



# **Animate 21 : Personal Devotions (for individuals)**

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# REJOICE: A Personal Devotion

## LESSON 1

### Rejoice Always

**PREFACE:** This is Lesson 1 of Rejoice: A Personal Devotion. This lesson centers around the theme, "Rejoice Always." Use this lesson to reflect on what the lesson's theme means for you personally. Though designed with students in mind, this lesson is incredibly applicable to all ages.

**Guiding Question:** What does it look like to rejoice always, no matter our circumstance?

For many young people, life is joyous and full of laughter. Unfortunately, though, some days bring about stress and anxiety from long to-do lists, upcoming tests, or friendship drama. Many students may also experience the sadness of moving to a new school, not getting into the college of their choice, or the loss of a loved one who provided much-needed stability. In all of these circumstances, scripture encourages us to rejoice always. **ALWAYS.**

We hope this first lesson can provide a space for you to start thinking about what it means to rejoice in the Lord each day, even when it feels impossible. Because this is the first lesson, use your time intentionally. Do not rush your thoughts or feelings. In order to truly connect with God, you have to allow yourself the space to process and reflect, so that you might hear what God is saying to you throughout these reflections. Make sure you are seated somewhere you can focus and be alone without interruption, ideally away from your phone or computer, too.

**KEY PASSAGES:** Psalm 96:11-13; Philippians 4:4-7

#### WHAT YOU NEED:

- BIBLE
- PENS/MARKERS
- NOTECARDS/PAPER

#### INTRODUCTION:

Welcome! Let's start with something fun! If you could compete on any tv show (i.e. The Voice, Survivor, Jeopardy, etc.) which one would you choose and why? Take a moment to think about your answer and write it down. Take the time to write down why you think that would be the best show for you, too. What are the specific skills you could bring to that show?

#### PRAY:

Dear Lord, thank you so much for time to be alone and reflect on my relationship with you. I pray that this time will allow me to focus on what it truly means to be loved by you. Be with me now, Lord, as I read scripture and pray through what it means to rejoice in you always. In Jesus's Name I pray, Amen.

## WHAT IS "CHARA?":

Have you ever heard the Greek word, chara, before? It's okay if you've never heard that word until right now. The word chara is Greek for "joy" or "gladness."

*Grab a notecard or a piece of paper and pen.*

Once you have everything you need, draw a picture of a time when you feel your happiest. It can be a part of your daily routine, or it can be a picture of one specific moment that you remember being truly joyful. Take a few minutes to remember this moment and draw it as best you can. It's just for your eyes, so don't stress about making it look perfect.

## **Ready. Set. Go.**

When you're finished, take a couple seconds to look at your drawing. Remember that it's not about the quality of the drawing, but rather the memory and feeling that it invokes for you.

## **Questions for Reflection:**

1. What made you think to draw that?
2. Was this the first moment you thought of?
3. Is this a part of your daily routine?
4. If not, is there a way you could work something similar into your day-to-day life?

## SCRIPTURE:

Open your bible to Psalm 96.

Psalm 96 is all about being joyful before the Lord. From the beginning of this psalm, the writer tells us to "sing to Lord" over and over again. You may be thinking, 'Why should we worship God?' Verses 4 and 5 tell us: "For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens."

*Pause there for a moment. How do you feel when you read those two verses, specifically that God is "most worthy of praise?"*

Now, move down a few verses in this psalm to verses 11-13.

This particular passage of scripture is very dramatic and active, meaning it allows for a strong visual. Think about it: the heavens are glad - they're smiling. The earth is rejoicing - it's singing. The sea makes noise! The fields exclaim with all that they have, while the trees of the forest sing! How amazing is that? Every piece of God's creation is joyfully rejoicing as it waits for God to be near!

## WAITING ON THE LORD:

How do you currently occupy your time as you wait for the Lord? Often times, there are days that we feel distant from God. We feel like we cannot hear God's voice as we cry out for help. Maybe we are stressed about school or something at home, so we look to God for help. What do you do in that time as you wait to hear the voice of God? Do you sing joyfully like the trees of the forest? Do you make a noise of praise like the sea? Or are you distracted, distressed, or angry?

As you think about this, grab a second notecard. Draw a picture of what you think it looks like for you to wait on the Lord in your tough circumstances.

## **Ready. Set. Go.**

*Take a moment to look at what you drew or wrote. Where are you in that moment? How do you feel in that moment?*

Let's compare this card with the card you drew at the start of the lesson. Does it look different? How so? Write down the main differences between the cards.

*Do you think that God is more present for the moment on one card over the other? If so, which one?*

## SCRIPTURE:

Did you know that even though we can't always hear the voice of God, God is there? Did you know that God cares for us when we are at our happiest as well as when we are at our lowest?

*Turn in your bible to the New Testament, to the book of Philippians: Philippians 4:4-7.*

There's a good chance you may have heard parts of this passage before. Read through the passage and see if you recognize it. Whether it's new to you or very familiar, think about what stands out to you about it.

This passage in Philippians commands us to rejoice in the Lord always. Do you find yourself talking to God more in moments of joy, or more in moments of stress and isolation? Why?

## WRAP UP:

To rejoice as scripture describes is much more than transient earthly happiness. Instead, true joy is born out of a deep, profound abiding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must learn for our faith and hope in God to rest not on our own confidence and emotions, but in something much stronger – the love of God. God is always listening to you, always preparing a way for you, always loving you. Yes, there may be days when you feel distant from God – maybe those isolating days in waiting seen on our second notecard – but what we all ultimately want as Christians is that joy depicted on your first notecard.

This does not mean that every day will feel like you do sitting front row at your favorite concert, or feel like a day on the beach. You will continue to struggle, but when you rely on God rather than your own strengths, you will know a joy and a hope so great, you cannot help but to rejoice always! You will rejoice because your confidence is not coming from your own successes and comforts, but in the unconditional, never-failing love of God.

*Over the next couple reflections, you are going to continue to explore how to rejoice even in the midst of sadness, insecurities, and doubts. You will learn how to rejoice always.*

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for this space to come before you and meditate on your scripture. I pray that I begin to trust in who you say you are, and that I lean not on my own understanding. I pray that I believe in the truth of your love because that love NEVER FAILS. I am grateful for a God who encourages me to present my requests before them so that I may rejoice always. I love you, Lord. Amen.

# REJOICE: A Personal Devotion

## LESSON 2

### Continue in Joy

**PREFACE:** This is Lesson 2 of Rejoice: A Personal Devotion. This lesson focuses on the relationship between rejoicing and lament, and how we as Christians are called to journey through both in joy.

**Guiding Question:** What is the difference between “happiness” and “rejoicing?” How do we find the strength to rejoice in moments where we must also lament?

In Lesson 1, we discussed the importance of rooting ourselves in something stronger than our own accomplishments or confidence: the unfailing love of God. Only through the acceptance of God’s love will we have the strength to rejoice always. Lesson 2 builds off of that by addressing more specifically how we continue in joy through the deepest of valleys when all we want to do is cry out to the Lord in sadness.

Some people may identify their lowest valley as the time they lost a loved one, or when their parents got divorced, or when they had to move far away from friends. Others may remember the sadness that surrounded the day a friend said they no longer wanted to hang out together, or the day they didn’t get into their school of choice. Whatever the struggle, God is with us and will help us find ways to rejoice through it all.

**KEY PASSAGES:** Psalm 13:1-6; John 16:17-24

### WHAT YOU NEED:

- Bible
- Pen
- Piece of paper/notebook

### INTRODUCTION - WOULD YOU RATHER:

Welcome back! Would you rather be able to talk to animals, or read people’s minds? Take a minute to write down your thoughts. Have fun with it!

### PRAYER:

Dear God, I thank you for another day to meditate on your holy word. I praise you for the ways you have already begun to reveal yourself to me through the first lesson. Be with me today as I look closely at your word and discover what it means to continue through dark valleys. Lord, I ask that you be near today as I think through vulnerable truths and ask brave questions. Fill this room with your Spirit’s comforting presence of peace. In your name I pray, Amen.

## SHOUT IT OUT:

In the first lesson, you learned about the importance of rejoicing always! You learned that God cares about you on your best days and your worst days. Your ability to rejoice always hinges on your understanding that God's love for you is steadfast. You may have thought after Lesson 1, "Well, what do I do on those days that feel too scary or too sad to focus on God's love?" or "What do I do when I feel alone in my sadness?" Or maybe you feel like no one can understand what you're going through and relate to your sadness. You're going to look at some scripture in a few minutes that will hopefully begin to guide you through those thoughts and feelings.

*In your notebook or on a piece of paper, write down some things that make you happy! Take your time.*

Once you are done, take a moment to look back through your list. Now, let's think about the opposite emotion of happiness: sadness. Take some time to write down what makes you sad or a time when you felt low.

*Set these lists aside for the moment. You'll come back to them later.*

## SCRIPTURE:

Grab your bible and turn to Psalm 13:1-6. This psalm is an example of a lament. Do you know what it means to lament? It's a difficult word to define because lamenting can look different for everyone, but essentially it means to feel deep sadness over something. For some people, lamenting might look like crying out over the loss of a loved one. For others, it may look like writing down their questions and confusions about a tough situation.

Start by reading Psalm 13, only verses 1-4, for now.

Once you've read through those four verses, think through the following questions:

1. What is the overall emotion you feel when reading this passage?
2. Were there any words or phrases that stood out to you in this first part of the scripture so far?

Now, look at the last two verses of this lament, verses 5-6.

Once you've read through those two verses, think through the following questions:

1. What is the overall emotion you feel when reading these verses?
2. Were there any words or phrases that stood out to you in these two verses?
3. What do you think changed for David between how he felt in verses 1-4 and how he felt in verses 5-6?

David's tone shifts as we move into verse 5. He says he trusts in the steadfast love of God to get him through this pit of sadness in which he finds himself. He says in verse 6 that the Lord

has taken care of him before, so he knows God will do it again. He remembers that God is a god of love and protection.

### SHARED UNDERSTANDING:

Think back to your own confessions of sadness from earlier. Pick one of the moments you wrote down and think about the following question:

- Why does this particular moment make me feel sad?

Now look through the list of examples of sad moments for other people below and answer the same question for at least one of them. Why would this particular moment make someone feel sad?

1. When my parents got divorced
2. When I had to move far away from my friends
3. When my older sister went to college
4. When my grandfather died
5. When my friend told me we couldn't be friends anymore

By naming what's hard about those moments, we are encouraged to put ourselves in their shoes. Often when we are sad we think no one will understand us if we try to talk through it with others. But as we just saw, people can surprise you with their understanding. As you read through those examples of other people's potential sadness, you were able to vocalize why that would be difficult to go through. So in the same way, others would do the same for you if you shared your vulnerable moments with them. More importantly, God will always understand your sadness. This is both because God is all-knowing, AND because God has experienced sadness and suffering, too.

### SCRIPTURE:

Jesus is the Son of God, and he suffered and died on the cross for you to take on the pain and death of your sins so that you don't have to. The pain that Jesus endured on the cross is unimaginable. He did this as a sacrifice for you. Because Jesus suffered such terrible pain and despair, he understands those moments when you cry out to God in confusion and sadness.

Now, read through John 16:17-24. These verses show Jesus helping his disciples work through their emotions after learning that Jesus is going to die on the cross. It's an incredibly sad and dark time for them. As you read through these verses, circle or underline phrases or emotions that stand out to you.

Once you've read through the verses, think through the following questions:

1. How do you think the disciples felt at this time?
2. What does Jesus say or do to encourage his disciples in this moment?



### WRAP UP:

Jesus comforts his disciples in this moment. He shares stories and examples that they will understand. He says, "I know it's confusing, but soon you will understand." When you feel sad, you need that comfort of the Lord. You need that understanding that God understands your sadness. I think one way you can see this is by confessing your sadness to others like you thought through earlier and like you see the disciples do in this passage in John. When you share the truth of your life with others, you cultivate much deeper relationships with those around you and with Jesus. If you try to carry all of your struggles on your own, you will eventually break under the pressure of it all.

It is powerful to share emotions with one another and begin to understand one another deeper, but even this excitement pales in comparison to the deep spiritual joy found in knowing that God understands you. God hears your cries. God feels your despair. God knows your confusion. God cares that you are sad. It is through an understanding community and through an all-knowing, always-loving God that you will know true spiritual joy in the midst of your darkest spaces.

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear God, I am so thankful for this space to be able to share and confess what fills me with joy and what fills me with despair. Lord, I pray that your Spirit continues to show me what it means to be consistently loved and never judged by you. May I continue to challenge myself and others to come before you in both sadness and joy and ask to be filled with your love and strength and not our own. In your name I pray, Amen.

# REJOICE: A Personal Devotion

## LESSON 3

### Be Strong in Joy

**PREFACE:** This is Lesson 3 of Rejoice: A Personal Devotion. This lesson focuses on how we respond to the convictions of our sins, and how we are welcomed by God into holy restoration rather than shame.

**Guiding Question:** How does God react to the presence of sin in our life? How does God want us to react to the presence of sin in our life?

As human beings we are constantly making mistakes and falling short of the glory of God. We consistently do the exact thing we swore we would never do. Lesson 3 is going to take a closer look at how God sees our sin, as well as how God wants us to see that sin our life. When we are forced to face our sins, our initial reaction is typically guilt, shame, or defensiveness. God does not desire these feelings for us. God desires joy for all of his children.

So how do we find joy in the midst of acknowledging our sin? Nehemiah 8:10 boldly proclaims, "Don't be sad, because the joy of the Lord is your strength!" Lesson 3 is going to explore how broken people are invited into the restorative work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of our sins. Our weeping turns to dancing as we experience the joy of God who is forgiving, gracious, and compassionate.

**KEY PASSAGES:** Nehemiah 8:5-11

### WHAT YOU NEED:

- BIBLE
- PENS/MARKERS

### INTRODUCTION:

Before getting started today, have some fun thinking through things you may have never done! Look through the list below and check off anything you've already done. Maybe add some things to the list that you'd like to do one day!

- Never have I ever been skiing.
- Never have I ever been in a school play.
- Never have I ever scored the winning point, touchdown, goal, etc. in a game.
- Never have I ever met someone famous.
- Never have I ever had Taco Bell.
- Never have I ever had a pet other than a cat or dog.
- Never have I ever been to a concert.
- Never have I ever dyed my hair.
- Never have I ever held a snake.

Never have I ever moved states.

### PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for another day to learn about what you have to teach me about joy in my weakness. God, you are my strength. I am a broken person and you are the one who can hold me all together. You desire love and joy for me, so Lord, may I look to you for my hope and peace rather than inwardly toward my own achievements today. I love you, Lord. Be with me as I move into this lesson today. In your name I pray, Amen.

### RESTORATION DEFINED:

Throughout this lesson, you will be looking at the theme of "restoration." Before you get started, do you know what the word "restoration" means?

*Take a second and write down your definition. (Don't look ahead!)*

"Restoration" refers to the process of returning something to its original condition, essentially making it look or feel brand new once more. Have you ever heard of or seen someone who restores old cars? This means they take old cars and repair them by fixing the engine, buying new parts, or adding fresh paint, and soon enough they look like the day their original owner bought them!

So, when we hear about God's hope of restoration for us and all of creation, this means that God hopes for us to find the joy and love that he intended for us to know at the start of creation. Sin became a part of this world in the Garden of Eden, and that causes us to sin. But God's hope for restoration describes God's desire for us to know joy and confidence in God alone once more.

Let's look at scripture to see how people before you have made sense of this theme of restoration.

### SCRIPTURE:

The scripture today is from the book of Nehemiah. Have you read anything out of Nehemiah before? It's not a book that normally gets talked about a lot in sermons or small group discussions.

Quick! See how quickly you can find the book of Nehemiah in the Bible!

*If you're having a hard time finding it, use your Table of Contents in the front of your bible! It's after Ezra and before Esther!*

Nehemiah gives a glimpse at what life was like in the Old Testament. In the passage you are going to read today, a guy named Ezra is going to read through the Book of Law to the people, which are the same laws we have in the Bible today.

Read through Nehemiah 8:5-9 first. As a note, don't worry about all the wild names in verse 7. Do the best you can!

Ezra is reading the law to the people, but what are they doing as he reads? (Look back at the end of verse 9 if you need to for help.)

The people are weeping! Why do you think the people would be crying while Ezra reads out the laws that God has instructed to them?

The people were weeping because as Ezra called out the laws they realized how often they failed to obey God's commandments to them. With every law that was read aloud, someone in the room felt shame for not obeying God. Their tears were tears of guilt and sadness.

*Have you ever felt like you've let someone down before? Maybe a parent, a friend, or a teacher? How do you feel when you know you've let someone down?*

It's not a fun feeling to know that you've disappointed someone. If a parent asks you to do something and you don't meet their expectations, you feel sadness and guilt. We can let ourselves down, too, right? Often we set goals for ourselves, and if we don't meet them, we feel like a failure. We feel like we aren't good enough. All of those emotions affect our self-worth over time. We start to lean into that guilt and shame and listen to it.

In the book of Nehemiah, worshipers begin weeping while Ezra reads the law because they are listening to those feelings of guilt and shame. As he reads, they think, I am not worthy of the love of God. I have not followed the law, so I am sure I have lost the love of God.

Let's see what happens next in verses 10-11, though.

*What does Nehemiah say to the people in verse 10?*

Nehemiah tells them this is a holy day, so their crying must cease. It is not a day to mourn, but a day to be glad in. Why?

Because "the joy of the Lord is your strength!" What do you think this means for those people and for us?

The joy of the Lord is found along the road of restoration. When God convicts of sin, our first reaction is often guilt, shame, and sadness. But our weeping turns to dancing as we experience the joy of God who is forgiving, gracious, and compassionate. As God restores us to everlasting peace and joy, we are empowered to join the Holy Spirit's work of restoration in the world around us, strengthened by the joy of the Lord at work in and through us.

## WRAP UP:

Do you remember what the word "restoration" means?

Restoration refers to the process of making something new or returning it to its original form. For us as Christians, God restores us to be made whole even though we are broken by human, earthly standards. God invites the Holy Spirit to renew our hearts with the truth that God loves us no matter what. God does not have a conditional love for us that only exists when we accomplish certain tasks. God loves you just as you are right where you are.

So, for the people in Nehemiah, God loves them even though they don't always keep the law. God desires the best for them, and God has set before them a way of life, but God does not turn against them if they fail to meet that expectation.

The same is true for you. God desires for you to live a pure and holy life. But if you mess up, God does not want you to feel shame or guilt and run from him. Rather those are the moments God wants you to run faster toward him in joy for knowing that you are safe and loved. God will never leave you, and that is something worth praising and rejoicing!

## PRAYER:

Dear Lord, I thank you for your steadfast love. How amazing it is to know that I can run toward you when I have failed. I never have to feel shame before you God because you are not a God who guilt me. You are a God who wraps me up and loves me every day every hour through every moment. Lord, I am so thankful that I am loved by you in this way. May it be an inspiration for how I love others. I pray this your name, Jesus, Amen.

# REJOICE: A Personal Devotion

## LESSON 4

### Lead in Joy

**PREFACE:** This is Lesson 4 of Rejoice: A Personal Devotion. This lesson looks at John 15, and the imagery Jesus presents of the “true vine” and its branches. You’ll look at how you can creatively lead others in the joy you have found in Christ Jesus.

**Guiding Question:** How do we share the good news of great joy that comes from the Lord with everyone we encounter? What does it mean to be one with the “true vine?”

Over the last three lessons, we have looked at the theme of declaring joy in all things – in our lowest moments and our highest points. In today’s lesson, we are going to look at Jesus’s imagery of the vine and its branches and what this means for us as disciples. It is now our task as Christians to continue to lead in joy for everyone we meet.

*In what ways is God calling us to live out the joy we have found in knowing him? Furthermore, what does it mean for our joy to be complete in Christ?*

**KEY PASSAGES:** John 15:11

### WHAT YOU NEED:

- BIBLE
- PENS/MARKERS
- PAPER

### INTRODUCTION:

To start today off, below are parts of various movie quotes, and you need to complete the movie quote AND write down the name of the movie! If you don’t get it right away, you’ve got some “multiple choice” options.

1. “Toto, I’ve got a feeling \_\_\_\_\_” – MOVIE TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. “...we took a wrong turn somewhere”
  - b. “...we’re not in Kansas anymore”
  - c. “...a storm’s coming”
  - d. “...you need to go to the bathroom”

2. "Fish are friends, \_\_\_\_\_" - MOVIE TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. "...not enemies"
  - b. "Be nice."
  - c. "...not food"
  - d. "Say hello."
3. "Ogres are like \_\_\_\_\_." - MOVIE TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Onions
  - b. Monsters
  - c. Sandwiches
  - d. Humans
4. "Life's like a box of chocolates, \_\_\_\_\_." - MOVIE TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. "...full of goodness"
  - b. "...lots of surprises"
  - c. "...you never know what you're gonna get"
  - d. "...want all of it"
5. "Oh yes, the past can hurt. But, you can either run from it or..." - MOVIE TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. "...learn from it"
  - b. "...face it"
  - c. "...hide from it"
  - d. "...ask for help"

ANSWERS - 1. B, Wizard of Oz; 2. C, Finding Nemo; 3. A, Shrek; 4. C, Forrest Gump; 5. A, The Lion King

### PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for another day to be nourished by your word. You are the source of all of our joy. Apart from you we do not know real joy. Be with me now as I look to your word to learn how to be more faithful in your world. In your name I pray, Amen.

### FAMOUS DUOS:

For this next activity, grab a pen and a piece of paper. Set a timer for 30 seconds and write down as many famous duos from movies or tv that you can think of. READY. SET. GO.

Take a look at your list. They're all famous duos because they complete one another. You can't have Shaggy without Scooby or Tom without Jerry (or whoever you listed). They are joined together.

In a similar, but even more profound way, this is what Jesus wants for you in your relationship with him. Jesus wants you to be so attached to him that your identity is fully intertwined with his.

### DRAW A TREE:

Before you read the scripture for today, grab a pen and another sheet of paper. Set another 30-second timer, but this time, you're going to draw a tree. READY. SET. GO.

Now that your time is up, take a look at your drawing. If you didn't put any branches on your tree, go ahead and add them now. Make sure those branches have blooms or leaves, too.

### SCRIPTURE:

Open your bible to John 15. You can set your drawing to the side while you read scripture. Start with John 15:1-4.

After reading verse 4, look back at your drawing of a tree and its branches. How do these first 4 verses relate to your drawing?

*When you drew branches onto your tree, are they attached to the tree? Or are they on their own?*

I bet they are attached to the tree because the tree and its branches are one. The branches cannot exist without the tree. Yes, branches can fall off the tree, but they will not continue to flourish once they are detached from the tree. Let's keep reading. Let's look at John 15:5-8 now.

After reading verse 8, what does it mean in verse 5 when Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches?"

Jesus is making the analogy we can see through your picture of the tree that he is the source of growth. He is the vine or the tree, and we are the branches that grow from that source. We cannot grow apart from Jesus because he is the source. Just like we said a branch that falls from a tree can't keep growing, Jesus is saying we cannot have true joy and life apart from him. Does this make sense?

One last thing before moving onto your last bit of scripture: what does Jesus say in verse 8 is his father's glory?

*What does it mean for God's glory or desire to be for us to bear much fruit and show ourselves to be his disciples? How can you do these things in your day-to-day life?*

For your final section of scripture, look at John 15:9-12.

You've been reading and learning throughout all of these lessons about the idea of joy in all things. With that in mind, what does it mean to "remain in God's love" like we read in verse 9?

Often, it means clinging to the truth and love of God even when things in life feel tough around us. When we think about leading in joy, that becomes increasingly hard to do when we are no longer attached to the true vine of Jesus. When we try to go off and grow apart from God, we will no longer be able to know true complete joy. God gives us hope that is greater than anything this world can give us.



### LIVE IT OUT:

Going forward, what are some ways that you want to challenge yourself to remain in God's love? What are some times that you usually find yourself straying away from the joy of the Lord and moving toward your own desires or reactions?

*What are some ways you can use your creative gifts to live out the joy you can find in God?*

### WRAP UP:

As you wrap up today, hold onto your picture that you drew of the tree. Keep that image in your mind, or with you physically. It will help you more than you know to remember that Jesus is the ultimate source of hope, joy, and life. When you have days that you feel discouraged or defeated, you can remember that you are still attached to the vine of Jesus Christ, and it is through this that you will be given life everlasting.

### PRAYER:

Pray to God to end your time today.

# REJOICE: A Personal Devotion

## LESSON 5

### Go in Joy

**PREFACE:** This is Lesson 5 of Rejoice: A Personal Devotion. This is the final lesson of the Animate curriculum, so this lesson will focus on the question, “Where do we go from here?”

**Guiding Question:** Where do I see God in my life, and how can this shape how I share joy with others? How would Jesus Christ live my life if he was me?

Over the last four lessons we have looked at the meaning of joy and the importance of finding joy in Christ. For this lesson, you will be encouraged and challenged to name the joy in your life. Knowing that God is in that joy, how does this affect the way we tell others about God?

You cannot tell others about something you don't fully understand yourself, so think during today's lessons about moments that you felt the love of Christ in your life. Once you are able to name these moments, you will be able to turn and share those stories with others.

**KEY PASSAGES:** Psalm 16:1-2; Philippians 1:3-6

### WHAT YOU NEED:

- BIBLE
- PENS/MARKERS
- PAPER

### INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to your last lesson, Lesson 5! To start off, think about this question: If you only had 24 hours left to live, what would you do? Take a minute to write down your thoughts. If it helps, use the guiding prompts below.

1. Who would you go see?
2. Where would you go?
3. What would you eat?
4. What would you say?
5. How do you think you'd feel?

Once you've thought through this idea, think through this second question: If Jesus lived your life, what do you think he would do? If Jesus had your family, knew your friends, and went to your school? How do you think he would spend his time? Write down some of your thoughts for this question as well. Let these thoughts guide you throughout this lesson today.

## PRAYER:

Dear God, be with me now as I prepare for this last lesson. It has been such a blessing to spend time meditating on your word and learning about true joy in you. I ask that during this time you reveal to me moments that I have truly known you and felt your presence in my life. Thank you for the ways you care for me and love me, Lord, even when I'm not paying attention. You are a good and faithful God. It's in your name I pray, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE:

Today, we're going to jump right into scripture. Turn in your bible to Psalm 16:1-2. Take a moment to read through the verses. Circle or underline anything that stands out to you or confuses you.

*In verse 1, David cries out to God and calls the Lord his "refuge." Write down what you think it means for God to be your refuge.*

A refuge is a safe space, specifically a safe space for people escaping danger. "Refugees" are people who are fleeing an unsafe place and seeking safety or "refuge" in a new place. How does this relate to the definition of "refuge" that you wrote down?

There's a church in Tennessee that named their student space "The Refuge" because they want that building to serve as a safe place for all of their students. No matter where they're coming from, all of those students can find a home and safety in that place. I think that's such a beautiful picture of who God is for all of us.

In verse 1 when we hear David call God his refuge, he is putting all of his trust in the Lord by saying this. Fill in this blank: In verse 2, David says, "You are my lord: apart from you \_\_\_\_\_."

David says, "...apart from you I have NO GOOD THING." How does this idea relate to what we talked about in our last lesson about the vine and the branches?

We discussed last time that we do not grow apart from God. If our branch is separated from the vine of Christ, we cannot flourish. So in the same way, David is saying, "Apart from you, God, I do not know real joy or life."

## FINDING JOY:

For the next few minutes, take a pen and piece of paper or journal and write down three (or more) moments where you feel like you have known full joy because of God. Think about a time that you were truly happy, similar to that very first lesson, and think about how this relates to your relationship with God. It can be something simple like a day you went for a walk in your neighborhood with a friend and it led to great conversation, or it could be a moment while worshipping at church. Just think about at least three moments you felt deep joy and think about how you can see God in that moment. Set a timer for yourself for about 5-7 minutes. Don't rush this.

When your time is up, look back through the moments you wrote down. Circle one that means a lot to you. I want to challenge you to share that moment with someone right now. You can tell someone in your family, or you could call or text a friend. Simply say, "I'm challenging myself this week to find joy in the little things, and I wanted to share this moment with you." This would be especially fruitful if the person you are sharing this with was a part of the joyful moment. After you share, ask them where they've been finding joy in their own life. It's okay if it was uncomfortable or your friend was confused for a second. Take a minute now to share with someone.

### SHARING JOY:

Often when we hear about the importance of sharing the gospel or the joy of Christ, it feels very intimidating. It can feel like you aren't ready for that conversation. But hopefully you just saw that all it takes is sharing one little moment where you believed in God to spread the joy of Christ. When you talk to a friend and say, "I'm so thankful to God for some unexpected alone time today," that shows our friend that our joy comes from the Lord and not ourselves. Does that make sense?

*How were you able to see God in the conversation you had today? Take a moment to write about your experience.*

### SCRIPTURE:

Your last piece of scripture comes from the book of Philippians, chapter 1. Take a second to find it in your bible. It's in the New Testament. Once you've found it, read verses 3-6.

These verses are Paul's words to the people of Philippi. He's encouraging them in their faith, which is a fitting way to end your time in these lessons. You have gone through these five lessons and shared your faith with others along the way. Paul writes in this passage that he is thankful for his partners in the gospel. He thanks God when he remembers these people. I hope you thank the Lord when you remember this time together and the people who encouraged you along the way. You are partnered with them in the gospel together.

*You have been partners in this pursuit of the gospel this whole time, but specifically today as you trusted someone else with your stories and joy.*

What are some moments throughout this time where you will remember God working? What are some moments where you grew closer to the joy of the Lord in this process? Take a moment to write them down.

### WRAP UP:

As you go from this place today, I hope you feel equipped to go out in joy to everyone that you know and share that joy with others. It can be done in such small, simple ways, such as reaching out to a friend that you know has been struggling. You can say "I've been praying for

you and thinking about you.” Or it can be a big reach out like inviting them to church or a retreat with you so that they can hear more about the love that Jesus has for them.

*However you choose to show joy, do it full of the love and power of Christ.*

Take a moment to write down some ways you can share the joy of Christ with others. Try to think of three people in your life with whom you would like to share the joy of Christ.

### **PRAYER:**

Use this time to pray to God and reflect over all you have been learning over the last few lessons. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you search for ways to connect with the joy of Christ, as well as share that joy with others.