

# How to Use This Study

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Welcome to *52 Weeks Studying the Word*, a resource written to foster the spirituality of the seniors you serve. It is our hope that you will use this resource to form a weekly Bible study or devotional group. It is also our hope that God uses these three-page lessons as a way to speak to the hearts of your participants.

This book is written in a seasonal format. Each season covers a different topic, and lessons are provided for each week of the year. If you are purchasing this book in the middle of the year, we encourage you to start with the season that you are currently in and work your way through the book's seasons as they correspond with your calendar. We wrote our lessons in a readable format so that you, your staff, a volunteer, or even a resident volunteer could simply read aloud from the book. Discussion questions are included, as well as an activity idea, if you would like to further the study. We are praying for you and your group members as you dive into God's Word this year!

## COMPONENTS OF EACH LESSON

Hymns - The hymn suggestions provide a way to open and close the session in worship. Sing the hymn aloud, or play the music for everyone to enjoy, depending on the level of participation your group members prefer. These hymns can be found on the ElderSong recordings *Hymn-Sing with ElderSong, Volumes 1 & 2*.

Opening Prayer – This prayer can be read aloud to start the group. Invite a group member to read the prayer to the group, if appropriate.

This Week's Verse - Verses for each lesson are taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. You can invite participants to bring their own Bibles to the study, but it is not necessary, as we give you the verse right in the lesson. Read this aloud to the group. We also suggest additional verses in our Going Deeper section, in case you, or your participants, want some additional context for the lesson and highlighted verse.

Scripture Lesson – Read this section aloud for your group, pausing to ask questions as needed.

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Reflection – There are reflection times and questions in each lesson. Ask these questions and pause for conversation. Discussing God’s Word and giving participants the chance to share their story is the best part of meeting in a devotional way. If participants seem reluctant to share, ask them to write down their answers first, if able. Allow the conversation to get off track a bit, but always return to the study.

Activity – We have included an activity in each lesson. Some ideas are simply further questioning or journaling. Some activities require a bit of advance preparation. Material lists are provided, so you can prepare what you need in advance.

Benediction – End each session by reading the season’s benediction. You will find the benedictions at the end of the book, in large print. Make copies for your participants, and encourage them to read the benediction aloud as a group to end your time together for the week.

Finally, the Believer’s Prayer is written at the end of this book if someone wants to make a personal decision to become a Christian.

Enjoy your time with the Word.

Haley Burress & Erin McCart

## JOY - Winter Season: January, February, March

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*There is nothing in the world more beautiful than the forest clothed to its very hollows in snow. It is the still ecstasy of nature, wherein every spray, every blade of grass, every spire of reed, every intricacy of twig, is clad with radiance.*

William Sharp, Scottish poet, 1855-1905

# Winter Season, Week 1: *The Joy of My Heart*

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## MATERIALS NEEDED

- CD player and hymn CD with lyrics
- Long strips of colored cardstock paper, cut wide and long enough to write on
- Markers or pens

## OPENING HYMN

“Doxology” – *Hymn-Sing with ElderSong, Volume 1*

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this new day. We thank you for a new year, a new beginning. Thank you for giving us your Word to live by. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

## THIS WEEK’S VERSE

Your statutes are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.  
Psalm 119:111

## SCRIPTURE LESSON

Boasting of 176 verses, Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. The design of this psalm is to magnify God’s Word and to make it honorable. Let’s take a closer look at our verse for today, breaking it into sections.

*Your statutes:* *Statutes* refers to the covenant between God and his people. God created us in his image. While we were created to worship him, sin entered the world through Adam and Eve. Since then, God has made a way for us to return to him. God’s Word serves as a testimony that God exists, that he loves us, and that he longs to be in a relationship with us.

*My heritage:* For Christians, heaven is our inheritance. God’s Word points us to heaven, giving us the assurance of heaven. The author is also saying that he had inherited God’s Word from his fathers, and he was determined to pass it on to his family forever. There is nothing more important to pass on to the next generation than

## Winter Season, Week 1: *The Joy of My Heart*

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God's Word. The scriptures point us to Jesus, who gave his life so that we may live eternally with him in heaven. It is up to us to claim God's promises and pass them on to our families.

*The joy of my heart:* Here the author is saying that God's Word not only brings joy but that God's Word *is* joy. Sometimes, when I'm feeling down, I pick up the Bible and turn to the book of Psalms. Now I admit it's not always easy for me to read the Bible when I'm feeling sad or lonely. I do so because I know that I will be filled by God's Word. The loneliness and the sadness will be replaced with joy. Even though I don't feel like reading God's Word when I'm in one of those moods, I do so because I know I will experience an abundance of joy afterwards. We are filled with joy as we read and take delight in scripture.

### REFLECTION

- *How many children and grandchildren do you have? Who has the most in our group today?*
- *What do you want to leave as a heritage to your children and grandchildren, or to the next generation?*
- *Do you come from a family of believers? Who taught you about God?*
- *Do you agree that God's Word is joy?*

### ACTIVITY

*Directions:* Distribute the strips of paper and writing utensils. Each participant receives two strips of paper. Ask participants to think of a New Year's resolution. Participants will write the same goal on the two strips of paper. If a participant cannot write, ask him or her to dictate the resolution to you to write down.

One copy is for the participants to keep; encourage the participants to put their resolution in a place where they will see it every day. The other copy can be used to display on a bulletin board within the community. Remember to ask permission first, and only include first names on the display board. Offer to provide materials to help participants reach their goals.

## Winter Season, Week 1: *The Joy of My Heart*

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*Say:* With the New Year upon us, let's think of a New Year's resolution or goal. Take a minute to think about a healthy habit you would like to develop over the next couple of weeks, such as attending an exercise class or reading your Bible after breakfast. In the next few minutes, think of your goal, and then write your goal—the same goal—on the two strips of paper. If you need assistance, I'm happy to help you.

Give time for participants to complete the activity; once participants are finished, continue on.

*Ask:* Is anyone willing to share their resolution?

Give time for participants to respond and be prepared to start the sharing time by sharing a resolution of your own. As participants share their resolutions, offer affirmation such as, "What a great goal!" Once everyone has had the opportunity to share, continue on.

*Say:* Thank you for participating! You have each set amazing goals. Let's try to keep one another accountable by checking in with each other throughout the week.

### CLOSING HYMN

"Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" – *Hymn-Sing with ElderSong, Volume 1*

### WINTER SEASON BENEDICTION

See page 164.

### GOING DEEPER

Read Psalm 119:105-112.

# Winter Season, Week 2: *Make a Joyful Noise*

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## MATERIALS NEEDED

- CD player and hymn CD with lyrics
- Drawing paper
- Watercolor paints and/or colored pencils
- Optional: adult coloring pages for participants needing prompting or direction

## OPENING HYMN

“We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations” – *Hymn-Sing with ElderSong, Volume 2*

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we praise you for this new day. This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Teach us how to make a joyful noise that glorifies your name. Open our hearts to your Word today. Amen.

## THIS WEEK’S VERSE

Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Psalm 100:2

## SCRIPTURE LESSON

Psalm 100 is a psalm for giving thanks. The theme is clear: *praise God*. It’s not a suggestion; it’s a command. Whenever we come before our God, we ought to be shouting for joy. Psalm 100:5 gives us reasons to shout for joy: “For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” We serve a faithful God. He isn’t going to leave us out on a limb. If God takes us down a path that’s challenging, he promises to be there with us. He is good, and his love endures forever.

Sometimes, it’s very difficult to have an attitude of joy. We run into challenges as we age. We face illness or loss; our families move away; we become lonely. Those challenges make it difficult to maintain a joyful attitude. Staying joyful when our lives aren’t going exactly as we planned in our youth is very difficult. We can allow bitter roots to spring up and rob us of our joy. Just the opposite can happen, too. Maybe

## Winter Season, Week 2: *Make a Joyful Noise*

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you think growing older makes it easier to be joyful. You've experienced tough times and are able to look back at those seasons with joy for the person they helped you become. Instead of bitter roots, true joy has taken root and filled your heart.

### REFLECTION

- *How do you feel today?*
- *Do you think that God wants us to be joyful in our old age?*
- *How have you stayed joyful during the times you've felt sad or when life was difficult?*
- *Do you think older adults are more joyful or less joyful than the people younger than they are? Why or why not?*

I'll never forget the time I traveled to South Africa. One afternoon, our team visited children living in a colony of shacks, surrounded by a garbage dump. While we were walking about, one little shack caught my attention. The shack was about the size of a small walk-in closet; yet outside, the tiny yard was filled with gorgeous pink roses. Out back, the women were tending a small garden. We asked what we could do to help; they just smiled and pointed to a few weeds we could pull for them. Then they invited us to sit with them in their yard to have a glass of lemonade. I can still remember the beauty that surrounded us as we sat in that yard, in the middle of a garbage dump. I can also still see the warm smiles on those beautiful South African women's faces.

Later that evening, I came across Proverbs 13:7, which says, "There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches."

I realized then that the riches of this world—big homes, nice clothes, successful careers—do not lead to joy. The South Africans had few material possessions; their clothes were patched, and most homes did not have indoor plumbing. Yet they had more than the richest person in the world because they had joy. The material items didn't matter because they had found something much greater. They had found the One True God and, through the Holy Spirit, they were filled with overflowing joy.



## Winter Season, Week 2: *Make a Joyful Noise*

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### REFLECTION

- *What do you think of this story about South Africa?*
- *Do you think there is truth in Proverbs 13:7 (There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches.)?*
- *Have you ever met someone who was poor in material possessions, yet had great joy? Tell us about the person.*

### ACTIVITY

*Directions:* Distribute drawing paper and utensils to participants. After you give instructions, play a hymn CD softly in the background. As participants draw, walk around and offer to assist. You may need to outline an image for them to color, or ask if they would like to color an adult coloring page. Use hand-over-hand techniques when necessary.

*Say:* Today, we're going to draw what brings joy to our hearts. Maybe it's the sun setting over the horizon that brings you joy, or maybe you feel joy when you see flowers blooming. Perhaps you experience joy when your family comes to visit, or when you see a dog or cat. Let's take a few minutes and draw what brings us joy.

When most participants are finished, ask them to share their artwork with one another.

### CLOSING HYMN

"Sweet Hour of Prayer" – *Hymn-Sing with ElderSong, Volume 2*

### WINTER SEASON BENEDICTION

See page 164.

### GOING DEEPER

Psalm 100 is a psalm for giving grateful praise. Read it in its entirety.