



Finding Joy in the Curriculum

A guide for how to best utilize the Quest for Life curriculum materials.

LESSON DEVELOPED BY

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TIPS TO PREPARE

1. Begin where you need to begin

Start with a lesson that connects with the people. The lessons are not designed to be delivered in a particular sequence. Use your judgment about what order makes the most sense. Many users begin with “Tuning-In to Joy: Discovering Joy in Real Life” because it introduces the idea of joy as one of many emotions to be discovered and chosen, setting a foundation for further learning. You may find that the discussions opened by the curriculum foster vulnerability and candor that shift something in the group. You may consider planning some of the more intense lessons for later. Know, though, that there is no wrong way to do it.

Consider the extent of your commitment to the project. We like the idea of using this curriculum over a twelve-month cycle or even a school year. Because the concept and practices of joy are not easily assimilated, and requires a kind of re-formation, devoting a season of time matters. The curriculum provides ample material.

Take a look in the Examples section to see how some congregations approached the order of lessons.

2. Respect the construction

While the entire curriculum is not sequenced, each lesson is carefully constructed to lead toward learning. Early users of the curriculum highly recommend following the order of the lesson plan. (Meaning they regretted it when they did not.) We advise you not to squeeze material in to fit the time available because you will lose impact.

That said, we know it is hard to move through the entire lesson if you only actually have a 40- minute block to teach or middle schoolers with a ten-minute attention span. You may, and you should, adapt the curriculum for use in your educational structure. Users of the curriculum have found success in dividing a lesson over more than one week, with a brief reintroduction to start. (This also benefits teenagers who are not present each time.) You may find a good divide between “Gathering” and “Engage” one week and “Reflect” and “Send Forth” the next. Users of the lessons have also adapted for different age groups by shortening lessons to match attention spans, being selective about Bible passages to avoid unfamiliar language and sentence structure, and carefully choosing the best fit among activities when several are included in the lesson (or make up one of your own!)

3. And build onto the construction

Go local. Draw upon the resources you have identified. Youth respond well to adults who share authentically about their own life experiences. Invite speakers from outside

organizations to share their knowledge and resources. Beware, however, of the rogue outsider. Carefully curate these human resources through in-depth conversation.

Go outside. What if you met in a coffee shop? Planted a patch of flowers? Established a Joy Place on the grounds?

Go to your bench. Share leadership with capable teenagers, giving them responsibility for teaching certain lessons that connect with their interests, experience or knowledge. (Again, preparation required.)

Go sensory. If you have the resource of space, create art and tactile materials with the teenagers for display to keep the themes visually present. Some have created a Joy Quilt, a Wall of Joy for posting Purpose Statements, pictures, other tangible items, and an altar of joy with artifacts (or smells or textures) that represent sources of joy in their lives. Generate a Spotify list of music that touches on each lesson or other connections the youth have made.

Go long. Identify ways to keep the themes alive between meetings and across the summer- text threads on apps used by the youth group, #where'sjoy Instagram account for joy postings, a bullet journal started on day one.

4. If time allows

Ideally, the youth leaders and adults who teach, would read, discuss and digest each chapter of Joy: A Guide to Youth Ministry

associated with each curricular piece and not simply pick up the lesson the morning of teaching. The field of “Joy” is newly emerging, and we have much to learn. We ask that you share the intellectual resources with your team and teachers. One of our hopes is that not only the youth, but also the adults and even the congregation might be transformed through the learning and practices of joy.

However, we also recognize that the ideal and the real may not coincide. Therefore, you will find “Going Deeper” to accompany each lesson. This is a short summary of the knowledge from the chapter on which the lesson is built that may support teachers.

5. Do you have to go it alone?

Consider creating a Joy Collective—a group of congregations who are each using the Joy Curriculum during the same time period. You might all meet for a shared meal to launch at the beginning and another to celebrate at the end of the year. Plan a regular time each month for a check-in via Zoom and agree on one person who will set up the calls. You will bring your own questions, but consider a standard agenda:

- What lessons have we done? What worked well? What would we do differently
- What lessons are we planning next? Who can give us insight or advice on these
- What is happening with our youth? Who else is being impacted?
- We have found that sharing your experiences with each other increases confidence and creativity. Plus, you might just inspire each other to keep going.

Purpose

Whether you are a full-time paid Christian educator or a volunteer youth group leader, or anything in between, we believe you will find a friend in the Quest for Life Curriculum. Whether you have three sixth grade boys or 100 high school seniors, we believe you will find a friend in the Quest for Life Curriculum. Here are some thoughts to help you thrive.

Introduction for Leaders

Origin Story of Quest for Life Curriculum

The Joy and Adolescent Faith and Flourishing project (JAFF) grew from the Yale Youth Ministry Institute's participation in the "God and Human Flourishing" project housed in The Yale Center for Faith and Culture. (The work was funded by a major grant from the Templeton Foundation.) The project aims for more than generating books and curriculum; it exists to start a movement that reclaims concern for the flourishing of individuals, communities, and our whole globe. Such a movement is urgent in a culture where concern for the self and seeking satisfaction through experience replaces love of God and neighbor.

Joy is identified as central to human flourishing. In the words of theologian Miroslav Volf: "The Bible invites individuals and communities to practice and participate in God's true joy. After telling the disciples that they should keep his commandments and remain in his love, Jesus explains, "I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete." Joy is the crown of the good life, integrating all positive emotions as well as including and expressing in its own way the responsibility to lead our lives well and to construe both the world and the good rightly." Yet joy has been underemphasized in modern Christian theology, thus the project took up the theology of joy and the good life as a central focus.

Adolescents, in the thrall of competing claims about what makes the good life, require particular attention. Their vision of flourishing easily shapes to fit our culture's obsession with maximizing experiences as the way toward a good life. At the same time, they may be the most open of us all to a vision of flourishing that holds joy at the center. In response to this reality, JAFF convened scholars of youth ministry to develop a theology of joy rooted in the

experiences of American teenagers and to create ways of teaching the practice of joy to youth. Thanks to their years of thinking, researching, and writing later, we have a book, *Joy: A Guide for Youth Ministry*, edited by David F. White and Sarah F. Farmer, and a robust curriculum crafted by the contributors to the volume.

Each chapter, and each lesson in the curriculum, focus on either an inhibitor of joy or on what fosters joy. The lessons teach practical tools adolescents may use to learn the way of joy—the disposition that leans us toward God’s goodness and delight and that pulls us toward the goodness and delight we find in God’s creation.

You are where you are.

No curriculum is one-size-fits-all. Start by mapping your reality so you can adapt the resources accordingly. Ask yourselves these questions: Who are our youth? When, where and how are we currently teaching them? Is this working? What are the places now where we would integrate the lessons? What resources do we have—space, time, leaders among the youth, pastor and congregational leadership support? Which adults in the congregation can speak to specific issues? Who in local community organizations might provide resources? What is the capacity of adult leaders? The answers to the questions will help you plan for how to best adapt the curriculum.

As you begin where you are, you might consider whether this is an opportunity to involve the larger congregation so that what you are teaching is affirmed and reinforced. Consider intentionally introducing the Joy Project to the whole congregation (take a look in the attached Resources for examples for inspiration), communicating regularly about lessons and learning, partnering with the pastor to incorporate themes into preaching and worship, or looking ahead to the church calendar in planning the sequence of lessons to connect with the life of the whole community.

Consider what parents and other adults may benefit from learning. Parents might read selections from *Joy: A Guide to Youth Ministry*; adults who have read it report that the insights are not just for teenagers but provide fresh perspective for adults. Adult Sunday School classes might study *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture and the Good Life* edited by Miroslav Volf or watch one of many videos on the theology of joy that can be found on the Yale Center for Faith and Culture YouTube channel and the Yale [Youth Ministry Institute](#) website.