



Community is shaped by the conversations we share.  
These questions are just a tool to help you meaningfully  
engage with the themes of this week's teaching.

## Discussion Questions

Joy: Theology of Celebration - Week 1 - April 7, 2024 | Genesis 18:1, 18:2-5, 18:10-15.

This week, we begin our Eastertide conversation on joy by looking at Abraham's experience of inviting God for lunch and how finding joy in the simplicity of our everyday lives can lead to more significant and unexpected moments of joy.

**Gravity:** Michel de Montaigne said, "The most profound joy has more of gravity than of gaiety in it." Although we may conceptually grasp that there is a difference between joy and fun or joy and happiness, it takes work to put our finger on joy in practice. So, in this first conversation on joy, we'll look at the profound joy in the simplicity of being human. Always reaching for what's next is exciting but rarely satisfying unless there's a solid foundation of joy in the ordinary.

**Shade:** Gen 18:1. The LORD (capitalization indicates God's name, YHWH, that had to be pronounced as *Adonai*) came to visit Abraham while he was relaxing on his porch. Pay attention to this simple moment of resting in the shade. Often, the most profound realizations and divine encounters happen to us when we find ourselves simply content. E.g. in our daily rituals, through walks, on our porch, under a tree, when we are not trying to conjure up a religious encounter with God.

**Side Quest:** Gen 18:2-5. How are we to understand the three guys called YHWH? Christians often see the Trinity here, which is not unreasonable, but wouldn't be what the writer of the story had in mind. What we see here, in the switching between the singular and the plural when Abraham addresses his visitors, reflects the early Hebrew conception of YHWH, as God surrounded by the divine council (God's entourage, or lowercase gods). We see a similar perception of God in Genesis when God talks about human beings created in "our" image; it's not plural gods; it's one God doing the creating and then explaining it to this group of the divine council. We can see a similar language of "gods" in Ps, 82. Over time, the concept of God has evolved in the Hebrew Scriptures, and now the lowercase gods (*elohim*) become angels (*malakh*), which means messengers. Since it was impossible to see the LORD and live, the "Angel of the LORD" idea appeared. The Angel of YHWH becomes a personal representative of God on earth; meeting one is like meeting God, but people can walk away alive (as in our story with Abraham

and Sarah here). But what would you do if you met God? Offer some water and lunch? The story is surprisingly small and low-key. Even in the big climax, when they are promised a child, Sarah laughs at the idea and the mechanics of intimacy at their age.

**Back to Basics:** Gen 18:10-15. The story will get big from here, ultimately guiding us to Jesus. But seeing it at the scale it's given to us is good. We are often presented with the ending of this story as sitting in judgement of Sarah, who laughed at God, but what if a healthy theology of joy beings when we can laugh at the absurdity of grace and notice small joyful moments that surround us all the time?

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**Connect:** One of the points that Jeremy made in the message was about the importance of finding profound joy in simplicity. What are some simple joys you have experienced recently?

**Share:** Jeremy shared a quote by Michel de Montaigne, a French Renaissance philosopher, *"The most profound joy has more gravity than gaiety in it."*

What are your thoughts on this idea?

How easy or difficult is it for you to differentiate joy from pleasure, having fun, eating good food, or celebrating happy moments?

What are some ways in which you try to cultivate joy that keeps you grounded?

**Reflect:** In Gen 18:1, we see Abraham relaxing in the shade, when he is visited by God. And Jeremy made this contrast between our "religious" expectations of where we think we can meet God and where God actually comes to us.

*"Your porch, your tree, your walk, your dog, whatever it is that feels like a sacred ritual to you, is as close to God as anywhere else. Please don't let religious expectations steal from you the ordinary moments that are trying to change your life. Because the Bible does not introduce us to a God, we conjure up religiously. It shows us a God that shows up often when we least expect. And in my experience those moments have most often come when I find myself just simply content."*

How has this been true for you?

What are some of your simple or daily routines that feel like a sacred ritual to you? Or some of the ordinary moments that tried and succeeded in changing your life?

How does God meet you in your contentment? And how does that shape your understanding of joy?

**Engage:** What does this story in Gen 18:1-15 tell you about joy, or maybe even our reactions to joy or unexpected (and absurd grace)?

Sarah is often judged for her reaction, but how does that sit with you? What do you think about her response to the divine promise?

What role do you think fear plays in our response to joy? Can you think of a time when fear caused you to not give in to experiencing the joy that was right there for you? How did you overcome that fear?

**Take away:** Take a few minutes, pull up your phone or grab your journal and make a list of three ways how you can intentionally create space in your life this week to savour small, gentle moments of joy. Share that list with each other if you'd like.

**Prayer from the sermon:**

Our joyful God,  
Who returns us to life every day,  
Who fills us with hope when we struggle to believe,  
Who reminds us that there is always time to change our path  
and pursue a new way,  
To rewrite our ending if the story has gone off course,  
Might our resurrection start now in our response to your grace:  
If we have reacted in fear, help us respond in courage.  
If we have reacted in greed, help us respond in generosity.  
If we have reacted in defensiveness, help us respond in openness.  
If we have reacted in sin, help us respond by turning back to you,  
Toward your grace  
Toward your peace  
Toward your path walked before us by Jesus.  
And in that might we experience the profound joy  
that goes far beyond a moment of celebration,  
And might that ground us in our essential identity as beloved children,  
Loved  
And longed for  
And welcomed home each day.  
May that joy lead us forward into new life this day.  
In the strong name of the risen Christ we pray. Amen.