

## USG SGM ~ The Practice of Joy ~ April, 2025

drawn from Soul Matters materials, see the full packet for more of all of these elements

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**Chalice Lighting:** Happiness is attached to things being a certain way. But joy is about the bliss of *being*. It transcends highs and lows. [Martha Beck](#)

**Check-in:** Share your highs and lows since we last met focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.

**Spiritual Exercises:** It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of thinking and into the space of doing, these exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say to us! Pick the exercise that speaks to you the most. Come to the group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did and what gift it gave you.

**Option A – Search Your Photos for Joy (and the Many Types of Joy!):** We often underestimate the amount of joy in our lives. So remind yourself by going back through all the photos on your camera or computer from the past year and pick out one for each type of joy you can think of. Besides helping you realize how blessed you are with joy; it will enable you to think more deeply about how you relate to joy. And with a better ability to name different forms of joy, the better you will be able to notice them when they show up in your life. Come to your group ready to share which new types of joy you discovered!

**Option B – The Story of a Joke:** Spend some time thinking of your best joke *story*. Not your best joke. Instead, one of the best stories you have about the role of jokes or a joke in your life. It might be a time when a joke brought needed levity to a sad or tense moment. Or when a great joke came from an unexpected person. Many of us will have stories of practical jokes that testify about how teasing can often be a tender way of saying "I see you" or "I love you." Or how about a time when a joke went contagious and made everyone gathered laugh uncontrollably, feeding off each other's joy in an endless loop. So, what's your joke story?! Come to your group ready to share it and why it means so much to you.

### Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.

[Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

What if joy and pain are fundamentally tangled up with one another? Or even more to the point: what if joy is not only entangled with pain, suffering or sorrow, but it's also what emerges from how we care for each other through those things? What if joy, instead of refuge or relief from heartbreak, is what effloresces from us as we help each other carry our heartbreaks? [Ross Gay](#)

I slept and dreamt that life was joy.

I awoke and saw that life was service.

I acted and, behold, service was joy. [Rabindranath Tagore](#)

We must reclaim joy outside of the artificial "cheer" it is often reduced to. There is a joy that is defiant. A portal to survival for our ancestors. A way to say, we will not be captive to despair nor abandon our belief in beauty. Joy with teeth. [Cole Arthur Riley](#)

I watched her cooking, from my chair...  
"It's ready now. Come on," she said...  
We ate, and talked, and went to bed,  
And slept. It was a miracle. [Donald Hall](#)

We're only here for a minute. We're here for a little window. And to use that time to catch and share shards of light and laughter and grace seems to me the great story. [Brian Doyle](#)

Joy - flighty, jumpy, startling thing that it is - often finds its true voice within its opposite... as a bright, insistent spasm of defiance within the darkness of the world. [Nick Cave](#)

A person will be called to account on judgment day for every permissible thing they might have enjoyed but did not. [The Talmud](#)

**Questions:** This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. They are not meant to be answered as much as to take you on a journey. Read through the questions 2-3 times until one question sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions "*shimmers*."

1. What simple joy rescues you over and over again? (What might you do to make a little bit more room for it in your life?)
2. What were you first taught about "deserving joy"?
3. Has choosing joy ever been an act of survival for you? Or an act of defiance?
4. Are you too responsible to let joy in?
5. If you could magically give a joy-filled and sorrowless week to one of your friends, family members or co-workers in the coming year, who would you choose and why?
6. Are you mostly a creator of joy, receiver of joy, notice-er of joy or spreader of joy?

**Sitting in Silence:** Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.

**Sharing/Deep Listening:** Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.

**Reflection and Gratitude:** This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.

**Singing:** Jon Batiste's [I Need You](#); Katrina and the Waves' [Walking on Sunshine](#); Pharrell Williams' [Happy](#); and 8 more joyful songs on the *Joy Overflowing* playlist on [YouTube](#) & [Spotify](#).

**Extinguishing the Chalice:** I don't think anyone "finds" joy. Rather, we cultivate it by searching for the preciousness of small things, the ordinary miracles that strengthen our hearts so we can keep them open to what is difficult. [Dawna Markova](#)