

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday December 15, 2019. "Advent Conspiracy. Give More. Joy".

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work thru from the message this past Sunday. Whether you were able to attend the worship service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

II Recap.

This is the third Sunday in our season of Advent. The inner preparation of our souls, not just for Christmas...but the coming of Jesus. The first week we talked about hope and tied it to the practice of worship. Not just attending church, but growing an awareness that God is everywhere. If we can work to grow that awareness, actively regularly worship, then we can grow hope also. Last week we talked about true peace. A peace that is deep and real comes from this life of wholeness and completeness. Which means we have to work into our life the practice of not looking to things of the world for completeness, but realizing if we can slowly and deliberately add practices and behaviors that grow this movement towards wholeness through God, we can experience this deep powerful peace. Advent is the four weeks prior to Christmas Day, and it gives us a focused time of work to prepare ourselves for making sure Christmas does a good work within us.

III Sunday.

So Sunday we hit the difficult to nail down, rarely used, but oh so connected to Christmas the Advent theme of Joy. In spite of the fact we rarely use the word joy in day to day conversations, it is in scripture, and most of us have a lay person's understanding that joy is significant and different than say...happiness. It's all too cliché, but we usually link feeling happy as a positive response to events and circumstances around us, and joy is much deeper, less dependent on the situations we find ourselves in.

So...let's try to narrow down how you define joy.

What does joy mean to you?

How do you differentiate between joy and happiness?

What makes joy....joy?

Kal started the message with this thought; **Joy cannot be felt, experienced, because it is a supernatural thing, unless we do something supernatural to receive it.** Since joy is not connected or dependent on our circumstances there must be something outside of our control where joy comes from.

And then it was shared there is a deliberate order of these Advent themes. They all build and are connected to each other.

HOPE (Confidence of future thru worship), + **PEACE** (wholeness/completeness and contentment from God) = **JOY**.

Joy implies; I have no fear or anxiety about my future and I am content with enough, what I have, so I have this thing called Joy.

The primary scripture used Sunday is the familiar story of the coming of the wise men. Read it in **Matthew 2:1-12**, and we'll pull some truths out of it.

First, as always, what jumped out to you about this passage?

Was there anything you noticed or realized you had never seen before?

There were three specifics Kal pulled from this passage that seem to be the spring from which joy pours from. And just like Kal did, we're going to do them slightly out of order.

2. Joy is outwardly focused and it moves towards others.

"Where is this king?". True Joy comes from a life that takes care of the inner space, to live an outwardly focused, open-handed generous life. Joy is **willing and eager to move towards others**. Physically and emotionally.

Is moving towards others easy or difficult for you? Why?

3. Joy honors and provokes generosity.

"They bowed down and worshipped". (**HOPE**). "They opened their treasure chest and **gave him...**". (**PEACE**)- "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also".

Joy, what we're all really looking for, **comes from living in generosity and giving**.

Is being generous, holding your stuff loosely, easy or difficult for you? Why?

And the final one.

1. Joy is not an emotion...it's a choice.

Emotions are natural reactions to our environment, things that happen TO us. "This good thing happened to me, I was on the receiving end of something good for me, and so I am pleased I got something." Joy is not a result, a response to positive events in our lives, or dependent on anything else. We **decide** if we're going to cultivate a life that produces the fruit of Joy. Joy is a **product**, results of a life, of **continual worship that builds Hope**, and a selflessness and lack of being consumed with the stuff of the world that leads to **wholeness/completeness Peace**.

So, if we want that deep, "meatier" as Kal describe it, joy, then we have to want it enough to incorporate behaviors and habits in our life that cultivate and nurture a life that brings joy.

What does it mean to you that you have to choose to experience joy?

Even though joy is not in our regular vocabulary, the scriptures speak of it often, and deep down we know we want to have this attitude and approach to life that is always hopeful and peaceful no matter what we face. And this comes from intentionally designing a life that aligns with the heart of God.

What one or two habits or activities could you start that would begin to cultivate joy?