**Series Road Map**

**Series Overview:** This series will focus on soul care using the story of the birth of Jesus. We will be breaking down the verse Romans 15:13 to better understand why it is important to take care of our soul. Going through the topics of seeing emotions as a gift and knowing how to process them, dealing with anxiety, and seeing the need for hope in Jesus in what feels like a hopeless world.

**Week Overview:** Learning how to understand and process our emotions well. Seeing that emotions are not a bad thing but a gift from God even in a season that can be difficult for some and exciting for others. Leaning on the truth that the Joy of the Lord is our strength through it all.

***Outline:***

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Pictures of different Christmas activities

**Tension (what’s the struggle):** Understanding and processing emotions in a season that can be hard

Using the story of Mary finding out she would have a baby and all the emotions she had to have felt in that moment

**Text:** Romans 15:13, Nehemiah 8:10, Luke 1:26-38, Luke 1:46-47, 2 Corinthians 7:4

**THP**: The Joy of the Lord is our strength.

**Application (call to action)**:

Write down the emotions you have been feeling and dive deeper using the emotions wheel to better understand them. Allow time to pray over this and ask God to remain in control.

*Red – Scripture*

*Blue – Personal Story*

*Green – Prop/illustration*

***THP/Main Points – Bold***

**Intro:**

What emotions do you feel? – (Picture of people decorating a Christmas tree, kids with Santa, the movie the polar express, buying gifts and opening them)

What emotions do you feel when you look at these – You think about how excited you might be to get to decorate your tree with your family every year, or you see that mall Santa and feel that same feeling of excited mixed with nervousness you did when you were a kid. Maybe you see polar express and you either love this movie or are like me and are freaked out by it. Or it is Christmas morning and you run downstairs to see all the gifts and you feel anxious, worried that people might not like the gifts you bought, excited, honestly it feels like every emotion all at once.

Sometimes the holidays intensify unhappy realities. Family dysfunction, financial hardship, or the loss of a loved one can take what is supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year and transform it into the most difficult time of the year.

As humans we experience all different kinds of emotions – whether they are shallow or are deep. Emotions like delight, affection, fear, anger, joy, etc., are so important in the Bible. They reveal what your heart loves, trusts, and fears.

Romans 15:13 says 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

**Tension:**

When you read a verse like that, you might ask yourself, does that verse even come close to describing me? Do you want a life that is *filled* with *all* joy and peace in believing? What does it look like to *abound* in hope?

For the next three weeks are going to be breaking down Romans 15:13. We all need to take care of ourselves. Spirit, soul, and body. The soul is the mind, will, and emotions where we think and feel. Whereas the spirit is that part of us that is enabled by God to know and worship Him, the part of humanity that "connects" with God. But why is it important to take care of our souls?

When we don’t take care of it, it can show in our spiritual walks in many different ways. We see it in “forgetting” God, or struggling to find time for spiritual study, questioning beliefs or sudden doubt, Feeling abandoned by God, feelings of depression and anxiety.

To take care of our bodies, we must eat and sleep every day. To take care of our spirit we must spend time with the Lord. But how do we take care of our soul?

Your soul should be a reflection of the image of God, as He has thoughts, emotions, and a will. Your soul can also relate, interact, and connect with other souls. Thus, you are to take care of what God has given you. Without a healthy soul, you cannot function well.

Soul care actually prepares us for encountering the Lord. Caring for our soul is the gateway for us to receive, grasp, and *understand* God’s ways in our life.

if we care for our soul according to God’s ways and methods (not the world’s), the result is sanctification—or holiness. Holiness fosters intimacy with God and builds spiritual strength and stability.

What better time for us to dive into this than at the start of the Christmas season. To open the door for the Lord to work in and through our lives and help change us to become better reflections of him.

*Pray*

Emotions are important – Emotions are a gift from God, he created every emotion that we feel. They will give you a reading on where your hope is because they are wired into what you believe and value — and how much. They are our heart trying to tell us something. And what it says is unique to each of us. Like everything else about us, our emotional life is both common among all people and particular to us.

Personal story – \*\*of a time emotions affected your life. either you pushed down your emotions or you allowed yourself to feel them\*\*

I remember Christmas of 2020. For some reason Christmas felt different that year for me. I sat down with my friend and said Christmas just didn’t feel the same and it had nothing to do with covid. Or so I thought. My friend began asking questions and helping to dig deeper on what was actually at the core of why things felt “different” for me. As she kept pushing, I kept opening up more about what my true emotions were. An hour later I found myself crying and saying to her I felt lonely, confused by how much I missed church, overwhelmed by the amount of time I had spent with my own thoughts, I felt this burden in my heart of helplessness searching for s sense of purpose in a time that felt like I had none. In all of that I had shut almost everyone out because I couldn’t handle anymore. It was that conversation that made me realize how much I had pushed my emotions down and needed help processing them more than I had thought and from there sought out help from a counselor.

Our emotions are talking to us. But are we listening?

I am *not* saying we should give our emotions complete freedom to control us. Not at all. Neither would I say we should allow intellect to be our master, nor our physical appetites. What I *am* saying is that we should give every part of what makes us who we are a voice at the table.

If we don’t study, we won’t learn, and our intellectual health will suffer. If we don’t exercise or rest enough or eat properly, our physical body will suffer. If we don’t pray and spend time with God, our spiritual lives will suffer. We know this. But far too often we are ignorant to the idea of emotional health and connecting it to soul care.

We stuff down our emotions, we tend to act as though some of them are not happening because it is easier than having to process them. So often we feel so many different emotions at once based on every circumstance that is going on in our life - we don’t even know where to begin so why even try at all to process it, right?

I know that the Christmas season can bring up a lot of emotions for many of us. Ones of excitement, gratitude, and happiness. But for others it causes stress seeing other people’s holiday photos is causing you to engage in self-comparison, Disappointment that Christmas yet again doesn’t look how you thought it would, anxious having to be around family members we don’t get along with. We could feel all at the same time due to our circumstances.

**Climb:**

But students the bible tells us in Nehemiah 8:10 ***The******Joy of the Lord is our strength.***

Before I go any further, I need to address that joy and happiness are not the same thing because I think we tend to use them as if they are. Happiness is dependent on our circumstances – We feel happy when we get an A on our test we didn’t study for.

Joy on the other hand has nothing to do with our circumstance, it has everything to do with our Savior.

Joy is a feeling of good pleasure and happiness that is dependent on who Jesus is rather than on who we are or what is happening around us. Joy comes from the Holy Spirit, abiding in God's presence and from hope in His word. in the Lord is not the elimination of our emotions.

We all want to be filled with all joy and live our lives to the full. But you see joy isn’t just something you wake up with one morning and all other emotions vanish for you and your life ends up being like the end of a 2000’s movie with music playing and life is all sunshine and rainbows.

Because you see joy isn’t a mood it’s a choice and it is not something that is just going to happen. Joy is something you choose to walk in daily.

**Truth:**

I want to give one of the greatest stories of Christmas to help us better understand so let’s turn to Luke 1, it says,

 “God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.’”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.’”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.” (Luke 1:26-38).

Her heart must have been *pounding* as she tried to process what she had just been told! Mary was greatly troubled – another translation says “confused and disturbed”

I don’t know about you guys but if an angel just appeared out of nowhere to me and told me not to be afraid, I probably would still be pretty afraid about what in the world is going on.

At the age of 14 she was now being told that she was going to give birth to a son, not just any son he would be the Son of God.

Mary a virgin, young, confused, being told that she was highly favored, going to carry a baby that was not Josephs how in the world would she explain that, going to give birth to the MOST HIGH (Pause) … she must have been feeling every emotion possible.

Verse 38 shows that even in all of the emotions she is willing to do it for the Lord. You see all those other emotions didn’t just vanish in this moment. She probably still felt anxious, afraid, nervous, confused. But in all of that she still sought the Lord.

A few verses later is something called Mary’s Song or also known as The Magnificat which in Latin means My soul magnifies the Lord. This scripture shows where she is feeling fullness of joy in God towards this pregnancy. Verse 46-47 “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”(Luke 1) In what was probably the scariest moment of her life she found that the Joy of the Lord was her strength.

There are so many other examples in the bible of people finding the joy of the Lord to be their strength in moments when they were feeling many other emotions

Joseph who was sold as a slave by his brothers and yet still praised God, In Moses who was trusting God when it felt like there was no way out from Egypt, Paul wrote Philippians which is also referred to as the book of Joy while he was in prison, Even in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus experienced deep emotional pain. But His joy was perfect in God.

***The Joy of the Lord is our strength***

Many of us in this room struggle with hard emotions on a day-to-day basis our thoughts, and feelings, feeling as though we are alone in that.

Emotions are like a signaling system. They let us know what's going on inside. In some ways, they operate similarly to our nervous system. If we feel pain in our hands, we know that we need to take them off the hot stove. If we feel thirsty, we know that we need to drink

If we feel sad, we tend to call our friends to be there as support. When you get angry at your siblings that is a signal as well. Feeling disappointment about not making the team you practiced so hard for, grief over the loss of a family member, discomfort when we witness something we don’t agree with and want to stand up for what is right, nervousness, fear, crying.

Seeing emotions as a signaling system means that we should be reflecting often on them, by looking inside and seeing what our needs truly are. Once we dive deeper and understand more of what we are feeling, we can choose to either try to meet our needs ourselves or surrender them to the Lord

Dealing with negative emotions by suppressing them, or dismissing them, or getting cross with yourself for even having them, is like driving a car straight through the traffic lights. You might feel like you're going faster and more efficiently, but eventually you will crash, and probably in a big way.

Acknowledging negative emotions and seeing them as a useful indication of the inner state of your soul and body is a far better way to go. Ask “make me aware of my emotions God and help me to meet your needs”

The need may be deep and require talking to someone experienced, kind and wise for an extended period.

We need to give ourselves space to fully feel our emotions. Mary allowed herself to feel her emotions and in processing them sought out the Lord where we saw she found joy. What would it look like for you to take a bit of time to reflect on your feelings? To sit in peace and quiet to listen to your heart.

God doesn’t ask or expect us to put on a façade of happiness or perfection, the shortest verse in the bible shows us that Jesus himself wept. It is good for us to process our emotions and name them.

In the midst of this broken world God reminds us to turn our faces sometimes with tears in our eyes, upon Him, so we can be reminded by his power only that “I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with **joy** in all affliction” (2 Corinthians 7:4) This is why the Joy of the Lord is our strength – Our understanding, relationship, and hope in Jesus is the strength we can hold on to.

**Application:**

So tonight, I want to give some time for you to really be able to process these emotions. To maybe for the first time allow yourself to recognize what exactly you are feeling. There is going to be cards under your seats, take some time to just write down what you have been feeling lately. Could be in the past week, month, or even the last year. It is easy for us to say this is our primary emotion, but what about what is underneath that. We are going to follow this wheel. Find your emotion and go more in depth, what are you actually feeling. write those down.

Once you do that, pray over them. There is power in praying through our emotions, to allow God to sit with you as you process. This kind of conversation with him honors that your emotions are real and you’re inviting him into the space with you and asking him to remain in control. As you begin to reflect tonight, I would encourage you to share with your life group leader or someone you trust to help guide you and process your emotions as you take them before the Lord.

**Inspiration:**

Talk to God. Open your heart to him. Yell at God if you need to. Cry before God if your heart is full of pain. Apologize to him if you are feeling shame. Rant at him if you are angry. His love knows no bounds. He has been with you through every joy, every hurt, every loss, every mistake, every victory and every defeat. He cannot be surprised, and he will be with you always. My prayer for you, for all of us, is that we would find the joy of the Lord to be our strength. Our emotions can feel like they get the best of us or like they are too much. We can continue to hold on to joy even when circumstances become difficult because our joy does not come from ourselves but from the deep love of God for us expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus