

Unwavering

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Living with
Defiant
JOY

STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS

STASI ELDREDGE



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SESSION 1

A Reason to Celebrate

INTRODUCTION

Group leader reads aloud these opening words from Stasi:

I love to celebrate. I love birthday parties and baby showers, holidays and homecomings. But I especially love Christmas. Except when I don't. At the beginning of too many holiday seasons, I can become overwhelmed by what is "required" of me. That is, I did, until I needed to pare down for my sanity's sake and to also keep my family from hiding from me. Still, I love creating spaces for beauty and for others' lives to be honored. And honestly, there's no one I love to honor more than our Jesus, and gathering to celebrate Him brings me the greatest joy.

But life doesn't take holidays. Pain doesn't check out. World events don't slow down. Evil doesn't give vacations. So how do we become a people who learn to celebrate the goodness of God and His many gifts in the midst of what is often a heartbreaking world? How do we grow to be a people known for our unwavering joy right in the middle of our hurting world?

Let's press in to find out together.

WATCH VIDEO SESSION 1

Video Notes

Use this space to make note of anything that stands out to you in the teaching.

“Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

(Psalm 30:5)

GROUP DISCUSSION: “DEFIANCE”

Gather into small groups if part of a larger group. Spend time together reacting to what Stasi said in the video through these prompts and questions.

Gathering Together

Read aloud as a group the following Scripture:

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18)

What jumped out at you or surprised you or struck you most in the video?

1. Stasi said defiance means resistance, opposition, noncompliance, disobedience, dissent, and rebellion. How do you feel about associating this definition with the living God?
2. When it comes to things that would destroy our souls, do you agree or disagree that this is the right response? Why or why not?

3. We oppose death and destruction by the life of Christ in us. We dissent by casting our vote against the belief that sorrow and endless suffering win. We welcome life, love, and the full work of Christ to bring all of His goodness into every aspect of our and His domains.

Brainstorm together some words you could use to fill in these blanks and briefly discuss what it means to actively oppose death through the life of Christ in us:

We comply with _____.

We obey _____.

We respect His _____ and His _____.

We overcome evil with _____.

We defy hatred by embracing _____.

We dissent by _____.

We choose _____.

4. Think about the phrase “choose joy.” Make a list of what that might look like in your everyday life, and share one idea with the group.

5. Share two or three areas where you would like more joy in your life.

6. 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.

The presence of God is our good. And knowing His presence in the pain is the sweetest gift of all.

7. 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 ESV, emphasis added). What is the *cup* you are asking (or have asked) to pass from you?

Encourage one another to accept God’s will, not our own, in this circumstance.

8. 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.)

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

Scripture Response

Ask for volunteers to read each of the following verses/passages aloud to the group. Go around the room and have each woman share one word or phrase that comes to mind after hearing these Scriptures:

“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.” (John 16:33)

“The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.” (Zephaniah 3:17)

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are God’s children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may share in his glory.”
(Romans 8:16–17)

Leader reads this final note from Stasi:

Yes, Jesus is known as the Man of Sorrows, but He is also the God of great joy! He rejoices over you. Yes, you. Right now. Our God sees the end from the beginning. When He looks at you, He doesn't see your failures, your disappointments, or even your sins. He looks at you and sees His spotless, perfect, beloved. His favor rests on you. He chose you before the foundation of the earth to belong to Him. You are His child.

We can rejoice over that.

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader or volunteer, close your group time in prayer:

Dear Father,

Thank you that I am Your child. I pray to know You more deeply as my good Father. I pray to encounter Your love increasingly, even in moments and seasons of travail. I need to see life with Your eyes. You know that what is suffered now does not compare to the glory that You will reveal in us. I pray to know that too. Thank You that You will provide everything I need every single day of my life. I pray to know Your Presence in the midst of my every day—the days of celebration and the days of sorrow. Your Name is Faithful and True, and I believe You are for me. Thank You. Thank You.

In Jesus' glorious Name,

Amen

Session 1

Personal Study

Read chapters 1–2 in Defiant Joy. Then, reread the excerpts included here and answer the questions that follow.

Defiant may not be a word we would normally associate with the living God, but it can actually be quite fitting. Defiance means resistance, opposition, non-compliance, disobedience, dissent, and rebellion. And when it comes to things which would destroy our souls, that is exactly the right response.

We are called to resist the lies of the enemy. Like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, we do not comply with the Vanity Fair offerings of the world. We are instructed to not obey the clamoring of the flesh. We are urged to rebel against sin. By the life of Christ in us, we oppose death and destruction. We dissent by casting our vote against the belief that sorrow and endless suffering win.

Instead, we welcome life, love, and the full work of Christ to bring all of His goodness into every aspect of our domains and His. We comply with truth. We obey our God. We respect His authority and His final say. We overcome evil with good. We defy hatred by embracing love.

We choose joy.

—*Defiant Joy*, pages 9–10

1. In your own words, how would you describe the difference between happiness and joy?
2. I describe defiance as meaning “resistance, opposition, noncompliance, disobedience, dissent, and rebellion.” How would you describe “*defiant* joy”?
3. How would you describe “denial”?
4. How are the two different?
5. Can you remember a time when you were defiantly joyful? What happened?

6. What was the effect of your defiant joy on those around you?

7. I confessed in *Defiant Joy* that I do not think of myself as a naturally joyful person, but others in my life would disagree. One of my favorite words is “YAY!” Where do you land on the spectrum of experiencing joy?

If you asked someone you trusted if they think of you as joyful, what do you think they would say? Want to risk asking them? Pray about that!

We humans are a mystery. We are not meant to be a stranger unto our very selves, but feeling like a stranger in our world, even to those closest to us, is often a commonplace experience.

Feeling alone is a sorrow we share, and being alone is the first thing God named as “not good”: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Yet we do feel alone. Isolated. Not understood and too often not wanted. It is not merely your condition; it is one we all have, and one that we feel compelled to run from. Numb. Escape. Ignore. It is a difficult thing to long for connection and meaning and live under a burden of futility and an emptiness that mocks. But when we run, we seed the fruit of denial and end up increasing our pain rather than soothing it. Hopelessness and denial may temporarily deaden desire and the pain of when it is unmet, but desire is a flame that refuses to be quenched.

—*Defiant Joy*, pages 17–18

8. Are you aware of feeling “outside” of life sometimes? Of feeling lonely? In what ways or circumstances?

We all feel lonely and we feel it often. The truth of Hebrews 13:5 is a great comfort. Take a few minutes to look it up and read it. Sit with this verse for a minute.

9. What comfort does Jesus offer in Hebrews 13:5?

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus did not want to be alone in the Garden but asked His sleepy disciples to stay awake with Him. Though they may have desired to stay awake, they failed Jesus by leaving Him alone in His agony. Jesus understands the feeling of being lonely and even misunderstood. He understands *you*. Your feeling lonely at times is a suffering that Jesus knows very well. It is part of the cup that we drink to share in His sufferings. It can even be something that draws our hearts closer to His.

When the soldiers came to the garden and Jesus stepped forward to offer Himself to His enemies, Peter also stepped forward and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus scolded Peter and told him to put away his sword. Then He asked, “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (John 18:11).

What is this cup? Actually, Jesus had mentioned this cup prior to that fateful night.

Earlier in Matthew 20:20–28, the mother of James and John, in typical motherly fashion, asked Jesus whether her nice, upstanding sons could have the honor of sitting beside Him in His kingdom. Jesus answered with a question: “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” (Matt. 20:22 NASB).

It was not a rebuke. It was simply a question, to which the brothers replied, “We are able” (Matt. 20:22 NASB).

It was a yes blithely given. Clearly, they couldn’t understand the full weight of what Jesus was asking. Jesus then turned to the other disciples who were mad that James and John’s mother had presumed to ask such a thing. They wanted to be seated next to Jesus as well.

Jesus spoke to all of them then and said that greatness in the kingdom of God is not easily obtained. It comes along the path of love—a path of sacrifice, service, and suffering. This is the cup of Jesus. And the people who seek to follow in His footsteps must drink of it and become like the one who came “not . . . to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

—*Defiant Joy*, pages 25–26

10. Look up Psalm 30:5b. Write it here.


What does this verse mean to you?

11. Read John 16:22 out loud.

So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy. (John 16:22 NLT)

Next, look up John 16:33. What idea do these two verses share?

Jesus does not promise a life without suffering. He does however promise that suffering will not overcome us. Not only has He suffered on our behalf, winning for us the triumph over death and sorrow, but He is coming again and bringing to us a life where suffering will no longer exist.



There was another cup offered to Jesus at the top of the hill at Golgotha. As He was suffering, the merciful centurion handed Him a cup. Jesus sniffed the liquid. It was wine mixed with myrrh, a mild narcotic to dull the pain. But Jesus knew He was not meant to dull the pain nor numb it in any way. He was to feel it. So He refused to drink the elixir. No denial. No numbing. He endured being fully awake to the pain, so it might produce all of its intended work.

Because Jesus drank from the cup of suffering and wrath, that cup became the cup of salvation. The cup of suffering became the cup of joy. Turns out, it's the same cup.

Hebrews 12 says that it was for the joy that was set before Him that Jesus endured His tortuous death on the cross. But to get to the joy, He first had to be willing to drink the cup of suffering. In the midst of His suffering, Jesus fixed His gaze on His Dad and held on to the joy that He knew was coming to Him on the other side of the cross. He showed us that we, too, can have joy in the midst of our suffering—and no one can take it away from us.

—*Defiant Joy*, pages 27–28

12. The concept that God uses suffering in our lives to hone and transform us is not one that usually thrills us. Still, it remains true. Looking back, can you remember a season of suffering in your life where you can see that God met you in it? What happened?

13. Look up the following verses and jot down the key point:

John 3:16

Colossians 1:13

Colossians 2:13

Ephesians 2:18

1 Corinthians 15:57

- 14.** In light of what Jesus has accomplished on your behalf, what reasons do you have to be joyful?

The sorrow and grief that come are real, and we have a God who is well acquainted with them. He doesn't ask us to ignore our grief but to invite Him into it that we might bear it together.

No matter what, we can know an internal defiant joy because death has been defeated. Life has won. There is suffering, yes. But always there is the potential for joy.

In the face of the ultimate reality won for us by Jesus, we don't have to pretend that life is better than it is, that we don't hurt as much as we do, or that we are feeling happy when we are not. We are invited to be fully alive, awake, alert, oriented to the truth, and to know that because of Jesus, we can be defiantly joyful.

—*Defiant Joy*, pages 31–32

WORSHIP SONG

I love to worship God. Music is dear to my heart and is one of my favorite ways to help me focus on how marvelous God is and praise Him for all He has done. Each week, I'll be suggesting a few of my favorite worship songs for you to worship to. You can pick any one of them—or all of them! Put it (them) on repeat! Find a time to listen when you are not distracted by many other things. Bless you.

- “Beloved” – Leeland
- “Here” – Kari Jobe
- “It Is Well” – Kristene DiMarco & Bethel Music

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Contemplative Prayer is a simple practice that has been engaged in by our spiritual fathers and mothers for centuries. It is a tool given to us to help us center all our faculties on the Presence of God in the moment we find ourselves. There are concerns in some Christian circles because the New Age movement has hijacked this practice, and a form of it is used in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. We will not practice those “techniques.” We don’t have to be afraid to simply sit in stillness and quiet ourselves before God. We come under His authority and His alone. Mary **pondered** things in her heart (see Luke 2:19). David says, “My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may **meditate** on your promises” (Psalm 119:148). Joshua 1:8 instructs us, “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate** on it day and night” (NASB).

We, too, want to set our thoughts on those above. We want to saturate our minds and our spirits with the Word of God. Meditating on Scripture is a wise and life-bringing thing to do.

Now, I know that life is swirling. You have a list you have to make. Don’t forget that bill you have to pay, that phone call to return, that topic you need to talk about with you-know-who. You know what I mean. To find the time to sit and let go of all those things, even for a few minutes, can feel daunting. Daunting it may be, but it is still well worth it.

Each week, I will invite you to practice Contemplative Prayer. Sometimes we will imagine ourselves in a passage of Scripture and being right there with Jesus in it. Don't think of it as something you have "to do." Think of it as a gift you get to receive. It will be simple.

We'll begin small. Just a few minutes.

Get comfortable.

Wait. Go back and silence your phone. It'll be okay. This is just going to be for five minutes max.

Okay, back to your comfy place.

To begin, you are simply going to "come home" to your body, where Christ dwells within you. Notice what you are feeling. Can you feel your feet on the floor? How is your stomach feeling? Put some words to it. Are there places in your body that feel tight or sore? Simply acknowledge them with an "I feel you." Now, notice your breathing. In. Out. In. Out.

Thank You for breath, Jesus. You are my breath.

Thoughts may come knocking now. We are easily distracted and there's so much to do. It can be difficult to quiet our minds. Just notice your thoughts. Acknowledge them. Speak kindly to yourself. "Right. Yes. Don't worry. I'll get back to you in a few minutes."

Notice your breathing again. In. Out.

"He himself gives life and breath to everything." (Acts 17:25 NLT)

"The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life."
(Job 33:4)

Jesus, You are my breath. You are my life.

For your next breaths . . . pray this simple prayer as you breathe in and out.

I breathe in Your love, Jesus.

I breathe out Your life.

I breathe in Your love, Jesus.

*I breathe out Your life.
I breathe in Your love, Jesus.
I breathe out your life.
I breathe in Your love, Jesus.
I breathe out Your life.*

Take deep breaths. Breathe slowly in and out. Continue this gentle prayer for a few more minutes.

And that's it.

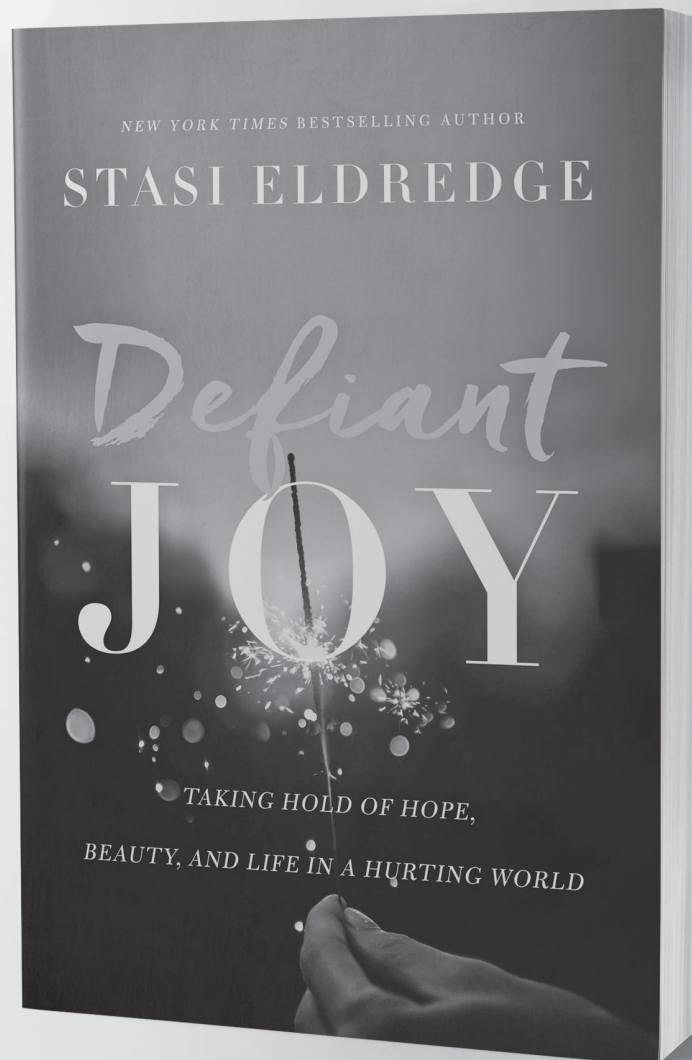
Close with these words to Jesus:

Jesus, I worship You as the King of all kings and the Lord of my life. All I am is Yours. You are the very breath I breathe. Thank You for giving me life. You alone are Life! I love You. Thank You for Your love for me. I invite You into every space in my life; into my body, my soul and my spirit. I give myself fully to You. I invite You into all that I need to do today. I invite You into the places I feel apprehensive and concerned. I invite You into the places I feel young and ill equipped. I invite You into the places that I am suffering. Please meet me there. Please help me, Jesus. In the places I don't understand, I ask to trust You. Please help me, dear Jesus, to know You, to love You, and to trust You even more. Thank You that You suffered and died on my behalf. You suffered in ways that I never will. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You.

I invite You in, Jesus. I give You everything. I love You. Thank You for Your immeasurable love for me.

*In Jesus' Name,
Amen*

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