



Celebrate Every Day | Pastor Stan Simmons | August 8, 2010

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat, perhaps offering coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray, or invite someone to pray, and open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes.)

Introduction: Biblically, we are supposed to celebrate every day. But some days are better than others. So how do we respond to the different ups and downs in our life? **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** tells us, *“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

1. Put a smile on your face! How can we put a smile on our face during difficult and trying times? [Read **Romans 8:28, 35, and 37-39** together now.] No matter what is going on, we can be sure that everything is okay because we are living in the love of God. During bumpy times, He is with us right in the middle of it. We also experience the peace of God. In **John 14:27** and **16:33** Jesus says, *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world give. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* In the upper room, Jesus showed up while the door was locked. He has been raised from the dead, stepped into the room and said “Peace be with you!” The disciples had little peace at that time, and Jesus’ appearing was a more than a little scary. And finally, during difficult times, we are confident that we are growing. **Romans 5:3-4** tells us, *“... we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”* Even in the middle of our struggles, we must grow. So we should be joyful always, and then we should pray rather than worry.

Talk to me. We should pray without ceasing. But really, how much do we talk to the Lord? Do we talk to Him during tough conversations or conflict? Do we meet with Him before making a decision? Do we ask for His direction, forgiveness and wisdom? When we talk to the Lord, sometimes He answers us instantly and unexpectedly. And sometimes it takes a long time. **Psalm 27:14** says: *“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart; yes, wait for the Lord.”* But waiting is not just waiting for a period of time to pass. It also includes what we do while we wait. And sometimes God never answers in a way that we can see. **Deuteronomy 29:29** says, *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God.”* Next,

Don't forget to say thank you. We read, *“Give thanks in all circumstances.”* This is easy to say to someone else, but how about when we are going through difficult times? When we say “thank you” to the Lord during these times He answers, “My pleasure,” because He can correct us and disciple us through the trials. **James 1:2-4** says, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

2. Talk to God about everything. We should talk to God about our life, our work, our kids, our parents, decisions, and crisis. God is probably thinking at times, “If I could just get their attention!”

3. **Remember who is in control.** When things seem out of control, we can turn to **Psalm 139** and read that God knows when we get up, when we go to bed, when we leave in the morning, and when we come home at night. He knows what we are thinking and what we are going to say before we say it. There is no place we can go where He is not. He had a plan for our life before we were born.
4. **Understand the potential of pain.** [Read **James 1:2-4** together again.] Testing develops perseverance, perseverance leads to maturity, and maturity leads to wholeness. When we look back at things we have learned in our life, many of those things probably came during a painful time.
5. **Smile it brings joy.** What happens when you smile or see someone smile at you? When we smile, we get a happy tummy.
6. **Take time to say thank you.** Who do we need to say thank you to? We can thank our boss for our job, or an employee for their diligence. But most important, we should say “thank you” to the Lord even when we can’t see what He is doing. He may be up to something surprising.

C. Life Group Questions (Select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes.)

1. During difficult times, do you consider yourself to be a naturally joyful and thankful person, or are you more prone to seeing the glass half-empty? When difficulty comes, what is your natural response? How does your response match up with God’s desire for you to be joyful always?
2. Jesus tells us that we can have joy in all circumstances when we remember His love, His peace, and the fact that He is constantly working through all circumstances to help us grow. How can we remember this truth during the most difficult times? Is God asking us to be thankful for the hardship or for the learning that comes through it? Explain.
3. Why do you think God wants us to be consistently joyful when He allows us to experience hardship?
4. Without naming names, tell about someone you know who seems to “*be joyful always; pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances*” in the midst of very difficult times. When you see this person what happens within you? Is their joy contagious?

D. Personal Application (1-3 minutes)

This week, get up every morning and ask God to help you remember His love and His peace no matter what circumstances you may face. Then, at the end of the day, take time to talk to Him about how He could use any difficult situations you faced to help you grow.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4; 10-15 minutes.)

- Pray that God will fill you with joy despite any negative or difficult circumstances.
- Ask God to give you more passion in making time for prayer.
- Give thanks to God for loving you enough to take through through hard times and allow you to grow.