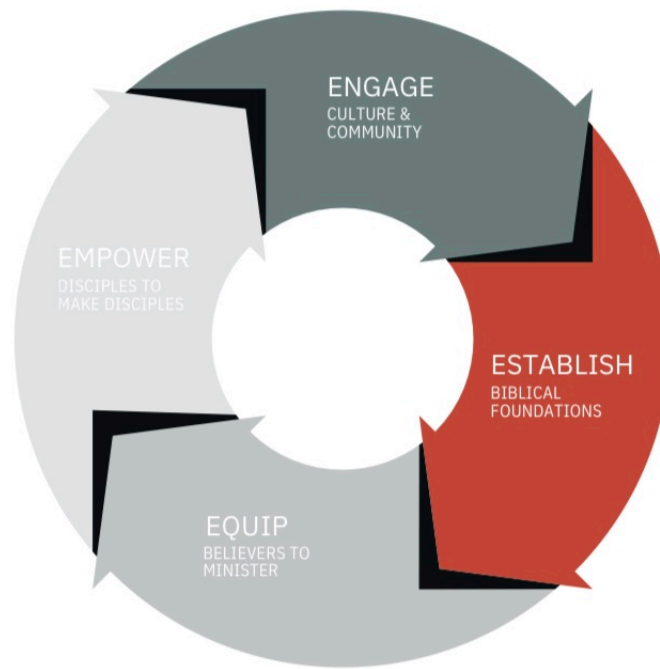


The mission of Rise Up Church is to raise disciples, empower families, and revitalize neighborhoods by the transformational power of the gospel. At Rise Up Church, our discipleship rhythm shapes how we live and expressed in four key movements that we call the 4E's. It is all about following Jesus and helping others do the same.



The purpose of our Koinonia Gatherings is to establish people in biblical foundations by building Christ-centered connections. We believe the Scriptures teaches that life change happens best in community, as we grow together in God's Word and are led by the Holy Spirit.

Below, you'll find a sermon-based guide from the most recent sermon to help lead a Rise Up Church Koinonia Gathering, along with a five day devotional designed to help you apply the sermon throughout the week.

Koinonia Gathering Guide: Advent Joy - A Joy Nothing Can Take

Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by asking God to restore or deepen the joy of salvation in each person's heart.

Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)

Share about a time when someone or something tried to "kill your joy." How did you respond? Looking back, what was the source of your joy in that moment—happiness (circumstantial) or true joy (rooted in Jesus)?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. **Joy vs. Happiness:** Happiness is circumstantial and temporary; joy is rooted in Jesus and cannot be taken away.
2. **Jesus Enters the Ordinary:** God brings joy into the mundane, messy, and ordinary parts of life—not just the highlight moments.
3. **Joy for All People:** The announcement of Jesus' birth came to shepherds (society's outcasts), showing that this joy is available to everyone, regardless of status.
4. **Salvific Joy:** The "good news of great joy" is the Gospel—Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we deserved.
5. **Joy Produces Response:** True joy moves us toward Jesus with haste, compels us to witness, and leads us to worship.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text (15-20 minutes)

1. **Read Luke 2:1-20 together.** What stands out to you about the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth? How does this challenge our modern, sanitized view of Christmas?
2. Why do you think God chose to announce Jesus' birth to shepherds rather than to religious leaders or royalty? What does this tell us about God's heart?

3. The angel said, "I bring you good news of great joy" (v. 10). What specifically is the "good news"? How is this different from general happiness or positive thinking?

Personal Reflection (20-25 minutes)

4. **Happiness vs. Joy:** Where in your life are you currently pursuing happiness instead of joy? What would it look like to shift your focus to Jesus as your source of joy?
5. **The Ordinary:** The sermon emphasized that "Jesus brings joy to the ordinary." What ordinary, mundane, or even difficult circumstances in your life need Jesus to step into right now?
6. **Barriers to Joy:** The sermon mentioned that we often don't receive joy because "we don't open ourselves up to Jesus." What excuses, pity parties, or victim mentalities are keeping you from receiving the joy Jesus offers?
7. **Status and Joy:** The shepherds had no status, yet received the greatest announcement in history. How does your pursuit of status, accomplishments, or relationships interfere with your joy in Jesus?

Application (15-20 minutes)

8. **The Joy Response:** The shepherds responded to joy in three ways:
 - They moved toward Jesus with **haste**
 - They **witnessed** to others
 - They **worshiped** God
9. Which of these responses is weakest in your life right now? What's one practical step you can take this week to strengthen it?
10. **Worship Based on What's Already Done:** The shepherds worshiped "for all they had heard and seen." Make a list as a group: What has Jesus *already* done for you that should fuel your joy and worship, regardless of current circumstances?
11. **Restoring Joy:** Read Psalm 51:12 together: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit." If your joy has diminished, what would it look like to pray this prayer daily this week?

Practical Applications

Choose one or two to focus on as a group this week:

Individual Practices

- **Daily Gratitude:** Each morning, list three things Jesus has already done for you before asking for anything new.
- **Bible Reading:** Commit to opening God's Word daily, even for just 5-10 minutes. (Remember the story of the money in the Bible!)
- **Joy Check:** When you notice yourself becoming unhappy, pause and ask: "Is my joy rooted in circumstances or in Jesus?"

Group Practices

- **Witness Challenge:** Share the joy of Jesus with at least one person this week. Report back to the group.
- **Pray for Each Other:** Pair up and pray specifically for joy to be restored or deepened in each other's lives.
- **Serve Together:** Plan a group activity to bring joy to "modern-day shepherds"—the marginalized or overlooked in your community.

Closing Reflection

The pastor said: "Your worship got to be based in so much what Jesus has already done for you, regardless of what the future may bring to you."

Take 2-3 minutes of silence for each person to reflect:

- What has Jesus already done for me?
- How should this change how I face tomorrow?
- What is one thing I need to surrender to experience deeper joy?

Closing Prayer

Have someone close in prayer, asking specifically:

- For joy to replace happiness-seeking in our lives
- For the Holy Spirit to help us open ourselves to receive Jesus' joy
- For boldness to witness about the joy we've found
- For hearts of worship based on what Jesus has already accomplished

For Next Week - Encourage group members to:

1. Journal about moments when they experienced joy vs. happiness this week
2. Memorize Luke 2:10-11
3. Come prepared to share one way Jesus brought joy into an ordinary moment

5-Day Advent Joy Devotional Guide

Day 1: Joy in the Ordinary

Reading: Luke 2:1-7

Devotional: Jesus entered the world not in a palace, but in a stable—among the mess, the smells, and the ordinary chaos of life. This reminds us that Christ doesn't wait for our lives to be perfect before He brings joy. He steps into our Monday mornings, our difficult conversations, our mundane routines, and our messy circumstances. The manger teaches us that God's presence transforms the ordinary into the sacred. Today, invite Jesus into the most mundane parts of your life. He specializes in bringing divine joy to everyday moments. Your workplace, your kitchen, your commute—these are all places where Christ can manifest His joy if you'll open your heart to receive Him there.

Day 2: Good News for All People

Reading: Luke 2:8-12

Devotional: The angels didn't announce Christ's birth to religious leaders or royalty first—they announced it to shepherds, the outcasts and marginalized of society. This reveals a profound truth: the joy of salvation isn't reserved for those who have it all together. It's for the broken, the overlooked, and the struggling. Your past doesn't disqualify you. Your status doesn't determine your access to God's joy. The gospel is good news precisely because it's for all people—regardless of where you've been or what you've done. This Advent season, remember that Christ came for you, just as you are. His joy isn't earned through performance; it's received through faith in what He's already accomplished.

Day 3: The Difference Between Happiness and Joy

Reading: Psalm 51:10-12; John 16:20-22

Devotional: Happiness depends on happenings—it comes and goes with circumstances. But joy is rooted in Jesus. It's a deep-seated confidence that God is with you, regardless of external situations. The shepherds returned to the same fields, the same work, the same ordinary lives—but they returned with joy because they had encountered Christ. Nothing about their circumstances changed, but everything about their hearts transformed. When your joy is anchored in what Jesus has already done—

His death, resurrection, and victory over sin—nothing can steal it. Not disappointment, not hardship, not even Dr. Killjoy. Today, ask God to restore the joy of your salvation, a joy that transcends circumstances and remains steadfast.

Day 4: Joy That Moves Us

Reading: Luke 2:15-18

Devotional: When the shepherds encountered the joy of the Lord, they couldn't stay still. They went "with haste" to find Jesus, and then they couldn't stop talking about what they'd seen. True joy isn't passive—it moves us toward Jesus and compels us to witness. Perhaps you remember when you first experienced Christ's love—you couldn't contain it. If that fire has dimmed, ask God to rekindle it. Joy in Jesus naturally overflows into worship and witness. You don't need to wait until you "get it together" to move toward Him. Come as you are, with haste, and let His joy transform you. Then watch as that joy becomes contagious to everyone around you. You may be the only Jesus some people will ever see.

Day 5: Worship as a Response

Reading: Luke 2:19-20; Psalm 100

Devotional: The shepherds returned "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." Their worship was a response to what God had already done, not a plea for what they hoped He would do. This is the foundation of lasting joy—gratitude for the completed work of Christ. He's already rescued your soul from hell. He's already died in your place. He's already conquered sin and death. That's enough reason to worship Him for the rest of your life, regardless of what tomorrow brings. When we anchor our joy in what Jesus has already accomplished, we can worship Him authentically through every season. Today, make a list of what Christ has already done for you, and let that fuel your worship and sustain your joy.