

**DEFINITION** **JOY**

**/JOI/**

a feeling of great pleasure and happiness; rejoice

**SCRIPTURE**

**Nehemiah 8:10**

Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

**BIG IDEA**

I was 18 years old kneeling by my bed with tears running down my face. The week had been hard and the pain was even greater. What I thought my first semester in college would be was far from reality. I was crammed in a small two bedroom room with 3 girls in the heart of LA. I was homesick and feeling so alone. Even though I was always around people, I never felt like I belonged. On top of all that I had injured my back and was in excruciating pain day and night. As I knelt there trying to make sense of it all I found myself in Nehemiah reading the verse that says, "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." I remember looking up to heaven with mascara running down my face and yelling at God "what does that mean the joy of the Lord is my strength?" I continued in my whining, "I don't feel very joyful right now."

In that moment God taught me a lesson I will never forget. He revealed to me, in the most loving yet stern way, that happiness is based on circumstance, but JOY is found in Him. I realized that even though my current circumstances were sorrowful, I didn't have to allow them to steal my joy and strength. My pain and disappointment didn't have to take front and center in my life. I had to remind myself in that moment that what I focus on is what I will fuel. I decided that I wouldn't focus on my circumstances anymore; I focused on Jesus, and from that moment on, my relationship with Jesus became—and has remained—the source of my joy.

In John 15:9-11 we see that joy is a byproduct of our choice to love and obey Him. Jesus gave us the secret to being marked by JOY! He shared with us that it's His joy in us, and it's that joy in us that makes us complete. The secret to having a life marked by joy is not in having ideal or perfect circumstances, nor does it mean we won't encounter sadness and disappointment. The secret is in allowing Jesus to fill our heart with His presence. The psalmist sums it up perfectly in Psalm 16:11, "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

## CONVERSATION

1. Discuss or jot down the difference between being happy and having joy.

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2. Ponder on this recipe for JOY:

Jesus

Others

Yourself

Ask yourself, am I most joyful when I put Jesus first, others second, and myself third?  
Share why or why not?

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WEEK 7

MARKED BY JOY



3. In the lesson it says “what you focus on you will fuel.” What things are you focusing on right now? Is it fueling joy or disappointment?

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## TAKE AWAY

Your days might feel like they're equal parts roses and thorns, sunshine and storms, but no matter your circumstances we must remember this: through Christ's hardest moment, He never lost sight of you. In Hebrews 12:2 it says “for the joy set before Him He endured the cross.” That joy set before Him was you. In His darkest moments, you were on his mind. You brought joy to His weary soul. Your life was worth Him surrendering His own. You were the one that He was thinking of when He rose from the grave. In turn, when you are facing your hardest trials, keep your eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of your faith. When the world paints a false picture of what happiness is, remind yourself that pure joy is birthed through trials (James 1:2-4). In His presence is the fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). Take time today to get in God's presence, and let him fill you with joy and strength. And remember that “weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.” (Ps 30:5 NLT).

