

DECEMBER STUDY



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Beginning thoughts...

This is the *Happiest Time of the Year*, when we should experience all the *Joy of the Season*. Hold it just a minute! For Christians, the joy of the season should be in our hearts every day, every year, for an entire lifetime. Don't get me wrong, I love Christmas with all its glittering lights, delightful sounds, fragrant smells, delicious food and everything that combines to make it a wonderful time of the year. But does it take gifts, family and friends, special recipes, decorations, holiday movies and music to make our holidays joyful? Or do we remember why we have reason to celebrate? It was the most joyful occasion ever, when Jesus was born in that stable so long, long ago.

When I think of the most amazing, joyous event that has ever happened in my life, I realize that it didn't take too long before the happiness faded. Yet, when I accepted Christ as my Saviour, I found the joy of the Lord. That joy is my strength; that joy is my heritage; that joy is my ultimate destination. One day, I'll meet that Joy and fall at His feet to worship.

I shouldn't be anything but joyful when I remember all the fantastic promises He has made to us. My happiness may come and go depending on circumstances, health, family, the world situation, or numerous other things; however, nothing can remove the joy that comes from knowing the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I just want you to feel my joy as you are reading and studying this month. I pray you find this joy—perhaps difficult to understand but so awesome to claim for your own.

JOY

COME, DELIGHT AND ABIDE

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Experience joy as you come into His presence, delight in His Word and abide in Him.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"* (Psalm 16:11).

★ Go over p. 13 of *Treasure* together.

Leader's Note: The study writer mentions that Psalm 119:161-168 is the "Schin" section. The longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119 is divided into 22 sections, with eight verses apiece. Each section is titled after a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So *Schin* is the Hebrew letter that distinguishes these particular verses.

★ Emphasize the first three promises mentioned. Each week write them in a journal.

★ **PROMISE ONE: His presence offers fullness of joy.** How do we come into the presence of God? (*With thanksgiving and praise—Psalm 100:4*)

★ When is Jesus with us if we've accepted Him? (*Always—Matthew 28:20*)

★ Do you enjoy being in the presence of God?

★ What does the Lord require of us? (*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God—Micah 6:8.*)

★ **PROMISE TWO: God's Word brings joy.** Do you find this to be true?

★ Plan to memorize some of the Scriptures listed: Psalm 119:11, 47, 105; 1 John 5:13; Romans 1:16; Jeremiah 15:16. Write your favorite in your journal.

★ **PROMISE THREE: Abiding in Him brings joy.** How can we abide in Him? (1) *Surrender our will to His;* (2) *Obey His commands;* and (3) *Love each other as He loves us.*

★ How does this bring us joy? (*By knowing and resting in the fact of Christ's forgiveness and healing of the Word of truth, we can experience joy—believing we have been pardoned through Christ's death and secured through His resurrection. Remember the illustration of the tea bag on p.12?*)

★ In John 17:13, why does Jesus say "my joy"? (*Jesus wanted His disciples to really know and understand Him and to accept what He was going to endure on the cross. It's the same meaning for "joy" found in Hebrews 12:2.*)

★ In Hebrews 12:2, the writer records that Jesus, "...for the joy set before Him, endured the cross...." What does this mean to you? (*For me, Jesus endured the cross so I could have joy.*)

COOL DOWN: Dismiss by singing "In The Garden" (*Rejoice! The Free Will Baptist Hymn Book*, p. 583).



JOY

ASK HIM, PLEASE HIM

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Know joy as you pray and seek to please Him.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 10:10).*

★ Go over p. 15 of *Treasure*: **PROMISE 4: Ask, that your joy may be full** and **PROMISE 5: If you want more joy, please God.**

★ Do you believe that God wants to please you and give you the desires of your heart?

★ Is this what "that your joy may be full" means?

★ God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please Him; what does He give to the sinner? (*travail, vanity and vexation of spirit—Ecclesiastes 2:26.*)

★ Does this mean, however, that Christians will never experience troubles or trials? (*No. James 1:2-3 says WHEN—not if—we have trials/trouble/temptations, we are to count them as joy.*)

★ Are you able to rejoice in the midst of whatever comes in your life?

★ How should we look at tribulation? (*As a challenge, an opportunity for God to display His works and His power*)

★ Do you have an *attitude of gratitude*, pleasing to the Lord?

★ How can we please God? (*With our faith—believing He is there with us all the time and having a thankful heart knowing that everything in life comes from Him.*)

★ What are some thankfulness items mentioned in Colossians 1:11-14? (1) *Sharing in the inheritance of the saints*; (2) *Deliverance from power of darkness*; (3) *Sharing the love of the Father.*

★ I'm sure you've heard the acronym: **J**-esus first, **O**-thers second, **Y**-ourself last; but do you believe it?

★ How can this be? The world would have us believe that it's all about you and your happiness, leaving Jesus and others out. (*Here, again, we must use faith and wisdom only God can give in order to make this J-O-Y a part of our life.*)

★ Do you know people with a joyful disposition and gratitude written all over them? Don't you love to be around them? (*To me, it's much more fun to be around people with cheerful spirits who don't often get discouraged, rather than those who are down in the dumps all the time.*)

★ Think on these Scriptures: Romans 5:3-5; 8:18; 8:37.

COOL DOWN: Dismiss by using the prayer suggestion listed.

JOY

THROUGH MEEKNESS AND PEACE

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Find joy as you exhibit a spirit of meekness and deliberately plan for peace.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 29:19).*

★ Go over the questions and answers on p. 17 of *Treasure* together.

★ In your journal write **PROMISE 6: Joy comes to the meek** and **PROMISE 7: Those who plan for peace experience joy.**

★ What does meekness mean to you?

★ Have you experienced joy through meekness?

★ What does 1 Peter 3:4 say about a meek and quiet spirit? (*This is precious in God's sight.*)

★ Do you know people who prove that living life with meekness is beneficial? How so?

★ According to 2 Timothy 2:25, what is essential in teaching the Word of God? (*Meekness*)

★ How did Moses exhibit meekness? (*Through his humility, strength, belief, leadership and obedience—Exodus 3:10-12; 4:1; 4:28-31*)

★ Were the people of Israel a joyful people? (*No. They grumbled and complained...no food, tired of the food, too much food, spoiled food—Exodus 16:12-15; 19-20; 26-27.*)

★ Even then God was merciful. What did He do when Israel finally obeyed? (*Provided them food for 40 years—Exodus 16:35. Some refer to manna as the original Angel Food Cake.*)

★ What was the Israelites' main problem? (*Lack of gratitude*)

★ Are you ever ungrateful for the blessings God gives you? Do you always thank Him for everything?

★ Do you enjoy peace in your life, or do you let schedules, calendar events, phone calls or even church activities take it away?

★ What is the secret to having peace? (*Knowing God's Word—Psalm 119:165; the ways of wisdom and understanding—Proverbs 3:13,17; we're justified—Romans 5:1; Jesus—Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20.*)

★ Sing the chorus, "Thank You, Lord" *Rejoice, The Free Will Baptist Hymn Book*, p. 318.

COOL DOWN: Dismiss by praying for peace over your schedules.

JOY

IN TEARS, TROUBLES AND TRIUMPHS

BODY FITNESS GOAL: Accept that joy comes through tears, troubles and after a night of weeping.

CORE DEVELOPMENT: *"For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).*

★ Go over *Treasure*, p. 19, together

★ Write in your journal, **PROMISE 8: Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy; PROMISE 9: Count it joy when you meet trouble; and PROMISE 10: Wait until morning.**

★ Read Ephesians 5:19-20. Are we to be thankful in just a few things? Good things? Fun things? *(No, it says ALL things.)*

★ How can we be thankful for heartaches, illnesses, financial problems, marital problems, wayward children, even deaths? *(By believing Romans 8:28. God is working everything for our good, if we love and serve Him.)*

★ Is it easy to be thankful during these times? *(Of course not. We're human, but God understands. Read John 16:33 and 1 Peter 2:21-24.)*

★ Sometimes in difficult situations, joy depends on attitude and perspective. Do you look at what's wrong in your troubles or what's right? *(You might say, "nothing could be right about this!" But just give time for God to work—Psalm 27:14.)*

★ Do you tend to dwell on negative things?

★ Are you only joyful when you are experiencing happiness in life?

★ Why do we sometimes see joy in the darkest of times? *(It's in those times we see God's hand at work and can really appreciate what joy is all about.)*

★ Does knowing God put you here for a purpose give you joy? *(It should because you matter. You are important to God; you are valuable to Him.)*

★ Recently I heard a sermon stating that thanksgiving should be: (1) Expressed—praise God; (2) Expansive—all the pleasures and burdens of life; (3) Expected—the mark of a growing Christian, a giving Christian, and a joyful Christian.

Leader's Note: Psalm 107 is an entire chapter of exhortation to praise God. Choose to share several verses if you don't have time to read it all.

★ Will you allow anything to steal your joy?

COOL DOWN: Dismiss in a prayer of thankfulness for God's promises and the joy He gives.

Final thoughts...

It's usually easy to be joyful during holidays such as Christmas, New Years, Easter, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving and others. What about the other days of the year when there's not enough money to pay a doctor or a utility bill, when the car breaks down, when you lose your job, when you or your family members experience a miscarriage, or when any other number of real problems arise? Who do we turn to for comfort and help? Is it Jesus? I hope and pray that something you have read or heard in this study has caused you to realize that our joy is not in material things or possessions. It's not in a person, even though we love our family and friends. It's not even in ourselves. Joy is only in the LORD. Our hope, our strength, and our purpose in life comes from God. No one is happy all the time; but how we act or react in times of trouble and heart wrenching disappointment proves whether or not we have real joy in our lives. May you truly have the *Joy of the season* in your heart this Christmas.

—Carolyn