

Spiritual Exercises
Celebration

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INTRODUCTION

The 24 Day Challenge has been a stretch for many, if not all, of us. There have been good days and bad days, inspiring days and frustrating days. Yet, the entire month has been an experience worth celebrating because you deliberately made an intentional investment in your life with God, which is always worth celebrating in the end.

Unfortunately for us, so many of us are not great “celebrators”. We are so aware of our own weaknesses and shortcomings or we are too perfectionistic to accept anything less than 100% or we are too hard on ourselves to imagine that we have anything to celebrate at all. This week’s exercises are about letting loose and having fun because the fruit of the Spirit” (the evidence of God’s work in our lives) is joy!

Take some time to reflect on why and how you do (or don’t) practice celebration in your life, but then spend this week thinking of ways (these ways or other ways) to celebrate community, to celebrate life and to celebrate God because God is worth celebrating!

**Exercises
To help us
Reflect on
Celebration**

REFLECTING ON CELEBRATION

So many of our values when it comes to celebrating life (or NOT celebrating life) are values we inherited honestly from our upbringing or we absorbed by osmosis from our culture. But what do these values really say about us and the way in which we value (or don't value) celebrating God's goodness in our lives. Spend some time with one or more of the following exercises to do some reflection on your own values when it comes to celebration and to challenge yourself to adopt biblical values.

1) *Make a list of the types of events that you currently celebrate. These could be annual events such as birthdays, anniversaries, etc., or less regular events such as a promotion, sports victory or baptism.*

- i. What kinds of events get celebrated in your world? What kinds of things purposely do NOT get celebrated? Why kinds of things do you find it hard to celebrate (though you know you should)?
- ii. Why does it feel natural to celebrate some things but not others?
- iii. How do you typically celebrate these various events? Why have you chosen to celebrate things the way you have?
- iv. Reflect on the types of celebrations/traditions that were part of your growing up years. What traditions/celebrations have you carried forward and how have you preserved or altered them to better suit? What have you chosen to leave behind? Why?
- v. If you have young children, consider reading *The Party* by Barbara Reid.

2) *Spend some time thinking about how the Bible portrays celebration.*

- i. When you think through the Scriptures, what kinds of things got celebrated in the pages of Scripture? How do those things compare to the kinds of things that get celebrated today?
- ii. When you think about celebrations in the Bible, what were some common features of biblical celebrations? How do these ways to celebrate compare to how we celebrate today?
- iii. How would you explain the similarities? The differences?
- iv. In what ways, do you think your life could be a bigger, better, more biblical experience of celebration than it has been?



**Exercises
In
Celebration**

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

The Bible says that, aside from learning to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, the single most important thing we can do is love each other as much as we love ourselves. Our lives are intended to be lived out in community with each other and part of that community is learning to celebrate the impact that our relationships make in our lives.

This coming week, consider trying to celebrate the community in our lives with one of the following suggestions:

- i. Part of the purpose of the book of Esther is to explain the origins of a Jewish celebration called Purim (Esther 9:22). This holiday is unique because, not only does it involve feasting and gift-giving, it also involves intentionally finding ways to give to the poor. The next time you host a celebration (a birthday party, a dinner party, or a wedding), find creative ways to live out the spirit of Purim and extend your celebration to the poor. You could consider making an extra dessert or main course and offering it to an underresourced family or individual.

- ii. Read Luke 14:1-14. So often our dinner parties (and other celebrations) are held with mixed motivations. We host people hoping for the return invitation, or hoping to initiate relationship with someone “popular,” etc. What would it look like for us to host dinner parties like Jesus describes? The next time you host a celebration, consider these words of Jesus and remember to also include some guests like the ones Jesus encourages in Luke 14:12-14.

- iii. Read Colossians 3:11 and Revelation 7:9-12. Diversity is a value in Jesus’ kingdom both here on earth and in eternity. Jesus loves to see communities made up of a variety of ethnicities, cultures, languages, educational backgrounds, religious backgrounds, all ages and both genders. Yet, so often, the relationships we celebrate are with people who look and feel and sound just like us. The next time you host a celebration intentionally make your guest list as diverse as possible to include all the kinds of people God loves.

- iv. What do you do when you ‘have people over’? Do you have a default mode of conversation? Do the same topics tend to repeatedly come up? Do you even find yourself making the same meal? What if the time that you carved out for other people took a more deliberate flavor? What if the moments we spend with each other celebrated the value of the relationship rather than simply maintained it?

This week, as you continue to build into peoples lives, take the time to celebrate your relationship. Perhaps, recount a memory the two of you that impacted you. Tell your friend, spouse, child, co-worker about this and let them know that you valued that time. Perhaps take the time to write a quick letter to someone, letting them know that you care and that they are important to you. The point is to remember, reflect and celebrate the important people in your life!

- v. Each person gives and receives love in different ways. One of those ways is verbally giving affirmation of care and value to others. This week, go out of your way to say out loud how you feel about the important people in you life-your friends, family, spouse, kids-all those who are significant. Try using someone’s love language (in addition to verbal affirmation) to make sure they “hear” your appreciation. Give them a small token of appreciation, perform an act of service for them, spend some quality time, or simply provide an affirming physical touch. For some, this can be difficult, however for the person who hears these words, and receives these actions, they may realize or remember, just how much they mean to you.

CELEBRATING LIFE

Often we hold off on celebration because we think that we need a “good reason” to celebrate, to throw a party. We would probably do well to learn that life itself is a good enough reason to celebrate. Celebrating God’s goodness in life is an act of worship because it declares celebrates God’s generosity and grace.

This coming week, stop looking for a good reason to throw a party and simply throw a party because life is good.

- i. Read Psalm 126 (especially verse 2). Though the Bible speaks openly about celebrating God’s goodness with laughter and shouts of joy. There is a Yiddish proverb that says, “What soap is to the body, so laughter is to the soul.” How does laughter cleanse our soul? Make time this week to gather with some good friends with whom you can laugh, tell stories, and be silly. If you have forgotten how to do this, observe some children playing together!
- ii. For whatever reason, we seem to have made a virtue of living in the “real world,” which doesn’t do much for our sense of celebration. This week deliberately encourage the gifts of fantasy and imagination.
 - a. When your kids or others kids ask you to play them, enter their world of fantasy and enjoy.
 - b. Foster your own imagination and see what creative ideas can be released.
 - c. Take time to relish the creativity of others. Visit or organize an art show of an artist you know or an intimate gathering (or formal concert) to hear someone’s music or to view a dramatic production of a friend’s play or movie.
 - d. Have a family art show to feature your children’s paintings and stories from school, or home.
- iii. “They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,” says Psalm 145:7. Why do we limit our celebrations to traditional holidays? Jewish festivals were times to remember God’s activity or faithfulness to the Jewish community.
 - a. This week make a list of the ways God has blessed you, or been faithful to you, to your family, or to your faith community.

b. Next try to think of some ways that you can pass your memories on to the next generation in your family or to your community of faith. Is there a physical token that can be a reminder of the story? Is there a specific date that can be set aside each year to remember. Is there a certain food that can tell part of the story? Could you write and illustrate a book that could be shared? The remainder of verse 7 says, “[they] shall sing aloud of your righteousness.” Is there a song to be written and shared?

c. Finally, share your new holiday with your family, friends, or your life group.

iv. Read Esther 4:12-14 and Daniel 3: 16-18. We seem to always want to wait until every “i” is dotted and every “t” is crossed in our lives before we are ready to celebrate what God has done. How do Mordecai (in Esther) and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (in Daniel) take a different approach to their level of expectation about God’s faithfulness? In what ways could you begin to celebrate, in faith, the ways in which God will be faithful to you, given your current circumstances, even if you can’t be entirely sure right now what (or when) that will be?

v. Define awe and/or wonder. What is it that normally inspires awe and wonder in you? When is the last time you had an awe-inspiring or wonder-filled moment? What are the barriers or hindrances that keep you from experiencing awe and wonder in your life? How can you deliberately restructure your life around opening yourself up to experiences of awe and wonder?

vi. When life gets mundane, normal, or even boring, how do you celebrate? How do you recognize the joy in life when it gets just a little too routine? What do you do with the ordinary? This week, as you go about your ‘ordinary’ tasks, attempt to change your perspective. Is there anything to be thankful in the fact that this task is yours? Is there room for celebration in it? If you are adventurous, consider throwing a ‘Regular Day Party’ where all your friends come over and you talk about what is wonderful about your ‘regular’ day. Because what if everything in life was worth celebrating?

CELEBRATING GOD

I know of very few people who have ever thought to celebrate the very best reason that we have to fill our lives with joy and laughter. God himself is a good enough reason for us to spend our lives in celebration. The very fact that God exists, that he loves us (for some incomprehensible reason), that he has created a wonderful world, that he is redeeming his world and filling it with truth, beauty and justice ought to be good enough reasons celebrate God.

Consider the following two verses from The Message translation of the Bible:
“Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him!” (Philippians 4:4)

“Worship God in adoring embrace, celebrate in trembling awe.” (Psalm 2:10)

This coming week, celebrate the presence of God in your life, as though that was all you needed for life (because he is).

- i. 1 Kings 6 tells the story of Solomon building the Temple to be a grand place of worship. Yet, you get the distinct sense from the story that the very ritual or act of actually building the Temple was also an act of worship. This week consider creating something to use in your own worship, and treat each step from idea, to design, to labour as an act of worship. You could write a special verse or prayer out in calligraphy, make a stepping stone, craft a prayer bench, write a story or a song, make a necklace with symbolic beads, or paint the image of one of your sacred places. These creations can then be used in your times of worship.
- ii. How can you create opportunities to worship at home?
 - a. Your family may want to consider creating a “praise jar” where you can write down things about God that are worthy of worship or celebration. And celebrate one of those things each night at dinner.
 - b. Like Moses in Exodus 33:18, you may want to pray “Now show me your glory” and see whether God doesn’t reveal something of his goodness to you.
 - c. You watch the following video by Chris Tomlin: Indescribable <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PTvr755V8s>.
 - d. You may want to consider creating a family art project based on scripture. Examples might include Luke 2: 8-14 or Daniel 7: 9-10.

End of Week Reflection

