

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

VIDEO
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NICOLE ZASOWSKI

daring JOY

What Six Women in the Bible Teach Us
About the Power of Celebration
When it Feels Risky, Complicated,
and Even Impossible



NICOLE ZASOWSKI

daring
joy

Lifeway Press®
Brentwood, Tennessee

Published by Lifeway Press® • © 2025 Nicole Zasowski

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ISBN: 979-8-3845-0671-3

Item: 005849215

Dewey decimal classification: 248.843

Subject heading: JOY AND SORROW / WOMEN IN THE BIBLE / CHRISTIAN LIFE

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Printed in the United States of America

Lifeway Resources
200 Powell Place, Suite 100
Brentwood, TN 37027-7707

Author represented by Angela Scheff of The Christopher Ferebee Agency

Interior photography by Melissa Zaldivar

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ABOUT
THE AUTHOR



NICOLE ZASOWSKI is a licensed marriage and family therapist and author of *What If It's Wonderful?* and *From Lost to Found*. She is also the coauthor of *Advances and Techniques in Restoration Therapy* and *Families and Forgiveness*. As a writer who wears her heart proudly on her sleeve, Nicole's work is a weave of biblical wisdom, psychological expertise, and vulnerable storytelling. Often praised for her wisdom and approachable style, Nicole is a sought-after speaker, frequently teaching at conferences, retreats, and women's events around the country on topics that integrate faith and psychology.

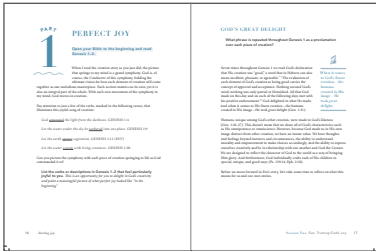
In addition to her private practice, Nicole's therapeutic work has included teaching as an adjunct professor at Alliance Theological Seminary in New York and leading marriage intensives at the Hideaway Experience.

Nicole and her husband, Jimmy, are the grateful parents of three young children. Her favorite place to be is looking for sea glass on the Connecticut shoreline, exploring a New England town or New York City neighborhood, or sitting in her front yard around a fire with her family, friends, and neighbors.

Nicole would love to connect with you on Instagram @nicolezasowski and her website: nicolezasowski.com.

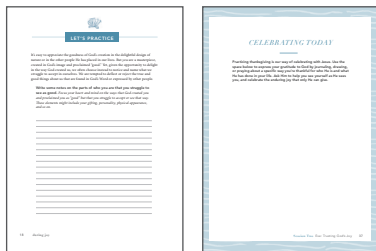
GETTING STARTED

Because we believe discipleship happens best in community, we encourage you to do this study with other women at your church or in a group setting. Or consider enlisting a friend or two to go through it with you. This will give you study friends to pray with and connect with over coffee or through text or email so you can chat about what you're learning.



PERSONAL STUDY

Each session features three parts for you to take at your own pace. You'll find questions to help you engage with God's Word and apply it to your life, as well as practical exercises to help you process what you learn.



LET'S PRACTICE & CELEBRATE TODAY

Included throughout the study are *Let's Practice* and *Celebrate Today* exercises. These are intentional moments for you to pause and reflect as you learn more about the courageous, daring joy Jesus invites you into.



WATCH & DISCUSS

Then at the end of each session, you'll find pages that provide space for you to take notes during the videos and follow along with your small group discussion.

LEADING A GROUP?



A free leader guide PDF is available for download at lifeway.com/daringjoy. The leader guide offers several tips and helps along with discussion guides for each session.



SESSION 01

INTRODUCTION

We were designed in the image of a joyful God who invites us to stand in constant awe of Him and His goodness. God *delighted* in fashioning each of us and all of creation. In the beginning of Scripture we read, “God saw all that he had made, and *it was very good indeed*” (Gen. 1:31, emphasis mine). And the psalmist teaches us that “in [God’s] presence is abundant joy; at [His] right hand are eternal pleasures” (Ps. 16:11).

But the more we encounter painful events, challenging circumstances, and broken relationships, we’re tempted to believe that hope is merely an avenue of disappointment and that it’s safer and maybe even more prudent to be suspicious of joy. Additionally, whether directly or indirectly, some of us have received the message that awe, celebration, and joy are a bit like dessert—nice to have but not essential to the Christian life. Perhaps we were

even taught that it’s frivolous to practice celebration and that celebration does nothing to deepen our relationship with Christ.

A Bible study on joy is not something I could have written even a few years ago. The idea of celebrating terrified me. Like so many people I know who have experienced prolonged seasons of hurt and disappointment, I had become highly suspicious of joy, afraid to hold God’s good gifts for fear that they would be snatched away. *I was sure that celebration always came with a catch, so I became practiced in praying for the miracle while preparing to mourn and dreaming while rehearsing disaster.* I viewed joy as an experience for the lucky few instead of a practice that is available to all of us at any time.

But I came to understand that this perspective was costly. I realized that much of the loss I had experienced in my

life was not only the grief and disappointment itself, but also the joy I overlooked because I was too afraid to embrace it. And I thought, *No more! I don't want to miss out on my vibrant, God-given life because I'm too busy preparing for the worst.* And I don't want you to miss out on knowing the fullness of God's joy either, which is why I'm thrilled you're joining me on this quest to find the courage to practice daring joy.

Throughout Scripture, God invites us to delight in Him, rejoice over His character and what He's doing in our lives, and wait with eager anticipation for what He'll do next. You may be surprised to learn that the theme of joy comes up more than two hundred times in the Bible.¹ Joy is one characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)—the Christlike characteristics that reveal we're becoming more like Jesus. And it's the mood of eternity, when God's people will rejoice together and glorify Him forever (Rev. 19:7)!

Perhaps most importantly, God's Word shows us time and again that the joy of the Lord has nothing to do with current events and circumstances and everything to do with who He is and who we are in Him. This is what we see reflected in the stories of six women in the Bible who we'll read about in this study. We'll encounter:

- A woman who struggled to trust God's joy.
- A woman who shielded her heart with cynicism against the vulnerability of joy.
- A woman whose joy diminished as she compared herself to others.
- A woman who had to relinquish the joy she wanted in order to receive the joy she needed.
- A woman who practiced joy when few others could.
- A woman who couldn't share the joy of the Lord fast enough.

Each of these women show us a different piece of the human experience and God's heart for our joy. Whether you've been hurt so many times you can't imagine feeling joy again or you're looking to deepen your practice of joy, these stories from God's Word will meet you where you are and give you the courage you didn't know you needed to celebrate God's goodness in your life.

My family lives in a small town on the coast of the Long Island Sound just outside New York City. For years now, one of my family's favorite rituals and pastimes has been looking for sea glass on the shore. Our collection started slow and small as we trained our eyes for what shapes, colors, and textures to look for among the rocks, shells, seaweed, and debris that clutter the shoreline. Now, years later, it's not unusual for us to find hundreds of pieces in a matter of thirty minutes. We know what we're looking for, and we recognize it quickly.



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Let's practice  
the courage we  
need to hold  
God's gifts  
without fear  
that they will  
be taken away.  
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One of my hopes for this study is that it will train you to more quickly recognize God's goodness and faithfulness, both in the pages of His Word and in your story. I wrote this study to press sustaining hope and inexplicable joy into your palms, especially if (like me) you've been hesitant to dream because you might be disappointed, felt afraid to hold God's goodness because the gift might be taken from you, or been fearful that hope would make a fool of you. It's my prayer that this study takes your hand, tenderly looks you in the eye, and says, "Sister, no more." Let's lay down our shields of pessimism and cynicism. Let's open our hands and receive more of God's joy. And let's practice the courage we need to hold God's gifts without fear that they will be taken away. Because *the joy that is available through Jesus cannot be lost, stolen, or extinguished. This is the joy you were made for.*

A FEW NOTES BEFORE WE BEGIN

One of my prayers for us is that we don't merely study for information but for transformation. As we study God's Word and the stories of these six women, I want us to be constantly asking ourselves two questions: *What is God saying in this verse or passage?* And, *What does this mean for how I live in my relationship with God, myself, and other people?* We want to understand God's Word in a way that changes how we live. I've divided each session of the book into three parts to help you pace out your study. When each part comes to a close, I'll give you the opportunity to pause and reflect on those two questions as a way of responding to what you've learned.

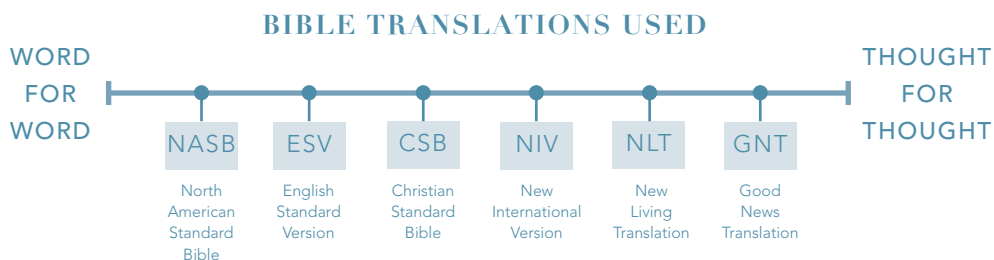
As a marriage and family therapist, I'm fascinated by what neuroscience research tells us about the way God designed the brain, and there are places in the study where I'll talk about the intersection between science and theology. I believe God is the Master Creator, Designer, and Artist of us and of the world we interact with. There is no wisdom apart from Him! So, when I discuss information

outside of Scripture, my assumption is that we are learning about God’s masterful design. The therapeutic model that shapes my understanding is called Restoration Therapy. It’s a model based in theological principles and interpersonal neuroscience, combining the advantages of Attachment, Emotional Regulation, and Mindfulness. (See p. 172 to learn more.) All truth is God’s truth, and in our ongoing learning and study we’re able to marvel at His incredible design of people.

Watching the Videos: You may have noticed that your copy of *Daring Joy* comes with video access. I’ve recorded seven videos for you, and you’ll find information for how to view those on the last page of this book. Whether you’re going through the study on your own or with a group, I hope you’ll watch them as they provide an opportunity for me to talk to you “face to face.” Throughout the videos you’ll hear more of my story—what led me to fight for joy and why I desperately long for you to experience the *daring joy* of the Lord—as well as encouragements from God’s Word and insights from Restoration Therapy.

Studying with Others: If you’re studying with a friend or a group, you’ll find a page of discussion questions at the end of each session. I’m expectant and excited for the communion you’ll share—a unique gift that comes from being in God’s Word together! My prayer is that each place of study and each question will be the birthplace of meaningful reflection, honest conversation, and sincere friendship with God and those who sit shoulder to shoulder with you in this quest.

A Note about Bible Translations: This study uses the CSB as the primary Bible translation, but we will read verses from different Bible translations. These translations are on a spectrum from “Word for Word” (as close to the original language as possible) to “Thought for Thought” (focused more on the original ideas and thoughts of the writers than the exact wording).



Let’s Practice: I believe the best way for truth to move from our minds to our hearts and into our daily actions is to practice implementing what we’re learning. I want to give us many opportunities to practice the truth we’re learning together in the study itself—starting right now!



LET'S PRACTICE

Before you begin the study, I want you to honestly reflect on where your heart is *as it relates to joy*. There are many feelings you might be carrying in this season and in circumstances you're facing that are impacting your heart. But for this exercise, I want you to specifically consider your relationship with *joy*, which is defined as "the happy state that results from knowing and serving God."²

Reflect on these questions: *Do you embrace joy with open arms? Are you hopeful but cautious because of disappointments and heartache in the past? Does joy feel difficult or even impossible to access because of circumstances you're walking through right now?*

Now draw a picture of your heart as it relates to joy. *What color is your heart? Is it bold and vibrant or pale and dull? What is the texture of your heart? Is it tender and soft or calloused and tough? Has it been bruised or scarred by a pattern or event in your life? Is it beating slow or fast? Or, instead of drawing a heart, you might want to think of a metaphor for how you feel and draw a picture of the metaphor.*

Don't worry about your illustration skills! The purpose here is to give you a baseline for how you feel in relationship to joy before you begin your study. And no matter what your heart looks like as it relates to joy, I promise, there will be learning and growing for you as we learn about the true joy God longs for us to embrace. I'm excited to begin this quest with you!

WATCH



Watch the Session One video and take notes below.

TO ACCESS THE VIDEO SESSIONS, USE THE INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BACK OF YOUR BIBLE STUDY BOOK.

DISCUSS

Discuss the following questions with your Bible study group. A more extensive leader guide is available for free download at lifeway.com/daringjoy.

- 1 What stood out to you from Nicole's introduction in the book and the first video?
- 2 On page 8, you read a list of the types of women you'll meet in this study. Which of these descriptions do you feel like you most identify with today? Why did you pick her?
- 3 Share responses and drawings from the *Let's Practice* exercise on page 11. If you haven't had a chance to complete it yet, take some time to do that now.
- 4 Nicole describes this study as a quest to find the courage to practice daring joy. How are you feeling today as you set out on this quest together?
- 5 What are some hindrances, distractions, or obstacles you might face in completing the personal study each session? If you're a Bible study veteran, what tips would you offer in how to stay the course in our study?
- 6 What is one way you want to ask God to work in you through this study?



SESSION 02

EVE

trusting God's joy

In the bouquet of biblical women, it's easy to look at Eve as the weed—"the bad one" or "the one who ruined everything." As we step into her story and seek to understand her, I encourage you to examine what the patterns and pitfalls in Eve's story look like in your own life. Of course, the details of your story will be different. But every woman's struggle for joy has its roots in the garden. The war between the illusionary joy that promises more than it can deliver and the true and full joy that Jesus offers is a battle fought then and now. Let's wander through the garden in Genesis together and ask ourselves, *How is God asking me to grow?*

PART

1



PERFECT JOY

Open your Bible to the beginning and read Genesis 1–2.

When I read the creation story as you just did, the picture that springs to my mind is a grand symphony. God is, of course, the Conductor of this symphony, holding the ultimate vision for how each element of creation will come together as one melodious masterpiece. Each section matters on its own, yet it is also an integral part of the whole. With each new movement of the symphony in my mind, God moves in creation.

Pay attention to just a few of the verbs, marked in the following verses, that illuminate this joyful song of creation:

God separated the light from the darkness. GENESIS 1:4

Let the water under the sky be gathered into one place. GENESIS 1:9

Let the earth sprout vegetation. GENESIS 1:11 (ESV)

Let the water swarm with living creatures. GENESIS 1:20

Can you picture the symphony with each piece of creation springing to life as God commanded it to?

List the verbs or descriptions in Genesis 1–2 that feel particularly joyful to you. *This is an opportunity for you to delight in God’s creativity and paint a meaningful picture of what perfect joy looked like “in the beginning.”*

GOD’S GREAT DELIGHT

What phrase is repeated throughout Genesis 1 as a proclamation over each piece of creation?



Seven times throughout Genesis 1 we read God’s declaration that His creation was “good,” a word that in Hebrew can also mean excellent, pleasant, or agreeable.¹ “The evaluation of each element of God’s creation as being good carries the concept of approval and acceptance. Nothing resisted God’s word; nothing was only partial or blemished. All that God made on this day and on each of the following days met with his positive endorsement.”² God delighted in what He made. And when it comes to His finest creation—the humans created in His image—He took *great* delight (Gen. 1:31).

~~~~~  
**When it comes to God’s finest creation—the humans created in His image—He took *great* delight.**  
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Humans, unique among God’s other creation, were made in God’s likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). This doesn’t mean that we share all of God’s characteristics such as His omnipotence or omniscience. However, because God made us in His own image distinct from other creation, we have an innate value. We have thoughts and feelings beyond instincts and circumstances, the ability to understand morality and empowerment to make choices accordingly, and the ability to express ourselves creatively and be in relationship with one another and God the Creator. We are designed to reflect the character of God to the world as a way of bringing Him glory. And furthermore, God individually crafts each of His children in special, unique, and good ways (Ps. 139:14; Eph. 2:10).

Before we move forward in Eve’s story, let’s take some time to reflect on what this means for us and our own stories.



LET'S PRACTICE

It's easy to appreciate the goodness of God's creation in the delightful design of nature or in the other people He has placed in our lives. But *you* are a masterpiece, created in God's image and proclaimed "good." Yet, given the opportunity to delight in the way God created us, we often choose instead to notice and name what we struggle to accept in ourselves. We are tempted to deflect or reject the true and good things about us that are found in God's Word or expressed by other people.

Write some notes on the parts of who you are that you struggle to see as good. *Focus your heart and mind on the ways that God created you and proclaimed you as "good" but that you struggle to accept or see that way. These elements might include your gifting, personality, physical appearance, and so on.*

Now, take some time to pray through each of those areas and journal your thoughts below. *Remind yourself of the truth from Genesis 1 that you are a good creation. Ask God to help you see that truth clearly and for His truth to be more powerful than your temptation to speak shaming words to yourself.*

Remember, we often have very good reasons for feeling the way that we do. Perhaps you were given a painful message about who you are or your safety in the world directly. Or maybe these harmful messages were communicated through patterns over time. While our feelings are understandable, God has empowered us to choose what message we will repeat to ourselves moving forward. What message will you claim for yourself? What message will you choose to speak to your heart? God's truth? Or the message of the lie?

Your feelings don't change the truth that you are a valuable creation, intentionally designed by God the Creator, but it will make a difference in your relationship with Him, with yourself, and with others when your own voice echoes this truth. May you have the courage to echo the voice of the One who rejoices over you as His creation!

I imagine it won't surprise you to hear that the reason for this disconnect between God's delight in us and our ability to delight in how He made us is the prevalence of sin. Sin broke the perfect world God created and took with it the fullness of joy present at creation (Gen. 3). The impact of that brokenness on how we experience joy is best understood by first acknowledging our belovedness, which is why I wanted you to sit with that picture of creation in Genesis 1–2.

Now look up and read Romans 8:1-2, then write it in the space below.



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**God saw us  
as His “good”  
creation  
when He first  
breathed life  
into us.**  
~~~~~

As verse 2 implies, we sin and fall short of God's perfection. That's our reality. We do things we shouldn't, and we don't do things we should. But the good news expressed in Romans 8:1 is that those who have put their faith in Christ have a way out of the brokenness. Listen to the way this passage is paraphrased in *The Message*:

With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death. ROMANS 8:1-2

Read Romans 8:3-4. How has Jesus restored us to a right relationship with God?

God saw us as His “good” creation when He first breathed life into us, and we are seen as good once again through Jesus. It is not our own goodness that reconciles our relationship with God but the work of Jesus on the cross.

An honest look at your life will reveal sins you need to confess, areas in which you need to grow, events and relationships gone awry. *But Romans 8:1 offers the assurance that no part of your story disqualifies you from the promise that you are priceless.*

REFLECT: What parts of your story, if any, have made you feel unworthy of Jesus's love for you?

A PERFECT RELATIONSHIP

Read Genesis 2 once more. As you read, take note of the specific name for God that is repeated throughout this passage.

Write it here:

In this joyous beginning, before sin entered the world, God is referred to as the “LORD God.” This specific name for God defines the special nature of the relationship God had with His children before sin entered the world. “Throughout [Genesis] 1:1–2:3 the generic word ‘God’ [*Elohim*] was used to denote the deity as the transcendent Creator. The reader is now introduced to God’s personal name, ‘Yahweh’ [LORD]. . . . The use of ‘Yahweh’ throughout this passage underlines the personal and relational nature of God.”³ This double name emphasizes the fact that God was both in authority over them as Creator and with them as Covenant Keeper and Friend.

The relationship God had with Adam and Eve in the garden models for us the two essential pillars of attachment we have as human beings: love and trust. We learn about our identities from the way that we are loved. The level of safety we feel in life is determined by the trustworthiness of our relationships. Both love and trust are essential to our growth and health as human beings.⁴

REFLECT: How do the roles of “Creator,” “Covenant Keeper,” and “Friend” described in the name the “LORD God” highlight the essential pillars of love and trust in the relationship God intends to have with His children? *As you reflect, think about how you see love and trust demonstrated in God’s relationship with Adam and Eve in the garden.*

To be loved by God as our Covenant Keeper and Friend forms our identity. This kind of relationship tells us that we are a unique creation, valuable, and enjoyable to God. It also tells us we are safe under His protection and care. *In relationship with God, we find perfect love and safety—the two essential elements we need to survive and thrive as human beings.*

Read the following verses. Make a few notes under each one about the personal relationship God planned and pursues with you.

But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God. JOHN 1:12

I [Jesus] am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me. JOHN 10:14

I [Jesus] do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. JOHN 15:15

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" ROMANS 8:15

All joy has God's signature. If something reflects beauty, summons delight, kindles joy, inspires awe, or prompts you to worship, God can be celebrated as the Source of that joy. Even when we assume we are taking pleasure in something else, we are actually taking pleasure in God because He is the Source of any joy we experience in this life. St. Augustine famously said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee."⁵

PONDERING JOY

What is God saying to you in the Scripture passages and study content we covered in Part 1?

How will this change how you live in relationship with yourself, God, and/or other people?

PART

2



ILLUSIONARY JOY

In Part 1, we established the perfect picture of joy that existed in the garden at the beginning of creation. We also explored the special kind of relationship that God had with Adam and Eve within that picture of joy. As we wander further into Eve's story together, let's take note of the structure in the garden and in God's relationship with Adam and Eve that facilitated the fullest joy possible.

EMPOWERED BOUNDARIES

God doesn't control us as His creation. He empowers us to make choices. But neither does He give us total control, which is good news. As we will explore, joy is not found in unlimited, boundless freedom. It's found within boundaries. Often, when we consider the concept of boundaries, we are focused on looking for opportunities to say no. But in reality, healthy boundaries are not simply about learning to say no. Employing healthy boundaries means knowing when to say yes *and* when to say no.

As a Restoration Therapist, I adhere to the idea of “empowered boundaries” which includes holding boundaries that protect and promote self-efficacy but also keep us from extending our power to take responsibility for things that are not appropriate or belong to someone else.⁶ In essence, empowered boundaries invite us to take appropriate responsibility in areas that belong to us—to be good stewards in the areas of our lives in which God has given us agency and the freedom to make choices.

Open your Bible and read Genesis 2:15-17. What was the boundary God gave Adam?

REFLECT: How do you see this boundary of not being permitted to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as essential to Adam and Eve's flourishing and for their ultimate good?

As demonstrated in creation, only God can properly steward unlimited power and freedom, and the tree He placed in the garden was a reminder for the first humans of His “divine wisdom.”⁷ The limits on Adam and Eve’s power and freedom were as essential to their flourishing, as they are to ours. God knows we thrive when we rely on Him.

In his profound book, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*, psychologist Barry Schwartz explains, “When people have no choice, life is almost unbearable. As the number of available choices increases, as it has in our consumer culture, the autonomy, control, and liberation this variety brings are powerful and positive. But as the number of choices keeps growing, negative aspects of having a multitude of options begin to appear. As the number of choices grows further, the negatives escalate until we become overloaded. At this point, choice no longer liberates, but debilitates.”⁸

REFLECT: Reflecting on your own life, in what ways do boundaries feel like obstacles to your joy?

On the other hand, think of a boundary that has served as an avenue of joy in your life and list it below.

God is the Creator of joy. And like any artist or inventor, He wants us to know how to interact with His creation properly so that we can enjoy it as freely and fully as possible. Understanding each function and the rules of operation will allow us to enjoy the creation as it was intended and enjoy it to its full extent.

Now turn to Genesis 3 and slowly read this chapter. Underline or note the verses that focus on Eve.

Beyond the specific consequences God outlined in Genesis 3:16, how was Eve hurt by gaining the knowledge that comes from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What was the effect on her relationship with God?

The specific consequences (v. 16) for Eve's sin were destructive, but the ramifications of her actions beyond that were devastating. The relational consequence of eating fruit from the tree was separation from God. When Eve ate fruit from this tree, she crossed the loving boundary God had established, and it ruptured the unique, perfect relationship she enjoyed with God that we studied in Part 1. Then Adam ate, and the same happened to him.

Read the following verses. Below each verse, note what that text tells us about the better way God designed for us to relate to Him.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline. PROVERBS 1:7

Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. JAMES 1:5

Walk as children of light—for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—testing what is pleasing to the Lord. EPHESIANS 5:8b-10

True wisdom begins with fear of the Lord; it does not begin with becoming our own god! *It is in our dependence on God—not our independence from Him—that we grow in wisdom and are truly free.* God implemented a boundary around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because He knew that ultimately depending on Him for wisdom and not attempting to become our own god is how we can experience the fullest joy. Eve failed to trust God's boundary as an avenue of joy. And often we do too.

ILLUSIONARY JOY VS. AUTHENTIC JOY

Reread Genesis 3:1-7.

In this passage, we see Eve fall prey to the serpent's deceit, as we often do in our own lives. The enemy's questions cause her to doubt not only what she knows about the good character of God but also God's goodwill toward her as His child. She concludes that instead of offering her joy in abundance, God is holding out on her and does not actually have her best interests at heart. Instead of continuing to depend on God, she decides (falsely) that her peace and joy are more secure in the hands of her own control.

REFLECT: How have similar lies appeared in your own life? What lies has the enemy whispered about who you are, your value to God, the trustworthiness of God, or your security as His child?

Eve is the one woman in history who knew the perfect joy described in the first two chapters of Genesis. She wanted for nothing in her relationship with God and in her life in the garden of Eden. Yet, she traded this great joy for a lesser, illusionary joy.

Paul David Tripp says, “God intended us to be in awe of his creation, but that awe cannot and should not be an end in itself.”⁹ Illusionary joy sees the gift as an end itself. Therefore, an illusionary joy promises more satisfaction and delight than it can actually deliver. No gift can contain the splendor of the Giver, and every gift will ultimately leave us wanting.

Every day we trade authentic joy for illusionary joy as well. Illusionary joys may not be tangible things or obvious pleasures such as wealth, status, or comfort. They can also look like control, people pleasing, winning approval, belonging, or being right (to name just a few examples).

REFLECT: How have illusionary joys promised more than they have delivered in your life? Ultimately, why do these illusionary joys fall short?

Compare the following two passages. Put an “X” through the word in 1 Peter 5:8 that describes the enemy’s purpose. Then **circle** the phrase in John 10:10 that describes Jesus’s purpose for coming to earth.

Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. 1 PETER 5:8

A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance. JOHN 10:10

What the enemy wants for you and what God wants for you stand in direct opposition to one another, and it has been this way since the garden. **While Satan’s aim is destruction, God’s design and purpose for you is life to the fullest.** As the ESV Study Bible notes, “Jesus calls his followers, not to a dour, lifeless, miserable

existence that squashes human potential, but to a rich, full, joyful life, one overflowing with meaningful activities under the personal favor and blessing of God and in continual fellowship with his people.”¹⁰

Many of us have learned to see a relationship with God as opposing to our freedom and joy. But the reality is, taking God out of our joy leads to heartache. Doubting God’s character and desire for our goodness and joy leads to sin. Eve failed to trust that God is more of an advocate for our joy than we are. The boundaries we experience in this life (including our own limitations) are not barriers to our joy. Rather, they are meant to be avenues of freedom and joy in our lives. And every time we choose joy in Him over the illusionary joys of our world, we reflect His glory and love to those around us.

PONDERING JOY

What is God saying to you in the Scripture passages and study content we covered in Part 2?

How will this change how you live in relationship with yourself, God, and/or other people?

PART
3



GOD'S LOVING PURSUIT

Eve's story might seem like an unusual story to study as we begin our quest toward daring to embrace joy, but as my colleague often says, "You cannot change what you will not name." Understanding what is broken in us opens the door for restoration. We will celebrate the hope of our Savior to the extent that we are sorrowful about our sin. Frankly, grace isn't a gift that will bring us much joy if we don't first acknowledge how much we need it.

Open your Bible and read Ephesians 2:1-10. Describe in your own words the difference knowing Jesus makes in a person's life.

REFLECT: Why is understanding our sin and our pain an essential step toward ultimately embracing our joy?

The lies we have believed about our identity and safety and the ways in which we have reached for lesser joys in search of love and security are essential to identify and own if we are going to absorb the hope and joy described in Ephesians 2.

Dead. Selfish. Under wrath. Enslaved. This is who we were apart from Jesus. Owning this part of our story may be uncomfortable, but it ultimately prepares

our hearts to receive the greatest joy. *Alive. Beloved. Saved. Empowered.* This is who we are in Jesus, and it is cause for celebrating! Our reality is that even in our sin, especially in our sin, we are unconditionally loved by our heavenly Father. And where there is Jesus, there is joy.

Sometimes, though, we confuse celebratory joy with escape. We assume our celebration is nothing more than a practice that allows us to forget our troubles, at least for a little while. But in fact, the opposite is true, and this is something I want you to understand today and keep in mind as we progress through the study. *Rejoicing and celebrating is a practice that keeps us connected to the reality of God's presence and faithfulness in all seasons; it's not a practice that disconnects us from our troubles.*

Behaviors we employ to escape our relational, emotional, or mental tension or distress are a reaction to pain and do nothing but temporarily (and ineffectively) numb our wounds, leaving us no healthier than when we made our escape. Celebration, on the other hand, is an avenue of connection with other people, our own emotional experience, and God as we remember His faithfulness in the past and rejoice in His enduring goodness. Deeply engaging our reality—even grieving and lamenting it—forms a bridge for us from escape to celebration.

Now read Genesis 3:8-14. What is God's question to Adam and Eve in verse 9? What does this question indicate to us about how God responds to us in our sin?

God's question to Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit was not, "How could you?" It was, "Where are you?" God, the One who created them in His own image, pursued them in their sin. And God's pursuit didn't end with Adam and Eve. This same pursuit is a central theme throughout the entire biblical narrative and in your story and mine. Yet, in our sin, it can be easy to shame ourselves, and it's often hard for us to picture God's loving pursuit of us.



LET'S PRACTICE

Two questions I ask my clients when I want to help them understand how they are feeling in the context of their relationship with God are:

Where are you in the room?

Where is Jesus?

These questions offer both me and my clients insight into how they are feeling about themselves and how they feel about their position in their relationships with God and other people.

How would you answer these questions? In the space below, name and describe a scene of deep struggle in which you've been tempted to shame yourself. *Note: It could be a scene related to an addiction you've wrestled with for a while, anger you can't seem to control, a rupture in a relationship, a betrayal, a bad habit you can't seem to muscle your way out of, feelings about your significance that have felt as present as your own shadow, or words you've spoken and deeply regret. Don't feel limited by these examples. These are just a few ideas to get you thinking.*

Think about how you feel about yourself or in the context of your relationships and circumstances in the scenario you identified above. Now, if I asked you to describe how you feel and where you are in that scene, what would you say? What would your body posture look like? What is the expression on your face? Are you in the center of the room, exposed and eager for the embrace of God? Or are you in the corner, or behind a piece of furniture, hiding as Eve was compelled to do in Genesis 3? Take some time to describe how you see yourself in the scenes of your life where you've felt deep struggle.

Where am I in the “room” (the scene you previously described)?

Now, imagine Jesus entering that same scene you’ve described above. What is the expression on His face when He looks at you? What does His body posture look like? Do you imagine Him moving toward you, moving away, or staying still?

Where is Jesus in the “room”?

As you reflect on your descriptions in the previous questions, what does this say about how you relate your sin to the experience of joy?



But God, who is rich in
mercy, because of his
great love that he had
for us, made us alive with
Christ even though we
were dead in trespasses.
You are saved by grace!

EPHESIANS 2:4-5



Exercises like the one you just completed can stir a variety of emotions within us. This particular exercise was meant to be diagnostic. In other words, your answers are meant to hold up the mirror to how you are feeling. But I want to assure you that however you answered the previous questions, God pursues you with His love in your sin, just as He did with Eve. His question to you in the situation you pictured is not, “How could you?” but rather, “Where are you?”

Read each of the verses included below. Note how each describes the relationship between sin and joy for those who have put their trust in Jesus.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Blessed are those whose lawless acts are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the person the Lord will never charge with sin. ROMANS 4:7-8

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ROMANS 5:1

For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:22

An attempt to escape our pain only keeps us stuck and more deeply entrenched in the very pain we were trying to avoid. But naming our pain and confessing the unhealthy and unhelpful ways in which we have tried to manage it sets us on a path that leads to joy. As Eve discovered, taking God out of our joy leads to sin and heartache. But through confessing our sins to God and naming our pain, we can claim His truth as our own. Again, we will enjoy God's grace to the extent that we know that we need it.

Eve's story is just the beginning. After the garden, she and Adam bore the first children and generations tumbled forward from their lineage, none of whom would know the perfect joy she experienced with God. But even while they were still in the garden, we see a glimpse of the greatest joy—Jesus Himself (Gen. 3:15). And over the coming sessions, we'll chart a course together back to the abundant joy He longs for us to embrace.

PONDERING JOY

What is God saying to you in the Scripture passages and study content we covered in Part 3?

How will this change how you live in relationship with yourself, God, and/or other people?

CELEBRATING TODAY

Practicing thanksgiving is our way of celebrating with Jesus. Use the space below to express your gratitude to God by journaling, drawing, or praying about a specific way you're thankful for who He is and what He has done in your life. Ask Him to help you see yourself as He sees you, and celebrate the enduring joy that only He can give.

DISCUSS

Discuss the following questions with your Bible study group. A more extensive leader guide is available for free download at lifeway.com/daringjoy.

1

What stood out to you from your study and the video teaching?

2

Ask a few volunteers to read through Genesis 1. Then discuss the “joyful” verbs and phrases you noted in the question on page 16.

3

In the video, Nicole listed the four main ways that we cope or react to our pain: blame, shame, control, and escape. Which of these do you tend to gravitate toward? Why do you think that is?

4

Why do we so often think of boundaries as a no? Why do they feel restricting and limiting to us? And how does that go against God’s intention?

5

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Using the questions on page 30, discuss what these verses teach us about God’s loving pursuit of us. Use this passage to celebrate together God’s love for us and how He has changed our lives.