

# Suggestions for Individuals or Group Leaders in Using *Return to Joy*

## Introduction: The Journey into Broken

In order to make people feel welcome in your group it's important to have everything organized (if possible) before the women arrive so that you can personally welcome each person. A class assistant is extremely helpful with this.

When the women come in the door give them an unfinished color in paper mask to work on while the others are arriving. These can either be 1) hand-made (Google "Masks to color and print"- example: Clip Art and Crafts Printable Butterfly Mask or Mask Pattern) or 2) ordered on-line (example: search Amazon for "make a mask"). Have things available, like markers and sparkles, for each person to design a unique mask during introduction time.

Have the class sit in a circle and 1) Introduce themselves and 2) Tell why they came to Return to Joy study.

I usually give a short introduction beginning with a fun journey I've taken. Then I talk about a harder one and explain that journeys are sometimes difficult. We live in a broken world because of the fall in the Garden of Eden. This means we now have sickness, divorce and pain of all sorts. Satan uses these hard things to keep us from experiencing all of the mysteries and fullness that God desires for us. But Jesus stepped out of heaven to set the captives free, to mend our broken hearts and to restore all that has been lost.

Return to Joy is about a hard journey on a broken road that led to the heart of God in worship. Worship is the bridge between heaven and earth so we will spend time each week worshipping our Beloved. In His presence there is comfort that will help you return to joy, no matter where you are in life or what you've been through.

Imagine with me for a moment that you're learning to dance for the very first time. In preparation you buy a book from a bookstore on dancing and study it diligently. It shows all the steps you need to know in order to dance. You take the book home and do everything it says. You even cut out little foot patterns and put them on the floor to follow. Then you practice the steps until you think you've got them down. You've got the book, you know the rules, you've even laid out the pattern. But there's one very important thing that's missing. It's the music. You can't dance without the music.

God wants us to dance like a child twirling breathlessly for her Daddy but most of us are so busy reading the book, learning all the rules and working so hard that we've forgotten to listen to the music. My prayer for you is that you'll learn to take time to sit at the feet of your Heavenly Father and hear the music. And then you will be able to relax and enjoy the dance.

Now have everyone hold their masks in front of their faces and look around to see each one. Next have them throw them onto the floor in the middle of the circle.

There is one rule for this class. You must remove your mask before you enter the room each week.

Remember that God is calling you on this journey and has this message for you:

Perhaps you would like to see a map showing all the twists and turns or even use a GPS for the journey that stretches before you. Would you feel more equipped if you could visualize what lies ahead? Well, there is a better way to prepare: spend time with Me.

Even though I know exactly where this path is heading I won't reveal it to you... but I will thoroughly prepare you for your passage. My living Presence will be your Companion and guide each step of the way. Stay in constant communication with Me, whispering my name when you feel lost or afraid. Always remember that I will go before you and prepare the way... so keep your eyes focused on Me.

"But you will not go out in haste. Nor will you go as fugitives. For the LORD will go before you and the God of Israel will be your rear guard." (Isaiah 52:12)

Suggested worship songs:

Emmanuel by Highlands Worship

Broken Vessels (Amazing Grace) by Hillsong Worship

My God by Desperation Band

## Chapter 1: Why This Journey?

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel? Could you identify with Bev's story?

What is the difference between joy and happiness? Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and is internal and doesn't depend on circumstances. The definition for happiness is "good fortune, prosperity". This is based on external circumstances.

Suggested worship songs:

Overflow by Beckah Shae

For Your Splendor by Christy Nockels

I Stand For You by Tree 63

On The Throne by Desperation Band

## Chapter 2: The Valley of Weeping

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

Good definition for grief: God-given emotions that increase with knowledge of sorrows and sin in this life. Hurt, anger or sorrow that come from our experiences living in a sinful, fallen world. (Watermark Church, Dallas, Texas).

Suggested worship songs:

You're Not Alone by Meredith Andrews

Through the Valley by Lex Buckley

Unfailing God by New Life Worship

It Is Well by Bethel Music

## Chapter 3: The Gateway of Hope

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

Refer to blog article "Where Was God?"

There is an elderly man in Maui that everyone knows as "the guy with the cross." He walks up and down the highways each day carrying a cross, praying for people who pass by in their cars and ministering to whomever the Lord brings his way. A friend of mine had the opportunity to meet him face to face and found out a couple things about him. 1) He's not crazy and 2) He goes wherever the Lord tells him to go and does whatever the Lord tells him to do. He said that his cross reads, "Love like Jesus" because that's what we are called to do. He also shared that every breath that he takes is as worship unto the Lord. So he's worshipping God 24/7 and we can too.

Suggested worship songs:

Lord of Lords by Hillsong

Wonderful by Christy Nockels

Only You by David Crowder Band

Wonderful Wonder by Ginny Owens

Change the Way by Aaron Shust

With All My Heart by Desperation Band

Break Open by Desperation Band

Rooftops by Jesus Culture

Transfiguration by Hillsong Worship

Magnified by Desperation Band

## Chapter 4: The Secret Place

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

Play and talk about the song, *Remind Me Who I Am?* by Jason Gray.

Suggested worship songs:

Do You See Me When? By Julie Meyers

Amazed by Desperation Band

No Longer Slaves by Bethel Music

Strong God by Desperation Band

No One Else by Desperation Band

## Chapter 5: The Bridge to Romance

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

Suggested worship songs:

When You Come Back For Me by JJ Heller

The One I Love by Generation Church

Love You by Andreanna Arganda

Jesus, Son of God by Chris Tomlin and Christy Nockels

O The Blood by Gateway Worship with Kari Jobe

Ever Be by Bethel Music

Fall Into You by Desperation Band

Christ Is Enough by Hillsong

We Are Yours by Desperation Band

To The Cross by Paul Baloche

Sinking Deep by Hillsong Young and Free

Son of God by Passion

## Chapter 6: Under His Shadow

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

Suggested worship songs:

Spirit Break Out by Soul Survivor

Sinking Deep by Hillsong Young and Free

Everlasting God by New Life Worship

You are the Glory by Desperation Band

Carry Me To The Cross by Kutless

Came to My Rescue by Hillsong

Open Heaven by Hillsong Worship

## Chapter 7: The Shadow of Darkness

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

To understand spiritual warfare more clearly:

### THE TALE OF TWO RULERS

The Bible paints an intriguing picture of the history of spiritual warfare. The following may sound like a fairy tale, but it is a real life spiritual drama taking place in the heavenlies. It all began with a glorious heavenly kingdom, the Kingdom of Light, that has been in existence from eternity past. This is the supernatural kingdom where God, the righteous King of Kings, rules with truth, mercy and grace. He is the loving creator of the universe who set the world into motion with a single word. "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16).

In His perfect timing, He created our earthly kingdom and filled it with every kind of plant and animal imaginable. Exquisite morsels were available 24/7 to satisfy even the most delicate of palates. I like to think that there was no need to worry about gaining weight because everything was naturally fresh and nutritious. Most importantly, this amazing kingdom was designed to be a realm of divine peace where every citizen could experience supernatural harmony with their Creator and with one another.

Like most kingdoms, however, there was an evil archenemy whose name was Lucifer. At one time he had been the highest ranking angel in all of God's dominion and was cherished by his Creator. Dissatisfied with the loving relationship with His Maker, he became crazed with an evil passion for power and attempted a coup. Although he was merely a created being who depended on God for his very existence, he committed an act of treason against the King of Glory. Exchanging peace for war, he rebelled against God's authority and took a team of angels with him to establish a rival kingdom, the Shadow of Death.

The Lord of the Universe wasn't surprised by this because He is sovereign, which means that everything is subject to His will and decree. I can't imagine the sadness He felt when this one that He loved so dearly turned his back on his Maker. The prophet, Isaiah, gives us a little picture into this chilling scene. "How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, 'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Because of this horrific act of rebellion, the King's "shining star" became His adversary and his name was changed to Satan. This was the beginning of an evil saga that will play out until the Day of Judgment. Satan then established a kingdom of darkness that was in complete opposition to the Kingdom of Light. A dark kingdom based on harmful lies and evil acts designed to destroy anything that is sacred and holy. Since that time everyone, including you and me, must experience the painful effects of this tragedy on a daily basis. Erwin Lutzer, in *The Serpent of Paradise*, describes it in this way:

When Lucifer (whose name means 'light bearer') rolled the dice, gambling that he could do better by being God's enemy rather than God's friend, he set in motion a moral catastrophe that would reverberate throughout the universe. You and I have been deeply affected by his decision made in the ages long ago (p. 13)

This great battle intensified when Satan approached Eve in an attempt to persuade her to listen to him instead of the Holy King. The first human couple had received the indescribable gift of intimate fellowship with their King and their choice of fruit from any tree in the garden...except for one. They had experienced mutual delight, walking and communing together with their Maker. What a picture this must have been. The Creator joyfully leading His beloved children in a divine romance and the human creatures joyously dancing before their King. They had an overflowing cup of blessing from the Holy One, but Satan lured them to believe that they "needed" something more to be happy. And in a moment of horrific consequence they chose to listen to the evil one and disobey their rightful Lord. Subsequently they were banished from their place of solace and Satan became their new ruler. As the prince of their new dominion, he gained legal authority to rule over man. With this fall, the unspeakable occurred. All of mankind became the slaves of sin. This is what Paul meant when He said, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness" (Romans 6:16)?

As the new ruler of the earth, Satan had the right to enforce his own rules, but not without God's permission. The language of the new ruler was introduced to the world: a language based on falsehoods because he is 'the father of lies'. Jesus spoke about this to the religious leaders. ""He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

As fallen sinners, Adam and Eve now hid from God in fear. I can hardly fathom their devastation, but it pales in comparison to what our Beloved must have felt. They experienced true guilt for the first time in their lives as peace and harmony was stolen from them. Instead of running to their King for guidance and protection, they now ran from Him.

The heart of God must have broken as He watched their innocence being replaced with shame and guilt and their joy replaced with sorrow. But the most heart wrenching consequence of this horrific turn of events was that all of mankind would be born into the world from this time forward as spiritually "dead men walking." "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 2:1-2).

When paradise was lost, there was much more at stake than the loss of a breathtakingly beautiful garden. The death mentioned in Ephesians 2 refers to spiritual rather than physical death. Spiritual death means separation from God and His fellowship. This was the dreadful consequence that Adam and Eve suffered after eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they rebelled against the King of Kings, they chose to follow another ruler and were placed under his evil reign. Since that time, all of mankind have become natural-born citizens of "this world" which has an organized system that despises and fiercely opposes anything to do with God. This new ruler tries to keep his subjects in bondage by shooting fiery darts filled with lies into their hearts. These weapons are meant to penetrate their minds with messages of fear, shame and guilt.

Just as Lucifer's fall was no surprise to the King of Kings, the fall of mankind was no surprise to Him either. However, Satan greatly miscalculated the consequences of Adam and Eve's decision to follow him. He had no idea the lengths to which the Almighty Creator would go to rescue His dearly beloved children. As children of wrath, we would be forever lost and without hope if not for the Heavenly Father's great love for us. Although we were undeserving, the Holy King did the unthinkable. He sent His only Son to die on the cross to pay the required price of our redemption.

The only way He could buy us out of slavery was to pay with the precious blood of the Holy Lamb of God. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and virgin born, so He was the one person Satan had no legal rights over. The evil one tried to persuade Him to break fellowship with His Father and act independently, but he failed. The world's entire destiny hung in the balance of this intense struggle. If Jesus had succumbed to one single thought out of harmony with His heavenly Father, Satan would have won the battle and been the undisputed ruler of the human race for eternity.

Instead, Jesus disarmed and dethroned God's diabolical adversary when He submitted to a grueling death on the cross. When this happened, Satan's dominion came crashing down and his legal claim against the human race was canceled. This meant that those who believe in Christ are rescued and delivered into the Kingdom of Light. "For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). The victory was won because Jesus died without committing one miniscule act of rebellion against the Father. Because of this

priceless sacrifice, the King of Kings regained His rightful reign and Satan, the prince of this world, was placed under His authority.

We now live in a fallen world and suffer the consequences of sin. Although it's difficult to understand, bad things happen to good people. But if anyone has accepted Christ as their Savior, the Holy Spirit has breathed new life into them and they are born again into the Kingdom of Light where Satan has absolutely no legal authority. No longer a slave to sin, from that time forward they are a citizen of the Kingdom of Light and are under the reign of the sovereign King of Glory. "But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior" (Philippians 3:20).

It is here that we can be awakened to the spiritual life that our Heavenly King originally designed for us. Because of what Christ did, everything that was lost in the fall is being restored. We can now joyfully dance, once again, before our Creator and enjoy sweet communion with Him.

Suggested worship songs:

Never Once by Matt Redman

The Victor's Crown by Darlene Zschech

The Cross Stands by Worship Central

You Are My Shepherd by Tricia Brock

God You Are My God by Desperation Band

Forever by Kari Jobe

Whom Shall I Fear by Chris Tomlin

Banner by Desperation Band

## Chapter 8: The Place of Forgiveness

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

Suggested worship songs:

Completely by Among the Thirsty

My Heart is Yours by Passion

Thank You by Hillsong Worship

I Surrender by Hillsong Live

## Chapter 9: The Garden of Gethsemane

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

Before heavy artillery and mechanized armor were invented, Romans soldiers locked their shields together to form an impenetrable tank. Many battles were won with this military tactic. Remember that we are all wounded and as believers we are on the same team. We need to lock our shields together on the battlefield of life.

Without trust, you can't feel safe. If you don't feel safe, you can't be vulnerable. If you're not vulnerable (in the presence of another "safe" person), you can't be intimate. (Lonnie Barbouk)

Suggested worship songs:

I Am Yours by Darlene Zschech

Holy by Matt Redman

Great Great God by Phillips, Craig and Dean

## Chapter 10: The Shelter of the Most High

Ask the class what they thought about this lesson (what were the things that stood out to them?). How did it make them feel?

Suggested worship songs:

Restless by Audrey Assad

This Is Freedom by Karyn Williams

We Will Not Forget by Desperation Band

Where The Love Lasts Forever by Hillsong United

Unveiled Live Free by Revolution Worship