



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

Scriptures: Psalm 33:1-5, Psalm 149:1-5

Summary. This week, we discuss joy as a shared communal practice. We examine what informs the theology of the Psalms (using Psalm 33:1-5 as our text) and how the Psalms, in their intent and art form, can instruct us in our search for and practice of joy.

Familiar and Newly Found. This survey series on joy looks at various literary genres in scripture and lets each contribute something to the project of identifying and constructing a theology of celebration. This week we look at the Psalms - an overtly theological collection of poetry, lament, and hymnody in the centre of our bibles that has shaped the liturgy of Jewish and Christian communities more than any other and continues to play an active role in how Jews and Christians think of God. As historical texts, Psalms show us that composing music and hymns was an avid practice in the ancient world across many societies. In Ps 33:1-5, we see how Psalms were both formulaic (in their form, vocabulary, and usage for worship) and generative (in the creation of new content). Similarly, some of us seek joy in the familiar. Others pursue joy in trying new things, and Psalms as a form encourage us not to leave any of the ingredients out.

Something Shared. Some Psalms reflect an individual voice and singer-songwriter vibe (E.g. Psalms 23, 121), but what scholars unanimously recognize about Psalms 33 and others is an assumed collective experience. Psalms assume a theological community as a recipient, which in turn teaches us something about the practice of theology itself and a theology of joy in particular. The Psalms remind us that the joy that finds us is meant to be shared, and they command us to share it. According to author Ross Gay (*The Book of Delights*), "joy is the moments when my alienation from people goes away."

The Underlying Assumption. Psalm 33 is just one of many psalms that use this imagery of a world infused with divine character. That character was reflected in the very act of God's creation of the world and then making a covenant with the Jewish people; the themes we first see in Genesis echo through the Psalms. They all point to one underlying assumption – God is Love, and everything is created out of love, filled with love, and sustained by it. This love, Scott suggests, is the ground of joy: "Something happens when in all your living you start from here. Here is where a theology of joy takes root."

Practice. Psa. 149:1–5 has the same elements as Psa 33:1–5, but also dancing. Scott ended the sermon with two stories about how dancing has become one of his teachers as he's learned to form and experience a theology of celebration. In the first story, Scott's friend encouraged him to go to the dance floor at a friend's wedding. In the second story, Scott's youngest daughter commanded the dance floor with her grandma at a family wedding. Moments like these show us that joy is a shared experience that emerges when bodies, voices, and stories intertwine, reminding us of the pervasive presence of love. Wherever life finds us today, the invitation is still the same – remain open to moments of joy and embrace the practice of celebration in your life.

Connect: As we continue with our series on joy, let's start with the same question: What moments of joy did you experience in the past week? Were there any familiar things that brought you delight, or were there some new things that brought you joy? Name one or two.

Share: In exploring the theology of celebration, Scott highlighted the Psalms as a profoundly theological collection that deeply influences Jewish and Christian liturgies.

What has been your personal experience with engaging the Psalms either on an individual level or communally?

The Psalms as an art form are formulaic (relying on the familiar principles of poetry, vocabulary, and imagery) and generative, as they encourage new

and creative expressions and experiences of joy. Some of us find joy in the familiar scents, books, coffee, and people, while others love trying new recipes, productivity strategies, prayer practices, and making new friends.

Where do you usually source joy—in the familiar or the newly found? Which of these two ingredients do you tend to leave out?

What are some of the new avenues for joy that you would like to explore?

Reflect: According to the Psalms, shared human experiences are integral to joy. Scott quoted Ross Gay, who observed that *"joy is the moments...when my alienation from people...from the whole thing—it goes away."*

Scott appreciates that Gay's definition of joy includes the whole of human experience.

"Because a deep, resonant joy can find us when we share our laughter... and tears. When we succeed together and when we fall short together.

When we lift our voices in chorus to praise Divine goodness on a Sunday, and when we lift our voices in chorus to advocate against injustice on a Monday.

Gay calls such experiences a joining. A joy-ning. Where we're connected to the mystery of a divinely filled world — and we're connected to the stories of those around us."

What resonates with you from these two quotes about joy being a shared (or even connecting) journey?

Can you recall a time when you felt a profound sense of joy through connection with others? What do you think contributed to that feeling?

How do you already cultivate moments of communal joy in your daily life? And how could we do it more intentionally - what might that look like in practice whether within your family, circle of friends/acquaintances, or even our church community?

Engage with the concept that love is the ground of joy.

The Jewish imagination of the Divine saw love as the foundation for their engagement with and experience of the world. Divine character and affection were reflected in the creation and in the history of God with humanity.

How does this perspective shape or influence your understanding (or should we say theology) of joy?

Where do you see God's love in your life right now and how does it ground your joy?

Here's the thought that Scott argued when talking about the underlying assumption of the Psalms and the author of Psalm 33. How does it resonate with you and your experience of the Commons community?

"For the poet, creation isn't just some abstract doctrine. It's the initiation of Divine character itself. This idea that God speaks. That God breathes. That God forms. That God blesses. That everything is found and filled by God's unfailing love. And we might think that sounds benign - or superficial - or ineffectual. But the Hebrew poets didn't - that's why they kept writing songs about it. And I don't think we should overlook it - because something happens when we start from the assumption that Love is the Source of all that is.

We talk about this a lot at Commons - that God is Love. That God in Christ displays that Love. That in following Christ we reveal that Love. And we talk about it because we're more and more convinced that this is the good news the world needs. Vengeance and violence are our tools - not God's. Exclusion and rejection are our preferences - not God's. And something happens when - in all your living - you start from here. Here is where a theology of joy takes root. And there it draws from a deep hope...hope born in and through your uncertainty and your difficulty, hope that gives way to a trust that you are valued. That you are loved."

Take away: Scott talked about dancing being one of his teachers as he learns to practice joy. What or who are your teachers of joy right now, and what do those "lessons" look like?

Prayer from the sermon:

God of joy unspeakable
and joy that inspires poetry and praise,
to you our hearts are open,
you see and know us as we are.
So let us rest in that today,
that there's no need for pretence here.
Where there is anxiety - be peace.
Where there is fear - bring relief.
And as we turn to ancient words and thoughts,
help us to be avid learners in how to live.
With your kindness and presence as our guide,
We pray in the name of Christ, our hope, Amen.