

# LIFE ON THE VINE



# JOY

## PREPARE

Read all the Scriptures assigned for the week. The parables in Luke 15 are familiar; so this time read them listening for what they say about God's joy. Think of them as party parables. And think about those *to whom* Jesus is addressing with these parables. But don't be too quick to identify with Jesus in his critique of his critics.

Read Chapter 3 in Kenneson's book. Think about how you might compare the experience of joy with the experience of pleasure. Note the link Kenneson suggests between the New Testament word for grace and the New Testament word commonly translated as joy.

Recall the last time you took delight in something beyond yourself.



Invite a group member to supply the fruit to share during the meeting time. This week's suggestion is orange slices.

*Set up the room: Have the items ready for the welcome table as well as Bibles and copies of the learner guide for group members.*

## PRAY

As part of your discipline of preparation this week, pray Psalm 100 aloud with joy. Consider picturing in your mind the image of the dancer (see above) as you say the words of the psalm.

## GATHERING AT THE TABLE OF LOVE

### *In Advance*

Prepare the welcome table by arranging the bowl(s) or tray(s) of fruit brought in to share. Open the Bible to Galatians 5 and place the white pillar candle or taper nearby. Be sure to have matches or a lighter handy for the person designated to light the candle.

### *As People Arrive*

Greet everyone. Introduce newcomers and visitors to other class members. Keep in mind that bearing the fruit of the Spirit begins the moment the first person walks in the door.

### *To Open*

Just prior to getting started, pass around the fruit so those who've arrived can enjoy it. Reserve a portion of the fruit as a display on the worship table. Once it's time to start, call attention to the worship table. Invite everyone to focus on the fruit on the table as you read aloud Galatians 5:22-23. Light (or have someone else light) the Christ candle on the worship table.

Conclude the gathering time with prayer. Consider having group members focus on the image of the dancer (on page 2 of their participants guide) and praying Psalm 100 aloud.

## EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF JOY

Begin by asking the group what distinguishes joy from pleasure or happiness?

Call attention to the link Kenneson points out between the New Testament word for grace (*charis*) and the New Testament word commonly translated as joy (*chara*). As he observes, both words “*imply the activity of freely taking delight in something or someone beyond one's self.*”

Then invite persons to recall and share with the group a time when they have taken delight in something or someone “beyond themselves.”

# EXAMINING THE FRUIT OF JOY

## *Character of the Fruit*

Hear read aloud the three parables in Luke 15:1-32. Then ask the group to discuss these questions:

- ◆ What do the three parables have in common?
- ◆ What does the inclusion of a celebration at the end of each parable say about God?
- ◆ What keeps the elder brother from celebrating with his father over the return of the prodigal?
- ◆ How do you react to hearing these parables?

Now compare how 1 Peter 4:12-14, Colossians 1:24, and James 1:2-4 make a connection between suffering and joy.

- ◆ Why do these passages seem to view suffering as an occasion for joy?
- ◆ When have you experienced joy in the context or aftermath of a time of trial, sorrow, or pain? How did you experience God?

## *Obstacles to Bearing the Fruit*

Kenneson identifies what he believes are at least three obstacles to bearing the fruit of joy on our lives.

Form three groups and assign each group one of the following obstacles. Then instruct the groups to discuss each one and the questions that accompany it below.

### (1) Manufacturing desire (advertising)

- ◆ What evidence do you see in our culture that consumption is a way of life?
- ◆ Where would you say you learned “how to be a consumer”— what clothes to wear, what foods to eat, what car to drive, what house to buy, what shampoo to use, etc.?

### (2) Glorifying the new

- ◆ Why is the “new” so often promoted as being superior to the “old”?
- ◆ To what extent would you say a “glorifying the new” mentality exists as part of your congregational life?
- ◆ What assumptions lie at the root of the perception that what is old or traditional is somehow less desirable?

### (3) Looking for more

- ◆ What is the danger in a “more-is-better” approach to life?
- ◆ How does fear characterize many of our consumer practices of trying to buy happiness, glorifying the new, and always seeking more?

# BEARING THE FRUIT OF LOVE IN THE WORLD

## *Cultivating the Fruit*

In response to the obstacles consumer culture places in the way of Christian joy, Kenneson suggests we cultivate the fruit of joy in several ways. Read them aloud:

- ◆ *Seek a more joyful worship*—the reconciling work of God in Christ should be celebrated in the same way a parent celebrates finding a lost child.
- ◆ *Develop a habit of thanksgiving and contentment*—praising God for what he has already given us can hold in check our tendencies to seek what we think we have to have.
- ◆ *Appreciate and reconceive the church's tradition*—rather than rejecting the old for the new, let us rejoice in our heritage and imagine new possibilities inspired by that legacy.
- ◆ *Enjoy children*—wherever there are children, joy is usually not far away.

Now invite the group to consider how they might cultivate these practices. Use these questions to guide the discussion:

- (1) What changes in our behaviors and attitudes would be required in order to cultivate any of these practices?
- (2) What risks would be involved in implementing any of these practices?

Wrap up the discussion by hearing 1 Peter 1:3-9 read aloud.

***Offer these action/reflection suggestions for loosening the grip of manufactured desires on our lives:***

- ◆ Begin a practice of starting the day giving thanks and praise to God before turning to the many tasks at hand.
- ◆ Make a list of your heart's deepest desires. Then choose a couple of them to share with a friend who might help you decide whether or not they are in line with God's desires for you.
- ◆ Play with some children.
- ◆ Pray Psalm 100 every morning and evening for the coming week.