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## LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

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### LEADER DETAILS:

- **MAIN TEXT:** Ecclesiastes 7:1–14
- **MAIN IDEA:** How the wise live lives of true joy.
- **GROWTH FOCUS:** What are ways for group members to share leadership responsibilities? (lead prayer time, icebreaker, announcements, a discussion, group special gatherings, etc. – you get the point lol).
- **ICEBREAKER:** What memory fills you with joy when you think about it?

### ANNOUNCEMENTS: (Full details at: [emergence.church/digital-bulletin](https://emergence.church/digital-bulletin))

- **Family Dedication** - February 19 and 22 in both Ringwood and Totowa. **Last week to sign up.**
  - **The Why** - By publicly declaring their intent to raise their kids to love Jesus, parents will be encouraged to keep that commitment through the highs and lows of parenting. A great opportunity for those families to invite family/friends to hear the gospel.
- **Student Ministry's Winter Retreat** - **February 20–22.** High Point Bible Camp – Pennsylvania
  - **The Why** – Huge opportunity for students to form deep friendships with other students and leaders, and to begin and grow in their faith.
- **Short-Term Missions** – multiple opportunities coming up. Fill out the form for more info!
  - **The Why** – Whether near or far, we want to bring the good news of Jesus, as we have opportunity. Short-term missions can have a profound impact on our spiritual growth.
- **Ringwood Chili Cook-off** – March 1<sup>st</sup> after services!
  - **The Why** – A community building event. Also, to invite a friend out for church. Maybe they don't like church but do like chili—they'll end up getting chili and Jesus.

### GETTING STARTED:

- **Pray:** This helps everyone to prepare their hearts as you head to the discussion
- **Watch Community Extras Video** (length 5:00 – any questions are included below)

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### LAST WEEK'S GROWTH STEP FOLLOW-UP:

[Leaders: These follow-ups are meant to offer some accountability while being low-pressure. Keep it casual, like, “If you were able to try this last week, how did it go?” Sharing is optional; it’s always okay to pass.]

**Outward Action:** As you go about your work or responsibilities this week, choosing gratitude, let someone know (co-worker, a friend, etc.).

**Inward Prayer:** Pray for awareness of places where work defines your identity, and practice re-centering your identity in Christ.

**SERMON DISCUSSION:** (quality of discussion over quantity of questions you get through)

**Intro**

In this week's sermon, Pastor Ryan reminds us that rejoicing is something that we are called to do as Christians. The reason we can rejoice is because of the hope we have in Jesus. In a culture that does anger and anxiety well, we can grow to be people who do rejoicing well. Paul says in Philippians 4:4 that we are to "rejoice always."

 When you hear that we are called to "rejoice always," what's your initial response?

**Read Philippians 4:4–7**

 Looking at that call to "rejoice always" with more context, how does it seem we can grow in this? How have you seen this play out in your own life?

Besides what we see in Philippians, there are other ways to foster joy. In the sermon, we looked at five ways the wise person cultivates long-term joy, according to Ecclesiastes 7:1–14.

**I - The Wise Person Cultivates Real Beauty**

**Read Ecclesiastes 7:1a** ("A good name is better than precious ointment,")

The "precious ointment" in this verse is cosmetic, and "a good name" represents reputation. Pastor Ryan talked about how real beauty isn't about how we look on the outside, but rather who we're becoming on the inside. A good name, godly character, and a life shaped by Jesus will always outlast and bring more joy than appearance, image, or first impressions.

 Why do we tend to drift toward prioritizing outward appearance over character? Share from your own life how you've experienced more joy as you've grown in character.

**2 - The Wise Person Lives with Perspective**

**Read Ecclesiastes 7:1b–4**

The wisdom to be gained in the "house of mourning" is the reminder that eventually life this side of eternity will end. Pastor Ryan pointed out that moments like funerals or seasons of loss have a way of clarifying what really matters and helps us to ask, "What am I living for?"

 Many of us have experienced loss on some level. How have those moments personally shaped and changed how you choose to live and invest in the present?

**3 - The Wise Person Chooses and Cultivates Good Friends**

**Read Ecclesiastes 7:5–6**

Pastor Ryan compared the thorns crackling under a pot from these verses to friends who are happy to laugh along as your life burns down rather than tell the truth. Wise people value relationships where there's enough trust and love to speak truth, even when it's uncomfortable.

♡ Do you have friends who can lovingly challenge you? If so, how do you usually respond when they do? If you can, share an example of when a friend challenged you, and how it helped.

#### 4 - The Wise Person Lives with Intentionality

##### Read Ecclesiastes 7:7–10

Rather than drifting, reacting, or living in the past, wise people live with intentionality. They know what they're building, they're patient with the process, and they're careful not to let anger, shortcuts, or nostalgia derail them.

♡ What's one area of your life right now where you sense God inviting you to be more intentional?

#### 5 - The Wise Person Chooses to Rejoice Every Day

##### Read Ecclesiastes 7:13–14

Ryan pointed out that when life is good, we should enjoy God's gifts. Also, when life is hard, we can still have joy trusting that God is at work, as those times are from him as well.

♡ What kind of season are you in right now? Carefree? Difficult? How might God be inviting you to practice joy and trust in whichever one you find yourself in?

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#### GROWTH STEP THIS WEEK

**Outward Action:** Enjoy one good gift from God this week with a heart of worship!

**Inward Prayer:** Ask God to reveal an area where you can take a step to be more intentional.

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#### PRAYER TIME

Pray for everyone to live more for what really matters, with joy in Christ.

Pray for God to show us where he's calling us to grow in character.

Pray that God would teach us how to live in real joy, no matter what season we are in.