



Dear LifeGroup Leader,

Welcome to Fall!

We just had our "Imagine Volunteering" kickoff, and I'm so excited for the new groups that will be forming this season.

This week it seems we are focusing on *presence*. The topic is technically joy, but here's why that's interesting. Psychologically, joy is the emotion of good connection with someone. In fact, I'm willing to bet that if you think of a memory of when you were feeling joy, you could replace the word "joy" with "connection", and it would be just as true. Joy is what we feel when things are right and good between us and another.

In this passage, John uses the word "joy" RIGHT after he reflects on what it was like to BE WITH Jesus, in the flesh. And that is worth thinking on: "Being with" Jesus gives us joy.

Then what does it mean that our bodies are the hands and feet of Jesus in our world? In our LifeGroup? For the Praxis section, I'm going to ask you to hold hands together. I hope this intro gives you a sense of why. If you feel uncomfortable, first ask yourself, why? Our physical touch is a powerful way of "being with" one another, something God designed to give us joy.

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Imagination Imagine Joy

Imagination is our ability to clearly envision a specific reality. Without imagination, we're caught in "the way things are", the status quo, the cultural milieu. But what if we were to allow ourselves to clearly envision a new way of being, a new way of relating, a new way of living in our world together? The epistles of John invite us to do just that. John invites us to believe in Jesus, who walked among us and who John witnessed, so that we can join in the joy. What would be different in your life if you could imagine this reality clearly?

FOCAL POINT: Jesus' presence brings us joy.



Getting Started

Catch up together about how your week has been, possibly also revisit last week's meeting.

- ▶ Apart from family relationships, what friendships bring you joy, even when you think of them?



Exploring Scripture

Read the following passage together.

1 John 1:1-4

- ▶ Where do you hear God's heart in this passage?
- ▶ What words or phrases stick out to you?



Reflection

Take time to reflect together about the passage.

- ▶ How would you put John's thoughts in your own words?
- ▶ These are the first words of John's letter. How is this message different than how you would expect a letter like this to begin? What is so important for John about starting this way?
- ▶ John's introductory words emphasize the personal experience of closeness to Jesus as foundational to faith and living. This flies in the face of other things we might have been taught about how to live well. When you imagine this being the foundation of your faith, what else melts away? What else becomes important?



Praxis

With the understanding that we gathered here are the body of Christ, let's allow the truth from today's scripture to impact us as a LifeGroup.

- ▶ Often in a "bible study" atmosphere, we can almost magnetically tend toward sharing intellectual thoughts and ideas about scripture or faithful living. Let's take a break and allow ourselves, per John's encouragement, to allow room for Jesus' presence with us.
- ▶ Scripture tells us that our bodies can be Jesus' presence to others. Let's take a moment, hold hands together, and read the passage again, recognizing that Jesus is with us.
- ▶ In this same posture, let's pray and simply give thanks, acknowledging Jesus' presence with us.
- ▶ What was this like for you? What did you notice?



Moving Outward

Challenge each other to live out God's truth this week.

- ▶ Practice bodily presence this week. With someone close to you (spouse, parent, sibling, close friend), give some act of physical touch, recognizing how Jesus is made present to you through this simple encounter.

1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.