

Whole-Brain Living

Session 1: The Power of Joy

1. Introduction: Why this class?

- Life is about relationships. You are created by a relational God.
- The greatest joys and satisfactions in life come through relationships.
- And, the greatest pain comes through relationships.
- Jesus told us the #1 Command is to love God with all that we are *and* to love others well (and even love our enemies).

2. Exercise: Practice Appreciation

- Take 3 slow, deep breaths
- Think of something you enjoyed from your day
 - Big or small
 - Something that made you feel joyful, peaceful, or connected
- Re-enter the moment as fully as possible (what did you feel, hear, smell, etc.)

3. Why 'Appreciation'?

- When we look for things to appreciate, we are training our brain to scan our environment for things that are good, for God's gifts, for things to be thankful for.
- Your brain is a natural amplifier. Whatever we feel we tend to focus on. Whatever we focus on we tend to amplify.
- Some of us tend to scan our environment for what could go wrong, for problems, threats, etc.
- The good news is that your brain is 'plastic' meaning it can grow new neural pathways and change – even as an adult.
- Plus, it's biblical! Cf. Philippians 4:8-9 "...whatever is true, noble, right, pure...think on these things...and the God of peace will be with you."

4. The Power of Joy

- The 1990s' – The Decade of the Brain
- UCLA – Dr. Allan Schore
 - Joy is the fuel your brain is designed to run on.
 - Joy is relational. It is being the sparkle in someone's eye. It means "we are glad to be together."
 - The brain can run on fear, but joy is its preferred fuel, and gets far better results.
- Joy is conveyed primarily through non-verbal communication
 - Facial expressions (especially the eyes)
 - Voice tone
 - Body language
- Our brain's "Identity Center" (right orbital prefrontal cortex) is built by our interactions with the faces looking back at us. It's largely comprised of mirror neurons.

5. Joy in the Bible [It's kind of a big deal]

- My relational connection with the God Who delights in me is my strength – Nehemiah 8:10
- Being in God's presence builds joy – Psalm 16:11
- Joy is what enables us to suffer well – Hebrews 12:2
- Jesus came so that our joy would be full – John 15:11
- Even God's Kingdom is primarily about joyful relationships with God and others – Romans 14:17
- The fruit of the Spirit is joy – Galatians 5:23
- Face to face connection with God is transforming – 2 Corinthians 3:18

6. Suggested Homework

- Share joy with at least 1 person a day this week.
 - Roommate
 - Co-Worker
 - Spouse
 - Child
 - Friend
 - Walmart Checker

7. Joy & Rest

- Your brain is designed to run on rhythms of joy and rest (or 'quiet').
- Joy should always lead to rest. Rest renews us to enter into more joy.
- Many places in the Bible combine joy and peace:
 - Romans 14:17 – "...righteousness (right relationships), peace, and joy"
 - Galatians 5:23 – "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace ..."
- Joy & Rest, Engagement & Disengagement
 - E.g., Seeing a friend
 - Tickling
 - Smiling at a baby
- The ability to quiet after both joyful and upsetting emotions is the #1 predictor of life-long mental health (Dr. Allan Schore).

8. Exercise: Simple Quiet

- Close your eyes, relax your body
- Take several deep breaths (4-5x)
- "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)
- Take several deep breaths

9. Optional Homework

- Set a daily reminder to take a 2 minute pause every day this week
 - Close your eyes
 - Slow deep breaths
 - Release everything to God
- Or, download the "One Minute Pause" app (free)

10. Non-Relational Joy Substitutes (AKA BEEPS)

- Behaviors
- Events
- Experiences
- People
- Substances

11. Immanuel Interaction

- Take 3, slow, deep belly breaths
- Ask God to bring to mind a special, joyful memory.
- Write a prayer of thanksgiving: *Dear Lord, I am thankful for* _____

- Write a response from God's perspective: *Dear child of mine* _____

- Ask: "Jesus, what do you want me to know about how you see me?"
 - Write down the thoughts, words, impressions that come to mind without filtering (you can test it later).
- Jesus' tender response toward me: *"My dear child..."* _____

