

forty days of
JOY



St. Luke's
United Methodist Church

Among my favorite verses from the Bible is Psalm 30:5 – *“Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”* Every morning, we can choose joy. Our children sing the words to Psalm 118:24 – *“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it.”* Every day, we can choose joy. Isaiah 61 says that God will give us *“the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of despair.”* Every day, when we go to our closets, we can choose to don the garment of praise and joy. Joy grows out of a recognition of God’s continual presence in our lives. It is available to us regardless of circumstance. It is a choice we make.

In the Bible, forty days is a number signifying the appropriate amount of time to do something in order to make it matter. Forty days of rain for a flood. Forty days of fasting in the wilderness. Forty years of wandering in the desert. Forty days on Mt. Sinai for Moses. Forty days between resurrection and Jesus’ ascension. So what if we decided to choose joy for forty days? Maybe it would stick? Engage with this joy journal daily and see your joy habit grow.

2020 is the year the Lord has made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it.



Lou Reed

the key

Each day of the week, we will experience this joy journey through a different action.

Day 1: Pray

Communicating with God allows us a direct connection to our true source of joy.

Day 2: Express

Fostering joy through activity allows us to incorporate more of ourselves as we practice a wholistic life of joy.

Day 3: Write

Recording our memories and thoughts can provide comfort and joy in times of need.

Day 4: Serve

Offering our gifts and time to others opens us to giving and receiving joy through service.

Day 5: Care

An important aspect of cultivating joy is self-care for our bodies, minds, and souls.

Day 6: Relate

Joy often comes from our interactions with friends, family and co-workers that allow us to see the joy of God in others.

Day 7: Read

Our scriptures are filled with insight on how to find and express joy in our everyday lives.

remember!

WEEK ONE

Day 1 – Pray

It's a new year! What an exciting opportunity to reorient our lives. Let's begin this year by working to incorporate joy into our daily lives. Joy can be a difficult word for us to wrap our heads around, especially since it has been co-mingled with temporal happiness. It can seem like joy is unrealistic and impractical in our everyday lives. However, hearts that are rooted in joy from God can shape our entire lives from the inside out!

We come from a God who joyfully creates and works in the world. We are made in the image of God, so it makes sense that we would want to grow in our practice of joy. This does not mean that we must feel happy or cheerful all of the time; but we can have joy in any circumstance as children of God.

Holy and Loving God, you are full of love and joy. You have created me to be the same. I ask that you walk with me throughout this journey of joy. Inspire me, challenge me, and enlighten me to more ways that I can experience joy in life. Let this joy continue to grow and flourish as I become a disciple that experiences joy in all circumstances.

Song of Solomon 1:4b
We will exult and rejoice in you;
we will extol your love more than wine;
rightly do they love you.



remember

40 DAYS OF JOY

Day 2 – Express

The trickiest thing about cultivating joy can be learning how to express it in our lives. We can do this through something as simple as smiling, singing, dancing, or enjoying our favorite hobby. Let’s start out easy today: what is the natural way you express joy? Is it reaching out to a loved one, experiencing a hearty laugh, or humming? Whatever it is, find time today to practice that expression of joy in a way that feels natural to you.

Day 3 – Write

One of the best things we can do for ourselves is to remember previous times of joy and allow that to console us in the present moment. Write about a time in your life when you felt immense joy. What were the circumstances? What was it about the experience that made you feel joy? Hold on to these memories of joy, so you can remember God’s faithfulness whenever joy seems more difficult.



remember

40 DAYS OF JOY

Day 4 – Serve

During your day today, look for an opportunity to perform a small act of kindness with joy. It can be as simple as opening a door for someone or picking up a piece of trash you see on the ground. Reflect and pray about how this made you feel.

Day 5 – Care

In the Wesleyan tradition, we believe that God’s grace is at work in our lives long before we realize it. Our joy in God can grow and blossom when we take moments to remember how God has been at work in our lives. Take some time today to remember two events, circumstances, or people you met that you believe to be the grace of God working in your life. Think about the gift that St. Luke’s is in your life and this community as we are celebrating our 75th year. Allow this to fill you with joy as you remember how loved you are by God! Remember these moments of grace when you need some light to shine in the midst of darkness.

Day 6 – Relate

We learn about joy by seeing examples of people who embody joy and positively affect our lives. Today, reach out to two people who bring you joy and tell them what you appreciate about them.

Today I will call/text/email/visit _____ &

_____.

Day 7 – Read Exodus 15:19-21

There can be an expectation in our world that we must always be moving forward. Sometimes that can prevent us from pausing to experience joy in the present. It can seem strange to stop and acknowledge the joy in our hearts for what God is doing in our lives when there is a feeling that there is still so much to be accomplished. Today's scripture tells us a different story. After being delivered from enslavement under the Egyptians and crossing the Red Sea, Miriam, Moses' sister, gathers the women together and they take time to sing a song with tambourines! They have not reached the promised land yet; it would not be for another forty years. Yet that did not stop Miriam from pausing at this point of the journey to remember God's faithfulness with joy!

Follow Miriam's example and remember to stop and feel the joy from an experience (no matter how big or small) and bring that joy before God.

praise!

WEEK TWO

Day 8 – Pray

One of the most common expressions of joy is praising God. God demonstrates joy to us when praising creation by calling it good. When we see all of creation as good deep down, from a lens of joy and gratitude as God does, it can dramatically shape how we see the world and others. The world is indeed tainted by the existence of sin, but we can still find joy amid this reality by following the example of God who sent Jesus to redeem and restore the earth. This does not mean that we become naïve to hardships in the world or our personal lives. Quite the contrary, we are to have joy in all circumstances as an undergirding hope because we know the light of Christ exists in the world and the Kingdom that is yet to come. We are children who will spend eternity praising God in this redeemed world. Why not begin practicing now?

God, in all circumstances, help me to praise you. It can be so easy to get distracted and forget that you deserve all honor, glory, and praise. Nudge me, gently, and remind me of my vocation to praise you just as you praise and honor your creation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

1 Peter 1:6-9

In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.



Day 9 – Express

Sing a song that brings you joy today. Sing it out loudly! Do not worry about sounding great! Allow yourself to express the joy you feel when using the instrument of your voice. You can do this in your car alone or with your children, spouse, friend, or roommate while cooking dinner. It can be a hymn that reminds you of good childhood memories, or it can be a Taylor Swift song. Notice how this might feel: liberating, fun, silly?

Day 10 – Write

Reflect and journal about the following: What part of the weekly worship service brings you the most joy? Why do you think that is?

Day 11 – Serve

This week while grocery shopping, grab extra non-perishable food and drop it by the Christian Community Service Center drop-off at 3230 Mercer Street. You can also buy water bottles at the grocery store to keep in your car for when you encounter homeless folks on the streets. Try to see these simple acts of service as an act of praise and worship to God.

Day 12 – Care

Care for yourself today by playing your favorite praise music in your car or your headphones today. Mix in some old favorites that let the memories bring you joy. Despite anything the day brings, worship God – your style! Tonight, reflect on how this shaped your day.

Day 13 – Relate

Think of someone in your life that you admire. Bring joy to that person's life by reaching out to them and offering them praise.

Today I will call/text/email /visit _____.

Day 14 – Read Psalm 27

Within the book of Psalms, we find a hymnbook for the Hebrew people during the extreme ups and downs of Israel's history. It is a great place to start to learn how to pray and communicate with God. It is filled with emotions: happiness, anger, desperation, and more. As you read this psalm, notice how the tone changes throughout. The psalm begins in a very upbeat tone, but in the middle there is a cry for help. In the end, the psalmist reminds us to wait on the Lord in the land of the living. Laments are an important way to communicate with God in times of struggle. Through lamenting, we can find a pathway to joy as we are honest and cast our fears and desperation toward God. How can this shift in prayer and thinking toward God affect how we walk through tough times with God?

enjoy!

WEEK THREE

Day 15 – Pray

As Christians, we can accidentally fall into the trap of thinking that we are not supposed to enjoy things of this world. However, God delights in creating us and creating things for our world. Like a loving parent, God wants us to enjoy what God provides. Being mindful of these gifts that we are called to enjoy is vital to shaping how we look at the world around us.

God, you desire for me to enjoy the gifts you give me. Fill me with gratitude and joy to relish in the blessings, great or small, that you pour into my life. You've blessed me with many memories, relationships, things that I treasure. Assist me in being a faithful steward of all of the gifts you desire for me to enjoy. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.

1 Timothy 4:4-5

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer.

Day 16 – Express

When we enjoy something, we tend to try to do more of it. While this can become unhealthy or impulsive, it can also, in moderation, help us remember our call to enjoy the gifts God gives us.

If you ever wondered what to do during a Sabbath, think of what you would do if you had more time in your day. Now, look at your calendar and schedule time to do that thing! Maybe it's waking up a little earlier, so you can sit and enjoy your cup of coffee for fifteen more minutes. Maybe it's getting your work done more quickly, so you can spend more time at home playing with your children. Maybe it's arranging your weekend so you can go for that walk in the park you've been meaning to go on. Find time to fully delight in that activity and remember God's desire for us to enjoy the little things.

Day 17 – Write

Joy springs forth from gratitude! Today in your writing experience list as many things you can think of that you enjoy and for which you are thankful. It can be air conditioning, your children, or chocolate. Try to be creative! When you are finished, ask God to use these things to remind you of God's love and grace for you.

Day 18 – Serve

Delight a friend, co-worker, or roommate with coffee or lunch today.

Day 19 – Care

What is something that brings you joy that you can do for yourself today or this week? Maybe it's taking a nap on the weekend. Perhaps it's getting a massage. Could it be time to buy a latte? Maybe you need to take some time to play basketball with a group of friends? Whatever it is, do it and enjoy it! No shame allowed here, friends! Give thanks to God for giving us little sparks of joy through self-care.

Day 20 – Relate

Spend quality time with someone today. This could be a co-worker or friend with whom you can grab lunch; maybe it is calling your mom, or snuggling with your spouse for a moment after putting the children to bed. God does not intend for us to live our life alone—God wants us to enjoy each other.

Today I will enjoy spending quality time with _____.

Day 21 – Read Genesis 2:20b-24

We are called to feel joy from the gifts God has given us. We find this in scripture. The very first lines spoken by a human in scripture are actually words of enjoyment! Adam finally finds his mate in Eve, whom God creates as a gift of love and grace to him and sings for joy. These are beautiful, precious lines that establish how we should enjoy each other. Follow the example of Adam and enjoy the companionship of those whom God has put in your life.

give!

WEEK FOUR

Day 22 – Pray

One of our Inside-Out Habits at St. Luke's is "We give ourselves away in generosity and service." This practice is important as we work to become people who live and love like Jesus. The New Testament is filled with examples of Jesus giving himself away – over and over, Jesus stops and chooses to heal and empower others during his ministry. When we give of ourselves, it can reconnect us to God and fill us with the joy that we are called to have!

Gracious God, I give you honor, praise, and thanksgiving once again for sending Jesus to give himself away to us. Help me to grow more and more into a faithful disciple of you through giving myself away to others out of a place of joy. Amen.

Matthew 13:44-45

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Day 23 – Express

Give away three hugs or high fives today to bring joy to yourself and others!

Day 24 – Write

God gives us gifts to share. Those that are often most precious are the ones that seem easiest to overlook. While monetary and material gifts are important, think about the gifts you have been given that are intangible. Each of us has been gifted by the Holy Spirit with skills to help us serve others in the name Jesus Christ. What are your gifts? If you don't know, take this assessment and find yours:

<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/spiritual-gifts-online-assessment>

Write some of them down and reflect on ways you can use these gifts more often to bring joy to others.

Day 25 – Serve

Plan to tip more than you usually would the next time you eat out. Allow your generosity to fill you with joy. Pray for your server, that he or she experiences joy in their life.

Day 26 – Care

Try practicing “inverse self-care.” Think about what you would like most today as a way to care for yourself. Is it coffee, patience, a blanket, a hug? Whatever you need, give that away to others today! See how this affects your view of caring for others and yourself.

Day 27 – Relate

Prayer is one of the most intimate things we can do for one another, and when we pray for others it not only helps the person we're praying for but helps develop our own faith journey. Reach out to two people and ask how you can be praying for them this week. Write down their requests and actually pray for them every day this week. After you have prayed for them, send them a quick text or email to let them know you are thinking of them.

I will contact: _____ and _____

Prayer Requests:

Day 28 – Read Luke 15:11-24

The parable of the prodigal son is very powerful in demonstrating God's joy whenever we return to God. The father is overflowing with joy upon his son's return and expresses this joy by giving his time, finest resources, and space. It is not an insignificant detail that the father clothes the son with a fancy robe and asks for the fattened calf to be prepared for the celebration. The father gave truly of himself out of joy and without strings attached.

This is the gift of grace from our loving Father God, who runs to us as we approach him. And this is what we can give to others and God out of joy. Follow the example of the father and give yourself away freely and joyfully to others.

release!

WEEK FIVE

Day 29 – Pray

In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for joy is not only an adjective, but it is also a verb that means “living fully with assurance.” This verb is also linked to release. When we have joy, we release our hopes, gratitude, and praise to God. We have joy whenever we experience the gift of forgiveness. We can look at joy as a way to release our anxieties, pains, and worries. Joy has a way of grounding us in our identity as children of God redeemed through Jesus Christ!

Loving and Merciful God, I know that you desire for me to be grounded in joy from your love and faithfulness that secures me. However, I am so bogged down with anxieties and worries that keep me up at night. These things separate me from your presence. Help me to release what I need to reconnect with you this week, and help me to remember that I'm joyfully forgiven. Amen.

Psalm 32:1-5

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;

I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.



Day 30 – Express

Shake it off, literally. Shake out your body and imagine you are releasing burdens and putting pieces of the past behind you. Name the burdens out loud while you are doing this and reflect on how this made you feel.

Day 31 – Write

Somewhere in the back of your mind, you may be thinking that you do not feel joyful. Maybe something is going on in your life that brings you anxiety or pain. Maybe you have a medical condition that gets in the way of feeling joy. Maybe there is someone from whom you desire forgiveness or that you need to forgive for past hurts. This unmet desire is nothing to be ashamed of. It is not good for us to pretend like joy is easy. Yet God desires for us to keep our eyes upward as we walk (and sometimes trudge) through life. Write down and reflect on some of the things you need to release so that you can experience joy.



release

40 DAYS OF JOY

Day 32 – Serve

Experience joy through releasing something you own. It can be big or small, one thing or the whole hallway closet. Many times the abundance of things we hold onto can burden us and keep us from the joy that comes from simplicity.

Day 33 – Care

Light a candle and spend time in prayer with God. Follow the example of Psalm 27 that we read on Day 14 and simply be honest with God. Use the flame to remind you of God's identity as one of light, warmth, and faithfulness.

Day 34 – Relate

One of the most humbling things we can do is ask another person for help. Sometimes even asking for prayer can seem difficult. However, the action of asking a trusted friend for prayer can serve as a powerful way to help us release some of what binds us. There is joy that comes from a community that surrounds you in prayer. Today, reach out to a family member or friend and ask them to pray specifically for what is on your heart. Be mindful of the release and joy that happens when you invite others and God to share this load with you.

Day 35 – Read Matthew 11:28-30

A yoke is not a common term we hear these days. It is a tool that helps animals pull together, making it easier for each animal to bear a shared load. Once we realize what it is, we see that Jesus is inviting us to share our heavy burdens with him to lighten our load. Not only will our burden be lighter when shared, but Jesus desires to be attached to us as we walk through life. Being in union with Jesus is the epitome of where our joy and forgiveness is found. Today listen intently to Jesus' invitation to you to take on his yoke as you journey through life with him.

embody!

WEEK SIX

Day 36 – Pray

As with all aspects of growing in our spiritual journey, we need to incorporate all of ourselves in living lives of joy. It cannot just happen on Sundays, and we cannot just contain our joy within the confines of our heads. We must let it flow forth to all parts of us every day.

God, I have learned that you desire for me to live a life that is filled with joy. Help me to practice having joy in all aspects of my life until it becomes a habit that shapes my journey of spiritual growth with You and others. Amen.

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.



Day 37 – Express

Incorporate your entire body, not simply your head or heart, when expressing joy together. Have a dance party in the car or the kitchen! Cook or bake your favorite thing! Paint or draw! Hug your favorite person! Do something today to build up joy that uses not just your heart or head but your body as well.

Day 38 – Write

Reflect on areas of your life where it is difficult for you to trust God completely. Is it your health, your relationships, your job, your finances? Whatever it is, reflect on why trusting God in this area of your life is difficult and consider how you can begin to change that response.



Day 39 – Serve

As we finish these 40 Days of Joy, commit to one regular act of service. If you are already doing something regularly with your family or small group, keep at it! If not, email the Outreach or Hospitality staff and learn about different ways you can embody a life of joy by serving others.

Outreach Ministry: mdavis@stlukesmethodist.org

Hospitality Ministry: aking@stlukesmethodist.org

Day 40 – Sending Forth

When we receive the benediction at the end of a worship service, it is not simply parting words. It is a commission to continue what we have experienced by living out our faith in the world. Through these past forty days, we have practiced and embodied what it means to be joyful disciples of Jesus Christ. Walk forward from this experience working to maintain the new spirit of joy you’ve received from this journey.

Record a practice that you will continue daily to incorporate joy into your life.

“Go bear witness to the love of God in this world so that those to whom love is a stranger will find in you generous friends.”



Continue the journey and join us on Sundays!

New sermon series
40 Days of Joy
begins January 5, 2020

Traditional Worship 8:30, 9:45 and 11:00 a.m. | Sanctuary
Contemporary Worship 8:45 a.m. | Fellowship Hall
Sunday School for children, students and adults at 9:45 a.m.
Nursery available all morning

Can't be here in person? Watch live StLukesMethodist.org/Livestream

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