

IT'S BAD NEWS . . .

Scroll through any newsfeed or watch any newscast on any given day and many of the stories will have one common denominator: They're depressing. From stories of epidemics to terror attacks to global warming to conflicted governments, our local, national, and global news is frequently filled with pain and sadness. In recent months, negative media coverage has been especially prevalent regarding the presidential election and Donald Trump's time in office. According to a Harvard study, roughly 91 percent of news coverage related to President Trump has been negative or critical. Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the coverage, finding joy in any genre of news is becoming more difficult.

Beyond national media coverage, and on a more personal level of news and reality, returning to school has begun to impose higher levels of stress and pain upon a growing number of students. A recent survey found that over 30 percent of American high school students reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed during the school year, which reflects a higher percentage compared to working adults.

So Where's the Joy?

Such numbers and statistics are striking, especially when considering that our country is a land of plenty and seemingly offers infinite opportunity for joy. From smartphones to vacations to personal accomplishment and achievement, we instinctively strive to create joy by serving ourselves. Yet, such joy is often fleeting and leaves the pursuers with an insatiable hunger for more.

Jesus, on the other hand, taught that lasting joy is found only by looking outward. Loving God and neighbor was not only how Jesus summarized our purpose, but also, it's in doing so that he said we would find our greatest joy. As Jesus taught and ultimately demonstrated by his death on the cross, joy can be found only when we are willing to serve something greater and more eternal than ourselves.

"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these." —Mark 12:30-31



Bad news

TIP FOR THIS ISSUE

LINC production happens on a tight timeline, but—almost as a testament to this issue—there are times when events that are difficult to process happen faster than we can respond to in real time. While this issue is about negativity in the news, be aware that this issue is *not* a response to the events that occurred in Charlottesville on August 12. Rather than compile this issue in a hurried response, our editorial team and writers took a breath to consider which of many approaches we might employ to discuss Charlottesville. That issue is in our pipeline and will deliver on Tuesday, September 5.

GOD PROMISES JOY

Question of the Day: What has brought you great joy this summer?

Purpose: To help teens find joy in a bad news world.

Cultural Connection: Negative Media Sources

Topic: Joy

WHO NEEDS SUFFERING?

James 1:2-4

My brothers and sisters, think of the various tests you encounter as occasions for joy. After all, you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let this endurance complete its work so that you may be fully mature, complete, and lacking in nothing. —James 1:2-4

Commentary:

Most people pursue relationships and activities that will bring joy and pleasure and avoid the situations that will bring pain and stress. Yet, throughout the Bible, we read stories and testimonies of how tests and suffering actually strengthen our faith. As Jesus shared at the Sermon on the Mount, it's only in those moments of trial and suffering that we will find ourselves to be in the presence of God.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ Do you believe suffering is a necessity? Why or why not?
- ▶ How would you personally explain trials and tests as joy to someone else?
- ▶ In what moments of life would you say you've experienced your greatest growth in faith?

INHERITANCE > SOUP

Genesis 25:27-34

Esau came in from the field hungry and said to Jacob, "I'm starving! Let me devour some of this red stuff." That's why his name is Edom. Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright today." Esau said, "Since I'm going to die anyway, what good is my birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Give me your word today." And he did. He sold his birthright to Jacob.

—Genesis 25:29b-33



Commentary:

Birthrights for a bowl of soup? In hindsight, after consuming his lentil stew and ultimately feeling the hunger pains return, Esau surely had second thoughts about the deal he had made with his brother. While today we rarely are tempted by a bowl of soup, Christians do still feel drawn to trade our eternal joy and holy inheritance found only in God for other sources of instant but temporary happiness. Like an inheritance, God's promises can seem distant, especially when our eyes are drawn to something tangible that may provide immediate satisfaction. But like Esau's bowl of soup, such worldly pleasures only leave us empty and wanting more.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ What are some modern-day examples of possessions or situations that bring immediate, but short-lived, joy?
- ▶ Why do you think it is so difficult to remain committed to the eternal joy God promises us compared to the joys of this world?

WHERE TO FIND IT

John 15:9-11

As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. —John 15:9-11

Commentary:

If the following question were asked of fifty people, most likely there would be fifty different answers: *What brings you the greatest joy?* From vacations to personal victories

TEACHER BIBLE PREP

In times of struggle, heavenly joy and comfort can be found even on a pile of dust and ash.

and accomplishments, it's natural to first recall times of self-seeking pleasure as our greatest joys in life. Yet Jesus, while offering some of his final words at the Last Supper, provides his disciples with one simple instruction for complete joy: Keep God's commandments. Earlier in his ministry, he summarized God's law as: Love God and love our neighbors. And now to his disciples, Jesus reminds them that these words not only represent their greatest purpose but also their greatest pleasure to pursue.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ What personally brings you the greatest joy in life?
- ▶ How can you personally attest to the truth of Jesus' definition of *joy*?

Job answered the LORD:

I know you can do anything; no plan of yours can be opposed successfully.

You said, "Who is this darkening counsel without knowledge?"

I have indeed spoken about things I didn't understand, wonders beyond my comprehension.

You said, "Listen and I will speak; I will question you and you will inform me."

My ears had heard about you, but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore, I relent and find comfort on dust and ashes. —Job 42:1-6

DEVOTION: COMFORT IN ASHES

Spend a few minutes reading and reflecting on Job 42:1-6.

On the surface the story of Job seems like one that could've been left out of the final Bible draft. It tells of a man who lived a righteous and joyful life filled with family and fortune. But then, in an unexpected moment, it was all taken away. And for much of the story, Job sits on a pile of dust and ash and debates with his friends and himself over why God would deliver so much pain and suffering upon him.

Finally though, coming in the form of a tempest, God responds to Job's accusations. And while God does not give Job a clear answer to his questions, Job comes to terms with his fate. For a while Job had heard of God only through past actions and works. But in this time of suffering, Job saw God for himself and ultimately found comfort on the dust and ash.

With Job's story in mind, remember the value of suffering. In times of struggle and pain, heavenly joy and comfort can be found even on a pile of dust and ash.

NEXT WEEK: As we look ahead to Labor Day, we're reminded of the importance of the work we do in seeking to live after the example of Jesus. Next week in LINC we'll talk about how we can be sure that our efforts to respond to the world around us continue to honor Christ.

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Getting Ready: You will need copies of Youth Page 6, pens or pencils, markers, and Bibles.

OPEN

Good News or Bad News?

(5–10 minutes)

As they arrive, inform teens they will play a game called “Good News or Bad News?” Explain that the game has one secret rule, but DO NOT tell them the rule now: *Player has “good news” if hands are touching; player has “bad news” if hands are apart.* The youth will understand the game only when that rule is discovered in play.

Begin the game by asking one person if he or she has good news or bad news. Based on the answer and hand position, state whether the player is right or wrong. Continue around the room until players figure out the rule or time runs out. (Suggestion: Secretly enlist one or two players beforehand to respond as correct examples of the secret rule.)

After the game, ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ What specific examples come to mind when you think of “good news” currently happening in the world? “bad news”?
- ▶ Would you say the world is full of more good or bad news? Why, either way?

Say: “It’s hard to avoid bad news these days. Regardless of where you live or who you are, trials and suffering are a part of life. Today we’re going to talk about how we can find joy regardless of what’s going on in the world around us.”

EXPLORE

Talk Topic 1: Who Needs Suffering?

(10 minutes)

Middle School Option

Ask teens to decide if the following “news” is good, bad, or both, and why: *family vacation; school starting; summer ending; school dances; growing older.*

Ask: “Do you believe suffering in life is good news or bad news? Why, in either case?”

Ask students to turn to James 1 in their Bibles and call on one student to read aloud verses 2-4. Then ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ What exactly do you think James is trying to say about tests and trials in life?
- ▶ Do you believe our faith grows more in times of great joy or suffering? Why either way?

Say: “Even Jesus said we are ‘blessed’ in times of mourning because in those moments we will be closest to God. He knew that, in such times, we are stripped of earthly securities and compelled to depend on the God who promises a holy peace and comfort that earth cannot replicate.”

High School Option

Invite students who have smartphones to pair up with others to play “Good News Bingo.” Instruct students to search news websites (such as CNN, NBC, FoxNews, Yahoo, Google News, Huffington Post) for three “good news” story headlines. When pairs or teams have identified three stories, they call out “Bingo!” and share their three story lines.

After all teams have reported their stories, ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ While researching the headlines, did you come across more good or bad news stories?
- ▶ Do you believe suffering in life is a necessity? Why or why not?

Call on one student to read aloud James 1:2-4, while others follow along. Then ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ Using your own words, what does James convey about trials and tests on earth?
- ▶ Would you agree with James that times of trials are actually joys? Why either way?
- ▶ Would you say your personal faith has grown more in moments of great joy or great suffering? Why either way?

BONUS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Show the video of the Scott Hamilton story at <http://people.com/sports/scott-hamilton-facing-third-brain-tumor-diagnosis/>. Use Romans 5:3-5 along with Hamilton’s story as a platform for discussion about taking pride in suffering.

- ▶ How do you believe we should approach suffering?
- ▶ What do you believe is to be gained from suffering?



JOY

Talk Topic 2: Inheritance > Soup (10 minutes)

Middle School Option

Hand out copies of Youth Page 6 and point out the “Now for Later?” activity. Ask teens to follow the instructions, and allow 1 to 2 minutes for decisions. Share and talk about answers as time allows. Ask, “Why is having something now so much more appealing than having it later?”

Ask students to turn to Genesis 25 in their Bibles. Explain that Jacob and Esau were twin brothers, but since Esau was born first, he was technically the rightful heir to his father, Isaac’s, fortune. Ask three students to play the parts of narrator, Jacob, and Esau and read aloud verses 27–34.

After the Scripture reading, ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ What did Esau fail to consider before making this trade?
- ▶ In the bigger picture, what do you believe is the moral of this story?

Say: “Even though we may never be tempted by a bowl of soup like Esau, we certainly are tempted to choose things that satisfy our short-term appetites and bring us only temporary joy.” Ask:

- ▶ Besides food, what are things that bring you immediate, but temporary, joy?
- ▶ What is the danger in pursuing things that bring you only short-term joy?

Say: “Like a dot on the horizon, sometimes God can feel very far away. At the same time, right in front of us are short-term joys—from cell phones to videogames to sports to sinful habits—tempting us to seek joy in the temporary but immediately accessible. Remember that these things satisfy only for a moment and ultimately distract us from the long-term joy God offers us.”

High School Option

Provide the story background offered in the “Middle School Option.” Enlist three students to read aloud Genesis 35:27-34 as the narrator, Jacob, and Esau. Then ask:

- ▶ In his haste, what did Esau fail to consider about the deal he struck with Jacob?

- ▶ What risk did Jacob take in accepting the deal?
- ▶ Thinking about Esau, what are personal examples of things that bring you short-term joy?
- ▶ What makes pursuing the short-term joys tempting over the long term?
- ▶ Thinking of Esau, what dangers and consequences exist in pursuing only short-term joys?
- ▶ Remembering Jacob, what are personal examples of things that bring you long-term joy?
- ▶ Would you say being a Christian is a short- or long-term pursuit?
- ▶ What risk exists in pursuing such long-term goals?

Transition by presenting information from the commentary in Teacher Bible Prep.

Talk Topic 3: Where to Find It (15 minutes)

Combined Middle School and High School Option

Ask, “Where would you say you personally find the following: best hamburger; best last-minute help for a math test; best movie review; best life advice?” Finally, ask, “Where do you personally find the greatest joy in life?”

When discussion slows, say: “During the Last Supper, Jesus shared his final words of wisdom. He told his disciples where they could find both their greatest purpose and their joy in life. As we read the Scripture, notice where Jesus says the greatest of joys can be found.” Call on one person to read aloud John 15:9-11, then allow time for youth to answer the questions on Youth Page 6. After a few minutes, talk about answers as a group.

Say: “Even as Jesus was aware of his terrible fate on the cross, he still knew the greatest joy was found in keeping God’s commandments: to love God and love others.” Ask, “How have you personally experienced Jesus’ definition of joy through your love of God or others?”

TAKE AWAY

Joy can be a complicated emotion. It can be absent in times of plenty but also evident in times of trial and suffering. This is because God is the true source of our joy. Remember that whether your life is full of good or bad news, true and eternal joy is found only in the love and Word of God.

WORKING IT OUT

NOW FOR LATER?

Place a check mark beside the items you would willingly give up in the year 2035 in order to receive the money listed now?

\$ NOW \$

\$1 million

\$2 million

\$3 million

\$4 million

\$ \$ \$ \$7 million

\$ \$ \$ \$8 million

LATER **L L L**

All chocolate products

Cell phone

All existing friendships

Sense of smell

All meat products

Internet



Where does Jesus say we find the greatest joy?

In a nutshell, how exactly would you summarize keeping God's Commandments?

Inherit the Mirth



In the Bible: Readings for the Week

MONDAY: Read Psalm 118:24.

What in your life brings you joy today?

TUESDAY: Read Galatians 5:22-23.

Which fruit of the Spirit do you struggle to possess?

WEDNESDAY: Read Acts 16:16-34.

What do you find admirable about Paul's actions in prison?

THURSDAY: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Do you believe joy is a feeling or state of being?

FRIDAY: Read Job 42:1-6.

When have you felt the presence of God during a time of suffering?

SATURDAY: Read Romans 15:13.

Allow yourself to be filled with God's joy and peace.

WHAT'S TRENDING?

What was the last piece of good news you received? Tweet or post your response with the hashtag #goodnews on Twitter to @YMPartners or on facebook.com/youthministrypartners