

Unwavering: Living with Defiant Joy — Group Discussion Questions

Discuss any or all of the questions below with your group. Choose some questions ahead of time, just in case you end up only having time to discuss a few of them:

Session 1: A Reason to Celebrate

John 16:33: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Romans 8:18: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

1. Think about the phrase "choose joy." Make a quick list of what that might look like to choose joy in your everyday life. Share one idea with the group.
2. Share two or three areas where you would like more joy in your life.
3. Everyone has known seasons of suffering and pain. Every person has a story to tell. Tell about either a past time of suffering or one that you're currently experiencing. *Dear one, the presence of God is our good. And knowing His presence in the pain is the sweetest gift of all.*
4. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let *this cup* pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39, emphasis added). What is the *cup* you are asking (or have asked) to pass from you?
5. In the video, Stasi shared about the decision to continue to host the Christmas Party on the evening that the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting took place. We needed to be honest about our grief and sorrow over the lives lost. We also needed to proclaim that even in the midst of this horrific tragedy, Jesus has triumphed over death.

Where do you need to proclaim and enforce the victory of Jesus Christ? (Take turns sharing.)

- a) In a place you are struggling or fearful
- b) Where you are concerned over loved ones lives and choices
- c) A particular evil in the world

Session 2: Godly Interference

Thessalonian 2:16-17: *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."*

1. Describe an encounter or life-changing event that struck you with the force of whiplash:
 - a) What happened?
 - b) How did you feel afterward?
 - c) Looking back, can you see where God met you in it?
2. We are honed both in our needing and in our being needed. Talk about a time when you have been honed for the better by needing others.
3. Not everything that happens to us is the result of God interfering. Often life-altering events are simply the result of living in a fallen world. But at other times, God *does* interfere directly. In all of it, He uses it for our good—to draw our hearts closer to His. Jesus came and He is coming again, and when He does, all things will be made right and all things new, including you and me. Now that's a reason for unwavering joy!
 - a) Take turns reading this statement, having each participant fill in the blank with their own word(s):
Jesus interferes because He _____
 - b) Do you feel him interfering with you these days? Said another way, do you sense him calling you to live differently—perhaps in a relationship, at work, or in your private moments alone? Where?
4. The “chance” of each of us existing is 1 in 400 billion. And yet, here we are, at such a time as this, because we each have an essential role to play. God will sometimes interfere with our lives so that we might step up higher into our calling. What role would you *love* to play to bring the kingdom of God? How would you like to be used for God’s purposes?

Session 3: Greener Grass

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4: *"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens...a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."*

Romans 8:15: *"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"*

1. The Scriptures make it clear that nothing is impossible for God. Thank goodness. What feels impossible for you?
2. Do you have times now when you would like to run away from your life? Where would you go? What are you hoping to find?
3. Stasi tells the story of having the joy of going to Israel and standing outside of Lazarus's tomb. God called her to: "Come out." "Come alive." Where is one place in you that God is calling you to "come out" from? Where do you feel God is calling you to "come alive"?
4. One of the divine exchanges is from fear to trust. Where has fear gripped you in the past or is holding you now? What would trusting Jesus in this place look like for you?
5. In the midst of a dire diagnosis, Stasi's friend Craig said, "I have many reasons to grieve; I have many more to worship." Take turns sharing some reasons you have to worship.

Session 4: Expectant Hope

2 Peter 3:9: *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."*

Romans 15:13: *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

1. Waiting requires trust that your waiting will not be in vain. Discuss the vulnerability of waiting. Does it make you feel exposed or secure? Does it inspire confidence or doubt?
2. What is your personal, silent hope? Take a few moments to get quiet with the Lord and be honest with Him. Let your hope rise up from the depths and pour out of you. What is your hope? Share it with the group if you are comfortable; otherwise just write it down and let yourself see your hope live on the page.
3. What has God promised you? Be specific. Share something either recently or in your past that you feel God has promised you. Discuss whether or not that promise has been fulfilled yet.
 - a) How does it feel or did it feel to wait for the promise to be fulfilled?
 - b) God made some outrageous promises to David, anointing him as the next king of Israel. God is always faithful to keep His promises, and David knew that. Still, for many years, David found himself not the king, but the hunted. Share with the group if you have ever felt like you, too, were living in a cave, not knowing the outcome? What does that dark place of unknowing feel like?
 - c) In your places of waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled for you, what might He be forging in you?
4. Stasi said she prays, "I give everyone and everything to you, God." How easy or difficult is that to pray when you are waiting? Why?
5. Why do you think joy is so difficult to know while we wait on God's promise? Do you find yourself experiencing joy and hope at the same time? Name and share one way you will approach waiting with joy and knowing joy in your hope.

Session 5: Cultivating Joy

John 16:22: *"So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."*

1. What is your favorite season? Why? Does it lead you to thinking forward or to reflecting back?
2. Think for a moment about endings, especially how they make you feel. Have you ever had sorrow at an ending? How about joy? Consider one specific ending—joyful or sorrowful—and share how that ending felt and why if you are comfortable.
3. Now think for moment about beginnings. In what ways do beginnings feel differently and similarly to endings? Discuss how beginnings can feel so hopeful and endings so full of sorrow, yet our ultimate ending is full of all hope.
4. What is something you are looking forward to in this next season of life?
5. What are the first three things you'd like to do when you get to heaven? Let your imagination run wild!
6. As gratitude is the key that unlocks joy, what are a few things that you can be grateful for today?

Session 6: The Ultimate Victory

Deuteronomy 31:8: *"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."*

Ephesians 4:1-2: *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."*

1. To grow in love is to grow in JOY. Describe a time in your life when you experienced growth in love that resulted in JOY.
2. Where and when has loving others felt risky to you? Where would you like most to make the choice to love?
3. What has loving others cost you?
4. Have you had to say good-bye to someone in your life? How has that experience left you feeling? Do you consider saying good-bye hopeful? Why or why not?
5. Stasi talked about the phrase *a hui hou*, which means, "I'll see you later." Does that help your heart in any way with the partings you have had to face or know you will be facing in the future? Why or why not?
6. The awareness of our heart's longings for life is heightened with every death. Let your heart rise. What are you longing for? Write it down and go back to it, so you can ask God to come for you in your longings.

LEADER'S GUIDE

What does it take to lead this study? Get together and watch God show up. Seriously, that's the basics of how a small group works. Gather several people together who have a hunger for God, and are willing to be open and honest with God and themselves. The Lord will honor this every time and show up in the group. You don't have to be a pastor, priest, theologian, or counselor to lead a group through this study. Just invite people to watch the video together and talk about it. All you need is a willing heart, a little courage, and God will do the rest. Really.

A FEW TIPS FOR LEADING A GROUP:

- ***Be honest.*** Remember that your honesty will set the tone for your time together. Be willing to answer questions personally, as this will set the pace for the length of your group members' responses and will make others more comfortable in sharing.
- ***Stick to the schedule.*** Strive to begin and end at the same time each week. It's helpful that the people in your group can trust you to be a good steward of their time, and they will be more willing to come back each week. Of course, you want to be open to the work God is doing in the group members as they are challenged to reconsider some of their preconceived ideas about the availability of the kingdom of God to bring them joy in their everyday lives, and at times you may want to *linger* in prayer or discussion. Remember the clock serves *you*; your group doesn't serve the clock. But work to respect the group's time, especially when it comes to limiting the discussion times. You don't have to get to every question suggested.
- ***Don't be afraid of silence or emotion.*** Welcome awkward moments. The material presented during this study will likely bring to the surface areas of pain and suffering. Don't be afraid to ease into the material with the group to allow space for honoring one another's stories and personal questions.
- ***Don't dominate the conversation.*** Even though you are the leader, you are also a member of this small group. So, don't steamroll over others in an attempt to lead—and don't let anyone else in the group do so either.
- ***Prepare for your meeting.*** Watch the video for the meeting ahead of time. Though it may feel a bit like cheating because you'll know what's coming, you'll be better prepared for what the session might stir in the hearts of your group members. Also review the material in this guide and be sure to spend time in prayer. In fact, the *most important* thing you can do is simply pray ahead of time each week:

Lord Jesus, come and rule this time. Let Your Spirit fill this place. Bring Your kingdom here. Take us right to the things we really need to talk about and rescue us from every distraction. Show us the heart of the Father. Meet each person here. Give us Your grace and love for one another. In Your Name I pray.

- ***Make sure your group members are prepared.*** Send out a reminder email with the Zoom link a couple of days before the meeting to make sure folks don't forget about it.

AS YOU GATHER:

You will find the following counsel to be especially helpful when you meet for the first time as a group. I offer these comments in the spirit of “here is what I would do if I were leading a group through this study.”

As your group gathers for the first time, start your time with introductions if people don’t know each other. Begin with yourself and share your name and what you want to learn most about the stance of defiant joy. Going first will put the group more at ease.

After each person has introduced themselves, share—in no more than five minutes—what your hopes are for the group. Then jump right into watching the video session, as this will help get things started on a strong note. In the following weeks you will then want to start by allowing folks to catch up a *little* with some “hey, so how are you?” kind of banter. Too much of this burns up your meeting time, but you have to allow some room for it because it helps build relationships among the group members.

Note that each group will have its own personality and dynamics. Typically, people will hold back the first week or two until they feel the group is “safe.” Then they will begin to share. Again, don’t let it throw you if your group seems a bit awkward at first. Of course, some people *never* want to talk, so you’ll need to coax them out as time goes on. But let it go the first week.

INSIGHT FOR DISCUSSION:

If the group members are in any way open to talking about their lives as it relates to this material, you will *not* have enough time for every question suggested. That’s okay! Pick a few questions ahead of time that you know you want to cover, just in case you end up only having time to discuss a few of them.

You set the tone for the group. Your honesty and vulnerability during discussion times will tell them what they can share. How *long* you talk will give them an example of how long they should. So give some thought to what stories or insights from your own work in the study guide you want to highlight. WARNING: The greatest temptation for most small group leaders is to add to the video teaching with a little “teaching session” of their own. This is unhelpful for three reasons:

1. The discussion time will be the richest time during your meeting. The video sessions have been intentionally kept short so you can have plenty of time for discussion. If you add to the teaching, you sacrifice this precious time.
2. You don’t want your group members *teaching*, *lecturing*, or *correcting* one another. Every person is at a different place in her spiritual journey—and that’s good. But if you set a tone by teaching, the group will feel like they have the freedom to teach one another. That can be disastrous for group dynamics.
3. The participants will have watched the video teaching and possibly read the corresponding chapters in *Defiant Joy*. They don’t need more content! They want a chance to talk and process their own lives in light of all they have taken in.

A STRONG CLOSE:

Some of the best learning times will take place after the group time as God brings new insights to the participants during the week. Encourage group members to write down any questions they have as they read through *Defiant Joy* and do the preparation work. Make sure they know you are available for them as they explore what God has to say about any of the concepts that might be new or challenging to them. Finally, make sure you close your time by praying together. Perhaps ask two or three people to pray, inviting God to fill your group and lead each person during this study. (A closing prayer is included in the guide, should you want to use it instead of or in addition to extemporaneous prayer.)

Thank you again for taking the time to lead your group. May God reward your efforts and dedication and make your time together in *Unwavering: Living with Defiant Joy* fruitful for His kingdom.