

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership
Leader's Guide

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 7: JOYFULNESS AND GENEROSITY

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Christian Character Development. When Christians fail and ministries fall apart, it is often due to a lack of character development in the leader. A Christian leader must take character development seriously, because discipleship requires that we grow in Christ-like character. This module examines a number of Christian character traits that are necessary for developing servant leadership. We will look at what the Bible teaches about these traits, and examples of Jesus and others displaying them. Godly character should be evident in the life of every follower of Christ, especially those who are leading others.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for these lessons is Christians who are maturing in their faith and desiring to serve God. The lessons will be especially helpful to those who are pastors, church leaders, mentors or teachers, but also anyone wishing to grow in their relationship with God.

The Leader's Guide is intended to help you as a leader in your preparation. These lesson outlines may be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials found online at www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

LESSON 7: JOYFULNESS AND GENEROSITY

PURPOSE

This lesson explores the Christian character traits of joyfulness and generosity, how Jesus and others in the Bible exhibited them, and how we can develop them in our own lives.

LEADER'S NOTE

We enjoy being with people who demonstrate positive character traits. This lesson deals with joyfulness and generosity. What do you possess in abundance that you could share with others? Does someone need you to disciple them one-on-one? Could you take someone out for a meal, or cook for them in your home? A generous person is usually a joyful person, because giving brings joy to both the giver and the receiver. If your circumstances permit it, consider an outing or activity you and your group could engage in that would allow all of you to practise generosity and joyfulness. Can you collect items to give to those in need? Bake or cook something to distribute? Train others in a skill? Spend time with those who have no one to care for them? Generosity and joyfulness come in many forms. As we give, God can replenish us. If you are feeling 'empty' in any way today, pray that God will fill you with joy and generosity so that you can bless others.

INTRODUCTION

Select two or three of the following questions to ask the group.

- ❖ What brings you much joy? What are you very grateful for?
- ❖ What is your natural attitude to money? Do you hold onto it tightly? Are you hesitant to spend it or give it away? Do you like to bless others with what you have, even if it isn't much?
- ❖ How can our Christian virtues be tools for evangelism? The world can learn about God by how His followers act and behave. How does having Christian character help us represent God?
- ❖ What have you learned from previous lessons about character development in your life? Knowing that God uses life circumstances to develop our character, what is your responsibility?



STUDY

Instruct the group on the following points.

TEACH:

- ❖ **The Virtues of Joyfulness and Generosity:** Christian character is not always about keeping oneself tightly controlled and restraining impulses. Some impulses are good, especially as the Holy Spirit works within us to make us more like Jesus! When we are overcome with gratitude and pleasure, our joy and generosity can spread to others and we can bless them as well as ourselves. We learn in 2 Peter 1:3 that we have been given all that we need for a Godly life through our knowledge of God and His Word.
- ❖ **Joyfulness:** Joy is more than just a smile on our face – it is a deep delight in God and the blessings He provides: creation, relationships, pleasures, and the hope we have in Him. We can cultivate joy in our life as we dwell on God and practise gratitude. Our love for God erupts into joy. It is not a temporary emotional response, because it is based on the permanent, unchanging, faithful love of God.
 - **Joyfulness is Not Happiness:** We may enjoy feeling happy, but true Christian joy is not like happiness. Happiness is a temporary emotional response to positive circumstances. It is circumstantial, focused on self. Happiness entertains, joy blesses.
 - **Joyfulness is Not Denying Sorrow:** A joyful person doesn't pretend that there isn't difficulty or sorrow in the world. In fact it is possible to feel sorrow and joy at the same time. There are times to mourn, or feel sad, but this doesn't need to end one's joy! Joy deep down inside us acts like an anchor, keeping us from hopelessness, reminding us of the love of God. We can have Joy even in suffering (1 Thessalonians 1:6).
 - **Joyfulness is Not Discouragement or Despair:** A joyful person looks past present negative circumstances and trusts in God who is faithful. True joy is not based on circumstances. It comes from believing that God's power is greater than any other in the world, and that our relationship with Him is secure.
 - **Joyfulness is the Celebration of Who God Is and Gratitude for What He has Done:** According to God's Word, we are filled with joy in the presence of God Himself. When we remember His blessings to us, even in the midst of suffering, we should be grateful. We can be filled with joy through the Holy Spirit, as we abide in God. Joy should bring about positive change in our actions, demeanor and attitude. Consider these verses about joy:
 - o Luke 10:21
 - o Acts 13:52
 - o Romans 12:12
 - o John 16:22
 - o Psalms 16:8-11
 - o Romans 15:13

ASK:

How is it possible to have joy in the midst of suffering, persecution and trial?



Are you a joyful person? How does joyfulness show in the life of a Christian?

Where does our joy come from?

How can we love others with our joy?

How would joy interact with the other virtues? What about joy and self-control? Joy and perseverance? Joy and compassion or mercy?

TEACH:

- ❖ **Joyfulness in the Life of Jesus:** We are not told that Jesus walked around with a smile on His face, or that He made others laugh as they reclined at the table together. So what do we know about Jesus and joy?
 - **Jesus was filled with Joy:** Several times Jesus spoke of His own joy, and said that it came from the Father. The joy that Jesus possessed was rooted firmly in His love for His Father. Jesus told His disciples that their joy would be full in knowing and believing His Word (John 17:13-14, John 15:11).
 - **Jesus expressed gratitude to God:** Gratitude is a heart attitude that fuels our joy. When we thank God for what He has done, we acknowledge His greatness and the undeserved blessings He has given us. Gratitude and hope marked many of Jesus' prayers and conversations (Luke 10:21-24, Matthew 11:25).
 - **Jesus celebrated:** Jesus had a spirit of celebration about Him! He was often found eating and drinking in people's homes, and many people were drawn to Him. His joy was contagious! Jesus' first miracle occurred at a wedding celebration. When the wedding hosts ran out of wine, Jesus miraculously turned water into wine. Jesus knew that celebration was an important expression of joy (John 2:1-12). Many of His parables that teach about our reconciliation to God speak of celebration, feasting, and joy. Jesus taught us to be hopeful and to expect our joy to be fulfilled in God (Luke 15:23, Matthew 25:23).
- ❖ **Biblical Examples of Joyfulness:** There are songs and prayers all through the Bible that are filled with praise to God, which is the overflow of a heart that hopes in God and enjoys a deep abiding joy.
 - **King David:** Many of David's Psalms are prayers or songs expressing joy and gratitude to God. This joy was not contained inside him. There are verses that point to the fact that David danced because of his joy (2 Samuel 6:14, 1 Chronicles 15:29, Psalm 149:1-9, Psalm 21).
 - **Apostle Paul :** The Apostle Paul was no stranger to persecution, struggles, adversity and pain, and yet he wrote letters to the churches he served, that were filled with joy. To Paul, these churches were a blessing from God and evidence of His grace and faithfulness (Philippians 1:3-8). He taught that being full of God's Spirit and delighting in Him would produce joy, and that we should rejoice in all situations (Philippians 4:4).



Even while in prison, Paul rejoiced, and the joy he had was a witness to others of the overcoming power and transformative love and grace that is found in God.

- **The 72 Disciples:** When the 72 disciples that Jesus sent out returned, they were filled with joy because what Jesus had promised them was true! They set their hope and trust in God, and they delighted in Him and His blessings ([Luke 10:17-20](#)). The same can be true of us!
- ❖ **Generosity:** The virtue of generosity is an overflowing response to our delight in God and all that He has given us. It is often understood as financial giving, especially to those in need. But we can also be generous with time, abilities, kindness, or with any other resources we have.
 - **Generosity is Not Greed or Stinginess:** The opposite of generosity is greed, wanting to hold onto what we have and acquire even more. When we are stingy, we do not want to share what we have worked hard for. Both greed and stinginess come from believing that we deserve everything we have. When we are generous, we know that all we have is from God and is to be used for His purposes. We can freely give away what we have because we trust God to provide for us.
 - **Generosity is Not Overindulgence:** Another opposite to generosity is overindulgence. Generosity is a joyful act that must be tempered with self-control and wisdom. When we show no restraint at all in spending all the money we have on ourselves, we do not value what has been given to us by God. Sometimes extravagant demonstrations of our wealth – even giving it away to others – is done because we want to attract attention to ourselves, not to God.
 - **Generosity is Not Manipulative:** When we give to others with an expectation that the favour will be returned, we are manipulating them. When we try to control others with our wealth, we are not acting in a joyful, generous manner. We must ensure that our generosity is backed by pure motives.
 - **Generosity is Giving Joyfully to Others from What God has Given Us:** Sometimes God chooses to bless people through the generosity of others. It is a joy to give to others, not a burden. Even if we have very little money or resources, we can share our time and friendship. When we recognize that God has provided all our needs, we are freed from hoarding and selfishness. If we are prompted by God to give, we will not be in want. Consider these verses about generosity:

- o [Acts 20:35](#)

- o [Luke 6:38](#)

- o [Luke 21:1-4](#)

- o [Matthew 6:21](#)

- o [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#)

- o [2 Corinthians 9:6](#)

ASK:

In what way has God made you rich? What do you have in abundance?

When opportunities arise to give, what is your initial response?



Is generosity easy or difficult for you? What beliefs do you have that cause this response? Are these beliefs based on God's truth?

How is generosity an expression of joy and trust in God?

TEACH:

- ❖ **Generosity in the Life of Jesus:** God has always overflowed with generosity to His creation. Consider the world that we live in. It is beautiful and full of countless pleasures. If God wanted only to provide for mankind's survival, why is there laughter, coffee, sunsets, music or flowers? Jesus showed an outpouring of joy throughout His life and ministry, demonstrating the heart of His Father.
 - **Jesus was generous with people:** During His time of ministry, Jesus spent long days with His disciples, and taught and healed people to the point of human exhaustion. Yet He always made time for people who sought Him as He continued to spread the message of the Kingdom of God. He did not have money to give, but offered Himself to people (Mark 1:45, Matthew 14:13, John 4:1-6).
 - **Jesus was generous in His miracles:** Jesus demonstrated the generous nature of God through His miracles. Consider when He had compassion on the hungry crowds who followed Him. Did He miraculously give each person a small portion to sustain them for a brief time? No! Everyone ate to their full satisfaction, and there was still food to spare!
 - **Jesus taught generosity:** Jesus taught this principle: God will pour out blessings on those who bless others, and forgive those who generously forgive others (Luke 6:37-38). He also praised those who were not wealthy yet still gave generously. Those who realized that all they had belonged to God, and returned to God a portion of it, brought joy to Jesus (Mark 12:41-44).
- ❖ **Biblical Examples of Generosity:** There are many Biblical examples of generous men and women who loved God. They demonstrated trust in God and His promises by being generous with the wealth that was given to them.
 - **Abraham:** Abraham was one son among many in an ordinary family, and received wonderful promises and abundant wealth from God. When Abraham left home and trusted God to show him a new land, he took with him his nephew, Lot. Together they entered Canaan with an abundance of animals, servants and wealth. There was not enough room in Canaan for both families to settle, so Abraham offered Lot the first choice of land. Abraham, being the elder and the one to whom God promised this land, certainly had the right to his choice of land first, but he expressed trust in God, love for his kin, and generosity (Genesis 13:1-18). Abraham knew that any land he was given was an inheritance and a gift from God.
 - **Abigail:** While King David had been promised the throne but had not yet possessed it, he was on the run with his followers. Nabal, a man David had loyally protected and helped in the past, was nearby. David asked him for a few provisions, but Nabal refused even though he had plenty. David could have retaliated; however, Nabal's



wife, Abigail, brought out a generous gift to David and his men (1 Samuel 25). While Nabal was concerned with pleasing his own appetites, Abigail generously gave to others.

- **Barnabas:** In the early days of the Church, members shared what they had in common, and gave to the Church so that the poor would be taken care of. There are two examples in the book of Acts – one good and one very bad! Barnabas was described as a 'good man, full of the Holy Spirit'. Out of his generosity, he sold land and gave all the money to the Apostles. A husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira, did the same, except they deceitfully held back a portion of the money. They were not generous, and for their sin they were struck down dead by God (Acts 4:36-37, Acts 5:1-11).

❖ **Evaluate your own Joyfulness and Generosity:** When we love God and trust in Him, we will be joyful and generous. When we acknowledge that all we have (good or bad, poverty or abundance) is from God, we can choose to use it for His work. When we are joyful and generous, we will attract others and be able to share the love of God with them. It is not a burden to be joyful or generous when we focus on God and who He is, rather than on ourselves and our circumstances.

- Consider the difficulties you might have in practising these virtues. Our actions are a direct result of our beliefs. Are your beliefs about who God is based on His Word? Do you choose to trust and have faith in Him rather than yourself? Do you resist selfish, self-focused thinking and practise meditating on God? Consider these verses:
 - Psalm 1:1-2
 - Jeremiah 9:23-24
 - Proverbs 11:24-25
 - 1 Peter 3:8-9
 - Psalm 27:4-6
- Are any of the following attitudes and behaviours evident in your life? Are you making choices based on what you think will make you feel happy and safe, or on the truth of God? Are you choosing to trust yourself instead of God for your own joy and satisfaction?
 - Relying on others to make you happy
 - Complaining about your circumstances
 - Becoming easily frustrated, saddened or discouraged
 - Participating in rituals or superstitions that you hope will improve your 'luck'
 - Wishing you had a life different than your own
 - Rarely demonstrating hospitality to others
 - Refusing to help meet the needs of others
 - Telling yourself you have no obligation to help those who are poorer than you due to sin in their life
 - Not volunteering, helping or serving in ministries of the Church
 - Having skills or knowledge but not actively looking for ways to use them



- o Not regularly meditating on the character and nature of God
- o Neglecting the study of God's Word

TASK:

Christian character is formed through our choices within the context of community. In order to practise making choices to be joyful and generous, divide your participants into small groups of 3-6. Have each group discuss each of the scenarios that follow this lesson. Discuss the questions provided.

DISCUSSION

- ❖ What is your attitude to becoming more like Jesus Christ? Do you think we should wait until our beliefs and feelings are in order, or act now as we work on attaining this goal?
- ❖ How can a person who lives in poverty be joyful and generous? Will they be better or worse off as a result of practising these traits?
- ❖ What excuses do we make for not being joyful? What factors of life cause our joy to be diminished?
- ❖ How do we change our thought patterns in order to be joyful and generous?

PRAYER

Close the lesson in prayer. Pray that your participants would love God more and more, and as a result, they will abound in joy and generosity. Pray that they would know the truth of God's Word and who He is, and that they would delight in Him. Pray that they would have generous spirits and give freely of what has been given to them by God. Pray that they would display gratitude, and that this characteristic would make them attractive to others.



CHOOSING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

- JOYFULNESS AND GENEROSITY -

In small groups, consider the scenarios below. For each situation consider these questions:

- What would your natural response to this situation be?
- How would someone who is joyful and generous respond to this situation?
- What might the results be?

You just found out you have lost your job. You do not know what you will do now to support your family, and you know there are difficult times ahead.

An announcement has been made at your church indicating an opportunity to help a number of refugee families that have recently moved to your city. There are many needs to be met, including food, clothing, adequate shelter as well as practical assistance in shopping, etc. Someone is also needed to help coordinate responses.

You receive a call from a sibling of yours whom you have not seen in many years. There were arguments and pain in your relationship with them in the past, which is why you have not sought reconciliation. Your sibling says they cannot expect you to forgive them, but would like to see you again. You consider what it would take to forgive them, and invite them to your house. It would take an act of choosing joyfulness and extending generous forgiveness.

You are given an unexpected gift of a large sum of money. You begin to dream about the things that money could buy, and whether you could now afford some of them. But then you remember that your church is raising money for an important building. You were content yesterday before this money came, and now you are conflicted.

You are having a great day until something unexpected happens that interrupts your plans. You had important things to do, and you feel anger and frustration welling up inside of you which you could direct at the person who caused the inconvenience.