

LIVING JOY

SMALL GROUP GUIDE



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO BEGIN...

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers...Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts...And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

- Acts 2:42, 46-47

If you want to really grow in your faith and deepen your understanding of it, a small group with other believers is one of the most powerful ways to get there. The new believers of the early Church understood that they could not pursue their faith on their own.

Life in the early Church gives us some clues as to how we

can live out a vibrant faith today. We need other people. We also need to deepen our understanding of the faith and how to live it. We need more of God's life which we access through the sacraments and praying together. Finally, we are constantly invited to go give and give away the amazing gift that we have been given.

You could capture the above passage from Acts simply as: shared prayer, shared fellowship, shared learning, shared mission. These are not only the key ingredients for a successful small group, they are the key ingredients for a life of holiness and happiness.

The Real Life Catholic study series bring these key ingredients together in a unique way. Whether you do the study at your parish with dozens of other people at table groups, or in your own home with a small group of friends, all the key ingredients are there. You are praying together throughout the series; you are fellowshipping with each other and sharing deeply about how the content can be applied in your daily life; you are learning together, and you are constantly invited

to go share with others what you have been given.

Dive in, don't hold back. This is the path to greater freedom and healing, and to deeper friendship maybe than you have ever experienced. It will require risks to share and open yourself up to others. Stretch yourself and leap into that challenge. Take baby steps if you need to, and as trust builds you will be free to share more of yourself. Real Life Catholic provides training not only for small group leaders, but also a special session on the "ideal small group member." Check out the small group materials on the "resources" page. This is going to be a great adventure for you. Know of our prayers for you and those you are growing with!

This guide offers a key scripture, reflection questions, discussion questions, challenges, and prayer prompts to accompany each of the 11 Episodes of Living Joy. **For free access to the online video course, scan the QR code on the corner below.** (reallifecatholic.com/living-joy-reboot-signup)

There are 3 ways to uses these videos and this guide to change the world.

(You might think I'm overstating the power of this program... but you won't after you watch it! But it's not us...it's the message that's captured hearts for 2,000 years.)

- 1 Gather in your church hall with a big screen, and tables for small groups. Share a meal or some snacks. Play the video. And then go through the meeting as groups. (We call this, "Small Groups in a Big Room.") This one takes some coordinating on a parish level.
- 2 Same as option 1, but simply in your home. You don't need permission, commissioning, or special training to invite a few friends over to deepen your faith together. If you're baptized and confirmed, congratulations, you're "commissioned!" It really is so simple and meaningful as resource that anyone can pull this off.
- 3 Watch the videos and use the guide for personal reflection, by yourself. That said, we're confident that if you do this you're going to realize it's too good to keep to yourself, in which case we refer you back to options 1 and 2 above.



Living Joy: 19 Videos



At each meeting:

- 1 Don't rush the fellowship! Set out good food and drink, or even a full meal if you're up for it. During this time, be sure to ask how people are doing. Get to know one another.
- 2 Watch the videos. There are two per rule, a total of about 10-12 minutes.
- 3 Have two people read, out loud, each of the two "Words to live by" quotes, and then offer a short prayer from the heart.
- 4 Go through the discussion questions as a small group. Don't feel pressure to get through them all or stick to them exactly. Just use them as a tool to create dialogue and discussion. Often you'll find the content so powerful that it's hard to get past the initial "CHECK IN" question each week: What just stuck you most from what we just watched? And guess what...that's perfectly wonderful!
- 5 Wrap up with the suggested prayer or another prayer of your own. And be sure to be in touch with everyone via text before your next meeting to personally invite them back.
- 6 Go! After meeting for a few months and seeing how it works, be committed to each small group member starting and leading a NEW small group. Imagine how the Church can grow if you do! And don't worry, you can keep your original group going too :)



Got Joy?

STEP 1: Watch the Intro Video

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Metanoia, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"
- Jesus (Matthew 3:2)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 On a scale of 1-10 how joyful would you say you are right now?
- 2 How would you describe the difference between spiritual joy and passing happiness? How have you experienced the two in your own life?
- 3 Have you ever experienced joy, or hope alongside grief, or sadness?
- 4 If anything, what "thing" (a person, a dream coming to pass, money, etc.) do you look a little too much for joy?

5 People are leaving all faiths faster than at any time in history. Over 10% of people in America alone are former Catholics (36 million). What do you think is missing from the experience of Church that causes so many people to look elsewhere?

* CHALLENGE

Take the following to prayer this week:

- 1 Gut check: Really ask yourself, what thing leave me thinking "I'm happy if..." or "I'll be joyful when..."?
- 2 Lift your mind: Carve out some time to read Philippians. It's only a few pages. Think about the joy Paul had while writing this in prison in the most dire circumstances of his life.
- 3 Pray: Spend some time reflecting on what you most want from this journey, and ask Jesus for it.

Take it To Prayer: Place yourself in the presence of Jesus. He stands before you and says, "Change your thinking!" What is it about the way you think that he wants you to change? Take a few minutes and write out your answer.

◆ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for You."

- Saint Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

→ CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the intro lesson?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What are 3 things that you are grateful for today?
- 2 Think of a time when you were carrying a heavy burden. Share 3 things that you were grateful for even in the midst of that difficult time. Did being aware of those things lighten the load?
- 3 Do you devote prayer time to giving thanks in a disciplined way? Or was Chris' challenge in Rule 1 new for you?

4 Solanus Casey said, "Be sure, if the enemy of our souls is pleased at anything in us it is ingratitude - of whatever kind." Where are you failing at gratitude in your life today?

5 How would more gratitude help and heal difficult relationships in your life?

* CHALLENGE

- 1 Count your "grateful" each morning. (Start this week by writing down as many as you can think of.)
- 2 Let trials "trigger" your gratitude. Start practicing this: Every time you feel annoyed, stop and pray in praise and thanksgiving.
- 3 Say "thank you" often. Start the practice with 5 times a day. (Try this: Maybe put a pen mark on each finger till they're all tipped with ink!)

Take it To Prayer: Write a list out of as many things you can think of that you're grateful for. Spend a moment on each one thanking God, and then text a few people on that list to express gratitude for the gift they are.

◊ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Jesus often withdrew to deserted places and prayed."
- Luke 5:16

CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Giving Thanks for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Think of a time when you have experienced profound silence. Describe how you felt.
- 2 What will come in the way of you creating more silence in your schedule?
- 3 What is your go to media "addiction"? Do you generally feel happy afterwards?
- 4 G.K. Chesterton said "The world is dry, not for lack of wonders, but for lack of wonder." When we lack silence, we lose wonder. What things stir up wonder in you? Do you spend enough time in awe and wonder of things like family, friends, prayer,

art, and nature? What gift do you most overlook because of the noise in your life?

5 Fr. Karol Wojtyla (later Pope St. John Paul II) was once quoted as saying that the overcrowded Paris Metra was a "superb" place for contemplation. What do you think he meant by this?

* CHALLENGE

- 1 Stop. Breathe. Think. Take a minute to simply pay attention to the sights and sounds around you. And try the Jesus Prayer that Chris described in the video.
- 2 Put limits on your screen time. In what way can you realistically cut back? What increased screen limits will you give yourself on Sunday? (And while you're limiting your screen time, it's okay to be bored. In those moments when you might glance at your phone in a line at the store, just stand there. I promise. You'll survive.)
- 3 Take a walk.

Take it To Prayer: Sit for just a few moments each day this week in silence, praying the Jesus prayer. Breathe in "Jesus" and then breathe out "mercy" or "I love you" or "thank you for helping me" or whatever you need to pray the most on that given day.

◆ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

- Saint Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Practicing Silence for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 The prerequisite of loving others is loving yourself. What does it mean to love yourself? How are you doing in that department?
- 2 What is an experience you had that lied to you about your dignity and worth?
- 3 What is an experience you had that revealed your dignity to you?
- 4 If you could put one name to it, which lie do you tell yourself the most? What single word or label would most effectively counteract that lie?

5 Are you taking care of your basic human needs? In the areas of rest, cleanliness, exercise, nutrition... how are you doing? What is one area where you would like to improve?

★ CHALLENGE

- 1 Speak truth: Identify your primary lie and renounce it out loud by saying "In the name of Jesus, I renounce the lie that I am..." Then identify the truth you most need to hear that counteracts that lie. Say it out loud, "I claim the truth that I am..."
- 2 Reflect on what false and unrealistic ideals you have for yourself that are exhausting to you. Identify them, then get intentional about rejecting them!
- 3 Make self-care a priority and do one concrete thing to treat yourself this week (and ideally, on a regular basis)!

Take it To Prayer: Spend sometime reflecting on Luke 5:1-11. Put yourself in Simon's shoes. How does the gaze of Jesus feel? Is it uncomfortable? Do you welcome it?

◆ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

- Proverbs 17:22

CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Loving Yourself for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 When did you start to lose the sense of "fun" you had as a child?
- 2 What's the most fun you ever had? Share and relive this memory!
- 3 Look over your weekly schedule. Is it all work and commitments? Do you have time for spontaneity?
- 4 Who helps you have fun? Who keeps you from taking yourself too seriously?

- 5 Who built you up by "wasting" time with you as you grew up? Who do you need to "waste" time with?

★ CHALLENGE

- 1 Be silly! (Try telling a stupid joke.)
- 2 Do some quality fun with intentionality, and by that, I mean, make sure the goal is FUN. (If it's not, you might find yourself way too stressed out after that round of golf or hour fishing!) It could be a favorite hobby or favorite book—but it's gotta be something with no practical or work-related utility.
- 3 Find a way to "waste time" having fun with people you love.

Take it To Prayer: Place the things that weigh heaviest on your heart aside and ask God to help you find light and hope even in the midst of stress.

◆ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Do you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you . . .?"

- Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 6:19)

→ CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Having Fun for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Consider your sleep, diet, exercise and general health routines. What is good and what needs improvement?
- 2 Are your dignity and identity reflected in how you carry yourself? Why or why not?
- 3 How do you feel after you exercise? How do you incorporate exercise into your daily routine? If not, when and where will you start to?

- 4 What is your biggest obstacle to healthier eating?
- 5 Smiling doesn't come easily for everyone. Does it come naturally for you? Why?

* CHALLENGE

- 1 Keep it simple. Set one, easy to achieve goal for the week to improve the care of your body.
- 2 Practice sitting and standing LIKE A BOSS.
- 3 Go ahead. Smile more.
- 4 Set when and where you plan to work out and just show up!
- 5 Do an examination of kitchen. Come up with 3 foods you need to get rid of.
- 6 Try to sleep more and reflect on how that impacts your overall mood.

Take it To Prayer: Spend some time thanking God for the gift of your body. Ask him if there are ways you can better care for it.

◊ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter: whoever finds one has found a treasure."

- Sirach 6:14

→ CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Engaging Your Body for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Think about the root system of Sequoias—how interlocking roots among trees makes them incredibly tall and strong. Which friendships in your life spiritually build you up to be tall and strong? Which friendships do you need to cut off?
- 2 Why is making friends so hard in society today, especially as we get older?
- 3 What prevents intimacy and authenticity in your friendships?

- 4 What qualities do you think Jesus had as a friend?
- 5 How do you need to be more like him in your friendships?

* CHALLENGE

- 1 If you haven't already, reach out to two to five friends as Chris suggests in the video to start a life sharing small group. Perhaps start by going through this program with them!
- 2 Invest. Reflect on what you need to do to invest in a friendship in your life to make it stronger, and do it!
- 3 Be intimate. When you connect with your friends, be intentional about revealing your heart, and asking how he or she is really doing.

Take it To Prayer: Spend time in prayer thinking of Jesus' words "you are my friends" (John 15:14). Imagine what it was like for Jesus' apostles to simply hang out with him... and think about how much he wants that relationship with YOU. Then spend a moment reflecting on how you can be more like the friend he was to his Apostles—with all their imperfections.

♦ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

- Jesus (Matthew 11:28)

CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Making Friends for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Can you relate with the Lamplighter in *The Little Prince*? When did your life speed up?
- 2 Look over your weekly routine. Is there a good balance between work and rest? What tends to throw off that balance the most?
- 3 What stops you from deeply resting even when you're not working?

- 4 What's your favorite restful activity that truly nourishes and rejuvenates you?
- 5 How do you honor the Sabbath? What can you do to honor it better?

CHALLENGE

- 1 Wage war on work, one day, every week. Truly practice the sabbath this week. Plan ahead. And plan a ritual to mark it off from the rest of the week.
- 2 Savor moments. Stop and smell the roses (literally) in some small way each day.
- 3 Don't rest lazily. Think of something you need to do to dive deep into quality "re-creation."

Take it To Prayer: Reflect on whether you've been experiencing true rest each week. Practice resting in the Lord.

WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

- Saint Paul (Philippians 2:5)

→ CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Resting for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 In Leviticus 23:22, God commands us, "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field...Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you." Do you leave enough "edges" in your time and budget to be able to help the poor and needy or are you maxed out? How can following this command lead to your joy and peace?
- 2 What material thing do you dream of getting (or

keeping) that you associate with happiness? Could you give it up?

- 3 Think of a time when you made service a priority. This doesn't have to be at a soup kitchen, but can be with your spouse and kids or friends. What impact did it have on your joy?
- 4 What does dying to yourself mean? How is it different from being a doormat?
- 5 Who (in your life or society) does your heart break for? What is one way that you could serve these people?

* CHALLENGE

- 1 Claim it. Out loud. Start each day by saying "Serviam! (I will serve!)"
- 2 Don't just sit there. Do something. Find one realistic act of service this week and commit to doing it.
- 3 Give money away.

Take it To Prayer: In John 1:38 Jesus says, "What do you seek?" Spend some time in prayer reflecting on his question and your answer.

◆ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



WATCH THE VIDEOS TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."
- Sirach 6:14

→ CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Serving for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Do you see your life through the frame of faith, or primarily through another "frame"? Another way to ask this: If your life were a story, what would the title be?
- 2 Was there a time when your frame...the way you saw your life...took away your joy rather than adding to it? What changed?

- 3 What's your favorite way to boost your faith in your daily life? What devotional activity are you most drawn to?
- 4 Have you ever prayed like Chris did in the video, asking Jesus for a personal relationship with him? How did that strike you?
- 5 If you became Saint (insert your name here), what do you fear you'd have to give up? How would your life become better?

★ CHALLENGE

- 1 Reject toxic faith: To begin rejecting toxic faith, reflect on ways your faith might be tainted by an understanding of God as astern, angry, or a father with performance based, conditional love. Then, spend a minute (literally, 60 seconds) in silence thinking about Jesus looking at you from the cross with great love. Do that 60 seconds in prayer daily, if you can—simply receiving God's love. You don't have to do anything at all.
- 2 Chris led you in a powerful prayer to decide for Jesus, and to receive him into your life in a new and powerful way. That prayer (on page 175 in the book *Living Joy*) is also written below in the Take It To Prayer section. Go someplace quiet, place yourself in the presence of God, and pray it again. Slowly. Just you and Jesus. If you've never prayed like that before, note the day you did it on your calendar. It's a big deal! And feel free to pray that prayer of self offering to Jesus regularly.
- 3 Practice your faith. find some devotional to increase your faith and do it!

Take it To Prayer:

Lord Jesus,

You are the love that I was born to find.

You are here, offering ME your heart.

And asking for mine in return.

You have given me the freedom to say no.

I use my freedom to say yes.

I surrender all that I am to you.

I renounce satan. Sin. The spirit of despair.

And the life that I am unlovable.

I forgive others, and I forgive myself

of my worst sin.

And I ask you to forgive me and to forgive those who have hurt me.

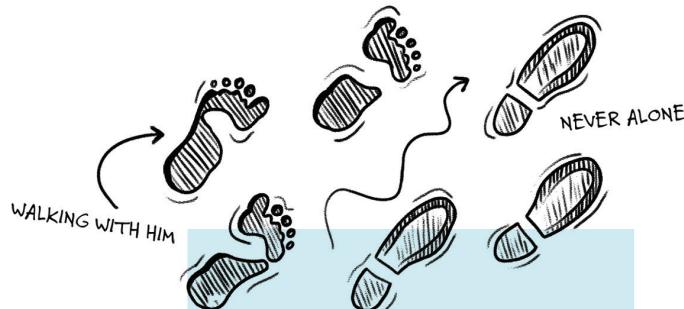
You are the Lord of the Universe.

Be Lord of my life.

I say yes to you.

◆ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



JESUS IS THE JOURNEY

WATCH THE VIDEO TOGETHER

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"You follow me!"

- Jesus (John 21:22)

 CHECK IN

How did you do with living out your challenges from the previous Rule of Framing Your Mind with Faith for *Living Joy*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What is your biggest takeaway from Living Joy?
- 2 What rule for living joy do you foresee being the biggest challenge, moving forward?
- 3 Ultimately, the 9 Rules for Joy create space for the One who is our Joy. Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and a sign of God's presence. Share an experience

of joy you've had in your relationship with Jesus.

4 God created you for eternal joy, and he wants you to think about that. (I know because that's why he revealed it! Thinking about heaven helps us get there, and increases our joy in the journey.) What do you think heaven will be like? Chat about this.

5 "The joy of the Lord must be your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10) was a rallying cry when the city of God was in ruins. How can God use your joy to rebuild and strengthen your personal life/dreams/family/Church/world?

◆ WRAP UP

Everyone share how you need prayer. Pray for one another out loud, and commit to lifting one another's need up in prayer until you meet again.



Chris Stefanick is an internationally acclaimed author, speaker, and television host who has devoted his life to sharing the love of Jesus, and helping others do the same.

His live seminars, TV, radio, and video ministry have reached millions, and his educational initiatives are turning the tide in the Church. He authored a confirmation prep program that's been used by over a million people, the popular SEARCH program and bestseller Living Joy. Chris is a recipient of the Papal Benemerenti Medal which was previously given by the pope for Military valor, but today is given for achievement in ministry.

A graduate of the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Chris is also the founder and president of Real Life Catholic, a non-profit organization that makes his initiatives for renewal a reality. Above all, he's proud to be husband to Natalie and father to their six children, and a grandfather of four!



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Together, we can share the love of Jesus.

Missionaries of Joy are monthly supporters of Real Life Catholic and Chris Stefanick who sustain the ministry and empower us to invest all our energies into sharing the love of Jesus and helping others do the same.

By becoming a monthly supporter, you not only help us spread the Gospel to the world, but you will also gain access to daily inspiration, exclusive content, and access to more **online courses** like Living Joy! These cover a variety of topics like overcoming fear, healing and forgiveness, reconnecting in your marriage, accepting your identity in Christ, and more!



Missionaries of joy

"It seems like every week I'm inspired by the content I see from Chris Stefanick and Real Life Catholic. Not only do I feel the spiritual benefits from it, it's also easy to share with my extended network of friends and family. I'm very blessed and grateful to be a Missionary of Joy."

-Deidra

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