

# Joy in the True Vine

*John 15:1-11*

Today, we are discussing joy. If you are a human being, there is a high likelihood that you are concerned with maximizing your joy. In fact, it's not a stretch to say that everything we do is driven by our relentless search for joy. How? We eat certain food, move to certain cities, and build our careers because we believe these things will increase our joy. **Wherever you believe joy is found will determine how you live.** Our pursuit of joy is real, but the question is, is it true? In John 15, Jesus wants to help us uncover what leads to true joy.

## What is Joy?

In order to understand what Jesus is saying about how we acquire joy, we need to understand what kind of joy he is referring to. In our society, joy is used in many different ways. You may say that watching *The Office* brings you joy, or playing golf, or riding bikes. Paul uses joy in a far different way. In 2 Corinthians 7:4, Paul says, **"I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction."** And in Colossians 1:24, he says, **"I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake."** Obviously, these versions of joy are not the same. It seems that there are two kinds of joy. Joy #1 is based on emotion and circumstances. It changes depending on the flow of life. This joy is surprised by suffering and trials. Joy #2 on the other hand is Paul's joy in affliction. It remains in the midst of the worst circumstances. Instead of being surprised, it is deepened by suffering and trials. **I believe that when Jesus speaks of joy, he is not talking about perpetual happiness stemming from good relationships, circumstances, and emotions, but is referring to deeper joy that remains in bad circumstances and "overflows in affliction."** As we consider Jesus' metaphor of the true vine, we'll notice that we gain access to this deep joy in three ways: 1) As we abide in Jesus, 2) as the Father prunes us, and 3) as we obey Jesus.

## Abide

Verses 4-5 read, **"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."** It is clear that for joy we are called to abide in Jesus. But what does it mean to abide? The original word that we translate into "abide" means "to remain" or "to continue in" or "to dwell". So, to abide in something is to remain in it, to continue in it, to dwell in it. When we are abiding in something, we are continually uniting ourselves with that thing. The relationship between the branch and the vine gives us a clear illustration of abiding. The branch is continually united with the vine. It gains all the energy it needs for growth and bearing fruit from the vine, and even gains its very existence, it's meaning, from the vine. Based on this image, **you could say that to abide or remain in something is to continually unite ourselves to that thing for energy and meaning in life.** So, the big question here is what are you abiding in apart from Christ? What are you turning to when you need energy? What do you look to for meaning in life? What do

you turn to when you are emotionally exhausted, stressed, or upset? Affirmation? Your work? Your spouse/family? **Finding energy and meaning in anything other than Christ will lead to an anxiety-ridden life characterized by discontentment and fatigue that will fail to give you what you long for most: joy.** Why is this? Because everything you are looking to for energy and meaning was not designed to fulfill your joy – they won't last. Affirmation only lasts as long as you meet the demands of others. Career success only comes if you are able to keep producing. Even if you are gain affirmation and career success, you will always want more. The vines of affirmation and success will not fulfill your joy. **Jesus wants to challenge your deepest-rooted beliefs on where energy and meaning are found, and point you to him. The true vine.** What does it mean to abide in Jesus? Abiding in Jesus means that you continually turn to Jesus as the source for energy and meaning in your life. Instead of turning to the fickle affirmation of others for energy, we get to abide in the continuous love of Jesus. Unlike the affirmation of others, Jesus affirms us and loves us before we do anything for him, out of his own grace. Instead of finding meaning for life from our work, we get to continually find meaning in Jesus' work on our behalf. I struggle with finding energy and meaning in the affirmation of others. When I am abiding in their affirmation, I live with a lot of fear. Every conversation is risking the other person's negative opinion of me. I avoid sharing my convictions and I hide my faults in order to preserve their affirmation. When I abide in the love of Christ, I am free to be honest about my faults AND my convictions. I no longer need their affirmation because I have the unfailing affirmation of Christ! When I am abiding in Jesus, I no longer need to use people to gain energy and meaning, but am free to actually love others even if they don't affirm me. Abiding in Jesus is so much better! And even more than that, Jesus says that if we abide in him, we will bear much fruit. He'll give us the faith to trust him, the patience to endure, the love to serve him and others, and, as he say in verse 11, he'll give us fullness of joy.

### **Prunes**

This passage also tells us that the Father prunes us that we might bear fruit. Verse 2 reads, **"Every branch that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."** To prune a vine or a plant means to cut of parts of that plant so that it may grow more and produce more fruit. This verse is telling us that God brings pain and hardship into our lives so we can bear more fruit, which will lead to his glory and our joy. **Because God prunes us that we may bear more fruit, we can receive the hardships of life knowing that God, in his infinite wisdom and grace, is allowing those things to happen for the fulfillment of our joy.** Let me use a recent example from my life. I have been interviewing for summer jobs since October. While a lot of my friends were getting killer jobs, I was interviewed and interviewed and got the boot every time. Honestly, I felt like an idiot, like a dud. This whole semester, God has been pruning me. Now, why does God do this? What is the fruit that he is referring to exactly? **The fruit is love for God that is expressed in obedience to God.** Here's how I saw the fruit of my pruning this semester: By having to face continual rejection, God has been teaching me to find my significance less in my accomplishments, in the respect of my

peers, and in my work, and more in my status as a son that God loves. He wanted me to abide in him that I might receive deeper joy that lasts. I know personally that many of you have gone through or are going through unimaginable tragedies that make mine look like child's play. I want you to know right now that there is tremendous hope. God is your Father that loves you, and he is bringing hardship in order to cut you and shape in order that you might cling to him all the more and find the deepest joy in him. He wants to give the joy of Paul - a joy overflowing in affliction.

## **Obey Jesus**

The final, critical component by which we receive the fullness of Jesus' joy is through obedience. Verse 8-11 read, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Is Jesus saying that he will only love us if we obey his commands? No. In verse 9 he says that he has already loved us. And we know that Jesus loved us while we were still sinners – all the way to the cross and all the way up from the grave. So what is Jesus saying? He is saying that a HUGE part of abiding in him is obeying him. We show our love for God by obeying him. How does obedience show love for God? When we choose to serve our City Group or serve at Austin Children's Shelter or Booker T, we are saying that God is more worthy of our love than our comfort or convenience. Or, to give another example, when we fight the temptation to act out in anger, we are demonstrating love for God above the fulfillment of our own desires. In verse 11, he says that when we obey, we receive Christ's joy and have our joy fulfilled. Our motivation to obey is not out of begrudging duty but for joy! So what does this mean for life? It means that we have to take Jesus' promises seriously. There will be times when the emotions aren't there and we don't feel like obeying – in that moment, will we believe our emotions or believe what Jesus said? Will we abide in him or escape? Remain or run? **If we believe Jesus, we will obey when we don't feel like it out of sheer love for him and the promise of joy.** Also, Jesus gives us a sober warning concerning obedience in verse 2 and verse 6. Lets read them. "Every branch that does not bear fruit he takes away..." and "If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." What he is saying, is that if you are not abiding in Jesus, if you are not obeying, then you may not truly belong to the vine. He is not saying that you have to obey perfectly to earn God's favor, he is arguing against neglect of God's favor. **Branches that have received God's favor bear God's fruit. Branches that have received Gods favor continue to abide.** Just because you have said a prayer or walked an aisle at some point in your life doesn't mean you are in the vine. Jesus requires your full allegiance. True faith and abiding in Jesus inevitably must lead to obedience. Furthermore, we should be people who LOVE to obey because we love God. There might be some of you here that have grown up in church and said the prayer but have zero signs of obedience to Jesus in your life. No repentance over sin, no love for your neighbors, no desire for God's kingdom. Jesus wants you to hear

that you may not be in the vine. That should legitimately concern you. The good news is that God loves you like you can't even believe. He wants to fill you with his Spirit to empower to live this life, to enable you to abide in Jesus, the true vine.

My hope is that we would examine where we believe joy can be found apart from Christ. I think that when we examine these beliefs, we will see the futility in them all. That they will rob us of the joy we were made for. They will never bring joy, but will throw us into a continual, never-fully-satisfying fight for approval, respect, and success. When we see the futility in these promises, I pray that we would look to Christ and see that only by abiding in him, the true source of all energy and meaning, will we receive lasting joy. The truth is that God is more serious about our joy than even we are. He wants it so badly that he endured horror of the cross. And when we don't know what is good for us, like a loving Father, he prunes us and calls for our obedience.