

A Misfit's Guide Toward Joy

Joy is foundational for a life with Jesus. According to Dr. Jim Wilder we can train our brains to make joy our default emotional state. Dr. Wilder designed this “Joy Exercise” to help us get started on a path toward joy.

Phase 1: Learning to Relive Gratitude Memories¹

Think of a memory in your life for which you are grateful. It can be big (the birth of a child) or small (a beautiful sunset). It doesn't matter, as long as you feel gratitude when you think about it. This step could take anywhere from 5-20 minutes.

Give it a two-to three-word title (for example, “Dave's Birth,” “Sunset on Trail”)

In a quiet place, go back into this memory and relive it for a minute, like you are back in it

Ask:

What did you feel in your body? Maybe “peace” or “lightness” (it doesn't matter what you feel as long as you feel something in your body)

What might God be communicating to you through the memory and the peace you feel? Ex. God is with me and likes to share His Beauty with me.

Compile a list of 5-10 gratitude memories that fit this criteria.

Keep this list close (on your phone, in your Bible, etc.) for the next 30 days.

Tips

Be gracious. As Dr. Wilder says:

Spending five minutes reliving memories without being distracted is difficult if you have never done it before...Give yourself grace. You may be exercising a muscle in your heart that hasn't been used much. Use your list of memories during the five minutes.

Habit stacking is key. Find a habit you do every day and “stack” the 30 Day Joy Exercise after it. For example: I get a cup of coffee every morning and brush my teeth every night. Habit stacking looks like:

¹ This joy exercise has been taken from Appendix B of Dr. Wilder's book: Hendricks, Michael and Jim Wilder. *The Other Half of Church*. Moody Publishing 2020

After I sit down to enjoy my coffee, I will practice the 30 Day Joy Exercise.

After I put my toothbrush down, I will practice the 30 Day Joy Exercise.

After I _____, I will practice the 30 Day Joy Exercise.

Use Scripture to jumpstart your gratitude. It may feel forced to feel gratitude. God's people have always used Scripture to tune our hearts toward gratitude. Here are some helps:

2 Corinthians 4:6

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand

Numbers 6:24-26

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

Psalm 28:7

The Lord is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.

Phase 2: The 30 Day Joy Exercise

Grab your list and spend five minutes residing in gratitude using your list of grateful memories. It is mostly nonverbal. You are feeling a connection with God in your body as you relive memories of gratitude.

Do this three times a day. Do it the first thing in the morning, at midday, and the last thing you do before going to bed. Do this for 30 days. Consistency is key.

Phase 3: Joy Maintenance (After 30 Days)

Maintain joy levels by spending five minutes each day in gratitude.