

## **Joy**

Joy is one of the sweetest gifts God gives us. It doesn't always come wrapped in laughter or sunshine—sometimes it grows quietly in the middle of hard things. Joy is deeper than happiness. It bubbles up from the inside when we know that God is good, even when life is not. This month, we're exploring what it means to carry joy with us—not just when everything goes right, but especially when it doesn't. From the songs of birds at dawn to the bold praise of Paul and Silas in prison, we'll see how joy shows up in creation and in the pages of Scripture. True joy doesn't need perfect circumstances. It only needs a heart that trusts God is near.

## **Character Trait of the Month: Joy**

### **Definition for Children:**

Joy means feeling glad inside because you know God loves you—no matter what’s happening around you.

### **Definition for Parents/Leaders:**

Joy is a deep sense of gladness and peace that comes from trusting God, not from our circumstances. It’s a fruit of the Spirit and a strength that carries us through both good and hard times.

### **What Joy Looks Like:**

- Smiling and being thankful, even on hard days
- Celebrating with others
- Choosing to worship when you're sad
- Finding beauty in simple things

### **What Joy Does Not Look Like:**

- Pretending to be happy when you're hurting
- Needing everything to be perfect to feel good
- Ignoring others who are sad
- Depending on stuff or situations for happiness

### **Memory Verse for the Month:**

*"The joy of the Lord is your strength."* — Nehemiah 8:10 NLT

### **Suggested Printables:**

1. Printable Character Poster: “Joy” with child-friendly definition
2. Printable Memory Verse Page with coloring elements

## **Week 1: Songbirds and Paul & Silas in Prison**

Joy is more than just being happy. It's something deeper—it lives inside of us, even on days when things don't go our way. This week, we're looking at how God's creation sings with joy, and how Paul and Silas praised God in the darkest of places. Joy isn't tied to our situation—it's tied to our Savior.

### **Animal Study: Songbirds**

Songbirds fill the air with music, especially in the morning. Before the world wakes up, they're already singing. They don't wait for perfect weather or a quiet moment—they sing because it's how God made them.

Even when it rains, songbirds often keep singing. Their joy isn't based on the skies being clear—it's just what they do. That reminds us of what it means to have true joy. We can "sing" with our words, our attitude, and our thankfulness—even when life feels cloudy.

### **Discussion Questions: Songbirds and Joy**

1. Why do you think birds sing even when it's cloudy or rainy?
2. What can we learn from the way birds start the day with a song?
3. How can we "sing" with our attitudes, even when we're not feeling happy?
4. Have you ever felt joy during a hard time? What helped?
5. What does it mean to carry God's joy with you every day?

## **Bible Story Connection: Paul & Silas in Prison**

**Read Acts 16:16–34 together.**

Paul and Silas were doing God's work when they got arrested. They were beaten and thrown into a dark prison. But instead of being bitter or angry, they sang hymns and prayed. Even in pain and chains—they chose joy.

And then? God sent an earthquake that opened the doors and shook the chains loose. But instead of escaping, Paul and Silas stayed. Their joy and peace had such an impact that the jailer and his family gave their hearts to Jesus.

Joy in hard times doesn't just strengthen us—it can change the lives of others too.

### **Discussion Questions: Paul & Silas**

1. Why were Paul and Silas in prison?
2. What did they choose to do instead of complain?
3. What happened after they sang and prayed?
4. How do you think their joy helped the jailer believe in Jesus?
5. How can we choose joy like Paul and Silas did?

### **Journal Prompts:**

1. Write about something that made you smile this week.
2. What do you think joy feels like inside your heart?
3. Describe a bird singing in the morning—how is that like worship?
4. What's one way you can choose joy, even if today is hard?
5. Write a prayer asking God to help you be joyful no matter what.

## Activity Suggestions by Age Group

### Elementary:

- Draw or color a picture of birds singing with sunshine and clouds—because joy happens in both!
- Make paper birds and hang them on a “Joy Tree.”
- Act out the story of Paul and Silas singing in jail.

### Middle School:

- Keep a “Joy Journal” for a week—writing one thing each day that brings joy.
- Record yourself reading a favorite Psalm out loud like a joyful song.
- Write a short reflection: “Why joy is stronger than happiness.”

### High School:

- Reflect on this: “If I were Paul or Silas, would I have sung? What would I have felt?”
- Research local songbirds and write about how their song brings peace or hope.
- Make a playlist of worship songs that help you feel joy—and explain why each one matters.

## **Week 2: Butterflies and David Dances Before the Lord**

Joy isn't something we have to hide or tone down—it's something we can express with freedom and delight. This week, we'll learn from butterflies, whose transformation and gentle beauty remind us of the lightness that comes with new life. Then we'll look at King David, who danced with all his might before the Lord—because his heart was full of joy. True joy doesn't worry what others think. It overflows in worship, movement, and celebration.

### **Animal Study: The Butterfly**

Butterflies are one of the most joyful sights in nature. Their wings are delicate, colorful, and always in motion. But butterflies weren't always that way—they begin life as caterpillars, slow and crawling. It's through a quiet, hidden transformation in the chrysalis that they become something new.

Their journey reminds us that joy is part of becoming who God made us to be. It's not forced or fake—it comes when we're changed from the inside out. Just like butterflies, our joy grows as we grow in Christ.

Here's an expanded version of your **5 Fun Facts About Butterflies**, written in the same joyful, reflective tone as the songbird section—perfect for your chapter on *Joy*:

### **Discussion Questions: The Butterfly and Joy**

1. How does a butterfly change over its lifetime?
2. What do you think it feels like to go from crawling to flying?
3. How is joy like a transformation in our hearts?
4. What's something in your life that brings you joy when you think about God?
5. How can you “fly free” like a butterfly in your own worship and thankfulness?

### **Bible Story Connection: David Dances Before the Lord**

**Read 2 Samuel 6:12–22 together.**

When the Ark of the Covenant returned to Jerusalem, King David was so full of joy that he danced before the Lord with all his might. He wasn't worried about what others thought. He wasn't trying to look “kingly” or proper. He just wanted to celebrate God's presence.

Some people didn't understand it—even his wife thought it was undignified. But David's heart was focused on the Lord, not on people's opinions. His joy was honest, free, and unashamed.

### **Discussion Questions: David's Joy**

1. What was David celebrating?
2. How did David express his joy to the Lord?
3. Why did some people criticize him?
4. How did David respond to those who didn't understand his joy?
5. What can we learn about worship from David's story?

**Journal Prompts:**

1. Write about something that makes you want to dance or sing.
2. When have you felt joy because of something God did?
3. What part of the butterfly's journey reminds you of your own growth?
4. How can you show your love for God with your whole heart—like David did?
5. Write a prayer thanking God for moments of joy in your life.

**Activity Suggestions by Age Group****Elementary:**

- Make a paper butterfly craft and write "Joy" on the wings.
- Act out David's dancing—play worship music and celebrate freely!
- Draw the four stages of a butterfly's life and label them with emotions of joy and transformation.

**Middle School:**

- Write a reflection: "From Caterpillar to Butterfly—My Journey of Joy."
- Create a movement or dance routine that expresses thankfulness.
- Discuss a time you felt like David—so full of joy that you didn't care what others thought.

**High School:**

- Reflect on this question in writing: "Would I be willing to express my faith openly, even if others judged me?"
- Research monarch butterfly migration and write a short devotional connecting it to perseverance and joy.
- Write a personal psalm of joy—like David might have sung—praising God for something meaningful in your life.

### **Week 3: Springtime Blooms and The Prodigal Son's Return**

Joy doesn't always come all at once—it often grows slowly, like the first buds of spring. After long winters or hard seasons, God brings moments of beauty, healing, and renewal. This week, we're looking at how springtime flowers remind us that joy always returns, and we'll read the story of the prodigal son—a powerful picture of the joy that comes with forgiveness, restoration, and coming home.

Even when things have been broken or barren, God can bring joy in full bloom.

#### **Nature Study: Springtime Blooms**

Flowers don't bloom overnight. They begin deep underground, as seeds or bulbs hidden in the soil. For weeks—or even months—nothing seems to happen. But quietly, God is working. And when the time is right, the first green shoots push through the earth, reaching for the sun.

Spring flowers teach us that joy often comes after waiting, and that God is always doing something new—even when we can't see it yet.

#### **Discussion Questions: Spring and Joy**

1. Why do you think it takes time for flowers to grow and bloom?
2. How is waiting part of the joy process?
3. What does it mean that joy can “bloom” after a hard season?
4. How do flowers show God's creativity and timing?
5. What's something that has taken time in your life but brought joy in the end?

#### **Bible Story Connection: The Prodigal Son's Return**

**Read Luke 15:11–24 together.**

Jesus told the story of a young man who left home and wasted everything he had. When he finally realized how far he had fallen, he returned home, thinking his father would be angry. But his father saw him from far away—and ran to him, hugged him, and threw a celebration.

That's how God feels when we come back to Him. He doesn't wait with arms crossed—He rejoices. His joy isn't cautious—it's full, loud, and overflowing. Like a flower blooming after a long winter, the father's heart burst open with joy at the return of his child.

#### **Discussion Questions: The Prodigal Son**

1. Why do you think the son wanted to leave in the first place?
2. What changed in his heart that made him want to return?
3. How did the father respond when he saw his son coming home?
4. What does this story teach us about God's love and joy?
5. When have you felt joy after being forgiven or restored?

**Journal Prompts:**

1. Write about something in your life that felt like winter—but God brought joy anyway.
2. What “flowers” are blooming in your life right now—big or small?
3. If you were the prodigal son, how would you feel coming home?
4. What brings God joy when He looks at you?
5. Write a prayer thanking God for the joy of new beginnings.

**Activity Suggestions by Age Group****Elementary:**

- Create a flower craft and write “Joy Grows” in the center.
- Plant flower seeds in a cup and watch them grow all month.
- Act out the prodigal son’s story with simple costumes.

**Middle School:**

- Keep a “Joy Journal” with a new entry each day about where you see joy blooming.
- Create a comic strip of the prodigal son’s return and the father’s celebration.
- Write a short story called: “The Day Joy Came Back.”

**High School:**

- Reflect in writing: “Where in my life have I returned to God—and what did that feel like?”
- Research early spring flowers and how they survive harsh conditions—tie it to emotional resilience.
- Write a modern version of the prodigal son story and include how joy shows up in unexpected ways.

## **Week 4: Rain and Mary Magdalene at the Empty Tomb**

Sometimes, joy shows up in the middle of sorrow—quietly, gently, and full of wonder. This week, we’re learning from rain—a part of creation that often feels gloomy at first, but brings life, growth, and refreshment. We’ll also see how Mary Magdalene, full of grief and confusion, encountered the risen Jesus—and in that moment, joy returned.

Joy doesn’t ignore pain—it rises through it. And when Jesus is near, sorrow turns to celebration.

### **Nature Study: Rain**

Rain may not always feel joyful when it starts. It’s messy, gray, and interrupts our plans. But without it, nothing would grow. Rain soaks the ground, nourishes the soil, and gives life to everything from wildflowers to towering trees.

In the same way, God sometimes uses “rainy” seasons in our lives to grow things we can’t yet see. What feels like a storm can become the very thing that prepares the ground for joy.

### **Discussion Questions: Rain and Joy**

1. What good things does rain bring to the earth?
2. How can a “rainy day” help us slow down or reflect?
3. Have you ever seen joy grow out of something that was hard at first?
4. What do you think God might be growing in your life right now?
5. How can we learn to be thankful for rain—both outside and in our hearts?

### **Bible Story Connection: Mary Magdalene at the Empty Tomb**

#### **Read John 20:1–18 together.**

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early in the morning, expecting to find Jesus’ body. She was heartbroken and confused. The One she loved had died, and now His body was missing. But then—Jesus appeared. At first, she didn’t recognize Him. But when He said her name, everything changed.

Joy flooded in. Grief turned to awe. And Mary became the first person to witness the resurrection.

Sometimes, joy comes in the quiet morning when everything feels lost—but Jesus is closer than we realize.

### **Discussion Questions: Mary at the Tomb**

1. What emotions do you think Mary felt when she first saw the empty tomb?
2. Why didn’t she recognize Jesus right away?
3. What changed when He said her name?
4. How does this story show that joy can return after sorrow?
5. What does it mean that Jesus brings joy—even when everything seems dark?

**Journal Prompts:**

1. Write about a time when something sad turned into something good.
2. How does rain remind you of God's love?
3. If Jesus said your name out loud like He did for Mary, how do you think it would feel?
4. What are some "rainy" parts of your life that might be preparing you for new joy?
5. Write a prayer asking God to help you see joy, even in hard or quiet moments.

**Activity Suggestions by Age Group****Elementary:**

- Paint a rainbow after a "rainstorm" craft and write "Joy Comes" at the top.
- Create a rainstick or shake bottle using beans and paper towel rolls.
- Act out Mary seeing Jesus and her joy when she hears Him say her name.

**Middle School:**

- Write a letter from Mary's point of view about that morning at the tomb.
- Design a "Joy After Rain" poster using real or drawn raindrops with words like "Hope," "New Life," and "Jesus is Alive!"
- Collect rainwater (if possible) and start a small plant as a reminder of how joy grows.

**High School:**

- Reflect on this question in writing: "When have I heard Jesus speak to my heart in a personal way?"
- Write a devotional connecting rain to healing or renewal in your life.
- Study the resurrection appearances in the Gospels and compare the emotions people felt—fear, doubt, joy—and how Jesus responded to each one.