

Moving from the Fear of Missing Out to the Joy of Missing Out

By Heidi Goehmann

Study Session 1 – Wait, what am I missing out on?

We have all had that moment when we open our phones or overhear a conversation and feel like we missed out on something. We want to be included in all the fun things people are doing. We don't want to be the third wheel who wasn't invited to the party.

Can you think of something you saw on social media or heard someone talking about in the last few weeks that made you feel like you were missing out? Or a time when you were younger and didn't get the birthday invitation everyone else seemed to get or weren't invited to the monkey bars where the "cool kids" hung out on the playground?

I remember when I was a kid, my sisters and I had to go to bed at around 8-9 pm so that we wouldn't be grouch-pusses the next day when it was time to get up for school. My parents didn't go to bed at 8-9 pm, because they aren't kids, and adults need less sleep. Instead, they popped popcorn and watched a show. I could smell that popcorn wafting up from the family room downstairs and hear them laughing at late night television. That popcorn smelled like butter, and warmth, and it also smelled like missing out on something really fantastic.

It stinks to feel like we're missing out on something. It stinks so much that we end up often in a perpetual state of wondering if we're missing out on something or constantly feeling a little left out. There are two ways God encourages us when we feel like we're missing out.

- 1 – We will never miss out on God and His love in Jesus Christ.
- 2 – We best avoid missing out by being the includer.

Let's break these things down.

We will never miss out on God and His love in Jesus Christ.

God does not stay hidden. So, while we feel like we might be missing out on things in life, God is not one of those things. God has many ways He reveals Himself to us, the Bible tells us. Every single person can see God by looking around them at all He created. Psalm 19 reminds us that God, and especially the majesty or the vastness and bigness of God as Creator, can be seen.

He doesn't want us to miss Him. We can look all around us and see the work of God's hands when we look at the sky and the stars, fresh flowers, the uniqueness of all the animals He made, and the variety of food on our table even. Psalm 19:1-4 reminds us, all these things in creation are there so we don't miss out on God:

*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
Their measuring line goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

If you are reading this on your own, list three things in your head that you see around you that are a part of Creation telling us God exists. You might even share these on your social media alongside Psalm 19:1. If you are in a group, you can share your three things aloud with one another.

The Catechism also reminds us that in making all of these things on the earth—plants that grow and wood to make houses and other humans in our lives to support us—God provides for us.

Luther's explanation of the First Article to the Apostle's Creed:

"I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him."

Why does the Catechism say God provides all of this for us? We don't want to miss that either!

Because He loves us. It's pretty remarkable that the God of the Universe loves us and wants to spend time with us. Because of that love He also brought Jesus to pay for our sins on the cross and rise again. With Jesus Christ in our lives, we don't have to wonder about who God is or wonder about ever missing out on all the grace and relationship that God has for us. Rather, God sent Jesus so we would never, ever miss out.

Look up Romans 5:8. How does it tell us we absolutely know, without a doubt, we will not miss out on God's love?

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

List in your head or on paper three sins, any three sins. These can be your sins or the sins we see around us in the world, on the news, in our schools, or in our social media feeds.

- 1
- 2
- 3

God tell us later in Romans 8:34-38, that these sins and so much else can never separate us from God's love because of Christ Jesus. Read those verses and list three other things in this world that will never separate us from God.

- 1
- 2
- 3

We will never miss out on God and His love in Jesus Christ.

We best avoid missing out by being the includer.

Look back at that passage in Romans we just read. The first thing listed in verse 4 that Satan will try to use to separate us from God is what? Condemnation. That means the shame we feel when we feel like we are left out or missing out, like we aren't good enough. It also means the sadness or frustration we feel when other people intentionally leave us out. This condemnation, words of "I'm not good enough, smart enough, sporty enough, good looking enough, popular enough," etc. have no place in us or in our relationships with other people because of Christ Jesus.

We have been given the gift of never missing out on God and His love in Jesus Christ, so we can now share that gift with the whole world around us. We can lift some of that FOMO from others, that fear that they are missing something, that feeling of being left out.

Consider this on your own or talk about it in your group:

What are ways people feel like they are missing out or feel left out in each of the following places?

- school
- family life
- social media
- romance
- at church

Now, what are some ways we can make people feel more included in each of these places?

- school
- family life
- social media
- romance
- at church

Time and again in the Gospels that tell us about the time Jesus spent here on this earth, before He went to the cross to die for us, He included other people. These people most often couldn't help but go and tell everyone they knew how this inclusion and the forgiveness Jesus brought them changed everything. When the Holy Spirit came to this earth, He appeared as a tongue of fire over the people's heads in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-8), but what special skill did they all pick up that day by God's hand?

Now if that's not inclusion, I don't know what is! We may not be able to speak Mandarin or Swahili or Spanish so that we can include our neighbor, but you just listed above a bunch of other ways to include people. This is the work of that same powerful Holy Spirit inside of us today.

We don't have to be afraid of missing out, because God is always working to do wild and wonderful things in our life. The Holy Spirit lives in us, from our Baptisms, as God's messenger of inclusion. The world will always leave people out, and there are times in this world we will feel left out. When the inclusion and the invite doesn't come for us, we have true Joy alongside our momentary sadness of missing out, because we have never been left out by our God in Christ Jesus, nor will He ever leave us out.

In the next study segment, we'll look closer at fear in the fear of missing out acronym. We'll answer this question to help us get from the fear of missing out to the joy of missing out: What is the purpose of fear?

Study Session 2 - What is the purpose of fear?

Fear is an uncomfortable emotion, one of those emotions no one wants. Fear seems counter to all God has taught us—trust, confidence in Jesus, gratitude, hopefulness. And fear does cause a lot of problems. It easily turns into anxiety or anxiety's close cousin, worry, both of which God wants to release us from in His love and grace.

When we talk about the fear of missing out, often there's some temptation there. We see somebody doing something and we want in on it. We want in on it so badly that we fail to have joy and gladness for the good things God has brought to them. That's not okay. It's destructive for our relationships and it hurts our own hearts. The Gospel of John reminds us that God offers grace upon grace for us in Jesus. We confess our sins when we want less for other people, and wow, God is right there to forgive every time. That forgiveness brings real joy into our lives and we can go out living in that forgiveness and sharing it all around.

But is fear always sin?

I don't think fear is always a sin. When someone tries to get into our house in the middle of the night, there is a place for fear. When we see a poisonous snake along the hiking trail, there is a place for fear. When someone pulls out in front of us in traffic and we need to slam on the brakes, there is a place for fear. We can have full assurance and excitement of eternity with Christ Jesus and still value our lives here on this earth enough to desire more time. We steward these bodies He has given us, which means we take care of them. Fear is something that shows up inside of us to alert us of danger. In this way, I believe that fear is a gift from God, knowing we would need an indicator of danger in a broken world, the world we live in since Adam and Eve ate the fruit on the tree in Genesis 3. This world has lots of trouble and we do need help from God, for our own sin and for all the junky results of sin all around us.

What is fear?

an indicator light pointing out that we are in need

Fear lights up our bodies saying, "Look alive!" Fear reminds us that we have needs, that we need help, and that what we ultimately need is God's help.

Consider, whether on your own or in your group, this question:

What is something you are afraid of?

You might share silly things or very real fears. God honestly doesn't tell us anywhere in the Bible that any of our concerns are silly. He is always ready to hear from us and He gives us His Holy Spirit to nudge us to see we need Jesus, every day, in every way.

A perfect Bible story for seeing the connection between the things that trouble us, make us anxious, or cause us to fear, and our need for Jesus is the story of two sisters named Mary and Martha. (I think the same would be true if the story involved two brothers, like James and John.)

Read Luke 10:38-42. Answer these questions: What is the one thing that Mary chose? Why do you think Jesus called it good?

The New Testament of the Bible was originally written in Greek and is translated for us by many experts into English, or other languages that we speak. The Greek word for necessary in Luke 10:41 looks like this:

χρεία (chreia)

This Greek word is related to what someone needs for a journey.

We are on a journey in this life, sent here by God, called for a purpose according to Jeremiah 29:11 and walking steadily to our home in heaven where we can fully be with God again—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all gathered around the heavenly feast. We get a tiny glimpse of this one-day feast when we take Communion together as the Body of Christ, the Church made up of God's people. Communion gives us strength for this journey and points us to Jesus. It's one way God settles our hearts and clears our minds to be fixed on Jesus through all the scary and frustrating and disappointing things of life.

Take a minute to consider this on your own or in your group:

What other things does God offer us to point us to Jesus again and again, to give us rest for this journey, and to remind us what we really need when we are afraid?

Along our journey we will encounter scary things, things that cause fear and anxiety and worry and sadness and hurt. Jesus gives us His death on the cross and resurrection to assure us that we are secure in the one thing needful. We have eternity with Him. We can experience fear and keep walking with Jesus on this journey.

When you feel fear or anxiety on the journey, a helpful question to ask is,

"What do I need right now?"

There might be lots we need, or only a couple things, and in the next study section, we'll hash out how God helps us figure all of that out. But at the end of the day, at the bottom of the pile is the real answer to this question: We have one thing needful—Jesus. This life is good and He is the best part of it.

God's answer to our fear, as is God's answer to all of our struggle on this journey, is Jesus. We do not live in fear, because we have our one real need provided for us in Christ Jesus. When we experience fear we know where to go with it. Knowing the real root of fear as another good gift of God to point us to Him and what we need in this life, we can experience fear and the fear of missing out and ask ourselves that question instead of letting it turn into anxiety that rules our life:

"What do I need right now?"

Maybe we need a good friend, maybe we need to burn off some energy, maybe we need to get outside in the sunshine, maybe we need a little fun and a little connection with people.

When we are confronted with the fear of missing out, it may not be as fearful as a snake in the grass, but when I open my social media and get that familiar pulse of "Look alive!" I can still turn to look to Jesus. He's alive and He is with me in every moment of my fear.

In Jesus we see joy, because He is Joy itself. May these words of Jesus, in John 15:11-13, be with you today in any fear you have:

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Prayer –

Lord, You came to lay down Your life for us. You gave us all we need in that act. Help us to see Your sacrifice and great care for us in the moments of our fear. Make us aware of the true joy You bring to us today and in life eternal. In Jesus' name, Amen.

In the next study segment, we'll figure out further what we need in moments of fear or of feeling like we're missing out by asking the question, "What do I really need?" And we'll look to Jesus together to see all He gives us to care for us in our fear and in our needs.

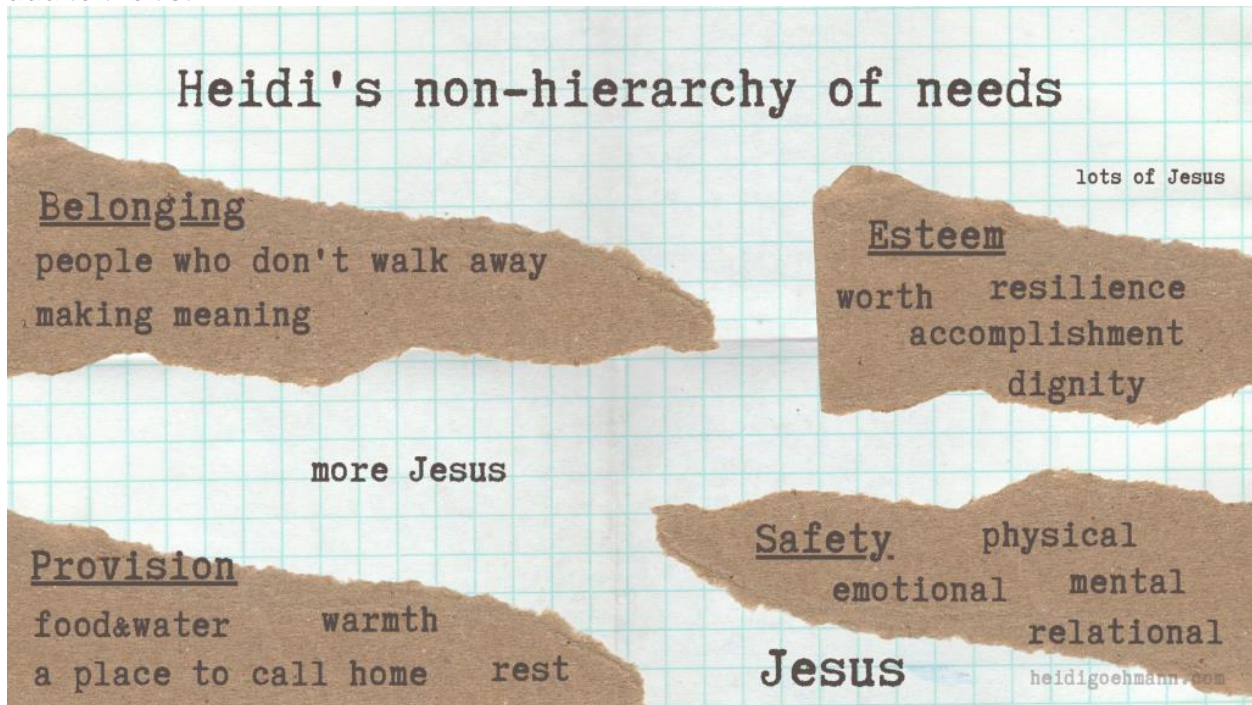
Study Session 3 - What do I really need?

If you drive a car, you're likely familiar with the check engine light. Actually, if you ride in a car you're likely familiar with the check engine light. No one feels great when that light comes on. Why? Because it indicates your car needs something and might spaz out at any moment if it doesn't get it. In the last study segment, we talked about fear our check engine light, an indicator that we need something. When we have fear, the fear of missing out included, we can dial in and ask ourselves,

"What do I need?"

The first answer to that question is always Jesus. If that snake bit me and I died, that would stink (like really, really and truly stink), but I know that I have eternal life in Christ Jesus. When the bite comes, I turn to Him. AND He also gives me all kinds of other things to help me on this journey—antivenom for instance, and a voice to call for help, and people to come to my aid. What are some of the other tools and resources God gives us in everyday life to help us along the way. If you need some ideas, you can look at Luther's Small Catechism in the explanation to the three articles of the Apostle's Creed.

Here's a list I made as a social worker and therapist to help us understand all the things we need in life for this journey. What I have included is based primarily on the research of a psychologist, Abraham Maslow, (maybe you've heard of him in a class?), but also on my research in God's Word and with God's people. I grouped them into four areas of need – provision, safety, belonging, and esteem – with our need for Jesus showing up all over the place. This list is most likely imperfect because our discoveries on this earth and in God's Word are always a work in progress. Which items off this list that we need for the journey do you think people are the most afraid of not having or missing out on? What might you add to the list?



It's important to understand that God gives us all we really need in Himself, whether we get all these things on this earth or not. When God sent us out on this journey to live this life, He also gave us the gifts of Baptism and Salvation. Those are our traveling clothes. They might look like a Jesus style white robe in your mind, or they might look like stylish hip-hop style white jeans and a t-shirt. It doesn't really matter, we just use white to represent the spotlessness of Jesus placed on us by God in the forgiveness of our sins.

Read Isaiah 61:10. How does God bring to us provision, safety, esteem, and belonging through the gift of Salvation?

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

When we don't have food and water... God gives us His Body and Blood in the bread and wine and the Word, which is the bread of life. He gives us rest in His care and from striving to do all the right things to make God happy. We have Jesus for that.

When we don't have people who keep us safe, when our safety has been compromised in this world where terrible things sometimes happen, or when those we trusted have used hurtful words or done hurtful things, God is always a safe place to turn to in our prayers and in His Word.

When we don't feel worthwhile or we don't succeed in our endeavors, God still calls us child and tells us we are worthy of His love in Jesus Christ. He doesn't need us to be awesome for Him, He just wants to be with us.

When we don't understand our purpose in this life, when we have a hard time seeing the good through the mire or yuck of life, when we feel left out and left alone, God always loves, always accepts, never forsakes—so much so that He sent His Son to die and rise for us.

John 1:16, which witnesses to the arrival of Jesus, born as a baby, in this world after a long time when the people of God did not hear from Him and likely felt pretty afraid, pretty left out, maybe like they had missed the Messiah or God had passed them by, tells us:

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Jesus came to bring Himself to us for our salvation, but He also brings grace upon grace. Lots of times in life, God gives us *more*, more of what we need and sometimes what we want. Consider each of the categories from my non-hierarchy of needs above and answer the questions on your own or with your group about what you or others around you need and how God supplies those needs. The explanation of the commandments in Luther's Small Catechism are a great place to go if you get stumped on one.

Provision:

What do people need in terms of food, water, a place to call home, rest, and warmth?

How does God supply for those needs when our check engine light comes on?

Safety:

What do people need in terms of safety, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or relationally?

How does God supply for those needs when our check engine light comes on?

Esteem:

What do people need in terms of worth, dignity, accomplishment, and resilience?

How does God supply for those needs when our check engine light comes on?

Belonging:

What do people need in terms of relationships, community, and not feeling left out?

How does God supply for those needs when our check engine light comes on?

Now the question remains, *what do you need?* God cares about what you need. We can say it out loud to one another because God is our refuge and He hears us, even if those people disappoint us in some way. To end this study today, say aloud to God or to God and your group one thing you need from Him, anything at all, knowing at the end of the day this truth: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—He is what we really need, every day, in every way. In Jesus we will never ever miss out on God's love.

Take a moment to read Philippians 4:6-7,13, in closing and presenting those requests to God in prayer.

Study Session 4 - Where do I find joy?

In this study we have:

- Defined FOMO and JOMO
- Discovered we never need to fear missing out on God's love
- Sorted through the place of fear in our lives
- Considered what we need, from God and other people

It's time to get to some Joy!

God changes everything in our life and brings Joy overflowing into the places where we feel afraid, lonely, and left out. Jesus is true Joy.

Earlier in our study we reflected on John 15 for just a moment. Let's return to that to remember where true joy comes from, especially when the world doesn't seem so joyful. Read John 15:9-13:

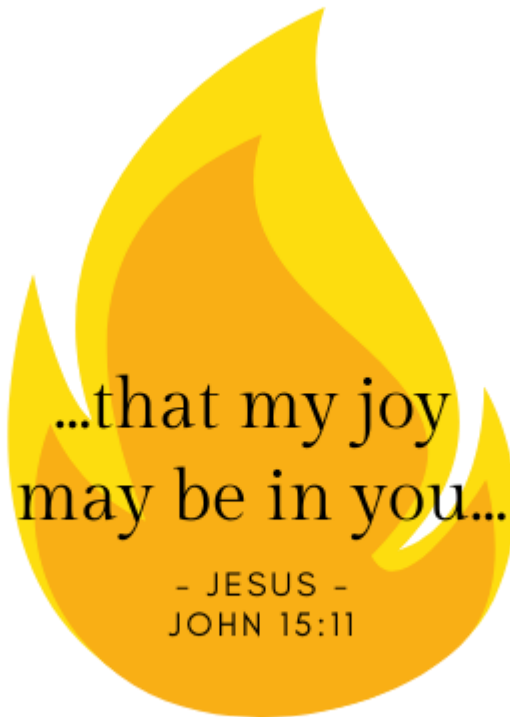
As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Essentially, we have joy in Jesus, wrapped all around with the love of Jesus. He laid down His life for us. Joy! He brings us help and counsel in the commandments. Joy! He speaks to us in His Word. Joy! We get to abide in God, because He abides in us through the Holy Spirit. Joy! He brings His love into our hearts to go out to our friends and all the people all around us. Joy!

The words of the song we likely learned long ago as children are 100% true: you've got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy down in your heart because the Holy Spirit lives there. Did you feel it at your baptism? Maybe, but most likely not. Jesus Joy isn't a feeling. It's a Truth. A lot of times I picture Jesus Joy as a flame of fire inside of me, because that's how the Holy Spirit originally appeared to the disciples. This visual picture helps me remember it's alive and well inside of me when I can't feel it.

Step One to JOMO: Create some awareness of your Jesus Joy.

The first thing that builds JOMO, the joy of missing out, (rather than the fear of missing out) in us is the awareness of this Jesus Joy. While the joy inside you is intangible, can you give it an imaginary tangible picture just for fun? Either on your own or as a group, create your Jesus Joy picture, something to represent the Joy that Jesus and His love brings into your life. Or you could just pick a color that represents Jesus Joy best for you. Maybe there's a way to post a picture of representation of it somewhere you can see it each day. Here's an example of mine. I like to use the words of John 15:11 to remind me just where this joy comes from. You might use another Bible verse or the single word – JOY!



Step two to JOMO: Tell God thanks for the Jesus Joy and all the other joy.

Philippians 4:4-6 reveals the closer relationship between joy, fear (or anxiety, which is fear that kind of festers), and gratitude. Read that passage on your own or with your group and reflect on how the three are helpfully or unhelpfully connected in:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

If you picture these three—fear, gratitude, and joy—on a triangle of things we experience in this life, one clearly seems out of place. Fear seems unlikely to feed gratitude, and joy seems unlikely to produce fear, but we are more complicated as people than simple triangles. We have all kinds of emotions deep inside us and sometimes right on the surface. This passage in Philippians reminds us that these things will coexist in our lives

simultaneously. The Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul's words, wouldn't tell us "don't be anxious" if He didn't know it would be a reality for us alongside joy. When we pray to God, sometimes we feel like nothing happens. But God is always at work. His Spirit is always at work in us. When we read of God's faithfulness and take a moment to thank Him, joy mysteriously gets bigger and fear gets smaller. Sometimes we can see this, and sometimes we can't. We may not be able to just throw fear and anxiety out the window. Faith is not the absence of fear, but the presence of God's faithfulness in us. Again, we can see fear as that indicator light, flashing, telling us to look to God, turn to God, and see the Jesus Joy that has been there all along.

Look around you and name for yourself or your group three things you are thankful God brought into your life today. These may be big like "my mom or dad's love for me," or silly, like "my mom or dad's baked goods for me."

Now challenge yourself or your group members: Grab a blank piece of 8.5x11 paper. It can be a scratch paper, too. Write "fear" or "anxiety" in large or small letters in the middle of the page. Then, set a timer for 3 minutes and try to crowd out the fear with things that God brings into our lives with His Joy. Don't forget to include the Jesus Joy. That's the most important one, so it should be big.

See how different fear and anxiety feels when it's crowded and maybe even covered by the Jesus Joy and all the other joy God brings to us? Thanks for doing that. I wish I could see all your joy!

Step three to JOMO: Watch for opportunities to experience joy for other people.

JOMO isn't just about spotting our joy. It's also about just being happy for other people's joy. I don't need to get good stuff to be happy for your good stuff.

When I open my social media and get that shock of, "Oh good gravy! They are doing such cool stuff and I am not!" or "Everyone is doing all the cool stuff without me!" Jesus gives me the ability to embrace vicarious joy. This is especially true in the body of Christ. What does Romans 12:3-5 have to say about the connection of people in the Body of Christ, including the many gifts of joy God gives to us?

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

First, God's children are God's children. Jesus's sacrifice on the cross for us says to us that He wants all of us to experience Jesus joy in this life. I am not worthier than you, to hold His joy and experience His joy. That means, I can be glad beyond measure for your joy, just as I am glad for my own.

Second, being members "one of another" is a truly unique way to look at joy. The world says, "This is my joy and this is your joy." But God's people say, "This is our joy." When someone tells you something exciting about their life or you see a friend experiencing something you want to experience, you get the opportunity to see it differently from the

world... you can be happy for them, you can have joy for them, you can thank God on their behalf.

This is where the rubber hits the road, as they say, where our faith meets the way we journey through this life and changes things, including our hearts. If you are in a group, have everyone name a cool gift they've received or a cool experience they've had in their lifetime, something really memorable to them. After each person shares, let's take a minute to demonstrate some joy for them. Without being fake or expressing something you don't feel, members could be invited to thank each participant as they share and use a crazy household item (think a pot and wooden spoon or a tambourine lying around) to praise God for bringing that gift into their life. Be creative and make some noise in expressing joy for one another. Be honest if you have been finding it hard to find joy in this season of your life. If you are doing this study on your own, make a list titled "Our joy" and think of experiences, invitations, and gifts those around you have received, then pray, thanking God for those things on behalf of others.

We will have times we are anxious, times we are afraid, times we covet, and times we feel ungrateful. God brings grace into our lives for those times and that grace just brings more joy. I'm never going to miss out on God's grace, and that's the most joyous place to be.