

Reframing Emotions

Reframing Joy: A Guide for Going Deeper

Note for Users:

Reframing Joy: A Guide for Going Deeper is the tenth week in an 11-week guide that accompanies the podcast *More to It: Reframing Emotions*.¹ Each session is designed to help you and your community know, love, and praise God for His wonderful design for our emotions, even the ones we view as “negative.” The guide features an episode summary, definitions of relevant terms, Scripture reading, discussion questions, activities, prayers, and reflection prompts.

Each section in a session (for example, prayer and discussion) features a timestamp, but the timestamp is simply a suggestion for the amount of time to spend. At times, you and your community may want to linger with the discussion questions. Or maybe you need to spend more time engaging with a concept through a small group activity. You should prioritize what produces the most flourishing in your community, even if it means bending or breaking the time “rules.”

In the podcast, one of our counselors suggests emotions—even the negative ones—are echoes of Eden. If we listen to those echoes and follow them to their source, we might just end up back in the garden, not hiding from God, but experiencing the forevermore joy found in His presence. As you use this guide with your community, we pray that a spirit of unity, curiosity, and humility will be present, creating a space in which you can be vulnerable, drawing near to God and one another.

The Austin Stone Institute, The Austin Stone Counseling Center

¹ Subscribe to the podcast here: <https://pod.link/1626545281>.

Session 10: Joy

Episode Main Point

Joy is not an emotion but a state of being. We receive it from God, and we cultivate it—on our own and in community—through orienting toward God and what He says is true, in both our happiness and sadness.

Episode Summary

We often use the words “happiness” and “joy” interchangeably, but the counselors encourage us to distinguish between the two. Happiness is an emotion. It is a positive response toward something we perceive as good. Joy, on the other hand, is a state of being. It is a supernatural grace we receive from God and grow in as we encounter both happy and sad occasions.

Joy, then, leads us to live in the tension of the already, but not yet. It allows us to acknowledge the griefs of this life while still choosing to live by hope in Jesus, who loves us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20). Happiness, perhaps especially in our cultural climate, urges us to avoid anything that makes us sad or uncomfortable. Our culture says happiness is the goal in life.

But chasing that goal is neither sustainable nor realistic. When we pursue happiness at the expense of everything else, we atrophy. We never develop depth or maturity. The pursuit might even affect how we think of and relate to people. Rather than seeing image bearers of God, we see inconveniences. Happiness becomes a pursuit of self—a pursuit of *my* glory, *my* will, *my* desire.

That isn't to say happiness is bad. Happiness is a good gift God sometimes gives us. It whets our appetites for the new heaven and earth to come. But when we prioritize happiness over God, we lose our way. We become one-dimensional rather than the beautifully multi-faceted people God made us to be.

Jesus shows us the better way. He lived a life filled with joy; Jesus *is* joy. And if Jesus is joy, then joy is selfless. Joy is loving and kind and gentle and self-controlled (Galatians 5:22–23). Joy is delight—delighting in God and His ways, even when our circumstances and emotions tell us to believe and do something else.

Definitions

- **Happiness:** Happiness is a felt, and often immediate, response to the perception that life is good or good things are happening or coming to fruition. Perception is key; the situation or thing deemed good may not, in fact, be good.
- **Joy:** Joy is a state of being rooted in God as our source of contentment. As a way of being, it persists whether circumstances are positive or negative, because joy is given and sustained by God, the one who exists outside our experiences and feelings.

Scripture

Genesis 1–3; Hebrews 12:1–2; Galatians 5:22–23; John 15; James 1:2–4; 2 Corinthians 3:12–18; Romans 8:18–30; Hebrews 2:5–18; 2 Corinthians 4:7–18; Romans 5:1–11; Romans 12:9–21; 1 Corinthians 12:12–31; Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Colossians 3:1–17

Pray (5 min)

Before beginning the study, pray aloud, using either your own words or the words provided.

Heavenly Father, we confess we pursue happiness instead of joy. Teach us the difference between the two. Lead us to prize joy, which is found in Your presence. Remind us to thank You for Your joy and the moments of happiness You give us. We want to honor You, Father, in all we do and in all we feel. May our joy and our happiness, or lack of them, draw us closer to You and Your people. Amen.

Read (5–10 min)

Either read the following Bible verses aloud or invite a volunteer to read.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22–23)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4)

Discuss (15–20 min)

Answer the following questions.

- The Bible’s pages overflow with agricultural and gardening imagery. Why do you think Paul uses the word “fruit”? What does that suggest about the nature of love, joy, peace, et cetera?



- Read John 15:1–11. What relationship do you see between humans, the branches, and the fruit described in Galatians 5?
- Andrew Dealy says James 1:2–4 uses “effortful language.” What “effortful” words do you find in the passage? What does that indicate about our role in maturing in Christlikeness?
- What hope do you find in James 1:2–4? How can that hope help you when you encounter difficulty or suffering?

Engage (10 min)

In smaller groups of 2 and 3, respond to the following questions.

- The counselors say happiness is an emotion but joy is a state of being. Were you surprised by that idea? Why or why not?
- When have you experienced happiness and joy “knitting together, offering a glimpse into what eternity will be like” (Andrew Dealy)? In what ways was that experience an appetizer for the life to come?

Pray (5 min)

Either read the following liturgy, a worshipful prayer, aloud or invite a volunteer to read.

A Liturgy for Seeking Joy

Father, I confess:

I often struggle to wrap my mind around what joy is.

Is it laughter or dinner with loved ones, delight or contentment?

What does it really mean to be joyful?

When I’m distanced by apathy, joy feels elusive: trying to strike a match in the wind.

When I’m crushed by the weight of grief, joy feels impossible: a bloom sprouting in the dead of winter.

But You, God, call me to joy anyway: Your breath, coaxing fire from embers.

Father, I ask:

When I forget Your joy, will You remind me?

Fill me with the fullness of Your joy—

For it is strength in grief, steadfastness through trial, zeal in place of apathy, an outpouring of Spirit,

A firm foundation: living in expectation

Of resurrection.



Reflect

Complete the following reflection on your own.

Spend 15–30 minutes reflecting on the following questions:

- How do I typically respond to difficulty? Do I avoid it, deny it, or power through it?
- How do I typically treat others? Do I consider them as more important than me, or do I tend to view people as inconveniences?
- What do my answers to the first two questions indicate about my beliefs regarding happiness?
- What do I need to confess and repent of?
- How could a friend or my community help me to cherish the enduring story God is telling rather than the stories this world tells?

Talk with Jesus about your answers, and ask Him for the joy that not only endures but also delights.



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