea. During those years on the run, and alone, David realized that despite his earlier prowess as a soldier, politician, and musician, even if he were to become king later in life, his future and his very existence were dependent on his relationship with God rather than his own accomplishments. David recognized that regardless of our position in life, or how alone we find ourselves, God is always with us. David expressed it succinctly:

*Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the Lord will hold me close. Psalm 27:10 NLT*

Page 67, Paragraph 5 – Page 68, Paragraph 1:

The prophet Jeremiah wrote Lamentations around 586 B.C. The people of Jerusalem had been tortured, enslaved or killed after Jerusalem had fallen to Babylon. In Lamentations, Jeremiah reflects back on the destruction and tragedy that had befallen the Jewish people. While the book is generally a book of sadness and tears, Jeremiah reminded the people of Jerusalem that even in the very worst of times, God was there

full of love. Just as God was there for them, he is here for us today. God never falters. He is with us day in and day out.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- Have you ever felt lonely even in a crowd?
- Is it hard to remember that God is always there for us? If so why?
- Will simply thinking about Jesus or God or the Holy Spirit help when you feel alone?

SCRIPTURE (Read aloud):

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him, because he remains with you and is in you.*

When I go, you will not be left all alone, I will come back to you. In a little while the world will see me no more, but you will see me; and because I live, you will also live. When that day comes, you will know that I am in my Father and that you are in me, just as I am in you. John 13:16-20 GNT

- Why can't the world see this "Helper"?
- Is it sometimes easy, even for believers, to forget this "Helper" is there? Why?
- Is this "supernatural" concept hard to understand or to accept?

REFLECTION:

- How would you describe the Holy Spirit?
- Does the Holy Spirit ever get "lost" amid the "noise" of everyday life?
- Can the presence of the Holy Spirit truly help in overcoming loneliness? If so how?
- How can the Holy Spirit be a comforter, or encourager or counselor?

*Greek – paraclete: comforter, or encourager or counselor

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Chapter 5 – Illness and Suffering

ICE BREAKER: What do you do to pamper yourself when you are sick?

THE STORY: The author describes how his sister has myasthenia gravis, a very debilitating disease, yet is more concerned about the welfare of others than her own. Do you know anyone in a similar situation? What is it that makes them so strong?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 72, Paragraphs 2 & 3:

There are two kinds of sickness: sickness of the body and sickness of the spirit. God wants to be with us to help us through either. God is at our bedside when we are ill, and he hears the prayers of those who are praying for the sick. However, illness and the frailty of the body are not as critical in God's eyes as is a sickness of the spirit. God wants us to understand that sickness of the spirit, or failure to comply with God's wishes, is a sickness that can have eternal ramifications. Fortunately, God is a forgiving and understanding God. He wants nothing more than for us to find salvation through Jesus Christ. The Lord can heal the body, and he sent Jesus to show us the way to heal our spiritual ailments. It is up to each individual to decide whether or not to follow him.

Obviously, the Lord does not heal everyone who is sick. Why and where he chooses to intervene is one of those mysteries beyond our comprehension and mortal understanding. On the other hand, God gives everyone the opportunity to heal a sickness of the spirit through acceptance of his will, and by following the teachings and example of Jesus. In the end, he does heal all illness and death as he restores those who believe and follow his commands.

Food For Thought and Discussion:

- Why does God allow physical sickness at all?
- Can you give examples of spiritual illness?

- Jesus performed many miracles, healing the sick. Why aren't there miracles today? Or are there? If so. . . examples?

SCRIPTURE (Read aloud):

He was going into a village when he was met by ten men suffering from a dreaded skin disease. They stood at a distance and shouted, "Jesus! Master! Have pity on us!"

Jesus saw them and said to them, "Go and let the priests examine you."

On the way they were made clean. Luke 17:12-14 GNT

- Why did Jesus wait for the men to leave before he healed them?
- What do you suppose these men did, and/or said, after they were healed? Could that have anything to do with why they and others were healed by Jesus?
- How would you relate the two terms "being healed" and "being saved"?

Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, and we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory.

I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. Romans 8:17-18 GNT

- *Do you know anyone who has been very ill, and in great pain, yet seemed OK with it because of their faith?*

REFLECTION:

- Is there ever any good that comes from being sick, either physically or in the spirit?
- What do you think about faith healers in the modern world?

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Chapter 6 – Poverty

ICE BREAKER: Have you ever been really broke? When? Why? How did it feel?

THE STORY: In the story some poor migrant workers reached out and helped the author while many wealthy folks passed him by. Do you think that experience is unique? Have you ever had a similar experience?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 81, Paragraph 1:

How many times have you heard that money can't buy happiness? While you know that it is true, doesn't it sometimes slip into your mind that the comfort of having unlimited wealth would bring great joy? On the other hand, how many wealthy people do you know who are unhappy in their lives, in their marriages, in their jobs, or simply unhappy with themselves? Is it money that makes us rich? Is it lack of money that makes us poor? Is money the currency that we should be considering when trying to determine what makes us happy? How should we treat others when we see they are poor and in despair? How much is the right amount to give? Why are there rich people and poor people? Does God favor some over others, or do we each have a role and a place in God's grand plan? Why is it that some of the poorest people in the world seem to be the happiest?

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- Recently Time Magazine did a story saying that the happiest people in the United States were a family of 4 with an income of about \$75,000 per year. Those earning less had trouble meeting basic needs, and those earning more weren't satisfied with their incomes and simply wanted more. What do you think about Time's observation?
- What does rich mean to you?
- What does poor mean to you?
- How did Jesus feel about wealth?

- How did Jesus feel about poverty?
- Does our society favor the wealthy over the poor?
- Did Jesus favor the poor over the wealthy?

SCRIPTURE (Read aloud):

Jesus then said to his disciples, I assure you: it will be very hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven. I repeat: it is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

Matthew 19:23-24 GNT

- Why would Jesus say this? Does he discriminate against the wealthy?
- How would you describe the Kingdom of God as it relates to financial wealth?
- How do you avoid letting money or wealth become a false idol in your life?

If we are rich and see others in need yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? 1 John 3-17 GNT

Then he will say to those on his left, "Away from me, you that are under God's curse! Away to the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels! I was hungry but you would not feed me, thirsty but you would not give me a drink; I was a stranger but you would not welcome me in your homes, naked but you would not clothe me; I was sick and in prison, but you would not take care of me." Then they will answer him, "When Lord, did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and we would not help you?" The King will reply, "I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me."

Matthew 25:34-36 GNT

- How can we know how much we should do? There is always someone else in need? How much is enough? How do you decide?
- Can we pick and choose? How about an obvious drug addict or alcoholic panhandling?

REFLECTION:

- The Bible clearly tells us not to treat the wealthy with more respect and favoritism* yet today we see it happening all the time. There are even Christians who believe that wealth is a sign of God's approval.
- What do you think?

*James 2:1-5 GNT

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Chapter 7 – Guilt and Shame

ICE BREAKER: Did you remember ever doing anything as a child that you were ashamed of or felt guilty about?

THE STORY: The author reflects back on how his father forgave him and set an example. Can you think of a similar situation in your life?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 91, Paragraph 1:

Have you ever been guilty of something, regretted it, and felt ashamed? It is almost impossible to be happy while feeling these emotions. God knows, better than we do, the weaknesses that are part of our human experience, and he recognizes the temptations and pitfalls that we encounter every day. From the very beginning, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge, their days of innocence were gone. The stage was set for the rest of humanity to be in a constant internal battle between good and evil; between following God's laws and succumbing to the temptations of the world.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- Do feelings of guilt and/or shame do you any good?
- Why is it that mankind as a whole, and individuals as well continue to make the same mistakes over and over?
- How do the Old Testament and the New Testament differ in regard to guilt, shame, and punishment? Or do they?

SCRIPTURE (Read aloud):

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us. But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing. If we say that we have not sinned, we make a liar out of God, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:8-10 GNT

- If one confesses their sins to God, is there any reason to hold on to guilt? Is it easy or difficult to let it go?
- When a lifelong sinner confesses his sins and accepts Jesus as his Savior on his deathbed, and is then saved, how can that be considered “fair” when compared to a lifelong believer and follower of Jesus?

Peter began to speak: “I now realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Those who fear him and do what is right are acceptable to him, no matter what race they belong to.” Acts 10:34-35 GNT

*This includes everyone, because there is no difference between Jews and Gentile; God is the same Lord of all and richly blesses all who call to him. As the scripture says, “Everyone who calls out to him will be saved.”** Romans 10:12-13 GNT

- Do you think that it is God’s will that there are so many denominations within the Christian faith? If yes, why? If no, why?
- Did Jesus really include everyone? What about the prideful Pharisees? What about the rich?

REFLECTION:

If there was one thing that you could do over in your life what would it be? Why?

*Joel 2:32 GNT

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Chapter 8 – Loss, Grief, and Sorrow

ICE BREAKER: Have you ever lost something, and then found it in the strangest place and wondered, “how in the world did it ever get there?”

THE STORY: The author lost a really close friend as a teenager and didn’t know how to deal with it. Can you share a particularly difficult time in your life when you suffered a major loss of some kind. How did you deal with it? Was there anyone there to help you through it?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 102, Paragraph 4:

Our human perspective tends to be short term and immediate. God’s perspective is long term and timeless. When we lose a loved one, or are grieved by some other situation such as the loss of a job, or the breakup of a marriage, we find it difficult to look beyond the moment. We find it difficult to accept that the Lord works in mysterious ways.* We are saddened, distraught, or angered, by events that we think are unfair, untimely or even unexpected. Nevertheless, though it may seem that we are alone in our grief, God is with us and will help us.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- This raises the age old question: Why do bad things happen to good people?
- Is there always a reason for tragedy? Are some events simply irrational?
- Why is our vision typically short term? How and why is our perspective different from God’s?
- How do you overcome grief and sorrow?

SCRIPTURE (Read Aloud):

Sing to the LORD, all you godly ones!

Praise his holy name.

For his anger lasts only a moment,

but his favor lasts a lifetime!

Weeping may last through the night,

but joy comes with the morning. Psalms 30:4-5 NLT

- What does “*his anger*” represent?
- How do you interpret “*weeping may last through the night,*” and “*joy comes with the morning.*” How many different ways can this be interpreted?

He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared. Revelation 21:4 GNT

- The reference is what will happen after death for those who have accepted Jesus. What is your vision of life after death? Heaven?
- Why is it that the world that we live in is so filled with tragedy, pain and suffering?

REFLECTION:

- Are you dealing with loss, grief or sadness?
- In a broader perspective, what can we do today to overcome some of the grief and sadness in the world?

*Romans 11:33-36, Isaiah 40:13

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Chapter 9 – Greed and Avarice

ICE BREAKER: What would you do if you won \$300 million in the powerball lottery?

THE STORY: The author tells of a time when he was tempted to do something that he knew was wrong but would make him a lot of money. Can you think of a time when you were tempted? How did you respond to that temptation?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 109, Paragraph 5:

There have been many books, movies, and plays written about it. We have seen it in our daily lives and on T.V. We have seen it on Wall Street. The insatiable desire for wealth or financial gain seems to overwhelm some people so that they cannot think of anything else. Their entire lives are focused on accumulating more and more money and material things. They seem to believe that if they can obtain just a little more they will achieve happiness. No matter what level of wealth they achieve, they still feel unfulfilled and discontent. So they continue to strive for more and more and more.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- How much money is enough?
- How does today's media impact our thoughts, or those of our children, regarding possessions and wealth?
- Why do people believe that having more money will make them happier? Does it?

SCRIPTURE (Read Aloud):

No servant can be the slave of two masters; such a slave will hate one and love the other or will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Luke 16:13 GNT

- What does this passage mean? Why can't you serve both God and money?

- How can a wealthy person relate to this passage?

Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. 1 Timothy 6:6 NLT

- Why is it so hard to be content with just the basics? Do we care more about what our neighbors and friends think, than about how God sees us?
- What does Paul mean when he says, *"Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth."*
- How often do you think about the fact that we bring nothing with us when we are born, and take nothing with us when we die? How do you feel when you **do** think about it?

REFLECTION:

- What is most important to you in your life? Why?
- What is the worst thing that you could lose?

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Chapter 10 – Pride

ICE BREAKER: Describe a great personal success or accomplishment.

THE STORY: The author talks of having to “reel himself in,” when he begins to feel too proud, and has forgotten that any gifts he has come from God. Have you ever experienced the same thing?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 117, Paragraphs 4 & 5:

There is nothing wrong with being proud of something you or someone close to you has accomplished. Nor is there anything wrong with taking pride in your family history, or being proud of your school, nation or country. The problem comes when someone has an excessively high opinion of themselves; when they are arrogant, disdainful, or haughty. When we start to believe that we, not God, are in control, and that all our successes are one hundred percent of our own doing, then we are being prideful.

Those who are arrogant and prideful are destined to eventually become unhappy and discontented. God wants to see humility in the hearts of men. He seems to watch out for those who are not humble so that eventually he can bring them back into the fold, humble them; even bring them to their knees, if necessary. Unfortunately some people never learn, and are arrogant and prideful right up until the end. At that point they have set themselves up for a mighty fall indeed.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- When we accomplish something that we are really excited about or proud of, why is it so easy to forget to thank God, and to take all the credit ourselves?
- Do we ever accomplish anything on our own without God?

- Does recognizing how much God has given us take away from our personal success?

SCRIPTURE (Read Aloud):

And because of God's gracious gift to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you should. Instead, be modest in your thinking, and judge yourself according to the amount of faith that God has given you. We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully. Romans 12:3-8 GNT

- What gifts do you have and how are you using them?
- Why would God give different people different gifts?
- How does this concept relate to family? Nation? World?

REFLECTION:

- What gifts do you wish you had?
- Do your children have the same gifts that you have? How are they sharing them?

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Chapter 11 – Envy and Jealousy

ICE BREAKER: Do you remember something that a brother or sister had when you were growing up that you really wanted? Or was there something that you had that you didn't want to share with others?

THE STORY: While the author's neighbor was very successful financially, he just never seemed to be satisfied and was envious of others' successes. He wanted to be the best at everything he did. Is it wrong to strive to be the best? Why do you suppose that, despite his many successes he just couldn't be content?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 127, Paragraph 2:

Envy, jealousy and selfishness have no place in a Christian life. We are to give freely, share what we have, put value on spiritual things, rather than material things, and follow the example set for us by Jesus. Unfortunately envy and jealousy are among the most common emotions that we see in our daily lives. They are major destroyers of happiness, are perhaps the hardest emotions to control. Nevertheless, God has given us the ability to be in charge of our emotions, and to decide whether we want to have a life focused on spiritual things or on worldly things. By focusing on God's law, Jesus' example, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can be in control, and not allow envy or jealousy take hold of our lives. Loving God, and loving others, precludes envy, jealousy and selfishness.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- When we are envious or jealous, what are we forgetting?
- Why is it OK for our God to be a "jealous God"* when we are supposed to avoid being jealous?

**Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. Exodus 34:14 NIV Also see Exodus 20:5*

SCRIPTURE (Read Aloud):

A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body;

jealousy is like a cancer in the bones. Proverbs 14:30

- Is this literally true? Can jealousy make you physically sick?
- Can you be at peace if you are envious or jealous?

But as for me I almost lost my footing.

My feet were slipping and I was almost gone.

For I envied the proud

when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.

They seem to live such painless lives;

their bodies are so healthy and strong.

They don't have troubles like other people;

They're not plagued with problems like everyone else.

They wear pride like a jeweled necklace

and clothe themselves with cruelty.

These fatcats have everything

their hearts could ever wish for! Psalm 73:2-7 NLT

- Is it hard to accept it when we see immoral or unethical people are doing very well financially?
- Why is it that some very bad people seem to prosper? Is this something we should be concerned about? Why? Why not?
- This verse would indicate that nothing has changed in this regard since the time of David. How do you feel about that?

REFLECTION:

- What can you do to overcome envy and jealousy in your life?
- How can we help our children (grandchildren) avoid being selfish?

Does God Want You to be Happy?

(A Christian Perspective on Overcoming Obstacles to Joy)

Study Guide

Chapter 12 – Lust

ICE BREAKER: What is your favorite movie that is a love story? What makes it such a good movie?

THE STORY: We all probably know someone like Jim from the story. What should we do when we know someone is cheating on his or her spouse?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 135, Paragraph 4:

How many times have we all seen situations where lust has destroyed happiness. Lust can impact not only the lustful individual, but all those around him or her. Lust is a distortion of love, one of the most beautiful gifts that God has given us. Love is the ultimate in sharing, while lust is the ultimate in selfishness. Concern with only one's own gratification, regardless of whom it may hurt, is above all else as ungodly as one can get. Nevertheless we repeatedly see it in our neighborhoods, on T.V., in the movies, among the rich as well as the poor. With so many ungodly examples surrounding us, is it any wonder that falling prey to temptation is so common?

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- Today approximately 50% of marriages end in divorce. What are the primary factors that cause divorce? How can they be avoided? Or can they?
- Is lust a genetic "hangover" from our prehistoric primitive ancestors?
- Why is sex such a motivating force in advertising?

SCRIPTURE (Read Aloud):

You have heard that it was said, "Do not commit adultery." But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:27-28 GNT*

*Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy 5:18

- Jesus was saying that lustful thoughts are just as bad as lustful acts. Do you agree? Is there a difference between a passing thought, and a real desire to do something?
- How do men and women differ in this regard? Of do they?
- Often we say that Biblical references need to be taken in the context of the culture and society of the time. Do you believe that this is the case with this admonition by Jesus?

Do not deceive yourselves; no one makes a fool of God. You will reap what you plant. If you plant in the field of your natural desires, from it you will gather the harvest of death; if you plant in the field of the Spirit, from the Spirit you will gather the harvest of eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8 GNT

- What does Paul mean by the “*field of natural desires?*”
- What does he mean by the “*field of the Spirit?*”
- Are we our own worst enemy? Or is it our environment that provides the bad influence on our lives?

REFLECTION:

- The Bible tells us to “*Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.*”^{*} Does this mean that we should avoid many movies and T.V. series? Should we avoid going to the beach where skimpy bikinis abound? Should we forbid our teenage girls to wear the most popular clothing because it is too sexy? Should we forbid our sons to “hang out” with anyone other than friends from church?
- In today’s world how should we, or can we, respond to this advice from Paul?

^{*}2 Timothy 2:22 NLT

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Chapter 13 – Happiness

ICE BREAKER: What was the happiest moment in your life?

THE STORY: The author reflects back on his parents, his upbringing, his career, and the many positive influences on his life. Despite all the positive factors, he describes how he became prideful and forgot the origin of his many blessings and gifts. Whenever this happened God had a way of intervening and “reeing” him back in to remind him of what was really important in life: his relationship with others, and especially with God.

- How did your upbringing influence where you are today in your relationship with God?
- Can you think of any examples in your life where God has “reeled” you in?

EXCERPT (Read Aloud):

Page 143, Paragraph 2:

Frequently we find that following God’s will and living according to his way seem totally different than what is normally accepted in the world. Sometimes it is hard to understand why it is better to give than to receive, to turn the other cheek, to love those who are our enemies, or to honor the poor, meek and hungry.* All of these things seem contrary to what worldly wisdom would teach. In practice, however, doing unto others as we would have them do unto us, and loving others as we love ourselves** prove to be practical, expedient, and the greatest sources of happiness and joy, while pleasing to God.

Food for Thought and Discussion:

- Is it any harder for us to live following Jesus’ example and teachings than it was for him?

*Acts 20:35, Matthew 5:39, Matthew 5:44, Matthew 5:3,5,6

**Luke 6:31, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39

- In our daily lives, how often are we overwhelmed by the “noise” of just living in this world, and forget about our relationship with God and what he expects from us? How can we be more tuned in to God and tune out the world? What is a good balance?

SCRIPTURE (Read Aloud):

May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!

Show a gentle attitude toward everyone. The Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thoughtful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.

In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble right, pure, lovely, and honorable. Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my action. And the God who gives us peace will be with you. Philippians 4:4-9 GNT

- Paul's summary for the Philippians provides a good summary for us as well. What can you take away from this summary that will help you in your everyday life?
- What, if anything, would be different if Paul were talking to us today, versus what he had to say 2000 years ago?

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. Matthew 6:33 NLT

- Sometimes what we need may be different than what we think we want. Can you think of an example of this in your life?
- Think of the many laws in the Old Testament and compare with the exquisite simplicity of Jesus' teachings. Why do we always try to make things more complex than they need to be?

So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God. Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 NLT

REFLECTION: Does God Want You to be Happy?

