

Week Beginning: 7th May, 2017

Worship Series: #3 in series **UNLEASHED**
A SKEPTIC'S CONFESSION



lifegroups
live life abundantly

living sharing growing

Theme Verse

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? *1 Thessalonians 3:9*

Remember This Week

To live in joy is to abide in God. Enduring joy is nothing but the joy of love; the joy that comes from being loved by the Father and the joy that comes from loving and living for those around us. It is a joy which is unaffected by circumstances. The more you rest in Christ's presence, the more constant your joy, the more evident your love, and the more overflowing your thankfulness will be.



You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalm 16:11

Lord of life, in a world which constantly tries to overwhelm us, you have given us reason to rejoice - for despite circumstances, your mercy will last and in your presence, we will find fullness of joy. You have defeated death once and for all that we can live victoriously in this world. Bless us as we gather in your presence and speak the Word which calms our fears, strengthens our faith, and fills us with an enduring joy. We ask this in your precious name. Amen.

1. *Share your highs and lows for the past week.*
2. *Accountability time! How did you go with your living purposefully from last time?*
3. *What brings joy to your life?*
4. *What do you do when you're having a bad day??*

The anxiety of waiting can be torture. Ever found yourself going to the letterbox a hundred times to see if the postman has been? Or checking your phone every few seconds to see if you have missed a call or text from a child who is late home and seemingly uncontactable when they are never more than an arm's length away from their phone? Or from the doctors surgery to let you know test results? Ever tossed and turned all night, paced the floor back and forth, felt on edge and caught yourself constantly ruminating about one thing? That's Paul in 1 Thessalonians. He knows the church he loves is suffering persecution but he is unsure how they are handling their circumstances. He's distraught and the waiting to hear how his spiritual children are faring is torture. Today we get to experience the relief and the joy that Paul feels when he finally gets word. But what brings him an enduring joy may surprise you.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 (Read it a second time using the Message Translation if time)

5. *Which part of this text challenges or impacts you most at this time?*
6. *When you think about your disciple family at LifeWay what comes to mind?*

Paul expresses his strong desire to see the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thessalonians 2:17. The word that Paul uses for the word "separated" is similar to how an orphan must feel apart from a parent or of childless parents.

7. *What emotions do you experience when you are away from the people that you love?*
8. *To what degree do you feel those emotions when you are away from your church family or LifeGroup?*
9. *How does caring for other people strengthen yourself as well?*
10. *Paul lays out some concerns as to why he felt things could've become unsettled while they were gone. What were those concerns?*
11. *In v 18 and then in 3:5 he mentions Satan/tempter. Why do you think Satan "blocked" him? Why was he concerned with temptation?*





12. What did Paul mean when he referred to the Thessalonian believers as...(v. 19)?

- a. "Our hope" –
- b. "Our joy" –
- c. "Our crown to boast of" –

Anxiety doesn't hound us about things that are unimportant. It reserves itself for the things we care about most – our future, the people and communities we love, and our deepest values.

13. What are you anxious about or have sleepless nights over at the present time? What do those things reveal about what you value?

When Timothy comes back bringing good news, you can almost see Paul's shoulder's slump in relief. His work had not been in vain. The Thessalonians faith was intact; their love was evident; and, best of all, their trust in God was secure. They held cherished memories of the apostle and longed to see him. And Paul is filled with thankfulness and joy at this good news. That is always the effect upon a father's heart when he receives good reports of his children in the faith. As Eugene Petersen translates: **In the middle of our trouble and hard times here, just knowing how you're doing keeps us going. Knowing that your faith is alive keeps us alive.**¹ Thessalonians 3:8

14. In what ways does knowing that other Christian's faith is alive, keep our own faith alive?
15. In verses 11-13, Paul prays some very specific prayers for the church. What does he ask God to do for them/in them?
16. This theme of believers building each other up and encouraging one another is found throughout the New Testament: Romans 15:4, Galatians 6:1-2, Hebrews 3:13 Hebrews 10:23-25...read & discuss. What is it that encourages you spiritually?
17. How are you built up & strengthened in your following of Jesus? How have believing friends been of practical help for you?

In Christ, among the family of disciples we are lifted above the suffering to see a God who never fails, who gives faith to endure, strength to abide and a love that enables us to love like he does. Paul drew strength from the courage of these new believers. Although he had come to minister to them, by standing firm in hard times they were ministering to him. Paul is saying, "I can face my trials because I see how well you are facing yours." Christian joy is the deep lasting buoyancy of your spirit put there by the Holy Spirit when you encounter the magnificence of Jesus in every circumstance of life. It's a deep, durable delight in God. Enduring joy comes...

* when you see someone else grow to fullness in Christ.

* In Christ among the family of disciples who are holding fast to Christ & each other in all circumstances.

Jesus prayed for Peter and he prays for you: "I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail" (Luke 22:32a RSV)

18. What encouragement does that give you in times of trial?

19. What is one thing you can do before next time to encourage others in your LifeGroup in their walk of faith?

"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." - 1 Thess. 3:12-13

Throughout Scripture, we see prayers of blessing over people or persons. Paul prays a blessing over the Thessalonians in the words above. Take time to think and write down a blessing for your LifeGroup. What would you like to see God do in their lives? Write it down and share it with them as a closing exercise.



* Praise God for sending us the joy God Christ's saving love. The good news of the Gospel - forgiveness and life in Jesus which he has given to us. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring holy joy to those who struggle with sadness or despair this week



Turn to the person next to you and make the sign of the cross on the palm of their hand or forehead as you say:

Name, you are Christ's joy. Amen.