

## Joy After Dark. Scripture and Background Information for Dec. 04-11.

To prepare for your group discussion each week, group members should use the **Community Group Discussion Guide** to complete the **GOD'S WORDS** and **MY WORDS** columns using the scripture below.

Last week, we launched into the Advent season. During the time of Advent, believers all over the world celebrate Christ's coming. Like the ancient Israelites who waited for Christ's first coming, believers today remember his first coming while waiting for the second. During times of captivity, persecution, and occupation, the Israelites waited for the coming king. What they learned was that in the time of waiting, God promises everlasting joy. With this series, we will look at what joy is, where it's found, and what to do with it once you have it. We start with Psalm 126, looking at "Searching/Waiting/Wondering."

### **Background for Psalm 126:**

Psalm 126 belongs to a group of Psalms (120-134) used as worship songs when the Israelites went to Jerusalem to celebrate their holidays. Our Psalm today builds on the background of Israel's captivity. After their enemies captured Israel, they came back to their homeland. The Psalm builds a thanksgiving of past actions and a prayer for future blessings. The psalm starts with God's actions and the people's dependency on Him. He worked in the past; He will also work in the future (v.1+4). The second subpoint describes the comparison of how God acted or will act. God acted in the past, and His people felt they were dreaming from His blessings. If God acts in the future, the people will flourish like the desert flourishes if water hits the dry ground (v.1+4b). Both sections within the psalm end with the result of God's actions, which bring everlasting joy (2-3+5-6).

Here are several insights and questions to engage with the text:

1. As you think about what joy is, how does it differ from how we commonly think of it? Why is that important for us to remember?
2. What do the comparisons reveal about God's saving actions (1b+4b)? When the Israelites received joy (1-3), what did they do for the future (4b)?
3. Which pictures does the Psalmist use for describing future blessings? What produces the joy in the psalm (verse 5)? How can our sorrow produce good fruits?
4. As you think about those in a season of darkness, how could the Lord use you to provide reminders of joy?

*Note: While waiting for Christ to come back in the future, Christians also recognize His presence with us. Sorrow, hardship, waiting, and other interruptions don't stop believers from serving Him because Christ gives lasting joy. After the people of Israel received joy through God's restoration, they prayed for a future spiritual restoration (v.4). How does Christ's joy in your life affect you?*

### **Scriptures for upcoming weeks:**

December 12-18

December 19-23

Psalm 21

Psalm 98