

DAY 5: SHOUT WITH JOY

Read Psalm 66.

Many of the Psalms have a pattern. They talk about the characteristics and actions of God. They talk about the problems and needs of God's people. They talk about how God's people can think, act, and feel differently as they consider who God is and what God does for them. This passage is full of energy, life, joy, and praise.

BE ATTENTIVE: What do you learn about God in this Psalm? What lessons has the Psalmist learned about life? If you write in your Bible, circle or underline all the words that are "happy" words.

PRAY: This might be the first time you've done this, but read the Psalm out loud. Read it out loud the first time just to hear yourself. Now you are ready for a second reading. Put some heart and soul into it. Try to read with emphasis and passion. Read with the kind of joy the person who wrote this Psalm must have been feeling. Notice how you are feeling. As you do this, you are engaging in worship and praise.

DAY 6: THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH

Read Revelation 21:1-5.

This is what you have to look forward to. The Bible starts in a garden and ends in a city. The city of God. The city of joy. The city of eternal and joyful life with God and the community of faith. I don't have a lot I want to say about this passage. I simply want you to read it a few times. Smile as you read it. Be full of hope and joy as you read it. Imagine—no more tears, no more of anything that is bad—only God and the goodness of God.

READ EVEN MORE: If you want to read the description of the city of God, see Revelation 21:9-27 and 22:1-5. It is a spectacular description. Words almost fail (well actually, they do fail) in describing eternal happiness. This is the City of Eternal Flourishing. Life in God's beautiful kingdom on earth is just a foretaste of what we have waiting for us in heaven.

A FINAL REFLECTION: Think about this entire week. Have you noticed any change in your joy and happiness levels as you have been rejoicing, thinking about what is good and true, and been aware of the blessings of God?



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AS A REMINDER, here are the main ideas from the Sunday message:

(Almost) everyone wants to be happy.

God wants you to flourish (John 10:10).

There is a lot of unhappiness all around.

We will be unhappy when we ignore God's way of flourishing (Matthew 7:13-14).

The Flourishing Project will help you get on track with God's way of flourishing.

This devotional will direct you to important passages in the Bible for study, reflection, application, and prayer. The blog site at LWCCyork.com/blog has best ideas and practices about flourishing and happiness. Together, these resources will help you go deeper in understanding and experiencing the *Real Life* God has for you.

Most English translations of the Bible do not use the words *happiness* or *flourishing*.

Instead, they use words like joy, contentment, satisfaction, peace, and thankful in place of happiness. *Abundance* and *fullness* are the words used in the Bible to describe a life that is thriving. The passages for today will not always have exactly the “right” words, but they will have the necessary concepts. For each passage, in addition to any particular guidance given, try to identify three to six main insights about how you can flourish and experience happiness.

DAY 1: ORIGINAL HAPPINESS

Read Genesis 1:26–2:3.

Here you see original happiness. Adam and Eve had it made. Everything was going their way. Everything they did turned out well. What are the instructions they were given that would lead to flourishing and fullness? There are a number of core insights (and principles) in the passage that are essential if we are to flourish. Why were they happy? What did they have that would create the experience of happiness? (Hint: If you need to, refer to the model of The Flourishing Project.)

REFLECT: How many of the ingredients for flourishing and happiness that Adam and Eve had in place do you have in place? **What is the one biggest part of your life that is simply not working the way it is supposed to?**

PRAY: Ask God to bless you in the areas of life where you are most in need of his help.

DAY 2: COUNTERCULTURAL HAPPINESS!

Read Matthew 5:3-12.

I’m going to get radical and provocative right away. There are few words in the Bible that are more challenging than the Sermon on the Mount, and few passages more in your face and at odds with the world than the Beatitudes. Read these eight different blessings.

To be blessed is to be given divine favor and protection. To be blessed is to enjoy the work God is doing in your life. There is work God wants (and needs) to do in us that is not what we would expect. There are spiritual realities God wants us to experience for our ultimate good, even if we do not understand how that will happen.

REFLECT: What do you think about the kind of life Jesus describes as blessed? How many of these things have you experienced? How did you feel when you experienced them? Were you happy?

THINK ABOUT IT: Why in the world would Jesus say these experiences are great blessings to receive and not severe problems to avoid? If you need some help, turn to Isaiah 55:8-9 and see if you can wrap your heart and mind around the teaching on the Beatitudes.

DAY 3: JOY AND PEACE

Read Philippians 4:4-9 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Joy and peace are about as close to happiness as you are going to get. An important principle to always remember is that you can behave your way into better feelings. You can also think your way into better feelings. What are the behaviors and thoughts that will help you feel joy and experience peace? Depression, anxiety, worry, and general unhappiness are emotional states. When you feel this way, it is certain that you are also thinking depressing, anxious, worried thoughts and, most likely, acting accordingly.

REFLECT: Pay attention to any time when you are feeling unhappy. See if you can immediately begin to put into practice what Paul teaches in these two passages. **Begin to change your thinking. Turn your thoughts around. Begin to pray about whatever is troubling you. Begin to worship, rejoice, and offer thanksgiving to God.**

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE: Make a list of 20 things for which you are grateful. What are your blessings? Every day, see if you can add three to five more things. Take time and thank God for them one at a time, one by one. As you thank God, allow yourself to feel thankful and grateful.

DAY 4: THE LIFE GOD HAS FOR YOU

Read Colossians 1:9-14.

This passage is one of many that describes a life of real flourishing. Make a list of all the features or qualities of a mature life Paul describes. This passage is full of holy activity. Here is a great point to remember: **Holy living is needed for happy living. Holiness leads to happiness. That is how God has designed life to work.** Another way to understand this passage is to see in it the blessings God has for you. So, what has God done for you? How are you to live?

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE: Be highly intentional and live today according to your new nature in Christ. Live like a child of God. Think like a child of God.

PRAY: Take each phrase in this passage and turn it into a prayer. Pray for yourself. Pray for others. Pray it into reality in your life.