



UNWRAPPING THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Mystery of Joy

Luke 1:14

1. This week we are discussing the Advent theme of JOY. Multiple times in the message, I used the phrase, "choose joy." I know there are people who love that phrase and others who find it confusing and frustrating. The Biblical word that means, "choose joy," is the word, "rejoice." To rejoice is to choose to celebrate and to be joyful. Do you believe that with God's help you can choose joy?

Do you believe that joy is a possibility for you? Tell the story of a time when you, despite difficult circumstances, chose to be joyful.

2. One of the benefits of choosing joy is that it strengthens you. **Nehemiah 8:10 - Nehemiah said, "...This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."** Dallas Willard explains how joy strengthens us, *"Joy is strength. Its absence will create weakness. The failure to attain a deeply satisfying life always has the effect of making sinful actions seem desirable. Here lies the strength of temptation. Our ability to overcome temptation is directly related to the amount of joy we have in our lives. When we celebrate, when we have joy, we exercise our ability to see and feel the goodness in the simplest gifts of God."* What are your thoughts on this quote?

How does it impact your thinking about joy?

3. Understanding that joy is a command, and seeing how joy strengthens our lives, the most relevant question is: How do we choose joy? Joy flows from a certain kind of thinking. When our thoughts are consumed with negativity and complaining, when we are constantly comparing ourselves to others, joy may seem inaccessible. Paul reminds us in **Philippians 2:14 - Do everything without complaining and arguing.** What are your thoughts on this verse? How difficult is it for you to follow the command in Philippians 2:14?

4. We choose joy as we choose to be generous and grateful. Generosity is defined as, "giving freely." One of the great paradoxes of life is that we find joy in freely giving to those in need. Gratitude is about living with thankfulness for all the gifts that God has given you. **Proverbs 11:25 - A generous person will prosper; who ever refreshes others will be refreshed.** Do you agree that generosity and gratitude bring joy into our lives? How does this take place?

Tell a story of a time when someone was generous with you and how that affected your life or tell a story about how you found joy through generosity or gratitude.

5. We also choose joy as we choose to freely give and receive forgiveness. For some, receiving forgiveness, even from God, is a very difficult thing. Let me remind you about God's forgiveness: **Colossians 2:13 ...God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.** Meditating on the forgiveness of Christ should immediately bring joy to our lives. Especially as we understand that all of our sin has been forgiven. There's a line that I love in the hymn, "*It Is Well.*" "*My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought My sin, not in part, but the whole, Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*" Clearly the knowledge of forgiveness brought joy to the writer of this hymn. How difficult is it for you to believe that all your sin has been forgiven, and find joy in this truth?

Finally, we choose joy as we choose to freely forgive others. I could be wrong, but I believe it is impossible or at least very difficult to be joyful while at the same time remain unforgiving. Unforgiveness brings anger and bitterness as we dwell on the pain we have endured. Those in Christ are commanded to forgive. **Colossians 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** What do you believe are some of the benefits of freely forgiving others as Christ has forgiven you?

Tell a story about the power of forgiveness in your life - a time when you gave or received forgiveness and it powerfully impacted your life.

6. Briefly discuss what it means for you to choose joy. Discuss how this principle works in your life and what some of the best ways are that you have found to rejoice, celebrate, and choose joy in your life.