

DISCOVERING JOY
HOME GROUP STUDY SERIES



June - July 2015

FGA MELBOURNE
LEADER'S NOTES

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OVERVIEW – Leaders Copy

DISCOVERING JOY

Series Summary

Series passage: *"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."* Philippians 1:3-6

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISCOVERING JOY SERIES

"How do we find Joy?"

Have you ever lost your joy, or met someone who is without joy? Every moment becomes a struggle, self-pity engulfs your thoughts and even everyday tasks can seem too much. Joy is so essential to human flourishing that millions of dollars, and countless lives are spent on the pursuit of things that bring joy. Finding someone or that special something that can bring about joy can change your whole perspective on life and give you something to live for. So we search. Every single one of us... searches for joy.

Our world is focussed on selling us ideas or things that bring us pleasure and joy. This can be as simple as learning to cook or sing in a choir, pursuing success in sport or a career, finding your perfect match, getting rich, or even indulging sin can often be pleasurable before the consequences of our actions kick in. Because pleasure and joy are so essential to our well being it's fundamental that we understand what brings us true lasting joy, not just momentary pleasure. There is a huge difference between the two, and knowing this will help us to invest our time and resources wisely. We all want to be successful, so let's invest in things that build up and benefit, not into things that do not last, or worse case, things we will end up paying for heavily in the end.

2015 Anchor Verse

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

We can see from our 2015 anchor verse, Jesus himself was not dependent on circumstances, people's opinions or feelings for His joy. His joy was founded in something greater and more stable. His desire to see that joy fulfilled was so intense that it enabled Him to endure the cross.

This series points us to look to Jesus, to see Christ formed in us. We will do this by taking an in-depth look at the Book of Philippians, written by Apostle Paul. He was someone who, despite his dire situation as a prisoner in a Roman jail, had a life that overflowed with joy. We need to discover his secret to joy. This joy that is enduring and motivating. Let us find the keys to finish the race and work towards bringing about the complete of God's good work in you.

Related words: Joy • Success • Perseverance • Single-minded • Christlikeness • Contentment

FAITH Emphasis: This is a teaching series covers the whole F.A.I.T.H. spectrum.

LEADING THE SERIES

This is our first home group series written and compiled as a collaborative effort – FGAM's Founding Pastor Roland Seow, Michael Ting who leads our 1830s ministry, our Founding Elder Peggy Ong and our Youth Pastor Ruth Larion. Not only did they write the material but their messages have been recorded for the home group video sessions. Furthermore, each will be sharing a message for the Sunday services as part of the Discovering Joy preaching series running through until the end of July. This exemplifies the Household of FAITH that we aspire to be, as each person brings their own unique perspective on the Philippians passages.

Specifically through this Discovering joy series we aim to articulate:

1. Anchoring our Joy on the right thing
2. Perspectives on success
3. How to live a joyous life irrespective of our circumstances
4. Keys to persevering

SERIES OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Each session in this series looks at a passage in the book of Philippians looking, with a focus on Discovering Joy in our lives.

Session Title	Main Point
Session 1: A Miraculous Life	The real miracle is the ongoing work God is doing in your life.
Session 2: The Key to Eternal Joy	Discovering the joy of the Lord
Session 3: "Press On"	Looking forward
Session 4: Contentment	Contentment is a learned by adopting an eternal perspective

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The accompanying DVD for this Discovering Joy series is available from the church office. Also, online streaming and is available at <http://www.fgam.org.au/#/leaders/home-group-videos>. Member handouts are available at <http://www.fgam.org.au/#/leaders/home-group-notes>

If you are unable to access the files or DVD, or need assistance with printing notes, please let us know. We are more than happy to get hard copies to you. Simply contact megan.griffith@fgam.org.au (0422 284 404) or yc.goh@fgam.org.au (0425 799 576) and we will ensure that you get it.

The DISCOVERING Home Group series will be augmented by:

- The "Discovering Joy" preaching series at FGA Sunday Services for 6 weeks, from 24 May to 28 July 2015. Sermons are available online <http://fgam.org.au/#/media>
- Leadership Podcasts for the "Philippians" series has an extended message from each of the passages and is available at <http://www.fgam.org.au/-/leaders/leadership-podcast>.
- An excellent commentary on Philippians is "Be Joyful" by Warren W. Wiersbe (Victor Books)

DISCOVERING JOY – Leaders Copy

Session 1: A Miraculous Life

What miraculous work is God doing in your life?

Key passage: "And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6, ESV)

A. Introduction and Purpose of the Session

Welcome to the first session of the Discovering Joy series. Before you launch into the series with your home group, it's really important to have everyone realise of just how important joy is to our lives. Everyone searches for joy in life. We spend a lot of time and money on seeking joy. The fuel for consumerism is based on the premise that things will bring joy, going one step back we see the financial sector relies on the dream of rich with the belief that money brings security or status which brings peace of mind or joy. However, it is clear that this is not the case. True joy is found elsewhere.

Therefore, this series is not designed to be a competitive feel-good series to lift us up for a night or even a season, rather it is a series that aims to help us orient our thinking and our life towards the things that bring true and lasting joy to our lives. This way we will spend less energy and resources on the things that we think will bring joy and more into the things that will actually give us joy. It is hard to convey how vital it is for all of us to get it right.

Joy and pleasure are two different things. Pleasure gives us a momentary high, whereas joy is something that lasts and is independent of our circumstances. Joy is attainable for all as it's the promise of God and is one of the fruits (or signs) of the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of this session is to introduce the series Discovering Joy, our study of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. In this session we want to explore the history of the Philippian church to which Paul is writing. This will give us a much needed context for the entire letter to the Philippians. We are given an account of how this church was founded in Acts 16 and the miraculous way in which God moved in the lives of people from a range of backgrounds to bring them into God's kingdom. We will then discuss how this applies in our lives - what is the miraculous work that God is or has been doing in your life?

FORMAT FOR SESSION ONE

This is a suggested format for the session.

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer2. Welcome3. Play Series Intro video4. Play Session Video5. Read Scripture6. Summarise Main Point7. Open for discussion8. Application and Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome2. Play Series Intro video3. Play Session Video4. Discuss one question5. Summarise Main Point6. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Videos (Series Introduction 2:53; Session 1 5:50)

This first video session looks at the founding of the Philippian Church. The major points of the this video are:

1. Paul is writing to the Philippians from prison
2. How the Philippian church was founded
3. Joy is when we have a sense of the miraculous work God is doing in our lives.

B. Scripture Readings: Acts 16, Philippians 1:1-11

Background to the passage:

Paul first came to Philippi and founded the church around 49 AD while on his second missionary journey. At the time Philippi was a regional centre and a military outpost acting as a thoroughfare between the Roman Empire and Asia. The account of how the church in Philippi was founded is described in Acts 16. While only 40 verses long, the chapter recounts three key interactions that Paul and Silas experience which are foundational to the founding of the church in Philippi.

The epistle to the Philippians is written approximately 10-15 years later while Paul himself is under house arrest in Rome. In the opening verses we see Paul greeting the church in Philippi to let them know how he was getting on while imprisoned and to encourage them to continue the good work that had begun with them all those years ago.

C. Main point

The real miracle is the ongoing work God is doing in your life

It's easy to read about the founding of the Philippian church in Acts 16 and marvel at the miracles that God was doing in the lives of those in Philippi, particularly the story of how the slave girl is delivered and how the jail is broken open by an earthquake, which led to the salvation of the jailer. Indeed, we tend to marvel at miracles that we hear about in the news or over the pulpit. But we often forget about the real miraculous work that God is doing in all of our lives on a daily basis, the fruits of which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

After reading the passages, do you think that Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer changed overnight to become saints? Probably not. I imagine the Lydia the rich businesswoman would have still struggled with pride and having to deal with non-professional people from other walks of life. I imagine the slave girl would have had issues with trust and self-worth that would take a long time to work through. And I imagine that the jailer would have had some rough edges and an abrasive personality that would need to be tempered over time.

We should take time to marvel at the miraculous work that God is doing in all our lives. What a joy it is that Christ is shaping and moulding us even right now as we discuss this topic. This is probably one of the reasons Paul can go through all his suffering and persecution and still find joy, because he knows that the real miracle of transformation is still being lived out in his own life.

D. Discussion Questions

1. How did you come to accept Christ into your life? (Optional: you can also talk about how the Home Group started, and how each person came to the home group)

Answer Guide: This is an introductory question which will lead into and contrast with the lives of the three that are mentioned in Acts 16 as Paul sets up the church in Philippi. Let your group discuss the ways they came to know Christ. If your group already know each other well and have shared their testimonies before, this can be optional. If there are new visitors (since it is a new series), this will help everyone to get to know each other and get a context for the home group.

If there are non-Christians present, you can just ask them to share their journey – either how they came to the home group, or how they came to the country or how they met some of the people in the home group.

2. Read Acts 16 (specifically Acts 16:11-15, Acts 16:16-18, Acts 16:25-34). How were Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer ministered to and saved? How was Joy discovered or what gave them Joy?

Answer Guide: It might be a good idea to break your group up into teams (or if your group is small just teams of one) where each team looks into one of Lydia, the Slave Girl or the Jailer. Each team can then read the passage, and then put themselves into the passage to explore what it must have been like at the point of conversion. What led them into joy should be a question you are asking.

Each person was living a life that lacked. It's important for your home group to explore that lack.

Lydia is converted as she is taught the truth through Paul's words, the slave girl is converted through deliverance (note: it isn't directly said that she was converted) and the jailer is converted when he sees the example that Paul and Silas set by not fleeing when the jail is broken open. God did miraculous works in the lives of these three but presumably also many others in setting up the church at Philippi. As Acts 16:40 refers to other brothers that they encouraged before leaving, it is highly likely that others came to accept Christ through their testimony.

3. In the introduction to Philippians, Paul is addressing these three (and others) as he writes to the church. What does he mean when he says: "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (1:6)?

Answer Guide: While keeping in the same teams, continue the exploration of these three characters. Explore what would have developed in the lives of Lydia, the Slave Girl or the Jailer as God continued the "good work" in them.

Read Acts 16 again and ponder, as Paul did, that the acts that brought Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer to salvation were miraculous. But understand the real miraculous work is the continuing work that God is doing in and through their lives. If those three are still participating in the Philippian church and growing more Christ-like every day, and the day they meet God face to face they will look back and see that the real miracle wasn't the moment they were saved, but the journey and the fruits of pursuing Christ whole-heartedly that saw God change lives through them and their ministry.

4. What is the miraculous work that God is doing in your life? How does that bring you joy?

Answer Guide: Take this question as a time for you to hear testimonies of personal transformation in your home group. A lot times we don't know about the ongoing work that God is doing in other people's lives. We just see the finished (or almost finished) product, and we skip right past how far God has taken us.

This brings the discussion back to our lives and the miraculous (and continuing) work that God is doing in and through us. Explore what this looks like and how we can start to take joy in being the vessel through which God orchestrates His will. There are many avenues to explore, some examples are: the ministries we are involved in, the ways God has shaped and moulded us over time, how God uses our testimonies to save and encourage others.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

If we allow Him to, God will do a miraculous work in our lives over time, transforming us and subsequently also those who interact with us.

E. Application and prayer

Pray with the group. Spend time praying for those who really need a touch of God's power or miracle to resolve a situation they are struggling with at the moment. Encourage one another with the promise that God will not stop working in your life just as Paul promised the Philippians (1:6).

F. Looking Forward

Next session we look at key to eternal joy as we study Philippians 1:12-25 with Ps. Roland Seow.

DISCOVERING JOY – Leaders Copy

Session 2: The Key to Eternal Joy

For me to live is Christ

Key passage: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

One of the constant challenges in life is not to live for ourselves, but to live for Christ. This is our true source of joy (Heb 12:2). When we look at the Philippian church we see they were much the same, living for themselves and yielding to their flesh, doing things out of a spirit envy, rivalry or competition and selfishness. Paul, however, shows that he is not concerned with such matters and, in fact, takes a very different tact.

Paul’s life is constantly spurring others to advance the good news that Jesus Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. So he exhorts the Philippian church to live fully for Christ and to understand the key to attaining true joy now and eternally. This session will challenge us to do likewise.

FORMAT FOR SESSION TWO

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer2. Welcome3. Play Session Video4. Read Scripture5. Summarise Main Point6. Open for discussion7. Application and Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome2. Play Session Video3. Summarise Main Point4. Discuss one question5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Two Video (6:32 minutes)

This second video session looks at living with the right focus. The major points of the this video are:

1. Is our goal to look for true lasting happiness in things or in our relationship in Christ?
2. The things that happened to Paul made for deep lasting joy, not superficial pleasure.
3. What is our first love? What is our motivation?
4. Discovering true fulfilment

B. Scripture passage: Philippians 1:12-25 (NKJV)

*“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. **For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am*

hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith"

Background to the passage:

Paul wrote this letter as a prisoner in Rome. As the most strategic city in the ruling Empire, it was a place in which he longed to preach (Acts 19:21; Rom 1:15). Paul realised if the gospel could be established in Rome, then its potential to spread organically throughout the empire was guaranteed. However, instead of going to Rome as a preacher, he went as a prisoner. Rather than be disheartened Paul had the capacity to see that this was God's plan – not for his personal comfort but for the furtherance of the gospel – to the authorities and all the palace guard. Paul had the experience to realise that although he was in chains, the Word of God is never bound (2 Tim 2:9).

The story recounting what happened to Paul before arriving at Rome is described in Acts 21:17 to 28:31. It began with an illegal arrest in Jerusalem, followed by two years imprisonment in Caesarea. As a Roman Citizen he had the legal right to appeal to the Emperor and was eventually brought to Rome for trial. On the way he was shipwrecked and could have easily died in Malta (Acts 27). To the natural mind, Paul could have been considered a failure. To the contrary this was all part of God's plan, and he knew Paul could handle it.

C. Main Point

"For Me to Live is Christ" – All in for Christ

Paul discovered the key to meaningful and real living - it is not in things or lifestyle but in a vibrant relationship with the person of Jesus Christ and serving His purpose. Paul discovered that this is what life is all about. Paul could have had a comfortable life on earth or better still in heaven but he chose to suffer persecution and tribulation for the sake of the church and the advancement of the gospel. His main motivation and delight in life is to see Christ honoured in everything he does.

What a man of God! What a sold-out servant and prisoner of the Lord. No wonder Paul was so mightily used and blessed with an abundance of revelation and anointing from God. We often want what the apostle Paul had but we're not willing to follow his path or be prepared to pay the price for it.

Most of us want the best of both worlds but end up not really enjoying anything. We can't straddle the fence and expect a rich spiritual life without full commitment to Christ. It's like wanting to have a great relationship with your spouse but at the same time flirting with others. This doesn't mean we can't enjoy our life on earth. Jesus taught us to love our neighbour as ourselves. We don't need to be taught how to love ourselves. Paul's priority is not about self but about Christ and his kingdom. A self-seeking person will never find fulfilment because true fulfilment is found only in Christ.

It was the joy of seeing us redeemed from hell that enabled Jesus to endure the cross and finish His mission on earth. Jesus' and Paul's life on earth were fully lived out serving the purpose of God and not themselves. Paul in this passage gives us the key to eternal pure joy.

D. Discussion Questions

1. Read Philippians 1:12-18. How did God use Paul's "chains" to advance the gospel? Why was Paul not upset that people were preaching Christ out of envy and rivalry? How would you respond?

Answer guide: When you have a single-minded focus, you look on your critics as another opportunity for the furtherance of the gospel. Everything in Paul's life served to advance the gospel, even the bad things. That was his perspective.

Paul was never small minded but lived with the big picture of wanting people saved by whatever means and grow in truth and knowledge of God's kingdom. That's why he said that he has become all things to all men that he might by all means save some (see 1 Cor 9:19-23). To him, the gospel being preached was the most important thing in his life as heaven and hell are real eternal entities.

God works all things together for good to those who love Him and follow His purpose (Rom 8:28) even when things are done wrongly. God sees our hearts but above all, His plans for the world will eventually be fulfilled. The world needs the gospel so badly and the more the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached the better it is.

2. What does the phrase “for me to live is Christ” mean? Take time in your group to discuss this in their own words without Christian “clichés”

Answer guide: A good analogy for the answer is:

“Eat to Live” vs “Live to Eat” – there are a lot of people who eat food (most people) but some people really like their food!

There’s a real difference between people who engage in Christian activity (eat to live) and then there are those whose life revolves around Christ (live to eat). Take some time to talk about this difference. Remember that it is very hard to tell based on EXTERNAL indicators (so we must be careful not to judge). Ultimately, we are trying to get your whole home group to do that evaluation on themselves (not others). Paul used every set back and obstacle for the extension of the gospel as that was his Joy.

In Christ we find our purpose. Many people are so task or goal oriented that they miss out on their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, our Lord, Saviour, advocate and friend. When we live for Christ and not for fulfilling tasks, we become more people oriented and have a greater sense of compassion. God gave His only begotten Son because He so loved the world (John 3:16). What we do should always be motivated by a heart of love and compassion and not just for the sake of getting things done and boxes ticked. This is why God gave us the two greatest commandments of love – loving God and our neighbour, as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Many Christians miss the point of ministry because they hurt so many people around them in the process of reaching their goals for the Lord.

3. In the video, Ps. Roland talks about the issue of wanting to have a great relationship with your spouse while at the same time flirting with others. There needs to be some exclusivity when it comes to our Joy in Christ. What does that entail for our lives?

Answer guide: Please be a bit careful with this question. It’s very easy to quickly conclude that we are asking how to remove all other “fun” or “joyful” things in our lives ... implying that we all need to be monks – daily living to pray and remove ourselves from the world. Please don’t allow the home group to go in that direction as that is not the intent of the question, nor is it in view in Philippians.

Think of it this way. Does all outside happiness and joy disappear when you get married? (haha .. maybe some people shouldn’t answer that question ☺) No. There’s room for many things in life, and things are made even sweeter when sharing it with your spouse. But, it is also important to note that being married does mean some level of exclusivity. Exclusivity in affections, intimacy and desire as well as exclusivity in some areas of time, money (e.g. How many people share your bank account?) etc.

This is an important topic to talk about, because there are a lot of things that pull us away, and that can subtly replace the Joy that is supposed to belong to Christ.

To balance the discussion, ask ... “How do you (yourself) check that your own Joy is daily found in Christ”?

Ps. Roland asks the question, “where is the pressure in your life? ... is it pulling you closer to Christ or away from Him.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

"It does not matter how great the pressure is. What really matters is where the pressure lies -- whether it comes between you and God, or whether it presses you nearer His heart."

James Hudson Taylor

E. Application and Prayer

This week, take time to commune with Jesus individually and ask Him to be the centre of all you do and desire. Ask Him to help you see Him in everything you do, such as in your interaction with your boss, colleagues, friends and family members and even in your school or work projects. How can He guide you in your attitudes and conversation throughout the week?

"Dear Heavenly Father, please re-orientate my perspective on the various aspects of my life so that whatever comes from my heart comes from a genuine interaction and relationship with Jesus. Please change my lenses so that I can see Christ more clearly and love Him more dearly day by day. May Jim Elliot's famous quote, 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose' ring louder and clearer in my mind each day, in Jesus' Name. Amen" is a suggested prayer.

F. Looking Forward

Next session we look at the keys to pressing on in our walk with Christ, through studying the passage Philippians 3:12-16, led by our Founding Elder Peggy Ong.

DISCOVERING JOY – Leaders Copy

Session 3: Press On

Persevering – the Single-Minded Pursuit of Christ

Key passages:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2, ESV)

"For me to live is Christ, to die is gain (Christ!)" (Philippians 1:21, ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

In this session we will learn from Apostle Paul the key for his amazing joy in the midst of suffering and imprisonment, by examining his life's goal to "gain Christ" (fully) and his single-minded, persevering mind-set to attain this goal.

Paul realised that Christ had taken hold of him on the road to Damascus and that he must now take hold of Christ's purpose for him and in so doing, he will "press on" until he has attained this purpose and the heavenward goal set before him. He was determined not be distracted or deterred by looking back, but will race like a well-trained and focussed athlete straining towards the finish line to win the prize of Christ Himself (see Phil 1:21).

Many Christians believe that they have 'arrived' when they made their first decision to accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. In reality, when we accept Christ, that is only the start of the race set before us by Him; we are to **endure, persevere and 'press on'** until our dying breath, to 'take hold' of the purpose for which He had first apprehended/saved us. Unless we realise this, we will be stuck at the starting line of the race and not attain the goal of our salvation.

Born-again disciples of Christ must run and keep running hard with zeal and passion, undistracted and undeterred by our past (be it failures, disappointments, achievements or successes) towards God's purpose for his/her life to fully attain Christ upon our death and resurrection. By being single-minded we will experience the deep joy that Paul writes about throughout the book of Philippians.

FORMAT FOR SESSION THREE

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer2. Welcome3. Play Session Video4. Read Scripture5. Summarise Main Point6. Open for discussion7. Application and Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome2. Play Session Video3. Summarise Main Point4. Discuss One Question5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Three Video (7:26 minutes)

This third session video, presented by Elder Peggy Ong, talks about things we need to realise to successfully journey with Christ. The main points of the first session are:

1. Our journey begins with salvation and continues until we die. Salvation is the start not the arrival of our Christian walk in God's eyes.
2. As we realise that Christ first took hold of us, so we respond to Him by "Pressing On".
3. Do we know the purpose for which Christ took hold of us? Or the season we are in now?
4. We need a heavenward goal to "Press On" to.

B. Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:12-16

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but **I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me**. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **I press on toward the goal** to win the prize for which God has called me **heavenward in Christ Jesus**. All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Background to the passage:

Earlier on in Chapter 3 (3:1-11), Apostle Paul defended his theology that 'circumcision of the flesh,' cynically referred to as "*mutilation of the flesh*" – a requirement of the Old Covenant law – was not essential for the Christ follower (3:2). He had used his own personal testimony for the defence. If anyone should have reason for holding confidence in the law, Paul said he was eminently qualified. He was a "Hebrew of Hebrews," a Pharisee (the religious sect that prided themselves in their superior knowledge and pursuit of the law), and on account of his zeal for the law, had persecuted the church. He had considered himself "blameless" in terms of righteousness under the law (3:1-6).

Yet, Paul now recognised that compared to Jesus Christ, all these 'superior' credentials under the law counted for nothing, in fact counted as "*dung*" to him (3:8). God deems true righteousness as that which is derived only from faith in Christ, not from the self-attained righteousness (or religious acts) of a person. His blamelessness under the law therefore did nothing for him and was counted as worthless rubbish compared to the true path to God that is, "*to know Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings.*" (3:10).

C. Main point

Press On!

Paul was absolutely determined that by "*any means possible*" he will pursue Christ, following after Him in death (to self, whilst living) and in attaining resurrection (after his death) to 'gain Christ' fully. That was his life's single-minded goal! This explains clearly why Paul's main point of the passage (3:12-16) is to "*Press On!*"

Paul starts off in the passage by saying that he has yet to attain "*this*," referring to his life-goal of Christ Himself. Nevertheless, until he does (ultimately, upon his death) he will "**press on**" like any intense athletic racerunner – single-mindedly straining with every fibre of his body toward this ONE goal!

Paul writes "**press on**" twice in this passage:

- (i) Paul will press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him (v 12).
Christ had taken the first step/initiative to take hold of Paul. Paul had not sought Christ; on the contrary he was persecuting Christ even as he persecuted His church (see Acts 9:4,5). Now, in turn, Paul will press on to take hold of 'that', the purpose for which Christ Jesus had apprehended Paul.
- (ii) Paul will press on towards the heavenward goal in Christ Jesus, for which God has called him (v 14)
Paul's life-goal is a "*heavenward*," not an earthly one. He looked forward to the city whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10). And he urges the people of God to "*seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God*" (Col 3:1).

All Christians who want to become mature or consider themselves mature are to join and imitate Paul in this, his single-minded and persevering mindset (3:17). I am sure it is a challenge to every one of us.

D. Discussion Questions

1. “Not that I have already obtained” says Paul. Why isn’t everything completed and done when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour?

Answer Guide: Please take the time to carefully balance justification and sanctification with your home group. You may need to have a proper discussion about the difference (Covered in depth last year during our TWINE series on the book of John). It’s important to note that everything IS completed as soon as Christ becomes our Lord and Saviour. However, there’s more to it than that.

A good analogy is (again) marriage. When you get married, (in the eyes of God, the country and your relatives) you are COMPLETELY married; nothing else needs to be done. However, who can say that that’s all there is?? It’s just the beginning of the journey. You married to spend all of life together (for better or for worse, to love and cherish etc.)

Focus on the orientation on our walk with God as a good parallel between our closest and dearest relationships. There’s always a need to “Press On” and pursue ...

2. Do you know why Christ had saved you? What do you believe is the purpose of your life in Christ from that time till you die and meet Him face to face?

Answer Guide: There are two purposes for our life as born-again people of God.

1. There is the **general** will or purpose of God for our lives.
We are created in Christ Jesus (more aptly, recreated born-again followers of Christ) so as to bring Him glory by how we live (Isaiah 43:7, Matt 5:16) and as we progressively reflect the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Furthermore, we were created to bring Him delight (Phil 2:12,13; Rev 4:11(KJV); Ps 149:4; Ps 37:4). John Piper quoting the American revivalist, Jonathan Edwards, said that God’s greatest delight is when His people delight in Him! When we genuinely delight in time spent with Him, in obeying His commands, and in serving Him and His Kingdom mission, we bring the greatest pleasure to Christ our Lord and Saviour! In turn we receive his joy.
2. Second, there is the **specific** will or purpose for our life for 'such a time as this.'
For every season of our lives, wherever we are and in whatever role we are placed in presently, Christ has a specific purpose for us. We need to seek out that purpose and fulfil it – the purpose for us at any one time is the function of our present calling, capabilities/gifting(s) and the opportunity(s) available to us to serve Him. This specific purpose can and will change as these factors interact dynamically at different seasons of our life. Hence, a full-time mother of several young kids may be unable to fully utilise her gift-set to fulfil her perceived calling to be a teaching pastor or missionary but when her kids are grown-up she is now positioned to fulfil this purpose. Until then, the purpose of her life is to be a great mother to the kids given her by God for their godly upbringing.

3. How does “Pressing On” help us to Discover Joy? What kinds of things can we do to “Press On”?

Answer Guide: Hint. Reflect on verses 13-14. We are to set our minds on the ‘heavenward’ (not earthly) goal ahead of us and to forget the distracting past - the failures and disappointments, the achievements and successes - but to “press on” with single-minded determination to reach the finish line, to attain Christ, fully.

Again to use the analogy of a good marriage: Couples are most fulfilled (and joyful) when each person pursues and presses on to work on the relationship. Sure, there’s a lot of hard work and lots of giving, sacrifice as well as doing a bunch of things that are for the sake of the other person. However, ultimately it leads to a joyful marriage. When little effort is expended into the marriage, it shrivels and the joy it can bring diminishes ... sometimes until it can be a complete burden and a source of sadness.

Our Christian walk can be like that. If we slide into comfort in our relationship with Christ, ultimately, there is no Joy to be found. Take time to discuss practical things we can do to work on our relationship with our greatest and closest friend in life!

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

At times, in the midst of life's struggles, we are all are tempted to give up or not care any more as it just gets 'too much'. Realise that that this time of difficulty is just for a season and open yourself to others you can share with share with who will pray for you and help you along the way. By doing so you will finish the race well. This is what living as a Household of Faith is all about.

E. Application and prayer

See if you can memorise verse 12. "*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*"

Reflect: As long as we live we have not achieved the things God has for us. Write down one thing that God is asking you to do, that requires you to press on to get it done.

In pairs, take turns to share and pray with the other person.

F. Looking Forward

Next session we will look at the keys to contentment with our Youth Pastor, Ruth Larion, as we study the passage Phil 4:10-13.

DISCOVERING JOY – Leaders Copy

Session 4: Learned Contentment

Seeking our true identity

Key passage: *"Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."* (Philippians 4:11, ESV)

A. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

The key to finding contentment (and lasting joy) is closely associated with how we see ourselves, our identity. If we do not feel valued by others (or even ourselves) it is virtually impossible know God's peace, and we will never find lasting contentment.

We know that winning and success brings joy, but failure and trials can quickly rob us of that joy. Learned contentment comes from really understanding the perspective of success from God's point of view. In this session we will see what success looks like, and how Paul found contentment.

It is easier to be a Christian at some times than others. Circumstances sometimes conspire to bring us closer to the Lord and sometimes to edge us away from Him. These circumstances did not deter Paul as he found that in all circumstances good and bad, he has learnt how to be content. In this session we will explore how he had learnt how to be content in all situations because he measured success by staying faithful to and aligning with God's purpose. We will discuss how we can likewise do the same.

This is probably one of the biggest challenges in life, to see our contentment in Christ alone, rather than seeking significance in what we do. Encourage your members to be really honest with themselves this session and pray that the Holy Spirit will do a deep work in your hearts.

FORMAT FOR SESSION FOUR

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer2. Welcome3. Play Session Video4. Read Scripture5. Summarise Main Point6. Open for discussion7. Application and Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome2. Play Session Video3. Summarise Main Point4. Discuss one question5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Four Video (6:52 minutes)

This final video session presented by Pastor Ruth Larion covers the following points:

1. Summary of the passage
2. Ruth's personal testimony of finding contentment
3. What does success look like in every season
4. Having a healthy perspective on life

B. Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:10-13

Background to the passage:

In this part of the epistle, Paul is thanking the Philippian church for gifts that he has been sent (4:10). While he is grateful, and uses this example as a way of encouraging Christian giving, he also uses this opportunity to speak of the manner in which he gains contentment in all his situations – which is not related to material wealth or personal gain.

Remembering back to the founding of the Philippian church in Acts 16, in the span of two days Paul goes from being pampered at Lydia's house to being locked up in jail. If you read about Paul's journey after he meets God on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19) it is similarly full of ups and downs. So Paul is writing with the authority of life experience when he says in Philippians 4:12 "*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*"

C. Main point

Contentment can be learned

The verse "*I can do all this through him who gives me strength*" (4:13), is often taken out of context to mean that Christ will give you the means to do things that would otherwise not be possible. While in a sense, that can be true, it does not necessarily mean that tomorrow you will wake up and win an Olympic gold medal, compose a symphony or start the next Google. Rather, Paul is referring to the verses immediately prior, where he speaks of being in need and being in plenty. He is saying that in any given life circumstance, Christ strengthens him to get through it. Not only to get through it, but to find contentment in the midst of those situations.

Paul had learnt to be content by focusing on what matters to God most. One of the key things to note is that Paul had to learn to be content, it wasn't something that happened to him in an instant. By adopting an eternal perspective the things of this world and the circumstances we find ourselves in simply pale in comparison. It didn't matter to Paul that he was in prison if it meant he was able to minister to his captors. It didn't matter that he faced an uncertain future as his security was founded in the salvation he had found in the Lord.

So how do we live our lives and in all circumstances learn to be content in the same way Paul has done? First, we need to understand that it is a process that will take a long time, but that by integrating things into our lives that teach us more about God and His perspective (prayer, meditating on the Word, and helping others) we can slowly begin to learn how to, at all times, we can be content.

D. Discussion Questions

1. How did Paul find contentment? (Or: How did Paul define success?)

Answer Guide: Paul went through really good times and really bad times. Take time to explore the passage and do some discussion on Paul's life. Bring out the fact that DISCONTENTMENT can occur both in people who are very successful (they want more) and those who have failed (they want something different)

Paul defined success (and found contentment) when he adopted God's eternal perspective. When the winning of souls is more important than the winning of accolades and the prospering of the Kingdom is more important than the prospering of your empire, you are starting to adopt God's eternal perspective. Paul wasn't concerned if he died (he knew he had eternal life) as long as Christ was glorified.

2. How can we "learn" to be content in our own lives?

Answer Guide: This is a time you can get your group to discuss current situations in their own lives where they may be struggling to find joy. Perhaps sit on this question for a while, and just take time to share and talk about your life. We are at the end of the series, and whether we realise it or not, we can ALL anchor our Joy on other things (besides Christ). Common areas that we rely on for Joy are:

- 1. Circumstances: "we can only be happy if things go well"*
- 2. People: "I need that person in order to be happy"*
- 3. Things: "shopping is now the world's No. 1 tourism/holiday activity" (World Tourism Organization)*
- 4. Worry: "holding onto things that God has in His hands"*

A huge component of this question is listening and allowing people to talk. After the sharing, you can then ask how can we learn to adopt and find joy in God's eternal perspective in both times of trial and times of celebration?

3. How do you balance contentment and ambition? Is Paul encouraging us to just settle down and not have any drive?

Answer Guide: There's a possibility that some in your home group will write off the whole series as irrelevant to their lives because it doesn't fit with their cultural expectations. In particular, for today's session, you might get some who are never content in life... and have now come to believe that this lack of contentment is necessary for all of life to function. After all it drives consumerism, the economy, the pursuit of knowledge, personal development and growth etc.

Take time in your home group to talk through it carefully.

Dissect the difference between a person who pursues ambitious things (knowledge, a better life, progress, personal development) due to a LACK or DISCONTENTMENT in life vs a person who "PRESSES ON" forward in Christ. The latter is done out a place of liberty and fulfilment and wholeness. This is an important distinction and needs to be processed if your home group members are to discover the Joy that is in view.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

A Christian life is not always easy, but in all situations we can learn to be content by understanding the things that are important to God and focussing on them. As we do this we experience the joy and pleasure of God through the Holy Spirit.

E. Application and Prayer

Suggest that each person some time praying before God asking what they are pursuing to find contentment. Should any of these be let go of in order to spend the time and energy pursuing things that bring true contentment and are successes in God's eyes? If your way is not working, try another.

Ask for God's peace and strength to successfully navigate through whatever season you are in, "plenty or in want" and help you to pursue Christ. By doing so you will experience the source of true contentment and joy.