

DISCUSSION GUIDE



December 15/18, 2016

BIG IDEA: Joy is an unexpected gift when troubles are in sight.

GROUPS VISION

We believe life transformation happens when we engage with other people, with Jesus as our focus, and take next steps together. A next step is where we Ask, Listen, and Respond to take any action that advances our journey with Jesus.

KEY VERSE

**For the joy of the Lord
is your strength.**

Nehemiah 8:10

MAIN POINTS & SCRIPTURES

It sometimes feels like joy is all around us, but not in us. In the Christmas story, Mary kept her focus of the gift of joy and didn't let it go, despite her many troubles in sight. This perspective brought "breakthrough" – when heavenly realities invade earthly circumstances. **(Luke 1:46-55)** Here are three ways we can focus on heavenly realities despite our earthly circumstances:

1. **Ponder God's promises. (Luke 2:19)** Our perspective changes when we *actively remember* His promises, and not let them slip to the back of our minds. Mary unwrapped joy by studying Scriptures – pondering them often and deeply. **(Luke 1:54-55)** During difficult times, she knew her God was greater than her troubles. **(Hebrews 10:23)** Pondering the promises of God opens the door of our hearts to experience the fullness of joy.
2. **Treasure God's faithfulness.** At just the right time when we least expect it, a gift from God enters our world for us to experience His goodness and faithfulness to us. **(Isaiah 25:1)** Mary had the faith to follow God, which allowed her to experience promises fulfilled, and the same is true in our lives. **(Luke 1:39-40)**
3. **Receive God's joy for yourself.** God's joy is not the same as temporary happiness from a lack of troubles. It is superior to circumstances, and it is a gift from the Holy Spirit inside us that must be received, embraced, and treasured. **(Galatians 5:22)** Joy is always there for us to access – giving us strength and courage. **(Nehemiah 8:10, John 15:11, Romans 15:13)**

DISCUSSION

1. Share some promises of God with your group. If you want, feel free to use an Internet search engine to bring more to mind. (See point #1)
 2. Describe some ways that God has been faithful to you. How can you use His faithfulness in the past to carry you through the present/future? (See point #2)
 3. In what areas in your life do you need to receive more of God's joy? How would your life look differently if you did? (See point #3)
- **What is the Holy Spirit saying to you?**
 - **What is your next step?**

Do you have a story of someone taking a next step?
Share with us at groups@valleycreek.org