**1. Motivate**

What are some events that you and your family celebrate?

* birthdays
* anniversaries
* graduations
* new job, house, car, salary raise
* retirement
* completion of a major project
* homecoming

**2. Transition**

Celebration produces joy and makes us strong.

* “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Nehemiah 8:10
* Celebration results from the faithful practice of all other Spiritual disciplines.

**3. Bible Study**

3.1 Celebration Is the Heart of Christ

Listen for a cheer that was voiced.

John 12:12-15 (NIV) The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. [13] They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!"[14] Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, [15] "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

What did people shout as Jesus came into Jerusalem?

* Hosanna
* blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord
* Blessed is the King of Israel

Video of Michel W. Smith “Hosanna”

Note that “Hosanna” means “Save now, we pray!”

Note also that their waving of palm branches expressed joy … palm trees symbolized spiritual vigor and righteousness.

What items, actions, or sayings might celebrate Jesus’ arrival today?

* standing ovation
* trumpet fanfare
* doing the wave
* ticker tape parade
* fireworks
* 21 gun salute
* T-shirt sales
* bumper sticker

Next week we will *celebrate* Christmas.

* Jesus came as a little baby,
* confined Himself to time and space.
* All for the purpose of setting us free.

Note that “Hosanna” means “Save now, we pray!” What are some of the things from which Jesus has set us free that should cause us to celebrate?

* penalty of sin
* power of sin
  + anger
  + lust
  + guilt
  + addictions
  + bad habits
  + fear
* eventually, the very presence of sin

What are some things the Messiah has set you free to be *able to do* for which you can and celebrate?

* rest in Him
* serve Him
* be a blessing to others
* make new friends
* adopted into the family of Christ, the Body of Believers, the Church

3.2 Begin with Obedience to Christ

Listen for multiple mentions of “love”.

John 15:9-11 (NIV) "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

What is Jesus’ desire concerning love?

* remain in His love
* obey His commands
* love others in the same way Jesus loves us
* love others as God the Father loves Jesus, the Son

What provides evidence that a person truly loves the Lord?

* obedience to Jesus’ commands
* follow the example of how Jesus obeys the commands of God the Father

Note Jesus’ reason for sharing this message with His disciples.

So that they (and we) experience the same joy Jesus does

So our joy will be complete

How were Jesus’ disciples to remain or abide in His love? How are we to remain/abide in Jesus?

* obedience
* following Jesus’ commands
* follow the example of how Jesus obeyed God the Father

How does obeying God’s commands demonstrate our love for Him?

* I realize how much He loves me and want to respond to that
* I begin to see that His commands are good for me
* I come to understand that God loves me and gives directions how to live that benefit me and glorify Him
* obedience also demonstrates trust, faith in Him – I can love God and obey Him because I trust His commands are the best way to live

What are some ways we can encourage one another to live lives of obedience to Christ so none of us miss His rich blessings of joy?

* Come alongside one another during difficult times (Heb. 3:13),
* be present in Connect Group whenever possible,
* introduce myself to those around me in the worship service,
* tell fellow Christians how their spiritual gifts have made a difference in your life

3.3 Celebration Strengthens Life with Christ

Listen for what guards your hearts.

Philippians 4:4-7, 11 – 13 (NIV) Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. … Philippians 4:11-13 (NIV) I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

What is often people’s initial reaction to the command, “Rejoice”?

* yeah, sure … whatever …
* easy to say, harder to do in the midst of a crazy-hectic life
* I’m too busy to rejoice – too many doctor’s appointments
* life is a circus – the one with the scary clowns
* I feel like I’m in a grinder, nothing to rejoice about here

Paul was writing from a jail cell. What kinds of things *could* he have communicated?

* I don’t deserve to be here
* it’s cold, stinky, totally unpleasant
* curses on those who put me here (may the fleas of a thousand camels infest their pillows)
* I’m mad at God … why did He let this happen

Instead of this, what *are* Paul’s comments and exhortations.

* Rejoice in the Lord always
* *again* I say, rejoice
* your gentleness should be evident, obvious

Why do you think Paul repeats the command to “rejoice?”

* people don’t tend to do this naturally
* normally we grump, we need to be reminded to rejoice
* it takes a conscious effort to look for things to rejoice about

How can we rejoice even when things aren’t going well?

* sing a hymn like “Count your blessings” (put the lyrics of a verse on the screen and sing right now in class)
* read the Psalms … David expresses all kinds of feelings … sometimes complaints and rejoicing in the same chapter
* make a decision to praise God, anyway
* remember we talked about the difference between joy and happiness … joy does not depend on the circumstances … declare your joy (rejoice) no matter what

Sports enthusiasts commonly rejoice over their teams’ successes. As believers, we have much more to celebrate.

* Sins forgiven
* God at work in our lives
* The joy of the Lord
* Knowing that God is in control
* We know the end of the story … God wins!
* Peace with God, peace within our selves