

Jesus Always

B I B L E S T U D Y S E R I E S



LEADING A
JOY-FILLED LIFE

Sarah Young

*Bible study and discussion questions
written by Karen Lee-Thorp*

LEADING A JOY-FILLED LIFE

JESUS CALLING® BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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JESUS ALWAYS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

LEADING A JOY- FILLED LIFE

EIGHT SESSIONS

Sarah Young

with Karen Lee-Thorp



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	vii
SESSION 1 JOY IN SALVATION <i>1 Peter 1:3–9</i>	1
SESSION 2 JOY IN RESTORATION <i>Luke 24:36–53</i>	13
SESSION 3 JOY THAT TRANSCENDS CIRCUMSTANCES <i>Habakkuk 3:16–19</i>	25
SESSION 4 JOY AND STRENGTH <i>Nehemiah 8:5–12</i>	37
SESSION 5 JOY DESPITE FEAR <i>Matthew 28:1–10</i>	49
SESSION 6 JOY AND HEALING <i>Psalms 30:1–12</i>	61
SESSION 7 JOY IN SINGING <i>1 Chronicles 16:23–33</i>	73
SESSION 8 JOY EVEN IN SUFFERING <i>Acts 16:16–34</i>	85
<i>Leader's Notes</i>	99



INTRODUCTION

Sometimes our busy and difficult lives give us the impression that God is silent. We cry out to Him, but our feelings tell us He isn't answering our prayers. In this, our feelings are incorrect. God hears the prayers of His children and speaks directly into the situations in which we find ourselves. The trouble is that our lives are often too hectic, our minds too distracted, for us to take in what He offers.

This *Jesus Always* Bible study is designed to help individuals and groups meditate on the words of Scripture and hear them not just as words said to people long ago but as words said to us today in the here and now. The goal is to help the heart open up and respond to what the mind reads—to encounter the living God as He speaks through the Scriptures. The writer to the Hebrews tells us:

INTRODUCTION

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

—HEBREWS 1:1–3

God has spoken to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. The New Testament gives us the chance to walk with Jesus, see what He does, and hear Him speak into the sometimes-confusing situations in which we find ourselves. The Old Testament tells the story of how God prepared a people to be the family of Jesus, and in the experiences of those men and women, we find our own lives mirrored.

THE GOAL OF THIS SERIES

The *Jesus Always Bible Study Series* offers you a chance to lay down your cares, enter God's Presence, and hear Him speak through His Word. You will get to spend some time silently studying a passage of Scripture, and then, if you're meeting with a group, openly sharing your insights and hearing what others discovered. You'll also get to discuss excerpts from the *Jesus Always* devotional that relate to the themes of the Bible passages. In this way, you will learn how to better make space in your life for the Spirit of God to speak to you through the Word of God and the people of God.

THE FLOW OF EACH SESSION

Each session of this study guide contains the following elements:

- **CONSIDER IT.** The two questions in this opening section serve as an icebreaker to help you start thinking about the theme of

the session, connecting it to your own past or present experience, and allowing you to get to know the others in your group more deeply. If you've had a busy day and your mind is full of distractions, these questions can help you better focus.

- **EXPERIENCE IT.** Here you will find two readings from *Jesus Always* along with some questions for reflection. This is your chance to talk with others about the biblical principles found within the *Jesus Always* devotions. Can you relate to what each reading describes? What insights from God's Word does it illuminate? What does it motivate you to do? This section will assist you in applying these biblical principles to your everyday habits.
- **STUDY IT.** Next you'll explore a Scripture passage connected to the session topic and the readings from *Jesus Always*. You will not only analyze these Bible passages but also pray through them in ways designed to engage your heart and your head. You'll first talk with your group about what the verse or verses mean and then spend several minutes in silence, letting God speak into your life through His Word.
- **LIVE IT.** Finally, you will find five days' worth of suggested Scripture passages that you can pray through on your own during the week. Suggested questions for additional study and reflection are provided.

FOR LEADERS

If you are leading a group through this study guide, please see the Leader's Notes at the end of the guide. You'll find background on the design of the study as well as suggested answers for some of the study questions.



SESSION 1

JOY IN SALVATION

CONSIDER IT

Billy Bray was a twenty-nine-year-old miner in Cornwall, England, when he had a brush with death on the job in 1823. He was known as a rowdy drinker and womanizer, but shortly after the mining accident, he read John Bunyan's *Visions of Heaven and Hell* and was convicted that he was on his way to hell. He became a passionate Christian and unconventional preacher, often bursting into singing, shouting for joy, and dancing in the middle of a sermon. Many hearers complained about this behavior, but Bray was so grateful for God's rescue from the path of destruction that he couldn't—and *wouldn't*—stop celebrating.

If you are a follower of Christ, what feelings and emotions does that evoke in you? Does your liberation from the enemy fill you with such joy that you can't help but let everybody you meet know about it? Perhaps you're not the type who sings and dances. Perhaps for you, joy is a deep and settled sense of peace, a sense that you're okay and nothing can take away your well-being. Yet regardless of how you experience joy, it's important to recognize the amazing gift that God has given to His children—and be incredibly thankful for it.

In this session, we'll examine what the disciple Peter has to say about the inexpressible and glorious joy we should all have when we think about what God has done for us. We will see that no amount of persecution could shake Peter's joy once he had seen Jesus risen from the dead and heard His promises about our future life.

1. *When you were a child, what was something that filled you with joy?*

2. When you were a child, what was something that could rob you of joy?

EXPERIENCE IT

In Me you can discover *Joy inexpressible and full of Glory!* You will not find this kind of pleasure anywhere else; it is available only in your relationship with Me. So trust Me, beloved, and walk confidently along your life-path. As we journey together, you will encounter many obstacles—some of which are quite painful. Expect these difficulties each day, and don't let them throw you off course. Refuse to let adversity keep you from enjoying Me. In My Presence deep sorrow can coexist with even deeper Joy.

Your life with Me is an adventure, and there are always some dangers involved in adventurous journeys. Ask Me to give you courage so that you can face your troubles boldly. Keep your hope fully fastened on Me and on the heavenly reward that awaits you. Your Joy will expand astronomically—beyond anything you could possibly imagine—when you reach your eternal home. There you will see Me *face to Face*, and your Joy will know no bounds!

—FROM *JESUS ALWAYS*, JANUARY 8

3. As a follower of Christ, how can you refuse to let adversity keep you from enjoying God? What chosen actions does that refusal involve?

4. *In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul writes, “No eye has seen . . . no ear has heard, and . . . no human mind has conceived—the things God has prepared for those who love him.” How do you picture heaven and the eternal life that God has in store for His children?*

I offer you *inexpressible and glorious Joy*—straight from heaven itself! This *triumphant, heavenly Joy* can be found only in Me. It is easy to slide, ever so gradually, from delighting in Me to living for the next spiritual “high.” Sometimes I bless you with a taste of heaven’s splendor, but the primary purpose of these experiences is to whet your appetite for the next life. Do not underestimate the brokenness of the world you inhabit. Your enjoyment of My Presence will always intermingle with the sorrows of living in this fallen world—until *I take you into Glory*.

Someday you will see Me face to Face, but for now *you love Me without having seen Me. You believe in Me even though you do not see Me*. This love for Me is not irrational or whimsical. It’s a response to My boundless passion for you, dramatically displayed on the cross and verified by My resurrection. You worship a risen, living Savior! *Blessed are those who have not seen Me and yet have believed*.

—FROM *JESUS ALWAYS*, FEBRUARY 12

5. *How is the joy that followers of Christ experience different than a mere emotion?*

6. How does the cross give followers of Christ a reason for joy?

STUDY IT

Read 1 Peter 1:3–9. In this passage, Peter lays the foundation for his letter by praising God for his salvation. Peter’s words point to the present aspect of salvation—the new birth—but there is also a much-longed-for future salvation that is yet to be revealed. Note that *mercy* can be defined as the compassion God shows to human beings despite their sin and because of their helplessness to right their own wrongs. The *inheritance* to which Peter refers is eternal life in God’s joyous kingdom, where the deepest longings of every believer’s heart will be fulfilled.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

7. *How does the resurrection of Jesus give His followers a living hope (see verse 3)? What are they hoping for?*

8. *If you are a Christ-follower, what gives you joy when you think about the inheritance you have in store for you?*

9. *What role does faith have in securing the inheritance promised to Christians (see verse 5)?*

10. *According to verse 7, what role do trials have in the life of faith?*

11. *Are you filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy because of your love for Jesus (verse 8)? If so, what fosters that joy in you? What can get in the way?*

12. *Take two minutes of silence to reread the passage, looking for a sentence, phrase, or even one word that stands out as something Jesus may want you to focus on in your life. If you're meeting with a group, the leader will keep track of time. At the end of two minutes, you may share with the group the word or phrase that came to you in the silence.*

13. *Read the passage aloud again. Take another two minutes of silence, prayerfully considering what response God might want you to make to what you have read in His Word. If you're meeting with a group, the leader will again keep track of time. At the end of two minutes, you may share with the group what came to you in the silence if you wish.*

14. *If you're meeting with a group, how can the members pray for you? If you're using this study on your own, what would you like to say to God right now?*

L I V E I T

At the end of each session you'll find suggested Scripture readings for spending time alone with God during five days of the coming week. This week, each reading will focus on the joy of salvation (both physical and spiritual) as portrayed in the book of Psalms. Read each passage slowly, pausing to think about what is being said. Rather than approaching this as an assignment to complete, think of it as an opportunity to meet with the One who loves you most. Use any of the questions that are helpful.

Day 1

Read Psalm 27:4–6. What gives the psalmist joy in this passage?

What is the modern equivalent of seeking the Lord in His temple?

Have you experienced the Lord keeping you safe in His dwelling? If so, how?

Today, consider setting aside a special place where you will go each day to meet with the Lord.

Day 2

Read Psalm 28:6–9. What causes the psalmist to praise God in this passage?

How have you experienced the Lord hearing your cry for mercy?

What joy does it give you to picture the Lord as the fortress for His children?

Ask God to be your strength and fortress today—and watch for how He answers that prayer.

Day 3

Read Psalm 33:1–5. What reasons for being joyful does this psalmist provide (see verses 4–5)?

How have you seen the truth of these two verses in your own life?

Are you the kind of person who “shouts” for joy? Why do you suppose that’s the case?

Rejoice today that the word of the Lord is right and true.

Day 4

Read Psalm 42:1–4. Can you identify with this psalmist thirsting for God? What does that look like in your life?

*Who or what are the voices in your life that whisper, “Where is your God?”
(verse 3)*

*What does this psalmist do to help him remember God’s salvation and
deliverance (see verse 4)?*

Pour out your soul to God today, and see if that leads to deeper joy.

Day 5

*Read Psalm 43:1–4. What was the general life circumstance in which this
psalmist found himself?*

How could he nevertheless be joyful that God was his salvation?

SESSION 1

What do you think the psalmist means when he asks God to “send me your light” (verse 3)? What is the light that God sends to His children?

Express your joy to God today for offering you His gift of salvation.