

JOYFULLY HIS

The shared theme of Women's Ministries throughout the world during 2016 is Joyfully His.

In Galatians 5:22-25* we read:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

It's great to know that one of the characteristics of the Kingdom of God is joy – joy in the Holy Spirit at all times. A joy which remains even in difficult times, because its source is found in God.

This year's Bible studies help to build an understanding of how it is possible to find and maintain an attitude of joy. They are designed to be flexible and allow additional materials that are relevant to your culture and context.

Each study includes four sections which can be explored with your group, as follows:

1. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS – where you explore 'What does the text actually say?'

It is important that you read the Bible carefully and allow it to speak to you and guide the content of your study.

2. OUR LIVES TODAY – considers such questions as:

- * What does the Bible reading tell you about your lives?
- * Does it highlight any problems in society?
- * What challenges are there for the way you live your life?

3. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – depending upon where you are using the studies, you may choose to select one or two that seem most suitable for you, or ask different groups to discuss other aspects and possibly, if you have time, share what they have been speaking about.

4. HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD – this is designed to give you something to take away and do before you next meet. If appropriate, the next time you meet you could share on how you have lived 'joyfully for him'.

May God's blessings be evident as you find joy, his joy, as you study his word together.

*Unless stated otherwise, Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version*® Anglicised, NIV®

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JOYFULLY HIS

'I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.'

BIBLE READING – JOHN 15:11

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

During the Last Supper, and knowing that time was short and Calvary was looming, Jesus took the opportunity to foretell his death and instil many important truths in the minds and hearts of his disciples. He demonstrated servant leadership by washing their feet; encouraged them to maintain their trust in God; unpacked something of the Trinity by explaining that 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' (John 14:11) whilst also promising power and peace with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who would be their comforter, helper, advocate, intercessor and teacher. He also insisted that love was the key to a fruitful life and to 'abide in his love' was vital (John 15:9-17). He illustrated this beautifully with an image of a vineyard, his Father the vinedresser, Jesus the 'true vine' and the disciples as fruit-bearing branches.

Jesus went on to explain that he had shared all these important truths with them 'so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete' (John 15:11). He was painfully aware that the disciples were perplexed, and he acknowledged that initially they would grieve over his death. But he was keen to reassure them that their sorrow would 'turn to joy' (John 16:20).

As the meal drew to a close, Jesus offered a powerful and heartfelt prayer to his Father, initially praying for himself and then for his disciples, requesting that God 'protect them from the evil one' (John 17:15). He said to his Father, 'I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them' (John 17:13). Later (v20), he broadened the scope of his prayer with the words, 'My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.'

OUR LIVES TODAY

As disciples in today's world we may take heart! We are included in Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper. He wants us to be joyful; to have the full measure of his joy in us! This is not a superficial, short-lived joy; it is not a mask we put on our face while pretending all is well! It is a deep joy that comes from the Lord. It is a joy that can be ours whatever our circumstances. It is a liberating experience! We are not dependent on the things of this world to furnish us with joy.

We are encouraged and enabled to be happy, to laugh, to rejoice!

Commissioner Silvia Cox – IHQ, from Switzerland, Austria and Hungary Territory (having served in Switzerland, Zimbabwe, Finland, South Africa and the United Kingdom with Ireland)

As World President of Women's Ministries I now travel around the world sharing the joy of the Lord with everyone I meet.

Unfortunately some Christians believe it is ungodly to be joyful and may quote the words from Mark 8:34, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' suggesting that such a serious matter is not one to be joyful about. Others feel that they should adopt a seriously grave face.

I was raised in a Christian family, heard about Jesus from a very tender age and asked God for forgiveness as a child. However, it was as a teenager filled with doubts and fears that I asked God to come and live within me. It was only then that I understood my sin was dealt with. I was forgiven, and I could have his power within me. This filled me with joy! I kept singing during the following week. I was so happy. If I had only one word to describe that experience it would be 'joyful'! I can also testify that throughout my life the JOY OF THE LORD has remained in me.

Jesus desires that we, his disciples, throughout the generations, experience the fruit of his Spirit in our lives – fruit which includes JOY! (See Galatians 5.22.) This desire was so important to him that, even as he faced Calvary, he expressly prayed that the disciples would have his joy in them, the joy of knowing sins forgiven, the joy of knowing that they were children of God, the joy of knowing they were loved! His prayer includes us! The fact is we can truly be 'Joyfully His'!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Chorus 206 in the English Song Book of The Salvation Army reminds us that there's joy in following Jesus every day and all the way! How would you explain this to a non-believer?
2. Do you agree with Augustine of Hippo who said that 'a Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot!'?
3. Why do you think it is important to have the joy of the Lord within us? And is it really possible?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

During this month, let us pray with Samuel Logan Brengle: 'O Lord, flood the world with your mighty joy!' (*The Soul-Winner's Secret* chapter 1)

JOYFULLY HIS THROUGH SALVATION

Jesus said, 'Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven' (Luke 10:20).

BIBLE READING – LUKE 10:1-20

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Salvation, which cost Jesus so much, provides for us a multitude of gifts, the greatest of which is that we will have our names written in the book of life and one day we will live in eternity with God. We have a future beyond our earthly death! God has given to all believers a protected inheritance which is eternal, imperishable, undefiled and unfading (1 Peter 1:4). This salvation rests solely on the goodness of God.

Salvation brings with it forgiveness for sins committed and an opportunity to turn our lives around. For this we have full reason to rejoice in our Lord with words similar to those of Isaiah: 'I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness. I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding or a bride with her jewels' (Isaiah 61:10 NLT).

Citizens in Jesus' day had their names written in a public register so they would be known and their inheritance properly preserved. Every child born (and still today in many places) was ordered to be registered at a synagogue or other public place of safety. Upon death or as a consequence of misbehaviour their names would be removed. They knew this law well and thus they would be happy – overjoyed – to know that their names were now written in Heaven (the book of life) and could not or would not be removed when their lives on earth were over. Instead they would live on eternally with the Lord.

Salvation is provided for all mankind through the death and resurrection of Christ for all who believe (John 3:16). We are 'citizens of Heaven', friends of God, and 'approved' by him. One day we will dwell with him.

The earlier verses of Luke 10 tell of Jesus sending out 72 disciples, two by two, to share the message of God and to work miracles in his name. Jesus knows how humans quickly pat themselves on the back and think they are important, or take all the credit for what they accomplish, so he reminds them that their victories were due to God living in and working through them. Therefore it is God who should be praised and in whom they should rejoice. God had worked his will through them as they went about his work.

Commissioner Nancy Roberts – IHQ, from USA Central Territory (having served in the USA, South America East, Kenya, IHQ, USA National)

'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?' (Psalm 27:1 *KJV*). As World Secretary for Women's Ministries, I find joy in serving him and in sharing the good news of salvation around the world. My joy in him does bring me strength each day.

OUR LIVES TODAY

This becomes a reminder to all Christians today that our lives, through the salvation God provides us, belong to him and the victories we win are really victories which he has carried us through. Rejoicing often in the Lord will keep us close to him and sensitive to his Spirit's leading. With our eyes and our hearts directed to him we will be less likely to move away and into sin. Rejoicing frees us and keeps us totally his, to be led by him, and to be used by him. Joy is an outcome of our salvation.

When King David fell into sin, he found that his joy in living and loving the Lord had disappeared. He prayed: 'Restore to me the joy of your salvation' (Psalm 51:12). Once we have experienced the joy that is found in and through the salvation offered to us, we must protect ourselves from losing it. Daily rejoicing in all that God has given and done becomes a reminder of his love and keeps the joy alive.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read the following portions of Scripture and discuss how they relate to or what they say about rejoicing in your salvation:
 - * 1 Peter 1:3-12
 - * Philippians 4:4-7
 - * 1 Thessalonians 5:16
2. How have your thoughts about rejoicing in his salvation changed or been expanded? If you feel comfortable, please share.

Our greatest joy is knowing that God's authority is over us and his presence is always with us. Our salvation is not about what we can do for God but about what he has done for us.

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

Begin and end each day with praises of joy for God's love and care, and for the salvation he has given to you.

JOYFULLY HIS, IN HIS PRESENCE

Surely you have granted him unending blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence (Psalm 21:6).

BIBLE READINGS – PSALM 21:1-6; 20:5; 16:11

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

In the Old Testament, only the high priest was allowed into the presence of God. Once a year the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple and come before the presence of God. It is not surprising, then, that the desire to be in God's presence is expressed a few times in the Psalms.

'My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God' (Psalm 84:2); 'You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water' (Psalm 63:1); The Voice translation uses the phrase 'I seek You with every fibre of my being'. 'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God' (Psalm 42:1).

In Psalm 20 the king is preparing to go into battle, prayers are offered for his protection and victorious return. In verse 5 the psalmist imagines the celebrations when the king returns undefeated: 'May there be shouts of joy when we hear the news of your victory, flags flying with praise to God for all that he has done for you. May he answer all your prayers!' (LB). Psalm 21:1-6 expresses exuberant praise for the king's safe return and for all that God has done for him. Importantly it is not the king who is being praised here, but, quite rightly, praise is being given to God. He has answered their prayers. There is such extravagant language used here to give thanks to a bountiful God: 'You have granted him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips. You came to greet him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head' (vv2-3). The culmination of this account of God's goodness comes in verse 6: 'Surely you have granted him unending blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.' What so many desire has been granted to the king (v6). Why? 'For the king trusts in the Lord' (v7).

OUR LIVES TODAY

Susannah Wesley, the mother of ten children who survived infancy, including Charles and John, knew what it was to be busy. As well as looking after her home and family she also took upon herself the formal education of all her children. She was well aware of her own need to regularly seek God's presence and, because space was limited, she would sit on a chair in the middle of the kitchen and pull her pinafore over her head and spend time in God's presence. The children all

knew that they were not allowed to disturb mother when she was talking to the Lord. For Susannah, spending time with the Lord was truly something to be desired.

I can remember those times when our children were still young and our home was filled with activity and noise. Often I felt, as so many other women do, that life was a juggling act, trying to keep the demands of being a wife, mother and officer in some kind of balance, even though I loved each of those areas of my life – and still do. I knew that the strength and wisdom needed for each day could only be found in God's presence, but that was too often the area that was neglected; the time with God was cut short. However, at that time I heard a song entitled 'I miss my time with you' (by Larnelle Harris). This song makes clear that God is waiting to spend time with us, that he wants us to take time out from being busy serving him, to just spend time in his presence. We need to learn to become comfortable with quietness, to learn to listen to him speaking to us rather than doing all the talking ourselves. The more time we spend in his presence, the more sensitive we become to him.

The marvellous part is that the joy we receive through being in God's presence is assured: '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). It is God's promise to us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever felt, as the Psalmist did, an overwhelming urge to come into God's presence? Were there certain circumstances that brought about this longing?
2. How easy is it to hear God speaking today? What can you do to reduce the distractions that may hinder you from hearing his voice?
3. How would you describe to a non-believer the difference between happiness and the joy that comes from being in God's presence?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

Over the next month, make a date with God to spend time in his presence, without any distractions. Enjoy the silence without feeling you have to fill the quietness with talking. Allow God to talk to you and share his heart with you.

Lieut-Colonel Debbie Cachelin – IHQ (from Switzerland, Austria and Hungary)

I have had the privilege of sharing the joy of the Lord as I have served in various ministries in Switzerland, Austria and the United Kingdom and now with colleague officers at the International College for Officers.

JOYFULLY HIS IN WORSHIP

Be joyful at your festival – you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. For seven days celebrate the festival to the Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose. For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete (Deuteronomy 16:14-15).

BIBLE READINGS – DEUTERONOMY 16:14-15; PSALM 100; PSALM 89:15

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

In the Bible worship conveys the idea of ‘bowing’ ‘to treat with reverence’ and other expressions. Worship strengthens the relationship between God and humankind. Psalm 100 says that there are clear actions noticeable during worship. They include shouting joyfully, worshipping with gladness, coming with joyful songs, knowing that he is God. We enter his gates with thanksgiving.

In the Old Testament the act of worship was clear – it meant giving. For the purpose of this study we shall look at worship in Deuteronomy. In these verses a person would come to the Tabernacle (or later the Temple) with their offering in their hands. In the New Testament, Jesus became the offering and gave his life as a sacrifice for all. For this reason Christians worship him and confess his name as Lord.

Psalm 100 shows that we are invited to gather around the Lord and worship him. Psalm 89:15 depicts the blessing of being near and walking in the light of the Lord. Human beings are created as worshippers. For example, during the time of the deliverance of the Israelites, God gave Moses a word for Pharaoh. He was to tell the king to allow the Israelites to go and worship their God. Jesus commanded that in worship of God, people should love others and care for God’s creation. Worship is the human being’s response of thanks to God’s gift of life.

We gain joy from seeing others enjoy what is good. God intends us to be in community, and there is a sense in which our joy is not complete until we have shared it with one another. Many Christians today need to use church services to talk about God and worship him, rather than mostly enjoy the comfort of each other. However, some simply meet together and exchange pleasantries and share how their week has been. Whether it is in a building or a tent or out in the open air, a real worship service should be an intense time to submit, to show humility and empty oneself to the Creator. We have to admit that worship should push us beyond our comfort zone. It requires total submission beyond the music and activities. Joyful worship starts in the heart of the believer. The same is true when we enter into worship as a community or congregation.

Commissioner Florence Malabi – IHQ, from Kenya West Territory

I have shared the joy of the Lord in Tanzania, Rwanda and Southern Africa. As Zonal Secretary for Women’s Ministries, I am privileged to travel in Africa. Through the visits I always experience great joy in worship in different countries in the zone, and have always felt God’s warmth, love and blessings, knowing I belong to him in my worship.

OUR LIVES TODAY

Christians are called and invited to worship God throughout the week. Joyful worship means a lot to believers. It should be differentiated from salvation. It is a means of transformation of oneself. Christians need to forget yesterday and embrace today as a precious gift from God; the old has gone and the new has come. Just as Paul emphasised in Philippians 3:13 we must forget the past and press on to what lies ahead.

In our daily lives, living in the present moment as believers, our deepest desire must be to rejoice in the presence of our glorious God. In today’s worship we usually express our joy in many ways such as shouting, singing and dancing; but these things are not the reason for our joy, simply a way to express our joy. Music is a great instrument that stimulates joyful worship but it does not make us joyful. Our joy in worship is not found in the things we do, but rather in the God we worship. Take a moment and think of how we breathe; we do not try to change our breathing rhythm but we notice that each breath that comes in and out gives glory to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When did you last worship God as a family? What led you in that moment?
2. What is your perception about worship in the world today?
3. In the text, we realised that God blesses the harvest and all the work of our hands so that our joy may be complete. Share how God has blessed you, and what your response is to that blessing.

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

God wants us to respond to him earnestly. We need to reflect and make time to recount our blessings of joyful worship and remember how great God is. Spend some minutes to reflect on God’s care in life and joyfully worship him.

JOYFULLY HIS IN GIVING

‘Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Corinthians 9:7).

BIBLE READING – 2 CORINTHIANS CHAPTERS 8 AND 9, ESPECIALLY 9:7

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

In this letter, Paul points out the example of the Macedonians’ liberal giving to the needy brethren in Jerusalem (8:1-6) and urges the Christians in Corinth to fulfil their promise to do the same. This would show concern for both Gentile and Jewish Christians in Judea, and display the unity of Christians in the Body of Christ.

We also find a revelation of God’s plan for giving: the purpose for giving (8:13-15), the policies to follow in giving (8:16-9:5), the principles of giving (9:6-7) and the promises in giving (9:8-15).

This passage also deals with the attitude one should have in giving. It should be cheerful and generous. God is not primarily occupied with the size of the gift, but with the motive that lies behind it.

The Bible says, ‘Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give’ (Exodus 25:2). Acts 20:35 says, ‘We must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive”.’

Jesus appreciated the poor widow’s offering as she offered all she had (Mark 12:41-42). In contrast, God thought very differently about the motives behind Cain and Abel’s giving (Genesis 4:2-10). Our offering should be out of thankfulness and worship. We are expected to give for God’s glory and for the growth of God’s Kingdom. And in giving, we should offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1).

OUR LIVES TODAY

At present, in many circumstances, tremendous emphasis is placed on giving. A sense of competitiveness drives people as to how much they can give and they may even boast about it. Some churches are persuaded by false teaching and unscrupulous pastors may try to force people to give more. We ourselves may mourn or feel dissatisfied and feel compelled to give. In addition, in this busy world, some people do not care about anything, have no time to think or consider anything and often have no trust towards any individual or organisation.

However, the Bible says giving must come from the heart, and a true desire to meet needs, not to gain a reputation in the church or in public. The Bible says each must give as they have decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty.

In addition, our generosity will please God. We have freely received, so let us give freely. We should be observant, aware, looking for opportunities to give which will increase the joy and delight in our hearts. God gave his own begotten Son as a free gift to us. This should stimulate us to meet the needs of the world. In the Old Testament the Israelites were commanded to tithe. The New Testament does not repeat this command although, as we have seen, it does teach us the principles of giving.

It is our responsibility to handle our money appropriately, as it is given to us as a trust from God. Therefore we need to be very careful about our giving. If we look back on Salvation Army history, we can understand how Salvationists and non-Salvationists dedicated their lives as well as offering their time, talents and gifts to God. As a result, we see people around the world are being clothed, fed and educated and can hear God’s word and become his children. In such ways has The Salvation Army tried to redeem the whole world. In India, for example, joyful giving has made a remarkable impact on people’s lives and enabled them to render sacrificial service in many parts of the country. Hence, many peoples’ lives have been improved, ignorance has faded, and many bad practices and rituals have been removed. Good education is offered, along with medical services, spiritual nourishment, love and compassion. This joyful service goes on.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are we joyfully giving today?
2. Are we living up to the standards and principles of giving?
3. Is our giving bringing joy to God and people around us?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

How to give joyfully to God! Women should know the principles of giving and the outcome of giving to the Lord. It is our responsibility to teach our children and encourage our corps towards giving. It is important to remember that giving is not only about money, it is also about giving our time, talents and ourselves.

It would be difficult, even after one hundred years, to improve on Barbara Stoddart’s song (SASB 920) – ‘Bring your tithes into the storehouse’. That was the quotation from Malachi 3:10 which ends with the promise: ‘I will... pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store (receive) it’.

Evangeline Muthukumar – Lewisham Corps UK and from India South Eastern Territory, Karayankuzhy Corps, Kanyakumari Division

As an operating theatre nurse, I am serving and sharing the joy of the Lord with my colleagues and with the patients whom I meet every day. I am very proud to say that I am a trained nurse from the Salvation Army Catherine Booth Hospital, Nagercoil in South India. I do enjoy my work, offer my time and skills in saving lives, and give support to the healing process.

JOYFULLY HIS ON THE JOURNEY

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (vv3-6).

BIBLE READING – PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

In the opening of his letter to the Philippians, Paul briefly but beautifully models the relationship we should pursue with fellow believers and illustrates the relationship we should seek with the Lord.

First, Paul demonstrates four things that he does – things that we, as Christians, should always do: thank God; remember others; pray joyfully; and remain confident that God will continue to work in us.

Paul recounts how he thanks God for the church at Philippi, highlighting the importance of approaching the Father with gratitude, before and above all else. What's more, he does it every time he remembers the Philippians – his brothers and sisters in Christ. He doesn't only remember them, but he also prays for them, and he does so with joy. Paul emphasises how consistently and thoroughly he does this. He speaks of all in his prayers, not just praying for some of the Philippians, but for all who have been partners 'in the gospel from the first day until now' (v5).

Paul then goes on to affirm what God has done and what he will do in the lives of the Philippians: He 'began a good work in [them and he] will carry it on to completion' (v6).

Paul is confident that God will do it! He does not suggest that this will happen instantaneously or even in their lifetime, but rather on 'the day of Christ Jesus'. In this way Paul encourages the Philippians to be confident in the journey, to be confident in the Lord. And with this confidence comes peace and joy.

OUR LIVES TODAY

If we consider the passage's key principles, we find how challenging they must have been for the Philippians and how challenging they can still be for us. It can be difficult to be grateful (to thank), to be mindful of (remember) those around us, and to commit them and their lives to prayer. It can be difficult to pray, to find time to pray, and to pray with joy. It can also be hard to be confident in our journey with the Lord as we live in an ever-changing and uncertain world.

Kelly Zvobgo – IHQ, from USA Western Territory

I have shared the joy of the Lord in my soldiery in Zimbabwe, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. At IHQ in London, I am currently helping to prepare for and support delivery of the 150th Anniversary International Congress, *Boundless – The Whole World Redeeming*. As I go on to pursue my PhD at the University of Southern California, I will seek to remain Joyfully His.

However, the journey is to be taken one step at a time. In our Scripture reading, Paul emphasises the passing of time to make clear that the journey is neither short nor swift. He writes of the Philippians' partnership in the gospel 'from the first day until now', and how God will carry the good work he began 'on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus'.

God has not finished working on us nor will he be done working on us, in us, through us, his beloved creation, until he calls us home or Christ comes again. So, let us delight in him, knowing that he will make our steps firm (Psalm 37:23); let us be Joyfully His on the journey.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How have you experienced joy in your journey with the Lord?
2. When is it most difficult for you to be joyful? Is it when the journey does not go as planned? How can you overcome this difficulty, and seek and find joy in the Lord?
3. Will you follow Paul's example of being grateful, mindful, joyful in prayer, and confident, starting today?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

Reflect on Psalm 23 and remember that God is right beside you, supporting you, loving you, guiding you. Our journey with the Lord is, indeed, one in which we should always be joyful.

'The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, *he leads me* beside quiet waters.... He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for *you are with me.... Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life*, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever' (Psalm 23:1-4,6).

JOYFULLY HIS IN OBEDIENCE

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands.
As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love (v6).

BIBLE READING – 2 JOHN 1:1-6

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

The text that we will look at in this Bible study is nestled in the middle of what are known as the Johannine letters found in the New Testament. We are not quite sure who wrote them but traditionally they are attributed to the Apostle John. They are addressed to three distinct bodies: the community as a whole (1 John); a select group of people (2 John) and an individual (3 John). Our text is addressed specifically to 'the lady chosen by God and to her children' (v1). The letter is written in a standard format with a formal initial greeting, then the body of the letter, and at the end a final, personal greeting. The initial greeting reminds the reader that 'Jesus Christ... will be with us in truth and love' (v3) and sets the scene for the rest of the letter.

These verses paint a picture of what it means to walk in truth. Who is truth? Jesus Christ, the Son of God. John 14:6 states 'I am the way and the truth and the life'; and this second letter of John reminds us that false prophets exist who do not speak truth and who are amongst us trying to lead us astray. Jesus, in contrast, is the truth – and as Jesus lives in us and through us, we can walk obediently on our Christian journey, keeping our eyes on the cross.

John reminds us that not only are we to 'walk in obedience to his commands' but also to 'walk in love'. To 'walk' indicates an action. We are active participants on this journey of obedience and love. To 'walk' is to journey through the hills and valleys one step at a time. In 1 John 4:8, we are told that God the Father is love. The command for each of us as women and children of God is to walk in love. When we walk in love (God) and in truth (Jesus), then our joy will be complete (2 John 1:12).

OUR LIVES TODAY

Obedience is not a word most people like to hear in the 21st century. Indeed, I suggest that this word has never been popular because it speaks of submission and control. To obey someone means we have to submit and relinquish control – something that is difficult for our human nature. Often when we think of the act of obeying, we think of a child obeying their parent. How interesting that 2 John is written to 'a lady and her children'. As a mother of four sons, I have had many opportunities to teach my children about obedience. Often I would have to discipline them when they

disobeyed. This was not a task I liked, but it was something I had to do in order for them to learn boundaries and respect.

Scripture tells us to 'walk in obedience to his commands'. On paper this is easy, but as we face the realities of daily life we find the act of obedience challenging. To be obedient means we actively agree to what someone else is asking of us, but we often want to do things in our own time and in our own way. Scripture tells us that not only should we be obedient, but that in our obedience we will find joy. This certainly goes against all that the world teaches. Often today we hear the phrase 'If it feels good, do it'. Our culture teaches us that we will find happiness in quick fixes and doing our own thing. I have yet to hear the media portray joy as an expression of obedience. The Scripture we read is counter-cultural. Christ's message is counter-cultural, and we are called to live and walk in the example that Christ has given us.

So many things in the world can pull our attention away from Jesus Christ and holy living. John addresses this later in his letter. We need to remember that Christ lives in us, and through the Spirit he gives us strength to resist temptation and false teaching. In him alone will we find truth. Let us remember that whoever 'continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son' (v9). The reason we are called to obedience is so that our 'joy may be complete'. Our hope and our strength come from the assurance that we are Joyfully His.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the author chose women and children as his audience to address the topic of obedience?
2. Why do you think that the writer of the letter did not name 'the lady' he was addressing?
3. The Scripture calls us to 'walk in obedience to his commands'. What is God commanding you to do today? Are you willing to be obedient? What will be the cost of your obedience?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

This month let us take time each day to intentionally encourage one another 'face to face' to live joyfully in obedience.

Major Brenda Murray – IHQ (from the Canada and Bermuda Territory)

I have shared the joy of the Lord in various ministries including hospice, government relations, emergency housing for women and children, camping ministries and now as Assistant Under-Secretary for Administration at International Headquarters.

JOYFULLY HIS IN TIMES OF TESTING

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers (Luke 22:31-32).

BIBLE READING – LUKE 22:31-32; JOHN 17:20

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

At the last supper with the disciples before facing the cross, Jesus warned Peter that his faith would be tested and that he would indeed deny the Lord three times. Passionate Peter emphatically refuted this, but sadly Jesus' words were true. When the rooster crowed later the same night, Peter realised what he had done and was overcome by guilt and shame. This incident was so crushing for Peter, as he had been so confident of his love and commitment to the promised Messiah.

However, even before Peter's failure was exposed, Jesus had foreseen it and encouraged Peter by telling him that he was already covered with prayer. Peter could not understand at the time as he was too sure of himself. But recalling this conversation later on, it must have comforted him to realise that Jesus knew and was praying for him.

Not only did Jesus console Peter, he also restored Peter's sense of mission by giving him the task of 'strengthening the brothers'. When tormented by his failure, it must have lifted Peter's soul to know that Jesus had faith in him, that he would 'turn back.'

Satan tried to influence Peter so that he would fall from following Jesus. Though the time of testing was extremely bitter for Peter, Jesus turned it into an opportunity for Peter. By thoroughly realising his own inadequacy, Peter truly learned that only the grace of God could sustain him and that God's love would never forsake him.

OUR LIVES TODAY

When we first come to know the Lord, we are so excited by the new way of living that is before us. Showered with promises of blessings, we are amazed, we are inspired – we are full of joy! But sooner or later comes a time of testing. Because we live in a broken world, being children of Almighty God does not exempt us from unexpected accidents, financial struggles, relationship breakdowns, physical illness, abuse and assaults.

When our desperate prayers do not seem to resolve the issue, discouragement may start to creep in; then disappointments; then doubts. Does God really care? Can I believe God cares? These dark times reveal the nature of our relationship with our Lord, reaching right into the deeper places of our heart that otherwise go untouched when things are nice and smooth.

Captain Miwa Nakajima – IHQ, from Japan Territory

With the joy of being his, I have served in Japan and in the South Pacific and East Asia Department at IHQ to share this amazing grace with others.

The Bible does not tell us why we have to suffer or why God does not intervene immediately, but it does assure us that the Lord is aware of the difficulties we are facing, and as Jesus prayed for Peter and his other disciples, he is praying for us too (John 17:20).

He is not indifferent to our struggles. He knows our frailty, so we don't have to pretend that we are strong, or try to fight it through with our own strength. It is good to pour out an honest cry from the heart. Only when we open our heart in such a way, are we able to receive comfort from God. The Psalms are full of examples of this.

The contrast between God's love and our own suffering often does not make sense to us. But when we genuinely seek his face in the midst of our pain, God will come and touch the deep places of our lives. Then our relationship with our Lord is never the same. Not by intellect, but by experience, we come to know his compassion and mercy. Our faith is renewed, and we come to the deep realisation that we are truly his, and he will not forsake us. That assurance will fill us with joy, much deeper and much purer than any we have known.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds, as suggested in James 1:2? Share your thoughts with others.
2. When a difficult situation arises, what is your heart's reaction? Denial? Anger? Frustration? Have you been able to share your deep, honest cry with the Lord? If not, what could be the reason?
3. Jesus told Peter to 'strengthen your brothers' when he 'turned back'. Has there been a 'Peter' in your life – someone who has encouraged you? How has this person been helpful?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

You don't have to look too hard to find a disappointed or a discouraged person. Is there someone that you can 'strengthen' by a smile or a listening ear, or with words of hope? Throughout this month, ask the Lord to show you such opportunities and how you could approach them.

JOYFULLY HIS IN SERVICE

Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will (v21).

BIBLE READING – PSALM 103

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Many of the Psalms are believed to be written by King David and they form a collection of praise to God. In David we see first a young man's zeal and commitment to God. Once he comes to the throne we see his failings as a father and a man. Yet despite all those things David was named as a man after God's heart. This man who learned many hard lessons and the need for confession says to us in Psalm 103:21, 'Praise the Lord.' Who are we to give praise to? The Lord! Who is the Lord? A dictionary definition of 'lord' is 'someone or something having power, authority, or influence; a master or ruler'.

Praise begins with acknowledging that God is Lord of your life. He has power, authority and influence over your life. He is master and ruler. David, who was himself a king and had authority and power and influence, acknowledges that God is the one who deserves that title and recognition. In the opening verses of this Psalm, David speaks to himself, admonishing himself to praise the Lord from his inmost being. He is not just going through the motions but all that he is will praise God. As he praises God he reminds himself not to forget what God has done. God forgives, God heals, God redeems, God satisfies. God has not hidden himself from us but lavishes his love on us. Rejoice, praise the Lord!

Out of that wellspring of joy there is the reminder that we are his servants. We serve a King who says to us that if we are his disciples we will do what he says. We will follow his example. We will do his will. We will serve a suffering world, the world he came to save.

OUR LIVES TODAY

'I am not your servant' were words I often heard from my mother when I was growing up, if she came into my room and saw laundry or ironing that needed doing! Later on, I would use those words on my younger sister to get her to do her share of the cleaning up in the room that we shared. In the culture that we live in, not many people aspire to be servants. They would rather be served or waited on. So many people are looking for their big break, to be discovered, to be famous, to have their 15 minutes of fame so that they can be admired and served. Being a servant is counter-intuitive to what many of us aspire to be, and yet the Scriptures and Jesus himself call us into service.

In the gospel of John (4:4-29) we are introduced to a woman who went out of her way to avoid the others in her community. It does not appear that she had any friends or people who were considerate to her. Jesus made a point of searching her out, so that she could see that God forgives, God heals, God redeems and God satisfies. He is not far from us and is aware of our trials. At the end of the account we see that same woman becoming an evangelist. She goes out to the same people she tried to avoid and engages with them and shares with them what God has done for her and what he can do for them.

To serve is not demeaning. Many people think that if they are in a position of service then they are less important. But we are reminded in Scripture (Romans 12:2) that we must not take on the pattern of this world but allow our minds to be renewed so that we will know God's will.

Jesus has established the pattern for us (Mark 10:45). He did not come to be served but to serve.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. David experienced the joy of being in a relationship with God. As you reflect on your relationship with God, how do you express your approval, gratitude and admiration (praise) to God?
2. Are there areas in your life where God is not Lord?
3. What is your thinking on service? Do you see it as demeaning or as a calling?
4. How are you serving God where you are?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

God the Holy Spirit speaks to us daily. Who has he been placing on your heart to serve?

It might be just to have a cup of tea with someone, or to really 'see' the people that you encounter every day. As with the woman in the Gospel of John, an encounter with Jesus changes the way that we see our situation. Let that be your motivation each day when you wake up.

Romans 6:16-18 helps to put it in perspective for us. We are no longer servants (Paul says 'slaves') to sin, but to righteousness.

Major Ana Frazer – IHQ, from USA Eastern Territory

I have shared the joy of the Lord as a corps officer and staff officer. I have served in the US Virgin Islands, Pennsylvania and New York, and now as Assistant Under-Secretary for the Americas and Caribbean Zone at IHQ. I am privileged to serve the Lord and others in each appointment that he gives me. I will praise the Lord!

JOYFULLY HIS IN TRUSTING

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (v13).

BIBLE READING – ROMANS 15:12-13

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Romans 15:13 records the wonderful prayer that Paul wants every believer to experience.

When speaking to the church in Rome, Paul focuses his thoughts not on the object of their faith but on the act of trust. He emphasises that the attitude of trust is essential if they want God to fill them with joy, peace and hope.

Of course, that did not mean that everything would always work out according to their expectations. But like Paul, when going through difficult times, they would know that God would never leave them or forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6). The wonderful truth is that as God's children we can have faith in him as the one true source of our hope – he will see us through whatever is encountered along the journey.

What is Paul saying in Romans 15:12-13? In essence he is saying that whoever trusts in Christ, whoever believes in him, has found the road to joy and peace – a deep and complete spiritual joy and peace which produces an ever-deepening sense of hope.

Interestingly, the three members (persons?) of the Godhead are mentioned here in these verses:

- * God the source, as a covenant God and Father, is the God of hope who fills the one who trusts in him with joy and peace.
- * Christ, 'the Root of Jesse', descended from David, is the object or meaning of our hope as the Son of God – his person, righteousness and salvation.
- * And the Holy Spirit, the enabler, is the one who unlocks this overflowing hope.

The Godhead is working together to give the believer joy, peace and hope as they trust in him.

OUR LIVES TODAY

Have you ever had your trust shattered?

During our service in Papua New Guinea, my husband and I journeyed to one of the remote villages to conduct weekend services. During our afternoon discussions with some of the corps personnel, I was ushered toward a white plastic chair. The moment I sat down, it gave way from underneath me and I ended up, unladylike, on the ground. Once I got up, dusted myself off and the flushed colour in my face disappeared, I soon came to realise that perhaps I was not the first person

to end up on the ground when sitting in that particular chair, for it was tied together with thin sewing thread. From that day to this, I tentatively, and only after quick examination, sit on plastic chairs. It's a trust thing!

When I read Romans 15:13, I have to ask myself if this verse actually describes me. Do I 'overflow with hope' as I put my trust in him daily? Despite what is happening within my life, is this hope within me welling up and influencing those around me? Is my life filled with all joy and peace as I trust in Christ?

This description of the believer found in Romans 15:13 comes from knowing God. The more I put my trust in him and walk with him daily, the more this hope will overflow from my life to the lives of those around me. This hope is not only a future in Heaven, but is also a present reality through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But how do we obtain this kind of faith that helps us overflow in hope, even in the midst of trials? There are perhaps a lot of things bound together that bring about this overflowing hope, but one essential way is to know God and his ways through his word. God's word shows him to be faithful to his people in all kinds of trials – he is completely trustworthy. And it is the Holy Spirit's power within the life of the believer that produces his holiness in us, as we trust in him in our daily spiritual walk. And so Paul says here, it's the power of the Holy Spirit which produces in us his fruit of joy and peace. As we trust in him and experience him by faith, so we overflow with hope.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In your everyday living do you trust God to see you through every situation? Do the words joy, peace and hope describe you?
2. Was there a time when you became conscious of the influence of someone else's Christian walk over your life as they placed their trust in Christ? Are you aware of a time when your Christian walk had an influence over someone else's life?
3. Has there been a time when, confronted by obstacles or challenges, you have sensed the settling presence of God in your life as you've placed your trust in him? Try to describe that experience to the group.

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

Over the next month pray daily that the God of hope will fill you with all joy, peace and hope, as you trust in him.

Major Deslea Maxwell – IHQ, from Australia Eastern Territory

In my everyday living, God has called me to share his joy and peace with those around me as I daily place my trust in him and his word. I have served in my home territory and in Papua New Guinea. I am currently the editor of *Revive*, a resource magazine for women in ministry and mission.

JOYFULLY HIS IN THANKFULNESS

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (vv13-15)

Let us thank God for his priceless gift (v15, *Good News Translation*)

BIBLE READING – 2 CORINTHIANS 9:13-15

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

What a verse! Verse 15 urges us to thank God for his 'indescribable' gift, or, as the Good News Translation puts it, his 'priceless' gift.

What is this gift? It is the gift of grace. 'The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 1:14).

There are many reasons to give thanks to Almighty God, but here is one that we don't fully understand yet, but which impacts our lives immeasurably.

I recall the chorus of a song from the Salvation Army Song Book which reminds us of the boundless love that pardons us and the wonder of his grace.

Higher than the stars that reach eternity,
Broader than the boundaries of endless space,
Is the boundless love of God that pardoned me;
O the wonder of his grace!

(HOWARD DAVIES, SASB 52 [1986 EDN], 876 [2015 EDN])

Particularly in the New Testament we read a lot about grace. Jesus told stories/parables about grace, such as in Matthew 20:1-16 about the workers in the vineyard. Read this parable and discuss together how this story can define God's grace:

- * Is grace measured out equally to all?
- * What is the mystery about grace?

The Apostle Paul, particularly, wrote much about grace in his letters. We would do well to make a study of the word grace in the Bible and in particular in the New Testament. That does not mean that grace is absent from the Old Testament. How can we read the story of Hosea and Gomer without realising that it was grace that Hosea showed? This story is also an example of how God himself shows grace to his people. I encourage you to read the story of Hosea and Gomer in the book of Hosea.

Give thanks to God for his gift of grace. We should be so thankful to our Father God for his gift of grace through his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus went willingly to the cross, he took our place. He took on the sins of the world – this is grace indeed!

Commissioner Denise Swansbury – IHQ, from United Kingdom Territory

I have served in the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, Liberia and Ghana. Currently I am the Zonal Secretary for Women's Ministries, South Pacific and East Asia Zone. I travel around the Zone sharing the joy and grace of the Lord with everyone I meet. How thankful I am to God for this opportunity and privilege.

'For the law was given to Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17).

OUR LIVES TODAY

In our world today we need grace. It is possible to see how much lack of grace there is in the world, but as Christian women we need to demonstrate the grace of God – shown firstly to us as individuals, to our families and then to others with whom we come into contact.

Grace is Amazing – Grace means that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more or love us less.

Grace is Liberating – Grace is where our personal salvation story begins. 'Man is broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue.' [Eugene O'Neill, *The Great God Brown*, quoted in *What's so Amazing about Grace?* Philip Yancey, ch 20]

Grace is Exceeding/Extravagant – Grace is abundant, infinite, plenteous, unlimited, boundless...

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What would a world without God's grace look like?
2. How can I show God's grace to this dark and needy world?
3. Through thankfulness, how can I demonstrate God's grace in my life?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

During this month, make a real effort to show by your thankful life the grace shown to you, and then share that grace with those around you, in your home, with your family, at work, with your colleagues and at your corps/church, with your brothers and sisters in Christ. I encourage you always to demonstrate the grace of God in your life.

'Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts' (Colossians 3:16).

JOYFULLY HIS IN THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls (vv8,9).

BIBLE READING – 1 PETER 1:3-9

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Peter wrote to the persecuted Christians living in Asia Minor with authority and as one who had credibility and a passionate conviction of the certainty of the hope that was both his and also theirs in Jesus. As a leader who had learnt from his failures, he wrote to encourage them through the difficulties and persecution they were experiencing at the hands of the Roman Empire. Many of them were young Christians in their faith, who needed guidance on their journey.

Instead of looking to the immediacy of their current situation, he reminds them of their heavenly inheritance. He directs them to the certainty of their hope found only in Jesus. It couldn't be taken from them. It impacted their future and their present reality. The hope they had in Christ would help them through anything.

In this passage Peter is basically instructing these new Christians to 'Become who you are!' If your faith counts for anything – it needs to count now!

'These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed' (1 Peter 1:7).

This was the reason for them to rejoice; even in their present trying and difficult situation, their genuine faith and holding on to what they knew to be certain, was much more precious than gold itself. This faith, based on love, results in an inexpressible, incomparable joy, not only in the present but also eternally.

OUR LIVES TODAY

Our personal stories are different, yet we also experience many similarities. We are all women on a journey, trying to make sense of the world we live in, by the grace of God and to the best of our ability.

By participating in this study, it's assumed you have a longing and desire to know more of who God is and what that means for you. To experience this inexpressible joy that Peter speaks of, we are encouraged to remember who we are in Christ! Our motivation should not be based on the reward, as wonderful as that will be, but as a response to the depth of love shown for us, 'not that we loved God, but that he loved us' (1 John 4:10).

God has the ability to step into the text of our lives and change it from our story to his story. Eugene Peterson, in

his Message paraphrase of Psalm 18:24, says, 'God rewrote the text of my life when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes.' The Christians in Asia Minor needed to be reminded that their lives were part of a greater story than their own. Do you also need that reminder? These persecuted Christians were in danger of losing faith, but Peter reminds them of 'Who they are in Jesus'. He reminds them of the hope they have in Christ. He points them beyond their current situation to a deeper understanding of who Christ is and what he has done for them. Perhaps you too need to be reminded today.

You are Joyfully His (in the present tense) in the hope of eternal life (future tense). Become who you are!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When and how did you become aware that there was a bigger and greater story than your own? How has God rewritten the text (script) of your life? What difference did it make and what changes did it bring about?
2. Have you experienced the joy which Peter speaks of (eg, time of conversion; on your journey of faith; through trials)? How did this impact the way you live your life?
3. In your own story/journey, what have been the difficult lessons to learn about trusting God for the present and the future?

HOW TO LIVE JOYFULLY FOR GOD

At least once a day, during the next month, do the following:

Choose your favourite cup. Take a moment to look at the cup and consider its shape, colour and condition. Consider its capacity for both filling and emptying. Whilst doing this, recite and reflect on one of the following verses.

Psalm 16:5 'Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.'

Psalm 23:5 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.'

Psalm 116:13 'I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.'

Ask yourself:

- * What does this verse mean for me in the way I live today?
- * What does this verse mean for me in the context of eternity?

Major Rosslyn Casey – IHQ, from Australia Southern Territory

I have shared the joy of the Lord in response to his call to ministry in Australia, the United Kingdom, and now as chaplain at International Headquarters.