Love God
Love Others
Share the Good News

SUMMIT CHURCH

Being Jesus Christ to the World

Theme: What is God Thinking?
Making Sense of Suffering and Grief
"Finding Joy in the Holidays"

We have a great new way for you to get these Meditation Moments each day directly to your phone. Just text "**med moments**" to **970-426-0700** to receive the **daily Meditation Moment** each morning and start your day grounded in faith and peace.

Weekly Memory Verse:

> [11] ***You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence, and the pleasures of living with you forever.*** Psalm 16:11

<u>Meditation Moments for Monday, November 23</u> – Read **Psalm 16 and Acts 2:25-28.** Psalm 16 is a rich Psalm that answers a fundamental human question: Where does the greatest human joy lie? If we're honest, we'll admit that the wisdom contained in these verses depends on the season we're walking through. It is often only when we reach the end of ourselves that we discover our only source of happiness. To the degree that these words do not reflect what we feel in this very hour, they serve as an invitation to take hold of their truths by faith.

- Jesus himself reflects his total dependence on the Father throughout his earthly ministry, modelling to his disciples the pleasure he finds in God's presence by spending sleepless nights in prayer and waking while it is still dark to seek intimacy with the Father. What does it mean to take refuge in God? What are other things we may take refuge in? Is there a challenging or dangerous situation you need to turn to God for help in? How does it affect our outlook and attitude when we know everything good, we have is from God?
- Peter quotes the last four verses of Psalm 16 on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:25-28. In Jesus, we discover both the perfect embodiment and the ultimate

fulfilment of these words. His life as fully human is guided by the LORD who he relies on as defender, even as he endures the accusation of his enemies. The empty grave is his vindication. Jesus rises from the dead and ascends to the right hand of the Father, where he experiences a joy because of a closeness to God. What three benefits does a proper relationship with God bring in verse 9? Remember a time when God has given you deep joy and give thanks for that as you close in prayer.

Prayer: *Loving God, some days I struggle to even address you as "loving." Yet letting that go doesn't take away any of life's tough stuff; it just leaves me with no one in whom to trust. I choose to find refuge in you; to hope in you; to know I will again give you thanks. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 24 – Read **Psalm 73:2-14.** Psalm 73 describes a persistent, never-satisfied longing. This psalmist's ache took the specific form of envy. Too often we achingly judge our own life, negatively, against what we see in others. The Catholic Theologian Thomas Aquinas reportedly said envy grieves any **good** thing that happens to our neighbor. In this psalm, the Hebrew poet observed that looking at others distorted reality (the wicked have **no** problems?) and nearly led to spiritual ruin. Constant ads for the newest phone, appliance, or car aim to create this kind of envy.

- Someone once joked that in America, contentment is making $10 a month more than your brother-in-law. In Psalm 73, it was "the prosperity of the wicked" that nearly destroyed faith in God. Jesus teaches in Mark 10:35-41 we can even envy other believers. Whose prospects, possessions, or position do you envy? If you examine the thoughts behind that envy honestly, are they accurate? Or do they distort reality the way they did for the psalmist?
- The psalmist's story didn't end with near-spiritual-ruin. Psalm 73 went on in verses 16-17: "When I tried to understand these things, it just seemed like hard work **until** I entered God's sanctuary." Turning attention back to God shifted something. Because faithless people are doing well now does not mean they will do well forever. Likewise, when innocent people are suffering, it does not mean they will suffer forever. What helps you look farther than disappointment at the seeming success of those who ignore God? How can worship, prayer, Scripture, and community refocus your perspective from envy?

Prayer: *O God, thank you for valuing me, even when I compare myself unfavorably to others. Give me contentment in being the person you've made me to be. Free me from the ache of envy. Help me serve you and others with the gifts and talents you've given me. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 25 – Matthew 26:38, 27:46 and Hebrews 4:14-15. We often do everything we can to avoid pain and heartache, and for good reason! No one likes to hurt. But there are no shortcuts in life when it comes to the fundamental questions of our humanity. We all would rather skip right to the joy! But the aches and pains of life cannot be denied or ignored. Distraction or anger can only take us so far. When we're

aching, it's easy to think, "no one, not even God, understands how I feel." How could the all-powerful ruler of the universe have any clue how powerless, helpless, and hopeless you feel? But Jesus felt the ache of being misunderstood and rejected, even cut off from God's presence. Even he had no way to "skip right to the joy." He **does** understand—because he experienced "the ache" himself.

- Matthew showed Jesus' painful agony in the garden as he prayed before he went to the cross. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary, *Matthew for Everyone*, "When we ourselves find the ground giving way beneath our feet, as sooner or later we shall, Gethsemane is where to go. That is where we find that the Lord of the world… has been there before us." Jesus' human feelings led him to say, "I'm very sad. It's as if I'm dying." What does it mean to you that the One you pray to has personally experienced agony, abandonment, and the feeling of being forsaken?
- The letter to the Hebrews said Jesus understood the pain of people disowned by family and facing the Roman Empire's fury. Scholar William Barclay wrote in his commentary on Hebrews, "When we have a sad and sorry tale to tell, when life has drenched us with tears, we do not go to a God who cannot understand what has happened; we go to a God who has been there… He knows our problems because he has come through them." How can Jesus' experience-based empathy sustain you when you ache?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, in my dark moments, help me remember you agonizing alone in Gethsemane and crying out on the cross. You felt the ache more deeply than I ever will. As my heart links to yours, remind me that I am never alone in the ache—you have been there too. Amen.*

Thanksgiving Day Prayer: *Gracious God, on this Thanksgiving Day, fill our hearts with a deep, steady joy that comes from your presence and enduring love. Thank you for the laughter, the beauty of creation, and the quiet moments of peace you give us. Even when life feels heavy or uncertain, help us notice your goodness and rejoice in your faithfulness today and all year long. Amen.*

Thursday, November 26 – Read **Psalm 30:4-12.** Psalm 30 capture a joy that is not manufactured by willpower but bursting forth when God moved from absence to presence. Verses 9-11 of the psalm reflected severe trouble that seemed to threaten life itself. The psalmist focused on how God had removed the source of fear and restored joy to life.

- This psalm acknowledges that there has been weeping. God seems to be absent in the mourning. Now, the healing of God has turned sorrow into joy. Even people of deep faith can experience times when God **feels** absent—remember Jesus quoting Psalm 22:1 on the cross where he feels abandoned and alone. We may say "God showed up" to describe times of recovery and restoration. How does the sense that "God showed up" contribute to joy in times of restoration?
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. applied this psalm to the civil rights movement. After hearing that the Supreme Court had ruled bus segregation unconstitutional, he

preached: "The dawn will come… 'Weeping may endure for a night,' says the Psalmist, 'but joy cometh in the morning.' This faith adjourns the assemblies of hopelessness and brings new light into the dark chambers of pessimism." When has "dawn" come in history—in your lifetime or in stories you know? What keeps you hoping for dawn when night feels endless?

Friday, November 27 – Read **James 1:13-17.** James was clear: God gives good gifts; God **doesn't** create temptation. Scholar N. T. Wright noted, "James warns us not to imagine that God is responsible for the temptation itself. The testing comes from within (Jesus made that clear, too) … If you are true to 'yourself,' you will end up a complete mess." Well-meaning Christians tell people being tempted, "God won't give you more than you can handle" which is a misuse of 1 Corinthians 10:13.

- When something bad has happened, have you ever said (or heard someone else say), "Why is God doing this?" James was plain: "No one who is tested should say, "God is tempting me!" This doesn't mean God is absent from our trials—but God isn't the cause. How can James' assurance correct and reassure you when you're tempted to hold God responsible for bad things? What's the difference between God allowing difficulty and God causing it?
- Wright also explained that "James grounds his teaching in what is true about God himself, God the generous giver, the 'father of lights.' Everything that truly lights up the world is a gift from him." Joy is always possible because we don't have to manufacture good things; we receive them from God. How can trusting that God is the ultimate source of all joy keep you open to receiving it? When have you been keenly aware that some source of joy was a gift from God?

Prayer: *Lord God, thank you for teaching me that you are the source of good things, not bad. Let your generosity fill my heart so that I rejoice in your good gifts. Amen.*

Saturday, November 28 – **Nehemiah 8:5-6, 9-10, Psalm 126:1-3, Proverbs 14:13 and John 16:17-22.** Today's passages show that the biblical writers spoke to a range of experiences. They knew this broken world makes human hearts ache in many ways. The Persians who conquered Babylon let the Israelites go home to Jerusalem after decades of exile. Psalm 126 expressed the dizzying joy of that return. When Ezra read the Law aloud, the people wept—perhaps realizing how far they'd strayed. Nehemiah used the occasion to teach a deep biblical principle: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Proverbs knew it can be a two-way street—sometimes joy turns to sorrow. And Jesus used the striking image of childbirth as an image of pain giving way to joy.

- The Greek word for joy is *Chara* and describes a joy whose foundation is God, not joy that comes from circumstances or triumph over others. That's why the Bible writers could speak of joy amid persecution in Luke 6:22-23, extreme poverty in 2 Corinthians 8:2, tests in James 1:2, and unjust imprisonment in Acts 16:22-25. How can the Holy Spirit's presence make joy possible even under such conditions?
- Jesus said your sorrow "will turn into joy" and "no one takes away your joy." When have you experienced the strength of God-given joy even in unlikely conditions?

How might your openness to Jesus' gift of joy described in John 15:11) make you an instrument who shares joy with others?

Prayer: *Lord God, thank you for the prophets' promise that your story—and therefore mine as your child—ends in joy. Like a woman whose labor pain becomes the joy of new life, you transform sorrow into something new. Thank you for joy that is persistent and can break out even despite life's darker moments. The joy of the Lord is my strength. Amen.*