



# CULTIVATE

LIFE TOGETHER IN THE SPIRIT

## MARCH GROUP GUIDE

# Welcome to Cultivate.

## We're so glad you're here.

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This month, we turn our attention to the fruit of the Spirit called **joy**. Not as a mood to maintain or a positivity to perform for others, but as a deep, sustaining gladness rooted in God's presence with us and through us.

Scripture speaks of joy not as something we generate through circumstances, but as something that emerges when we are held, known, and loved by God.

### **Joy is a direct result of God's presence in our lives.**

Joy grows where love has already taken root. It flourishes where we are grounded in God's faithfulness rather than our own control. When we remain open to God's presence, joy naturally begins to surface.

Your group is one of the places where joy can be gently cultivated together. Not forced cheerfulness, not spiritual bypassing, but a deeper awareness of God's nearness and goodness to each of you. A place where joy can be named honestly, even if it feels fragile or faint. A place where the Spirit forms us slowly, together.

“...the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Nehemiah 8:10

A note about joy in the world: joy is not dependent on ease or the absence of struggle. It often grows alongside grief, perseverance, and trust. Biblical joy is vast enough to hold sorrow and hope at the same time. It does not deny what is hard, but it refuses to let hardship have the final word.

## About This Month

For March, you'll again notice a brief section for individual reflection included in the guide. These practices are meant to be engaged on your own, outside of group time. They are not assignments to complete or goals to achieve, but simple invitations to notice where joy may already be present or where it feels distant. The final step is to be vulnerable in your most sacred relationship, bringing these findings honestly before God.

This month is not about trying harder to feel joyful. It's about paying attention and learning to recognize joy as a gift that comes from abiding, trusting, and remaining open to God's work in us. As we read Scripture, reflect quietly, and share openly, we trust that the Spirit is already at work, often in ways we don't immediately see. Isn't that the beauty of our shared journey—the ability to look back and see all the miraculous ways the Lord has worked in and through your life and community.

Throughout March, your group will continue to serve as a space set aside for God's forming work. Together, you will listen, reflect, practice, and learn to trust that joy grows over time.



# Personal Reflection and Practice

Look up the passages below on your own and read them slowly. As you read, notice what it reveals about joy, its source, its posture, or its purpose, and name the main idea in your own words.

## Joy as God's Gift

**Psalm 16:9–11**

**Isaiah 61:1–3**

*Notice antonyms to joy, belonging, and praise*

**John 15:9–11**

**Joy is received before it is expressed.  
Formation begins with abiding.**

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## Joy as Strength and Sustenance

**Nehemiah 8:9–12**

*Notice how community shapes and preserves the joy of the Lord*

**Habakkuk 3:17–19**

**Romans 15:13**

*A blessing for perseverance*

**Joy does not ignore hardship. It anchors us within it.**





# GROUP TIME



This outline is simply a suggested flow for your time together, not a prescription you must follow. Every group has its own rhythm, personality, and needs, so feel free to adapt the structure in whatever way fosters meaningful conversation and connection. Use what serves your group, release what doesn't, and trust that the Spirit will guide you as you shape each gathering.

## MARCH

### **Cultivating Joy**

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**Goal and Purpose:** Reflect on joy as a fruit of the Spirit, explore how it forms beneath the surface of our lives, and notice where joy is present, growing, or longing to be restored.

#### **Themes for the Month:**

**Week 1:** Joy That Dances

**Week 2:** Joy That Strengthens

**Week 3:** Joy That Finishes

**Week 4:** Joy That Surrounds

**Week 5:** Joy That Cries Out

# SESSION

## 1. Welcome + Opening (10 minutes)

### Leader Says:

“Today, we continue our Cultivate journey by turning our attention to joy. This month isn’t about pretending everything is fine or forcing ourselves to feel happy. It’s about noticing where God’s joy may already be present in us while learning to stay open to the Spirit’s quiet, forming work.”

### Share:

Invite people to share about a season when joy felt hard to access, fragile, or surprising. This might be a time when joy appeared unexpectedly or felt absent altogether.

Then, share a time where joy felt abundant. Reflect on God’s presence in your daily life when joy felt easy to access.

### Leader Note:

Remind the group that sharing is always optional and that honesty matters more than resolution. Encourage people to speak generally and allow space for silence.



## 2. Watch the Teaching Video with Pastor Rich (10–20 minutes)



### Leader Prompt Before Video:

When you hear the word joy, what response rises in you right now—longing, resistance, comfort, skepticism? Why?

### Video Summary (for leader reference):

- Big Idea: Christianity is meant to be marked by joy and celebration.
- Christians were accused of being “gluttons and drunkards” not because they were, but because their faith was marked by contagious joy.
- Joy is central to the Kingdom of God.
- Joy is not dependent on circumstances.
- Jesus endured the cross “for the joy set for him.”
- We are called to not only glorify God with our lives, but to enjoy him.
- The modern church seems devoid of joy.

After watching the video together, invite a time of sharing to hear what stood out for all those in the group. Was there a particular story that resonated with the group? Do you agree with Pastor Rich that the modern church has a joy problem? Why or why not?

### 3. Group Reflection: Hear the Word (5 minutes)

Read aloud Philippians 4:4-7. Consider reading it more than once while participants hear the Word.

#### Leader Says:

“As you listen, don’t try to analyze or apply. Simply notice which word or phrase draws your attention.”

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again:  
Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all.  
The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:4-7

Allow moments of silence.

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### 4. Personal Reflection (5 minutes)

Notice words or phrases that stand out. Write your reflections below and consider if you’d like to share them with the group or not.

Invite quiet reflection using these prompts:

- Which word or phrase stood out to you?
- Does this description of joy feel inviting, challenging, or distant?

- Where do you sense joy present in your life right now?
- Where does joy feel tender or hard to imagine?

**Leader Reminder:** Insight is not required—attention is enough.

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## 5. **Shared Reflection** (8-10 minutes)

Invite group sharing where comfortable:

- What did you notice in the passage?
- What does this text reveal about the kind of joy God offers?
- What might it look like to receive joy rather than chase it?
- How is God's presence intertwined with our experience of joy?



## 6. Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Trust the Spirit's slow and faithful work.

### **Leader Encouragement:**

“Joy grows slowly. It deepens as we remain open, attentive, and honest before God. You don't have to force it. Simply stay present to God's work and trust the Spirit to grow in spaces where needed.”

### **Closing Prayer:**

God of joy,

Thank you for meeting us where we are—  
in celebration and in weariness,  
in hope and in longing.

Teach us to recognize your joy  
not as something we must create,  
but as a gift you freely give.

Help us remain open to your presence,  
even when joy feels fragile or faint.

Thank you for allowing us to be a people  
of celebration

instead of a people of mourning.

Amen.





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