

CELEBRATION

DISCIPLINE EQUALS FREEDOM, WEEK 5

I. OUR CALL TO DISCIPLINE

Proverbs 25:28

II. OUR MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

III. CELEBRATION EXPLAINED

“We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, *in conjunction with* our faith and confidence in God’s greatness, beauty, and goodness. We concentrate on *our* life and world as God’s work and as God’s gift to us” (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 179).

“Celebration is a way of engaging in actions that orient the spirit toward worship, praise, and thanksgiving. Delighting in all the attentions and never-changing presence of the Trinity fuels celebration” (Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 28).

“Joy is the end result of the spiritual disciplines’ functioning in our lives. God brings about the transformation of our lives through the disciplines, and we will not know genuine joy until there is a transforming work within us” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 193).

IV. CELEBRATION IN THE BIBLE

Reasons for Celebration

Call to Celebration

Philippians 4:4

1 Thessalonians 5:16

Celebration for Obedience

Romans 16:19

Philippians 1:3-5

Celebration for Deliverance

Psalm 18:2-6

Celebration for Goodness

Psalm 16:5-11

Types of Celebration

Celebration through Song/Music

Judges 5

Psalm 148-150

Celebration through Dancing

Exodus 15:19-21

2 Samuel 6:14-16

Calendar Celebrations

Leviticus 23

Celebration through Feasting

Deuteronomy 14:24

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20; 2:24; 3:12-13

Isaiah 25:6-8

V. CELEBRATION IN THE TEACHING OF OTHERS

Benefits of Celebration

“Celebration is central to all the spiritual Disciplines. Without a joyful spirit of festivity the Disciplines become dull, death-breathing tools in the hands of modern Pharisees. Every Discipline should be characterized by carefree gaiety and a sense of thanksgiving...without joyous celebration to infuse the other Disciplines, we will sooner or later abandon them. Joy produces energy. Joy makes us strong” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 191).

“Faith in its celebration sometimes becomes a delirious joy coursing through our bodily being, when we really begin to see how great and lovely God is and how good he has been *to us*. Even those commonly thought to be ruined (Luke 6:20-23; Matt. 5:3-12) – the poor, the depressed, the persecuted – have godlike well-being in his company and Kingdom” (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 181).

“Far and away the most important benefit of celebration is that it saves us from taking ourselves too seriously. This is a desperately needed grace for all those who are earnest about the Spiritual Disciplines. It is an occupational hazard of devout folk to become stuffy bores...our spirit can become weary with straining after God just as our body can become weary with overwork. Celebration helps us relax and enjoy the good things of the earth” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 196).

“Celebration heartily done makes our deprivations and sorrows seem small, and we find in it great strength to do the will of our God because his goodness becomes so real to us” (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 181).

“In celebration the high and mighty regain their balance and the weak and lowly receive new stature. Who can be high or low at the festival of God? Together the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless all celebrate the glory and wonder of God. There is no leveler of caste systems like festivity” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 196).

Obstacles to Celebration

“When our appetites are habitually overindulged, our ability to experience a meal as a feast is undermined. Feasting loses its meaning in a culture of gluttony. When I speak of feasting in a Christian sense – as a spiritual discipline – I mean simply a special meal enjoyed as a gift and means of grace” (Jones, *Dwell*, 179).

TRAINING PLAN

“Do what makes you happy. I hear people say this. And I get it. In life, do what makes you happy. Try to find a job that makes you happy. Try to hang around people that make you happy. Try to live in a place that makes you happy. These things are good. When you view things in your life from a long-term, strategic perspective, then absolutely: do what makes you happy. The problem comes when people decide to let that ethos drive their daily life. When people try to do what makes them happy every day. This is wrong. Do not do it. Lying in bed for another 37 minutes makes you happy. Eating a donut will make you happy. Watching another episode of some random television show will make you happy. Scrolling through a social media page will make you happy. Buying some shiny new product will make you happy. These actions all result in SHORT-TERM HAPPINESS. The problem is they all also result in LONG-TERM MISERY.”

—Jocko Willink, *Discipline Equals Freedom*, 106-107.

Circle the Level of Engagement You Are Committing to This Week

All four are good choices, and you don't need to pick the same level every week.

First Steps:

- Read through the description of Celebration on pages 4-5 of this handout and at least 1 day this week practice one of the “Spiritual Exercises” listed at the bottom of page 5. When you are done, reflect on your experience. How was it challenging? How was it valuable?

Hit Harder:

- Read through the description of Celebration on pages 4-5 of this handout and at least 2 days this week practice 2 of the “Spiritual Exercises” listed at the bottom of page 5 (1 per day). When you are done, reflect on your experience. How was it challenging? How was it valuable?
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide #4* below to guide your conversation.

Hard Core:

- Read through the description of Celebration on pages 4-5 of this handout and at least 3 days this week practice 3 of the “Spiritual Exercises” listed at the bottom of page 5 (1 per day). When you are done, reflect on your experience. How was it challenging? How was it valuable?
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide #4* below to guide your conversation.

Beast Mode:

- Read through the description of Celebration on pages 4-5 of this handout and at least 4 days this week practice 4 of the “Spiritual Exercises” listed at the bottom of page 5 (1 per day). When you are done, reflect on your experience. How was it challenging? How was it valuable?
- **IN ADDITION**, set aside a couple hours this week to begin planning a feast for the Lord. Feasts are most enjoyable in celebration with others, so begin praying about who you could invite to your feast (could just be 1 or 2 people or as many people as you'd like). Then begin planning a menu and a day on which you will hold the feast. Finally, begin planning some specific ways you can celebrate God together during the feast (sharing together what God has done in your lives, singing or listening together to certain praise music, or anything else you can think of).
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide #4* below to guide your conversation.
- If you commit to Beast Mode, please email, text, or call me so I know about it and can be praying for you. As time allows I will try to reach out to see how it is going. mboyd@grandgrace.org; 218-259-1844.

READING: CELEBRATION

Adapted from Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Expanded Edition, 28-30

Desire	To take joyful, passionate pleasure in God and the radically glorious nature of God's people, Word, world, and purposes.
Definition	Celebration is a way of engaging in actions that orient the spirit toward worship, praise, and thanksgiving. Delighting in all the attentions and never-changing presence of the Trinity fuels celebration.
Scripture	<p>“The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing.” (Zephaniah 3:17)</p> <p>“I will praise the Lord, who counsels me... Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; My body also will rest secure... You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in your presence, With eternal pleasures at your right hand.” (Psalm 16:7, 9, 11)</p> <p>“Applause, everyone. Bravo, bravissimo! Shout God-songs at the top of your lungs!” (Psalm 47:1 <i>The Message</i>)</p> <p>“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful I know that full well.” (Psalm 139:14)</p>
Practice Includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and pursuing those things that bring the heart deep gladness and reveling in them before the Lord. This may include time spent with other, sharing meals, working, serving, worshipping, laughing, listening to music, dancing, and so on.
God-Given Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping company with Jesus no matter what happens • Living from a mentality of abundance rather than of scarcity • Participating in the celebration and love of the Trinity • Rejoicing always in the God who rejoices over you (Zephaniah 3:17) • Enjoying every good and perfect gift as coming from God • Living out of the joy of your salvation • Cultivating a spirit of gladness • Taking yourself less seriously • Freedom from the addiction to criticism or negativity • Having holiday traditions that guide your celebration

On Celebration

God celebrates. He invented delight, joy, and celebration. And one way we enter into the divine life of the Trinity is through celebration. Whether solemn or exhilarating, formal or spontaneous, celebration can enlarge our capacity to enjoy and serve God. Celebrating God does not depend on perfect circumstances or happy feelings. Even in prison Paul and Silas found something to sing about (Acts 16). And Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, wrote:

My soul is downcast within me.
 Yet this I call to mind
 And therefore I have hope:
 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed
 For his compassions never fail.
 They are new every morning. (Lamentations 3:20-24)

Jeremiah found reason to delight and hope in God even in lament.

The world is filled with reasons to be downcast. But deeper than sorrow thrums the unbroken pulse of God's joy, a joy that will yet have its eternal day. To set our hearts on this joy reminds us that we can choose how we respond to any particular moment. We can search for God in all circumstances, or not. We can seek the pulse of hope and celebration because it is God's reality. Heaven is celebrating. Right now the cherubim, seraphim, angels, archangels, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and all the company of saints overflow with joy in the presence of their Creator. Every small experience of Jesus with us is a taste of the joy that is to come. We are not alone – and that in itself is reason to celebrate.

To abandon ourselves to celebration can feel like a risky thing. What if we are misunderstood or seem to take hard things too lightly? King David was so “undignified” in his celebration of the Lord that his wife rebuked him for his public impropriety! But David replied, “I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes” (2 Samuel 6:21-22). Set your eyes on God as you celebrate, and forget how you look. God delights in all kinds of worship.

Spiritual Exercises

1. Identify the place you most readily connect with God. Is it in nature? Listening to Christian music? Participating in corporate worship? Solitude? Go to that place. What do you want to tell God about the joy you receive there?
2. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recall all of God's gifts, provisions, guidance, and love toward you. To celebrate God's grace to you, write a song of celebration, make a collage that represents your joy, write a poem of praise, play music and dance before the Lord, or memorize a verse of praise and repeat it all through the coming days.
3. Familiarize yourself with the church calendar. (If you don't know about the church year, do a Web search for “church calendar.”) Consider ways you can go all-out in your celebration of Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, and All Saints Day this year. Plan a way of celebrating God alone or with friends.
4. Attend to the people who give you joy. Ask God how you might celebrate them in a way that encourages them.
5. Plan to celebrate someone's birthday, Mother's Day, or Father's Day in a way that reminds the person of how precious he or she is to you and to God.
6. Consider how God loves you. Read Zephaniah 3:17. Then be still and listen. How is God celebrating you? Celebrate the God who celebrates you. Intentionally ask for the gift of appreciating yourself the way God does.

Resources on Celebration

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster, chapter 13, “Celebration”

DISCUSSION GUIDE #4: CELEBRATION

Meet together this week with at least one other person to discuss your experiences with celebration. Later in the week would be ideal so you have some time to practice. Meeting in person is best, but over the phone or via video chat would work too.

Before meeting, each person should read pages 3-5 in this handout. Alternatively, you could read it together. Underline key parts of these readings and write down any questions you might have.

Questions for Your Group

1. What were your experiences with celebration like this week?

2. Discuss the readings in this handout. What struck you as helpful or challenging?

3. Choose some of these reflection questions to discuss together (from Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 29-30):
 - a. Where are you most prone to celebrate God? Alone? With others? In worship? In music? In nature?
 - b. What does this tell you about how God made you and how you most naturally meet with him?
 - c. How is your celebration enhanced or curtailed by your ability to remember the past, live in the moment, or anticipate the future?
 - d. When you see others celebrating God in a way that is new or foreign to you, what goes on in your mind and heart?
 - e. Is there a heaviness about you, an overly serious side, or an entrenched critical spirit? How might celebrating God affect these traits and move you into new areas of transformation?
 - f. Who do you know who really celebrates life and God? What attracts you to them?

4. In what ways is the practice of celebration necessary for growth in the spiritual life?

5. How would you like to build deliberate celebration into your life going forward?

Pray for one another as you continue on this journey together!