

The JOY of Living Love

LCMS SERVANT EVENT **DEVOTIONS** (LEADER'S GUIDE)



“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!”

(Psalm 100:1-2 ESV)

 **THE**
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod
Youth Ministry

Leader's Notes

Objectives

The purpose of these devotions is to help servant event participants, by the power of the God's Spirit working through His Word, better understand and experience the great joy of living a life of love and service to Christ and others. The goal is for each participant to begin each new day of service in the spirit (Spirit!) of the psalmist who said, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!" (Ps. 118:24 ESV).

Group Guidelines

These devotions have been developed for use in small groups of five to seven participants. They also can be used in a larger group setting (see suggestions below). If this is the first time your group has met or if there are new people, it would be good to take some time to get acquainted prior to using these devotions.

Capable leaders will be needed to guide the groups in their use of these devotions, to initiate and encourage discussion where appropriate and to keep the length of the devotion limited to the available time frame (which is assumed to be between 15 and 20 minutes).

The Introduction is meant to set the tone for the devotions. It can be read aloud by the leader before the **Day One** Devotion.

Each devotion begins with an **Opening Litany** or prayer, usually designed to be read responsively. Leaders are encouraged to be creative in their use of these and other responsive readings provided in the devotions (i.e. take turns having people lead the readings, divide the groups in different ways for different readings, etc.).

The **Something to Think About** section is not really intended for discussion but rather to be "something to *think* about." If time allows, however, and if the leader feels it would be helpful, the thoughts offered here certainly may be used to stimulate some brief opening discussion. This section can either be read aloud by the leader (or another group member) or it may be read and pondered silently by members during a "quiet time."

The **Something to Smile About** section focuses on a particular passage (or series of passages) of Scripture that speaks of some aspect of the joy that is ours in Christ. Leaders will need to decide how best to handle these readings in view of such factors as the length of the reading and the size

and makeup of their own group (responsively, in unison, one or more readers, etc.).



The **Something to Talk About** section is meant to encourage brief discussion, usually based on the Scripture reading in the previous section. The length of time allowed for discussion will depend on such variables as the time available and the "comfort level" of the group (five minutes maximum is probably a good target time). If the devotions are used in a large-group setting, the leader may wish to: (A) Encourage brief one-on-one sharing with the person sitting behind you or on your left; or (B) Allow a few individuals to share very brief thoughts or comments with some "commentary" or "closing thoughts" by the leader.

In some cases, additional Bible passages are offered in this section for further reflection and discussion. As time allows, these may be read aloud or summarized by the devotion leader (in large-group settings) or "looked up" (in Bible study fashion) by various members of the group (in small-group settings).

While group sharing is an important part of the devotions, strive to keep discussion brief and to the point. Encourage members to share one key thought, idea or experience so the discussion is not limited to or dominated by a couple of members.

Possible answers to the questions raised in this section are fairly "self-evident" from the Scripture passages provided. Familiarity with the material through careful personal preparation will be of great help to the leader handling questions that may arise and in steering the discussion in helpful and productive directions.



Something to Sing About offers a specific song to sing together that typically connects to the devotions' main idea. However, the option to sing another favorite song is always available. Choices here will depend on available materials, familiarity of certain songs and tunes, etc. All songs offered can be found in the *All God's People Sing* songbook (Concordia Publishing House [CPH] No. 97-6453) or the *Lutheran Service Book* (CPH No. 031170) and are referred to throughout the study as "AGPS" and "LSB."



Closing Prayer or litany brings the devotion to a conclusion and is designed to be read responsively. If the group and/or leader wishes, additional prayers or specific petitions can be offered.

Introduction

***Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!***

(Ps. 100:1-2 ESV)

Did you know that the word, “joy,” is used nearly 200 times in the Bible? “Laughter” is mentioned about 50 times. Richard Bimler reminds us in his book, *Angels Can Fly Because They Take Themselves Lightly*, that “[Our Lord] often counseled and comforted His friends by saying, ‘Be of good cheer.’”

“Our joy and laughter,” writes Bimler, “begin at the cross where we see God taking our sin upon Himself in order to turn our sorrow into joy. The joy in our lives comes from knowing that the Lord has taken away our grief and sin and given us a new joy in Him! Our joy begins quietly at the cross and builds to Easter! And Easter becomes every day as we live out our lives as Resurrection Resources!”

The purpose of these devotions is to point you daily to Christ’s cross and empty tomb so that as you participate in this servant event of living love in Christ’s name and in the power of His Holy Spirit, you may “rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1

Peter 1:8 ESV). It is a joy that comes from knowing how much Jesus loves you, a joy that expresses itself in your willing and selfless service to others in response to His incomprehensible love.

“One of my favorite sayings,” writes Bimler, “is ‘If you love Jesus, why not tell your face about it?’ This does *not* mean that we walk around laughing and guffawing, oblivious to the pains and hurts in our lives. It does mean, however, that the love of the Lord is what allows us to live out a life joy-filled and celebrative.”

It is my prayer that these devotions will help you begin each of these days of service in the joy of Jesus’ love and that His joy would overflow in all kinds of ways as you live love in the lives of all those around you.

- The Rev. Dr. Joel D. Lehenbauer
Executive Director
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Day One Devotion: **Joy through Thanksgiving**

Day Two Devotion: **Joy in Our Savior**

Day Three Devotion: **Joy through Trials**

Day Four Devotion: **Joy through Serving**

Day Five Devotion: **Joy to All People**

Day One Devotion:

Joy through Thanksgiving

Opening Prayer

At the dawn of this day, O Lord,

have mercy on me and refresh my soul.

At the noon-hour of this day, O Lord,

have mercy on me and be my Stay.

At the sunset of this day, O Lord,

have mercy on me and grant me Your peace. Amen.

(George Kraus, *By Word and Prayer*, CPH, Page 50)

Something to Think About

Think of the last time you received “less-than-cheerful” service from a waiter, store cashier, customer service representative, etc. How did you feel? How did you respond? How did it affect your attitude toward the place of business employing such a grumpy server?

Now think of a time you served someone else — your parents, another family member, classmate at school, etc., with the same kind of sourness and grumpiness. How do you think they felt? How did “serving with a sneer” make you feel? How do you think it made God feel?

Something to Smile About

Read Ps. 100 responsively *twice*. First, read it in a gloomy, grumpy voice. Then, read it again with smiling, cheerful voices.

Shout for joy to the Lord,

all the earth.

Serve the Lord with gladness;

come into his presence with singing!

Know that the Lord, he is God!

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

How do you think the Holy Spirit intended this Psalm to be read? (I’ll bet even the grumpy reading made you smile!)

Something to Talk About

Our lives are not always joy-filled. Situations in life may cause us grief, anxiety or depression. Read Jeremiah 31:13.

Who or what might help us “turn our mourning into joy”? How might we be able to do this for someone else?

Robert Dale, a pastor in England in the late 1800s, once wrote:

“We ask God to forgive us for our evil thoughts, and we ask God to forgive us for our evil temper, but rarely, if ever, do we ask God to forgive us for our sadness.”

When might the sadness, gloominess or grumpiness we can experience actually become a sin in need of confession and forgiveness? What helpful hints does Ps. 100 give us for overcoming our sadness and enabling us to “serve the Lord with gladness”? (Focus especially on verses three, four and five).

Praise God in our joy we live in forgiveness.

Something to Sing About

“Serve the Lord with gladness,” says the psalmist, “come into his presence with singing!” According to Martin Luther, “Singing is the finest art and practice ... singers are neither worried nor sad but shake all cares from their soul.”

Take Luther’s advice. Engage in some “soul-shaking” by joining together in singing, “In You is Gladness” (AGPS 137, LSB 818) or another favorite song of joy to the Lord.

Closing Litany

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin!

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness;

let the bones you have broken rejoice.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence,

And take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,

and uphold me with a willing spirit.

(Ps. 51, selected verses)

Day Two Devotion:

Joy in Our Savior

Opening Prayer

God of joy,

Redeeming King,

Forgiveness flows in healing streams to wash away our tears of guilt.

The death of Christ has made us new, forgiven sin and freed us all.

Now may our lives respond in faith with quiet trust in You, our King.

Help us resist the Evil One who seeks to pull us from Your hand.

Enable us to live love in the joy, the joy of Your redeeming love.

This prayer we speak in God's great name, the Father, Son and Spirit, One.

Amen.

Something to Think About

In most artistic portrayals of our Savior, Jesus has a rather sober and serious look on His face that reflects the sober and serious nature of His mission and the suffering that He would endure for the sins of the world (including our sins). In more recent years, however, some religious artists (such as Richard Hook) have deliberately emphasized the *joy* that (according to Scripture) filled the heart of our Savior as He carried out His Father's will on our behalf. How closely does it reflect your own "picture" of Jesus?

Something to Smile About

Both Matthew (26:30) and Mark (14:26) tell us that Jesus sang a hymn with His disciples in the upper room on Maundy Thursday before heading out to the Garden of Gethsemane where He would be arrested. Most scholars believe that the hymn Jesus sang was part of the Jewish "hallel" from Ps. 115–118. As you read the following selected verses of Ps. 118 responsively, imagine Jesus singing these words with His disciples on Maundy Thursday, in full anticipation of the sufferings that awaited Him:

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!

Out of my distress I called on the Lord;
the Lord answered me and set me free.

The Lord is on my side; I will not fear.

What can man do to me?

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,
but the Lord helped me.

The Lord is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.

Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous:
The right hand of the Lord does valiantly, the right hand of the Lord exalts, the right hand of the Lord does valiantly!

I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!

Something to Talk About

Heb. 1:9 says of Jesus, "God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." Heb. 12:2 says that Jesus endured the sufferings of the Cross, scorning its shame, "for the joy that was set before him." What do you think was the secret to Jesus' joy? (Matt. 17:5; 1 Peter 2:23; Luke 15:3-7)

Something to Sing About

Sing together the hymn "Beautiful Savior" (AGPS 70, LSB 537) or another favorite hymn that focuses on the joy and "beauty" of Christ and of our salvation in Him.

Closing Litany

How can I repay the Lord

for all His goodness to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all His people.

O Lord, truly I am your servant;

**I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant;
You have freed me from my chains.**

I will sacrifice a thank offering to You.
and call on the name of the Lord.

I will fulfill my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all His people.

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord! Amen.

(Ps. 51, selected verses)

Day Three Devotion:

Joy through Trials

Opening Prayer

O Christ, my Master, let me keep very close to You.

When I am tempted to be undisciplined or self-indulgent or self-pitying, make me remember Your days of prayer and fasting.

When enthusiasm and zeal fade, make me remember Your night of prayer and Your determination to do the Father's will.

When I flee from testing, lead me to Gethsemane.

When I feel forgotten and defeated, turn me to the open tomb of my risen Savior.

Whatever outward events may be, grant me the gift of inner joy, which You have promised to all who love You. Amen.

(George Kraus, Page 24)

Something to Think About

Yesterday morning's devotion focused on the joy that filled the heart of our Savior as He carried out His Father's will on our behalf and the joy that sustained and strengthened our Lord even through the awful sufferings of the cross. The joy that gave strength to Jesus was not a fake, superficial joy. He did not go to the cross with a plastic smile plastered on His face as if He were trying to fool people into thinking that He was oblivious to pain. Instead, says the book of Hebrews, Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence" (Heb. 5:7 ESV).

Jesus never "faked it." He wept real tears. He cried out in real pain. But in the face of this pain and suffering Jesus was able, by the Spirit's power, to cultivate the fruit of inner joy — a joy that comes from heartfelt trust in a gracious God despite the outward circumstances of life.

Think of some of the "tough times" you have been through in recent weeks (or months or years). Did you try to fool yourself (or others) into thinking that everything was "just fine"? Did you seek strength and reassurance from a trusted friend? Did you turn to the Lord in prayer asking for His gift of inner joy?

Something to Smile About

Is it really possible to find joy in trials even when things seem like they're falling apart or never ending?

Here's how Paul (who knew a thing or two about tough times) might have answered this question. As you read

his words together and take them to heart, pray that the Holy Spirit will cause a strong, silent smile to rise up within your soul:

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:1-5 ESV).

Something to Talk About

Suffering is all around us. List some recent situations or occurrences in your life, community or in the world where you have seen or experienced this.

How has God used "losing" or suffering in your life to build your faith and Christian character? How has suffering made you a more effective witness for Christ and servant to others? How can Paul's words in Rom. 5 (above) and the inspired counsel of James (see James 1:2-4) help us to have joy through trials?

Something to Sing About

Sing the song "Have No Fear, Little Flock" (AGPS 115, LSB 735) or another song that gives praise to God for His presence, peace and power in the midst of adversity.

Closing Litany

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.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again: Rejoice!

Amen!

(based on Phil. 4:4-7 ESV)

Day Four Devotion:

Joy through Serving

Opening Prayer

O Lord, in the simplicity of my heart, I offer myself to You today, to be Your servant forever, to obey You and to be a sacrifice of perpetual praise.

(Thomas á Kempis)

Something to Think About

We were reminded in yesterday morning's devotion that it isn't always possible — even for Christians — to be beaming with happiness for all to see. Jesus, Himself, was not always smiling.

Thankfully, however, there are times when the joy of God's Spirit bubbles up from the inside and spills out in very outward and obvious ways: in our smiles and laughter, in the twinkle of our eyes and the cheerfulness of our expression, in our happy talking and sharing with each other. This outward joy is also a precious gift of God's Spirit and can be used by God in wonderful ways to create opportunities for witnessing to others. After all, what is witnessing except sharing our joy — the joy that God has given us through faith in Jesus — with others?

Martin Luther says: "When a Christian begins to know Christ as his Lord and Savior ... then his heart is permeated with God, so that he is driven to help others receive the same, because there is no greater joy for him than this treasure, that he now knows Jesus. So he heads out in every direction, teaches and urges all others, boasts about the Gospel, and witnesses of it to everyone ... as one who lives for one purpose, that is, that he might spread more widely among people God's honor and praise."

Something to Smile About

The Psalms are filled with jubilant songs of joy encouraging us to spread far and wide the Good News of God's love and salvation in Christ. Read the following Psalm responsively twice: first, in a quiet whisper; then, in loud and joyful shouts of praise for all to hear:

Oh sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things!

His right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

The Lord has made known his salvation;

he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;

break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,

with the lyre and the sound of melody!

With trumpets and the sound of the horn

make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!

(Ps. 98:1-6 ESV)

Something to Talk About

Think about your experiences serving this week. Has God used your joy or the joy of someone else through serving to open up an opportunity to share God's love with someone else?

Read Matt. 5:14-16 and 1 Peter 3:15-16. What do these passages have to say about the witness value of serving with joy for Christ? What do they say about the opposition that we may sometimes encounter because of our cheerful allegiance to Jesus?

Something to Sing About

Sing "'Come, Follow Me,' said Christ the Lord" (AGPS 85, LSB 688) or another favorite song that rejoices in our calling to share Christ's love and joy with those around us.

Closing Prayer

O Morning Star,

Son of the Dawn,

Mighty Savior

Prince of Peace,

Sun of Righteousness,

grace my waking hours with Your presence

and lend me Your zeal for the Father's work.

Fill my day with Your rich Spirit

That all may know the Father's love through me.

Hear me, Blessed Jesus,

in Your most holy name. Amen.

(George Krause, Page 66)

Day Five Devotion:

Joy to All People

Opening Prayer

This is the day the Lord has made.

I will rejoice and be glad in it.

I will serve His name

from the rising of the sun to its setting.

All praise, honor, glory, majesty and might

be to His most wonderful name. Amen.

(George Kraus, Page 64)

Something to Think About

In his book, *Joy to the World*, LCMS pastor and former missionary, the Rev. Philip Bickel, writes, “If our Savior God were only a local tribal deity with limited geographic influence, we would have to sing:

“Joy to my town, the Lord is come!
Let my corner of the world receive its King;
Let ev’ry one from my culture prepare him room
And the United States and Canada sing.”

This was never God’s plan, however. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1 ESV). “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14 ESV). Our God loves the world. Christ is a world Savior. The Holy Spirit was sent to make us witnesses to all people, to the ends of the earth. Since the Triune God is a “world God,” we ought to be “world Christians” (Bickel, Page 9).

How has God used your participation in this servant event to “enlarge” your world? Do you have a “bigger picture” of the Church, the body of Christ, than you did before attending this event? Do you have a larger understanding of God’s plan to “make disciples of all nations”? What is your place in that plan?

Take time to thank God for making it possible for you to share in the joy of this experience and ask Him to continue to mold you into a “world Christian” so that you may be better equipped to share the Good News of God’s love and joy to all people in Christ with those both near and far.

Something to Smile About

To some people, the book of Revelation is a frightening book. But God gave this book to His people not to frighten us but to fill us with joy — the joy that is ours now through faith in Christ and the even greater

joy that we will experience when we reign forever with Christ in heaven. Here’s a picture from Rev. 7 that ought to make every Christian smile. Read the following responsively or by turns in your group:

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, **‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’**

“And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying,

‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.’

“Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Something to Talk About

A local newspaper conducted an on-the-street survey asking people to respond to the question, “If an asteroid were going to destroy the earth in a week, what would you do?”

- A seventh-grade boy said, “I’d skip school and go to a Chicago Bears football game.”
- A high school senior boy said, “I’d go bungee jumping into the Grand Canyon.”
- A high school senior girl said, “I’d go on a cruise to Barcelona, where it’s nice and sunny, so I could get a great tan.”

While the reporter's answers shared in the survey might make us smile (or even chuckle), they are also kind of sad. How do they reveal a lack of real joy or purpose in life? According to Rev. 7, what is our ultimate and joyful reason to live as Christians? In light of this, how would you answer the survey question?

Something to Sing About

Sing "My Faith Looks Trustingly" (AGPS 175, LSB 702) or another song that celebrates our salvation in Christ and the joy of living each day to Him and to others.

Closing Litany

Lord Jesus, thank you for the privilege of being your servant.

Thank you, Jesus, for your incredible service to me and to all people through Your life, death and resurrection from the dead.

Thank You for all that I have learned this week and for how I have grown in faith, joy and love.

By the power of Your Spirit, help me to share Your love willingly and cheerfully with others.

Teach me to be a "world Christian" — to see how large the body of Christ really is and to see how many others still need to hear the Good News of Christ's love.

Keep me focused on my ultimate goal and destination: life forever with You and with all my brothers and sisters in Christ in heaven.

Smile down upon me again this day, Jesus, with Your love, **and help me to share Your loving joy to all people, wherever I go and with everyone I meet.**

Bless all the new friends that You have brought into my life.

Bind us together in Your love until we meet again, here on earth, or before Your throne in heaven.

In Your precious name, we pray.

Amen.

(based on Phil. 4:4-7 ESV)