

#InstagramJesus

Weekly Devotional

*A ministry of Chapel Hill
chapelhillpc.org*



Rachel White

LifeGroup Coordinator Intern, pastor's wife, and mother to Evelyn and Ezra. Things you should know about me: I love navy blue stripes, quality time, and seeing people grow spiritually by connecting with the Word and others! My greatest moments of joy are spiritual conversations with my kids, my neighbors, and my church family.

Saturday through Friday January 12-18

LifeGroup Guide

See Alpha Discussion questions for "Who is Jesus?" following this introduction.

This week is a little different. This weekend Craig Springer, the Executive Director of Alpha USA, is our guest preacher, and we thought it would be a great opportunity for all our groups to experience a week of Alpha. We hope this will give you confidence to invite your unbelieving friends to one of our Alpha sessions on Wednesday nights, as well as give you a chance to dig into this topic for yourself. We've chosen the week of Alpha that most closely aligns with our series in Mark's gospel; "Who is Jesus?"

In your group this week, you will want to plan to eat some food together (snacks is fine!), watch a short video and share discussion questions with your group on the topic “Who is Jesus?” You can find the video link and the discussion questions attached. We’ve also attached some extra information on how to lead an Alpha discussion, since it is a little different from our usual LifeGroup model. We will be back to the normal LifeGroup format next week.

The daily devotional this week connects with the weekend sermon on daily joy by Craig Springer.

LINK TO ALPHA VIDEO: youtu.be/TXdJqNhlkN0

Tips on how to lead a great Alpha small group and the group questions are on the next pages, followed by the weekly devotional.

Three keys to hosting a great Alpha small group

LOVE

Alpha is about sharing God’s love through friendship.

“We loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thessalonians 2:8, emphasis added).

The greatest thing you can do as a host or helper is to share your life with your guests and to love and respect them.

“People come to church for a variety of reasons, but they stay for only one—friendship.”

John Wimber,
Founder of Vineyard Church

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LISTEN

Alpha is a chance for the guests to ask anything and say what they think.

The role of the hosts and helpers is to listen; not to have all the answers or to win an argument. Love them, be interested in them, and be respectful towards them.

**“[People] are never so likely
to settle a question rightly as
when they discuss it freely.”**

Thomas Macaulay

The model for the Alpha small group is not teacher-pupil, but host-guest. It is vital to give guests the opportunity to respond to what they have heard and to ask questions in a safe, non-threatening environment.

Groups can be ruined by one of two things:

- Hosts and helpers speaking too much;
- Allowing one guest to dominate the discussion.

Role of the host:

- Greet newcomers to the group.
- Introduce guests to one another.
- Facilitate the discussion.
- Pray regularly for the small group.

Role of the helper:

- Look after the needs of guests.
- Handle administration for the group.
- Support the discussion with helpful comments, but do not speak too much.
- Pray quietly for each guest during the small group discussion.

Six tips for facilitating a great discussion:

1. **Ask open-ended questions.**
2. **Be encouraging.**
3. **Be yourself.**
4. **Answer the ice breaker questions, but refrain from answering other questions.**

Exceptions to asking “What does anyone else think?”

Questions of fact

E.g., how many gospels are there?

E.g., where are the toilets?

Direct questions

E.g., why are you a Christian?

E.g., when did it first make sense for you?

Difficult questions

In the first session, make a note of everyone’s questions.

If you don’t know the answer, tell guests that you’ll find out and get back to them next session.

Recommended reading

Searching Issues by Nicky Gumbel.

Chapters include:

“Why Does God Allow Suffering?”

“What About Other Religions?”

“Is There a Conflict Between Science and Christianity?”

“Is the Trinity Unbiblical, Unbelievable, and Irrelevant?”

“What About the New Spirituality?”

“Does Religion Do More Harm Than Good?”

“Is Faith Irrational?”

5. **Don’t be afraid of silence.**
6. **Rephrase the question.**

LAUGH

The experience in the Alpha small group should be low key, relaxed, and fun.

Avoid intensity.

In the first session, break the ice with a game and questions to get to know the guests:

1. Name game
2. Ask, "How and why did you end up coming to Alpha?"
3. Ask, "If it turned out there was a God after all, and you could ask one question, what would it be?"

Remember that laughter is a key component of Alpha.

Have fun and enjoy the journey.

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Finally, pray for your Alpha

Prayer undergirds everything we do in Alpha, from beginning to end.

Before you begin

- The pre-session team prayer meeting is vital; a chance to pray for yourself, the team, and the guests in your group.
- Divide up the group between the hosts and helpers and commit to praying for each guest on a weekly basis.

From the front

- In general, we want to make the guests feel at ease with us, so we avoid public prayer. However, at the end of session 4—“How Can I Have Faith?”, there is an opportunity for guests to join in a simple prayer asking Jesus into their life, if they want to.
- We don’t say “grace” or pray before the meal.

In your small group

- The topic of prayer is introduced in session 5—“Why and How Do I Pray?”
- You may want to offer to say a short closing prayer at the end of the discussion on session 5 or in any of the subsequent sessions—“Would anyone mind if I said a short prayer to finish?”
- At some point you may feel it’s appropriate to give your guests an opportunity to pray out loud:
 - go around the group and ask each person if there’s anything they’d like prayer for;
 - a host should start with a very short prayer; long eloquent prayers may be impressive, but they discourage others from praying;
 - give space for those who would like to pray, to do so;

Who Is Jesus?

Admin

Welcome the group, then go around and ask each person to introduce themselves briefly. Welcome any new guests and ask them, “How and why did you end up coming here today?” Update the registration list. Add any new names and contact details and correct any mistakes from the previous session.

Key Concept

Understanding the evidence regarding the historical claims of Jesus Christ.

Guests come to Alpha with a variety of ideas about Jesus. Many of their views would fall into the “folklore/legend” category. Others would see Jesus as a wonderful man, great moral teacher, or religious leader. There are some who really have no idea about Jesus. The goal this week is to get their ideas on the table and begin to help them sort out the evidence that either questions or confirms their assumptions. Discussions around Jesus that may surface include: Was Jesus a real, historical person? Was He more than a wonderful man? Was He more than a great moral teacher or religious leader?

Questions for discussion

1. What did you think or feel about the talk?
2. What makes you happy?
3. What do you think about Jesus?
4. If you had a chance to meet Jesus, how would you feel and what would you say to Him?

Additional questions (if needed):

5. Before you heard the talk tonight, what was your concept of Jesus? Has it changed? If so, in what way?
6. What aspects of the evidence presented tonight did you find convincing/not convincing?

DAY 1 – Monday
Daily devotional

- **Read**

Galatians 5:22-23

- **Ask**

What is your daily experience of joy like?
Where does true joy come from?

- **Reflect**

The person in my life who expresses the most joy is my son Ezra. When he is joyful, his whole face lights up and every ounce of energy expresses the excitement he is feeling! Every day when Ellis gets home he will run and skip and hop from one end of the house to the other, and throw himself into his Dad's arms, shouting "Daddy!". This moment brings us all great joy every single day!

Ezra's joy is contagious and I often wish I could have half his energy and enthusiasm! My own daily experience of joy is far more affected by circumstances and my own natural inclination to be more serious and intense.

The concept of joy can feel unattainable. For many, in joy's place is a more surface-level attempt to appear and feel happy. The world encourages us to seek after happiness as our ultimate goal, and teaches us that we will find it in self-gratification, material possessions and a certain lifestyle.

The Biblical answer to joy goes so much deeper than the fleeting pleasures of this world, and is not dependent on circumstances or our own innate abilities. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It is a gift from God and the evidence of Christ living in our hearts. Jesus said that a tree could be recognized by the fruit it bears (cf. Matthew 7:16).

In context, these verses from Galatians are set in direct contrast with the works of the flesh (cf. Galatians 5:19-21). The fruit of the Spirit is both a defense against and an attack upon those works. This fruit comes from the Spirit, and not merely from our own efforts. If God is the source of our joy, then joy is not dependent on circumstances, or temperament, or even age! This is good news indeed!

DAY 2 – Tuesday
Daily devotional

- **Read**

1 Corinthians 3:9

- **Ask**

How are you cultivating joy?

- **Reflect**

A few years ago while we were down in Fresno, California we spent a day visiting a friend's family fruit farm. This was my first ever experience of seeing the huge orchards, fields, machinery and distribution system involved in growing and delivering the fruit we buy in our grocery stores. The same pluots with dinosaur stickers on that we can buy in our local Costco start out life on this farm. It was such an incredible experience of learning along with my kids where our food comes from.

We often think of the fruit of the Spirit as something that happens instantaneously without any effort on our part. But today's passage reminds us that we are God's co-workers. We have a part to play. We are designed to cultivate that fruit, in partnership with the Lord. Just like the workers at my friend's farm work as a team to water, weed, protect the plants from bugs and harvest the fruit, we have a part to play in cultivating joy.

I find the image in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 really helpful to understand our part in this process. Paul here is speaking of spiritual growth. He says "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." This passage helps us to understand our place and role. We take an active part in cultivating the right environment for fruit, and God is the one who gives the growth. I love that this passage reminds us that we don't do this work alone!

How can you partner with the Lord to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in your life today?

DAY 3 – Wednesday
Daily devotional

- **Read**

Proverbs 4:23

- **Ask**

How does guarding your heart protect joy?

- **Reflect**

My children don't love it when I set limits and boundaries for them. Turning off the iPad when screen time is done, stopping playing when it's time for bed, monitoring how they speak to one another.... "Kind and gentle, kind and gentle, kind and gentle" is what I feel like I spend all day saying! I'm not popular when I enforce these rules! And how often do we feel the same way as adults about the idea of setting wise limits and boundaries for ourselves? Using screen time limits on Facebook, selectively choosing what Netflix shows we watch, thinking carefully about the influence our friends have on us... these are all hard things to do, and counter-cultural ways of living.

I wonder how many of us have already broken New Year's resolutions about things like this. We know there's wisdom in setting limits, but keeping to them takes a lot of discipline. Sometimes we wonder why we even bother!

Today's passage teaches us the importance of guarding our thoughts and heart. Why? Because from it flows the source of life. In the book of Proverbs, the heart is "the center of one's inner life and orientation to God" (ESV Study Bible). There is a choice to make. Either out flows evil thoughts and actions (cf. Mark 7:21-23) or springs of life (Proverbs 4:23).

Choosing what we fill our hearts and minds with is one way to guard our hearts such that out can flow life in all its fullness. A life filled with joy. What's one practical way that you can guard your heart, and thus protect your joy, this week?

DAY 4 – Thursday

Daily devotional

- **Read**

Psalm 1:2-3

- **Ask**

How does meditating on the Word protect our joy?

- **Reflect**

My new year's resolution last year was to read the Bible in One Year, using an App produced by Alpha with daily passages and commentary. I highly recommend downloading it if you are looking to get into the daily discipline of reading the Bible. (bibleinoneyear.org) I'm repeating the same resolution two years in a row because this worked so well for me to read and apply Scripture on a daily basis! You can download it from bibleinoneyear.org.

Psalm 1 says we are blessed when we meditate and delight in the Word. When we spend time reading God's Word, praying to him, worshipping him, cultivating our relationship with him we become like a tree planted by streams of water, which produces fruit and prospers. This is a promise we can claim. We will "yield fruit in season" when we take delight in the Lord.

There are so many verses about taking delight in the Lord. I encourage you to do a word study on this! One that is very near and dear to me is Psalm 37:4, which we have on our wedding rings. It says, "delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart". When we seek God he shapes our desires to be his, and in time, gives us those desires. So when we delight in the Lord he both increases our desire for joy, and he gives us that joy.

Spend a moment today praying for our whole church body to develop the daily discipline of being in the Word, and consider if there's a friend you could encourage to read it with you. Perhaps you could both commit to reading the Bible in One Year and discussing what Jesus is doing in your hearts as you read.

DAY 5 – Friday
Daily devotional

- **Read**

Philemon 1:6

- **Ask**

Who could you share joy with?

- **Reflect**

I'm always surprised and delighted at moments of sharing Jesus with friends. In my experience evangelism always brings with it a mix of anxiety and excitement! Let me give you an example.

This year, our little Evelyn started Kindergarten. I can still hardly believe it! She rides the school bus and what started out as a tentative hope that this might give me a chance to meet new neighbors has now turned into a blossoming new group of friends for both of us. This crew shares daily ups and downs together, from sleepless nights and tantrums, to family deaths and dramas. We all have different cultural backgrounds and it's been so fun to get to listen and understand everyone's upbringing, languages and traditions. What started as shared play dates has now turned into birthdays and holiday celebrations. So it was only natural that I would share with my new friends my pursuit of ministry, and my excitement about all that was going on at church in the Christmas season.

As Christmas approached, I felt the Holy Spirit nudge to invite my new friends to GLOW. But even though they had responded well to me sharing my personal journey in ministry, I really wasn't sure how they would receive my invitation for them to be part of it! I gathered up the courage one morning to invite them, and the courage again closer to the weekend to text them and invite them again. Both times I said the words, then waited with bated breath, bracing myself for rejection. GLOW came, and I was so overwhelmed and shocked when one of my new friends came. What incredible joy to get to be part of this significant moment of a friend attending church for the first time ever. Wow.

Who could you share joy with by inviting them to Alpha?

DAY 6 – Saturday

Daily devotional

- **Read**

John 15:11; John 16:22b

- **Ask**

Where are you battling for joy? Pray for a keen awareness of Christ's presence with you, as a reminder to you of the truth that joy is always possible. Today, choose joy.

- **Reflect**

As I look back on my life at the seasons when I can say I experienced the fullness of joy, I realize it's not dependent on circumstance or my own ability. It's much more closely connected to my relationship with Christ, and an awareness of his presence with me. The truth is that joy is always possible and always available because he is always present.

Take a read of John 15. Joy in all its fullness is found by abiding in Christ's love and keeping his commandments. As we continue in daily personal relationship with Christ we find joy like no other. This passage uses the image of the vine to help believers understand that fruit is born out of connection with God (John 15:5). Apart from Christ we cannot bear fruit, but when we abide in him and he is in us, we have his full joy. The image of bearing fruit was one used in the Old Testament as prophets looked forward to a future time of fulfilment. That time has arrived with Jesus, and as his followers bear fruit, they fulfil the vision of God's people "blossoming and putting forth shoots, filling the whole world with fruit" (Isaiah 27:6). This means that when we bear the fruit of joy, we are part of something so much bigger than ourselves. The people of God have been anticipating and looking forward to this new reality for many, many years.

Look with me at John 16:22b. True joy cannot be taken away, even with death, because it comes with the presence of Christ. As it says in Psalm 16:11 "In your presence there is fullness of joy." Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. It's not dependent on us. It's not dependent on circumstance. It's dependent on Him. Hallelujah!

DAY 7 – Sunday
Daily devotional

- **Read**

Romans 15:13

- **Ask**

How will your joy impact you and those around you?

- **Reflect**

Joy, peace, hope. These qualities all come by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joy is possible because we have the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, the same one who raised Jesus from the dead (cf. Romans 8:11b). When things are hard, we must remember we have God with us, and go back to the story of who Jesus is and what amazing things he accomplished in his life, death and resurrection. If you are struggling with joy today, why not take the time to read through the whole gospel of Mark, and remind yourself of God's power.

I love how today's verse is such a visual image: "overflowing with hope". Our joy, peace and hope are not given purely for our own enjoyment. As we choose joy, we choose it not only for the sake of ourselves, but for those around us. I shared with you on day one about my son Ezra's infectious joy. Joy is always like that. As we become more joyful, it changes the environment around us. And as we read in day two, "there is no law against those things." We could all use a little more joy, and really, who is going to complain about it?!

If you are like me and don't always know the words to say to share Jesus with your friends, or if you don't naturally always feel the most excited and joyful right away about life, or if you aren't the most disciplined person and you struggle with guarding your heart, let's commit together to choose joy. Let's press into the truth that joy is always possible. May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit!
