

Selah // Animate 2021 // Rejoice!

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." - Philippians 4:4

Day 1: Rejoice!

Psalm 96:11-13; Philippians 4:4-7

Prayer:

We invite you to speak aloud the words in bold, wherever you are, whether praying this prayer alone or with a group.

You made the heavens and the earth.

And said it was good.

You made the sea and everything in it.

And said it was good.

You made the mountains and planted every living thing.

And said it was good.

You spoke and the cosmos came to life.

And said it was good.

You knit me in my mother's womb.

And said I am good.

Holy God, creator of every good thing, we rejoice because you are the giver of life. You were God long before you breathed life into us and you will be God long after we've taken our last breath.

Too often we approach life as a task to be completed, an obstacle to be overcome, a trial to be endured, rather than a generous gift to be received.

Help us recognize that every breath we take is a gift. That being alive, here and now, is good.

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap, yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not worth much than they? Can worrying add a single moment to your life?

Those same birds sing your praises each and every morning.

The sea resounds.

The fields grow as they were lifting their hands to heavens.

The trees of the forest sing for joy. (Trees can sing?)

And even if we refused to praise you, even if we refused to thank you for this generous gift, the scriptures say that even rocks would shout and praise You because You are worthy of praise.

And so, let us join with all of creation in recognizing that this moment is good. Today is the day that the Lord has made. Let us **rejoice** and be glad in it. Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, **rejoice**.

Visual Prayer:

As you pray these prayers and reflect upon your experience, we encourage you to also engage with these visual prayers each day. Art presents the opportunity to explore the depth and wonder of who God is in ways that words often cannot. Perhaps ask yourself, what does this visual prayer communicate about God? What does it say about today's theme?

This visual prayer is *The Creation* by Phaedra Jean Taylor. More often than not, we perceive time as linear, but in actuality we are spinning in circles. And so is all of creation. God created and is still creating today.



The Creation, Phaedra Jean Taylor, @phaedrajeanartmachine

Suggested Activities:

1. Create a list of people, things, and experiences you are thankful for, or a list of things that you recognize that God has given you for which you are thankful.
 - Ask a friend to make a list of his or her own so that you can share with one another. You may discover insight about who God is and who God created us to be.
2. Draw or paint a picture, write a short poem, or compose a song lyric. Create something that inspired by God or responds to the gifts that God has given us.

Day 2: Continue in Joy

Habakkuk 3:17-18; Psalm 13:1-6; John 16:17-24

Prayer:

Today's prayer will invite you into the practice of Lectio Divina. We invite you to read this passage of scripture several times.

At the conclusion of the first reading, write down a word or phrase that resonated with you and grabbed your attention.

Psalm 13:1-6

How long will you forget me, LORD? Forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

² How long will I be left to my own wits,
agony filling my heart? Daily?

How long will my enemy keep defeating me?

³ Look at me!

Answer me, LORD my God!

Restore sight to my eyes!

Otherwise, I'll sleep the sleep of death,

⁴ and my enemy will say, "I won!"

My foes will rejoice over my downfall.

⁵ But I have trusted in your faithful love.

My heart will rejoice in your salvation.

⁶ Yes, I will sing to the LORD

because he has been good to me.

Read the passage a second time, meditating upon the passage. This is not easy to do, especially in our busy day and age. But still, imagine yourself within the passage. What kind of space does this passage depict?

Read the passage a third time. This time, express to God in prayer, words (spoken or written), art, movement, music all of the feelings that this passage has stirred within you. What feelings, fears, actions, convictions, and question does this passage prompt in you?

Finally, read the passage a fourth time and practice contemplation. Be silent in God's presence. Listen for God's voice. The Holy Spirit may give you a particular word or action to take with you. The Holy Spirit may convict and inspire you. Or, you may not hear, see, or feel much of anything. That's okay, too.

At the conclusion of this exercise we invite you to pray this prayer:

God, we confess that the gift of life is often overshadowed by the troubles of this world. Help us resist the temptation to not be honest about our pain and loss. Grant us the humility to acknowledge our need for You. The Psalms teach us that you are big enough to hold our doubts, fears, and angry pleas

for deliverance and justice. And so, we offer them to You now, trusting that they will die with You. And so, may our joy be restored, just as You were raised to life anew.

Visual Prayer:

Former Animate Guest Artist, Scott Erickson, depicts a cross, made of a branch, whose leaves are falling. It is as if even all of creation weeps at the foot of the cross.



Scott Erickson, @scottthepainter

Suggested Activities:

1. *The church does not have enough prayers and songs that help our congregations grieve and lament well. The church must be able to minister in the valley as well as atop the mountain. We encourage you to compose a prayer or song or lament, with Psalm 16 as your inspiration. Be honest. God doesn't want us to "praise our way through it." God wants us to lay it at the foot of the cross, because Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness.*

2. *What might a worship service that includes lament look and sound like? Encourage your Youth Group or worship leadership team at your church to wrestle with these questions. Consider journaling about your insights on this.*

Day 3: Be Strong in Joy

Nehemiah 8:5-11; Psalm 30:1-5 11-12; John 17:9-13

Prayer:

God, we rejoice, because joy wraps its arms around the entirety of this life.

Joy is not dependent upon happiness or sadness.

Joy is not dependent upon whether things are good or bad.

Joy embraces all of it.

The good, the bad, the happy, the sad, the wins, the losses, the successes, and the failures.

Joy says, "though there may be pain in the night, joy comes in the morning."

This is why the writer of Hebrews says "for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Joy says that life is too short not to be celebrated, so make the most of it.

Or, as it says in John's Gospel, "have life and have it to the full."

God, we confess that this kind of joy is difficult to comprehend.

We confess that we often confuse joy with happiness.

Help us to receive the joy You have set before us.

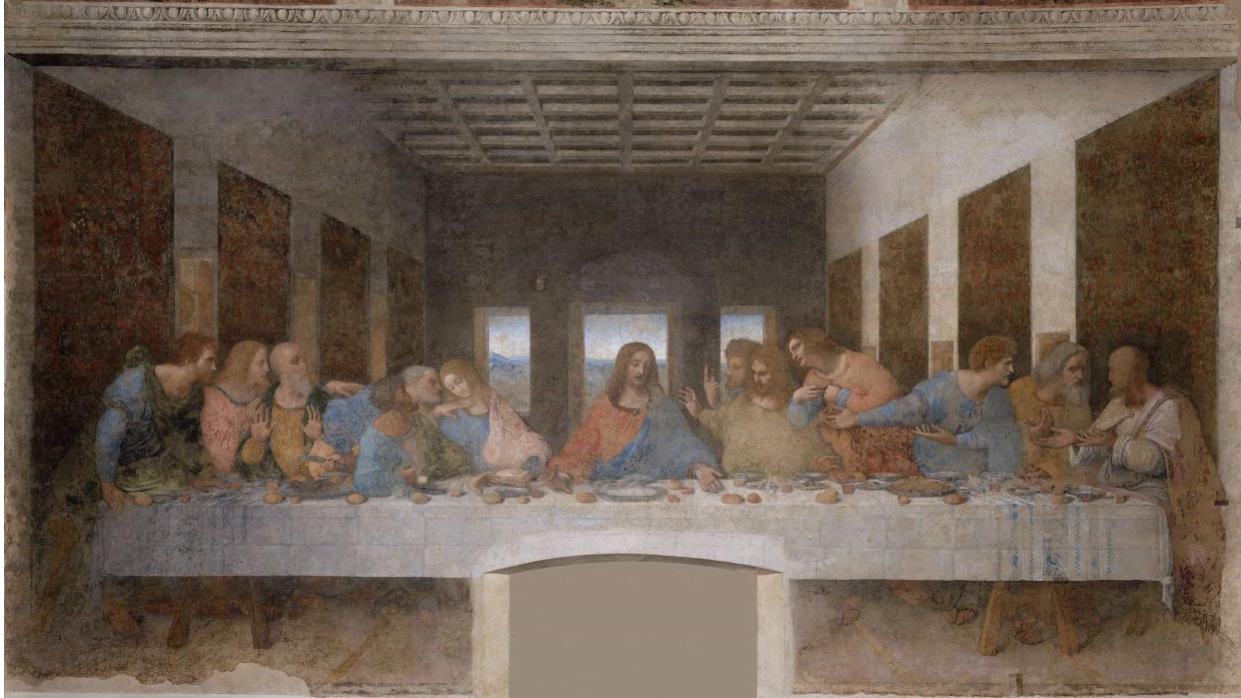
May your joy equip and empower us with a perspective that transcends happiness and sadness and frees us to participate in the restoration and reconciliation of all things.

May your joy strengthen us. May it prompt us to follow you wherever you lead us. May it flow in and through us into a world that needs what you freely give.

May your joy bring peace, hope, and healing to this ailing world. And may we, equipped with the strength and boldness of joy, treat every day as if it were holy ... because it is.

Visual Prayer:

Leonardo Da Vinci's The Last Supper is one of the most famous paintings in all of art. Look at the disciples and then look at Jesus. Think on Jesus, who "for the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."



The Last Supper, Leonardo Da Vinci

Suggested Activities:

1. Take time to rest and enjoy life. God is the giver of every good and perfect thing. Set aside time to do something that brings you joy and helps you rediscover the joy we have in Christ.
2. Find ways to participate in the “restoration and reconciliation of all things.” God is at work in the world, healing what is sick, mending what is broken, and tearing down walls that keep us from sharing the love of Christ with one another. How can you and your church partner with the Holy Spirit in this work? Research how this might be possible in your local community. Develop a plan of action and propose it to a Youth Group leader, mentor, or parent.
3. Write down your strengths and weaknesses. Be honest. Rejoice in your strengths, because they are gifts that God has given you and they will be instrumental as you discern your calling. Rejoice in your weaknesses, because Christ is made perfect in our frailties.

Day 4: Lead in Joy

Luke 2:10-11; John 15:11

Prayer:

God, as we consider how we might create, and practice, and work, so that others may worship you, teach us what it means to truly worship you.

During this time, take a moment to write or draw what you believe it means to worship the living God?

God, you have given us gifts, talents, and abilities. We rejoice in who you have made us to be. We rejoice by writing songs, making art, shaping and speaking words, all as an act of worship, a response, to you.

Blessed with these gifts, talents, and abilities, equip and empower us to lead your people in worship. Inspire us to create and lead with creativity, conviction, and compassion. Like you, remind us to place others before ourselves. Teach us to create not out of our own strength, but in and through the power of your Holy Spirit.

Help us, so that we may earnestly seek the one true God, and not a version of you that bows to our preferences, desires, and opinions.

Teach us to create a space that is honest. You are a God that celebrates our joy and triumph. You are also a God who comforts and grieves with us in our deepest despair.

May our worship be filled with honest prayers rather than positive platitudes.

When we feel inadequate, when we ask, "Who am I to lead your people in worship?"
You say, "Who are you not to lead my people in worship?"

May we, like the angels, proclaim your good news, and do so with great joy. May we do so in the fullness of who you are and what you have done for us. May it be so, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Visual Prayer:

John August Swanson's *Celebration* is a vibrant and beautiful illustration of what worshipping with all of God's people looks like. It is full of joy and light. What does this image say about the worship of God?



Celebration, John August Swanson

Suggested Activities:

1. Set your aim or intention for contributing to the work of worship leadership. Our worship leadership should lead people to a particular place. Ultimately, that place is the presence of God.

But beyond that, what does our creative work say about who God is and what God has done for us? What does it say about who we are and how we fit into God's story? What does it say about what is good, true, and beautiful? Our worship leadership, whether we realize it or not, is picture of what we believe God looks and sounds like. God chose us to bear God's image, share his good news, and to lead God's people into his presence.

2. Plan a worship service. (Even if it's just for fun or for your personal devotion.) Use the resources you discover here at Animate to craft songs, prayers, and liturgies. Planning worship and the flow of worship is like plotting a story or preparing to lead others on a journey; it is an

art in and of itself. Yes, the Holy Spirit is at work in our worship leadership, but the Holy Spirit is also at work in the planning of worship.

3. For everything you do “on” the platform of worship leadership, do something that leads God’s people in worship “off” the platform. If you’re leading worship with a team or group of people at your church, begin using the language of worship leadership “off” the platform.
4. Theologian John D. Witvliet talks about how we worship in “all of life”, in the “gathered community”, and in “small acts or praise”. In what ways do you worship God in all of life, in community, and in small acts. Journal about those moments of worship. Develop a regular worship practice on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis using these three categories.

Day 5: Go in Joy

Isaiah 55:12; Psalm 16:1-3, 7-11; Philippians 1:3-6

Prayer:

“Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” — Howard Thurman

Go out in joy.

Not because you should.

Not because you feel like you have to.

Not because you you're supposed to be happy.

Go out in joy, because you are the recipient of a gift.

Your life.

This day.

The lives of those around you.

This is the day that the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

The Gospel is good news. So, let it be, good news.

We rejoice with thanksgiving in our heart. We remember who you are and what you have done for us. We offer ourselves in partnership with your Holy Spirit, rejoicing in its power as we make the world a more lovely, just, and beautiful place.

God is not far off or distant, but God is here and now. God is in and through all things, just waiting to found.

Jesus invites us to see the image of God in others so that one day, we may all see him face to face.

As we leave this place, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit will be with us, making known to us the path of life. In God's presence there is fullness of joy.

And even when there is no joy in us, may we reminded that joy is not something we conjure up, but a free gift from God, that is as faithful as the rising sun.

Go out in joy. Follow joy wherever it takes you. Seek it out and you will find it.

Know that God is on the other side of that joy, inviting you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. And may grace and peace be with you, every step of the way.

Visual Prayer:

The Culture House, in Washington D.C., used to be the home of Friendship Baptist Church, one of Washington D.C.'s oldest African American congregations. When Friendship Baptist Church moved to a larger building, the artist Hence was commissioned to reimagine this sacred space. As you prepare to “go in joy,” what does it mean for us to be the church, the body of Christ, in the world?



Culture House DC, Washington D.C., Hence, formally Friendship Baptist Church

Suggested Activities:

1. Make a list of the things that brought you joy this past week. Why did they bring you joy?
2. What makes you come alive?
What do you love and enjoy doing?
Have you considered what it would be like to do these things for God?
As an act of worship?
As a gift to the world?
Take the time to journal your responses to these questions. Let the Holy Spirit use them to prompt and guide your next steps as you leave this place.
3. Find something that reminds you of the joy that is embedded in all of life. It can be a sticker, a keychain, an iPhone background, a post-it note on a mirror. Anything that reminds you that joy can be found in each and every moment.
4. Find tangible ways to share the joy you have found with others. That may include explicitly telling them about the Gospel, or it may just be your being a good friend.

5. Find a community of people whom you find joy with. Stay connected to that group of people. Share the gift you have been given with them. Following Jesus and living this life is not something we can do alone. It is meant to be done with others. Hopefully those people are in your church or in your youth group. If not, seek out that group of people.