

Discussion Questions for “Joy in the Desert”

Texts: Isaiah 35:1-10 • James 5:7-10 • Matthew 11:2-11

Opening Reflection

1. When you hear the word *joy*, what do you usually associate it with? How does Scripture’s picture of joy in this message differ from your normal understanding?

Isaiah 35- Joy That Blooms in the Desert

2. Isaiah describes deserts rejoicing and blooming. What “desert” seasons (dry, difficult, or discouraging places) can you identify in your own life right now?
3. According to Isaiah, why does the desert rejoice? How does this shift the way you think about joy during hard seasons?
4. Isaiah lists signs of God’s renewing work (blind see, lame walk, streams in the desert). Where have you noticed small signs of God’s presence or renewal in your life recently, even if things are still hard?

James 5- Joy While Waiting

5. James calls believers to patience while they wait for the Lord’s coming. What is hardest for you about waiting during long or uncertain seasons?
6. How does the image of a farmer waiting for rain help reframe your understanding of patience and joy?
7. James says to “strengthen your hearts.” What practices or reminders help strengthen your heart when joy feels fragile?

Matthew 11- Joy Amid Questions and Disappointment

8. John the Baptist questions Jesus while in prison. What does John’s honesty teach us about faith, doubt, and joy in difficult circumstances?
9. Jesus points John to the *signs* of the Kingdom rather than explaining everything. How might paying attention to God’s work, rather than waiting for everything to change, shape your joy?

Living the Message

10. Billy suggested that joy comes from recognizing the King’s presence rather than escaping the desert. Where might God be present in your current circumstances in ways you hadn’t noticed before?

11. What “wildflowers” (small moments of grace, encouragement, growth, or beauty) have you overlooked in your life lately?
12. Isaiah calls God’s people to “strengthen weak hands and steady trembling knees.” Who in your life might need encouragement this week and how could you offer it?
13. How does understanding joy as *defiant hope* challenge the way you respond to discouragement or suffering?

Closing Reflection & Prayer

14. What is one step you can take this week to cultivate joy, not by changing your situation, but by noticing where God is already at work?
15. Spend time praying together (or journaling individually), asking God to help you recognize His presence and nurture joy in the midst of waiting.