

CHRISTIAN JOY

by Mark Reed

PURPOSE

To lead youth to a practical understanding of Christian joy and to assist them in securing and maintaining that joy in their lives.

PREPARATION

Collect felt-tip markers, three sheets of posterboard, chalkboard, chalk, pencils, paper, three 3 x 5 cards for each person, tape and Bibles.

If you use the laugh tape or giggle record in the Opening you will need to purchase one or make your own. Make one by recording four or five people in a small room. One person starts chuckling, then giggling, another joins, then another, until everyone is roaring with laughter.

Bring a tape player or record player to the meeting.

Write one of the following incomplete sentences at the top of each posterboard:

There is joy in . . .

If it feels good . . .

Happiness is . . .

Post the signs about the meeting room.

Ask a youth to lead several choruses about joy such as: "The Joy of the Lord Is My Strength," "Rejoice in the Lord Always," "There Is Joy in Serving Jesus," and "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy."

Arrange chairs in a circle with the chalkboard in front.

Copy the Joy in Jesus discussion guide in the "Meat" of the Meeting section. Make one copy for every four or five youth.

OPENING

As the youth arrive, distribute markers and ask them to complete the posterboard sentences with a word or phrase (in graffiti fashion).

After everyone has written ideas, ask the song leader to begin the choruses.

As an option, play the game Poor, Poor Puppy. One person selects someone in the circle and tries to make that person laugh or smile. The person may only touch or pat the other person on the head and say, "Poor, poor, puppy." If the person cannot break the subject's solemn look after saying this three times, the player must move to someone else. No other words may be spoken but gestures and facial expressions are unbounded. Play passes to the person unable to keep a straight face.

Another "laughable" activity is to play a laugh tape or giggle record. Start the tape without introduction—soon everyone will be laughing.

THE "MEAT" OF THE MEETING

Divide into small discussion groups with a sponsor or leader in each group. Each leader receives a

copy of the Joy in Jesus discussion guide, pencil and paper.

Joy in Jesus

1. What color do you think of when you hear the word joy? Why?
2. How would you define joy? Refer to the graffiti posters.
3. Where does joy come from? Make a list of the sources of joy. See Philippians 1:3-7; 2:2, 17-18, 28-29; 4:1, 10-13. What caused Paul to rejoice?

Have each group complete its list and share answers with the large group. Read Philippians 3:1 and 4:4. Ask, "Why do you think Paul commands joy?"

To make a distinction between joy and happiness, write "Happiness" on the chalkboard and write "Happen" below it. Explain that happiness depends on what happens, but joy does not depend on circumstances. Rather, joy depends on personal relationships to God. Happiness is a rollercoaster ride while joy continues regardless of circumstances. (Paul wrote the Philippian letter while in prison.)

Write on the blackboard, "Joy is an attitude."

Ask, how do you feel about that? What do you think it means? How, then, can we have joy when we're in the midst of troubles? Refer to Paul's life noting the importance of self-sacrifice, unselfishness, putting others first and the need to depend upon God as the source of joy.

Return to the groups and have the youth write a description of the joyous Christian's outlook on life. Have each group share its descriptions.

RESPONSE (OR CLOSING)

If time permits, give each youth a pencil and two 3 x 5 cards. Ask the participants to write on the left side of one card something that makes them happy and on the right side something that makes them unhappy. On the left side of the other card have them write "Joy comes from Jesus," and on the right side list the times they had the least joy.

When all are finished, have them tear the cards in half. Provide tape for them to put opposite sides together so the unhappy and happy sides are mixed.

Remind them that in Jesus, the happy and sad times flow together and have little effect on our Christian joy. The other card serves as a reminder during the difficult times that Jesus is the reason for and source of joy.

From the group lists of the joyous Christian's outlook ("Meat" of the Meeting), ask the youth to choose one characteristic they need in their lives. Have them write it on another 3 x 5 card, and how they will immediately utilize that characteristic in their lives. Allow time for volunteers to share their commitments with small groups.

Close with prayer in the groups. Encourage each person to pray for the person on his or her right.