

THE PURSUIT OF JOY

John 15:1-11

By Steven Edelman

“I feel disconnected and I want you back.” Those were the words that came out of our mouths after a decade of marriage. We both felt that way. We needed to fix it. After having a couple of kids, life was hard. We remember feeling joy on our wedding day. The feeling of love and delight filled the beginning of our marriage. Like many marriages, long hours at work, disagreements, kids, friends, hobbies, finances, health challenges, and family took its toll. We needed to reconnect. More on that later!

Have you lost your connection? Have you lost your joy? If you have no joy, there's a connection loss with the joy giver. Maybe you never found joy in the first place. If so, this message is for you. This message is for me.

As we begin, we should start by defining joy. We are not talking about people who smile all the time or wear bright happy colors and have pet unicorns. It's not a state of having a permanent smile like the joker! In the dictionary, joy is defined as a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. Notice that joy is interchangeable with happiness. Jesus defines joy in the gospel of John as something greater and deeply satisfying.

Today, we want to look at what Joy is and what it is not. We will look at the definition of joy as Jesus defines it in the gospel of John. Throughout John, Jesus spells out His character and purpose so they can find real joy. Jesus said, ***“I am the bread of life” (6:48); “I am the light of the world” (8:12); “I am the door” (10:7); “I am the good shepherd” (10:14); and “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25).***

In John 15 he says, ***“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”***

Let's look at the John 15:1-11 together.

John 15:1–11 (ESV)

I Am the True Vine

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide 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. ⁵I 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Let's look at three ways in which we can find joy in our lives: First, to have joy we must know the difference between His joy and our happiness.

1. To have joy we must distinguish between His joy and our happiness.

In **verse 1**, Jesus introduces himself as the **real** vine and his Father as the gardener. An **intimation** or "**counterfeit vine**" would include anything else other than Jesus. The people of Israel were also referred to as a vine that rebelled against God. The fruit that God desired from Israel was: loving obedience, righteousness, and justice (Isa. 5:1–7). The Bible tells us that Israel tried to do things on their own will and failed to find joy. There are many things in the world we put our trust in, but they can't deliver the same joy that Jesus is talking about.

Do you know the difference between the real vine and the fake vine?

There is a trend of people laying fake grass because there is no maintenance. Are we soon going to start seeing plastic trees outside? I mean no maintenance is required. Should we add plastic squirrels, cats, and dogs? Plastic bugs, plastic kids? Plastic wife or husband? My point is that when we fill our lives with easy counterfeit things... the plastic is lacking the full experience. It's not the same. Jesus wants us to have a real relationship with him so we can experience Joy. Let's look closer.

To determine real joy, we must understand that:

a) Christian joy is a delight in God that you feel in your soul.

In John 15:11 Jesus says, "*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be **in you**, and that your joy may be full.*"

The Greek word for joy in this passage means – to experience gladness or delight that comes from experiencing God. We need to experience God in all of life.

John Piper said it well, *“Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world.”*

Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit’s presence and occurrence in the lives of believers (Gal 5:22). Joy enables believers to endure trials and suffering of the Christian life. **The joy Jesus is talking about is deeply satisfying and life changing.** However, we pursue our own happiness.

b) Worldly happiness is a fleshly pursuit.

Many assume that the only way we can experience joy is by **obtaining** fleshly pleasures. As we have seen, the world uses the word **“happiness” and “joy” interchangeably**. Remember, Jesus refers to joy as delight that touches our soul when we experience God. The world sees happiness as consuming the many pleasures of life, so that you feel good or satisfied. This is a temporary satisfaction that will not bring you joy. Kind of like ladies who wear high heels for pleasure but end up in pain! Joking.

Living for worldly happiness is a life that is disconnected from God and focused on self. A life lived by the world’s values has great marketing, but no delivery. Unfortunately, our natural tendency is bent to pursue pleasure.

As reported in the Daily Mail new research suggests, *“Scientists believe the 'pleasure principle' may be at the heart of most human decision making. The neurotransmitter dopamine, which helps transmit signals between nerve cells, is linked to reward-seeking behaviour. It generates pleasant feelings that are associated with certain kinds of stimulus, such as sex or food.”*

Daily Mail

We seek stimulus in all kinds of things that trigger dopamine which is a chemical in our brain that is linked to addictive behavior. It makes you feel good. Notice that it’s a chemical reaction that is temporary.

Pleasure in itself is not wrong because God created it. However, we live in a culture with few boundaries when it comes to indulgence and amusement. Sadly, many who call themselves Christians live this way and don’t produce fruit.

To quote Ravi Zacharias “Pleasure without God, without the sacred boundaries, will actually leave you emptier than before. And this is biblical truth, this is experiential truth. The loneliest people in the world are amongst the wealthiest and most famous who found no boundaries within which to live. That is a fact I've seen again and again.”

Look with me at verse 6, “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch (**not abiding is seeking pleasure without God**) and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” When the branch withers... the fruit withers. Have you been looking for joy from temporary sources? Has your joy withered?

When we seek pleasure in things that require us to disobey God, our joy is depleted. Meaning, we are disconnected and trying to attach to a false vine. The false vine is the fake plastic things in our lives.

Living for fleshly pleasure is a branch that does not produce fruit and will be cut off by God. In the pursuit of pleasure, our culture is amusing themselves to death. We hear about the Netflix hangover because of people who have binge watching TV shows for days. Pokémon Go... searching for virtual characters that are not really there when you view it through the lens of a phone. What lens are you looking through to find joy?

The root cause of why we sin is that we think it will make us happy. We believe it will bring us joy and fulfillment. For a time, we may feel good... but in the end, produces guilt and destroys authentic joy.

What are some of the false things that you believe will make you happy?

Every time I drive by a KFC fast food joint when I am hungry I want it. After eating it I always regret it because of the grease sitting in my stomach. Do you look to beauty, work, a relationship, obtaining something or someone, better sex or having sex at all, food - like eating bacon or every day, drink, being the center of attention or living on the ocean with an infinity pool? Maybe for many here, it's if I had better health or I was younger or had a good friend – then I would have joy. Did you discover some detachment points?

What does God need to cut away from your life so you may have Joy?

Psalm 51 is the greatest example of repentance that we find anywhere in Scripture. In this psalm, David, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, is brought to repentance for his sin with and against Bathsheba.

He says, “Restore to me the **joy** of your salvation” (v. 51:12a).

Can you determine what delivers real joy and what offers temporary happiness?

As we have seen, **to have joy, we must distinguish between His joy and our pleasure.** Christian joy is a delight in God, that we feel in our soul. Worldly happiness is a fleshly pursuit with temporary satisfaction.

Secondly, to find joy we must be connected to the source of joy.

2. To find joy we must be connected to the source of joy.

Many of us are dependent on our cell phone to accomplish many tasks. It has become our second brain. As you use it and depend on the task, the battery drains. News 1130 was talking about how the battery drain increases our anxiety. If we are out at a restaurant or socializing and the battery is below 20% we get anxious. They could no longer enjoy their time as a result of their low battery and would leave the venue or friends just to charge their phone. This illustrates how we are reliant on a source of power for our phone to function.

In the same way, we are reliant on God as the source of Joy to function. In John 15, the vine represents the covenant that God has made with his people. This is a reminder that we are planted and tended by Him so that we will produce fruit. He wants to cut away branches that have no life in them. A full life comes from Jesus who connects us with God. The source of Joy. **We can't experience joy on our own. He hasn't abandoned you. He is waiting for you to go to Him to find joy. Having joy is an indication that we have a healthy relationship with Jesus.** God wants to see fruit coming from his hand tending the vines (15:2).

In verse 2, he describes two activities of the gardener to keep the fruit healthy and ensure a nourishing connection. First, cutting away the branches that cannot bear fruit. Second, pruning every branch that does not bear fruit. The second half of verse 2 mentions the reason for the gardener's actions; *so that it (the branch) will be clean and bear more fruit.* Is your life clean and bearing joy?

The responsibilities of an effective gardener include: controlling pests and diseases, fertilizing, irrigation, monitoring fruit development and characteristics, deciding when to harvest, and pruning. As God is monitoring your life, what would he see? We need to ask God to reveal the things in our life that are keeping us from having a healthy relationship with Him. As God reveals them to you, ask Him to cut away the **joy killers** and prune them from your life, so you may experience joy in Him.

Verse 10 says, *"¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*

Application - Obedience leads us to the source of joy. Disobedience leads us away. Our fading joy is a symptom that exposes our disconnection from God and reveals sinful self-reliance. Sin leads to guilt.

R.C Sproul says, "Guilt is fundamentally a depressant. It squelches any feeling of well-being. It robs us of peace. It torments our souls. It is probably the most significant barrier to real joy. Thus, when our guilt is removed, joy floods our souls."

Isn't that true! Guilt is determined not by our feelings, but by what we do. Pain gives us the signal that there is a problem that needs to be treated. Pain is a warning signal. When I get a toothache that tells me that something is not right with my tooth. So it is with guilt and guilt feelings. Guilt feelings should do the same thing; they should tell us we have done something wrong and motivate us to change. When our real guilt is treated and the guilty feelings go away, we feel great joy.

Have you dealt with the sin in your life? Are you really being honest with yourself and God? Are you living a life cut off?

R.C Sproul says, "Those who have experienced the forgiveness of God and the initial joy of it always need to have that joy restored, to have the guilt of their continuing sin removed so joy may return. As we seek forgiveness from God on a day-to-day basis, we return to the beginning of our joy—the day we discovered that our names are written in heaven."

Jesus wants to see our joy replenished from His joy. We replenish our joy through an obedient connection with Him. As a vine that gives sustenance to the fruit it is attached to it. In verse 6, *He expresses the desire that our joy should be full. "And that your joy may be full."* Isn't that what we

want? We do not want a partial cup of the fruit of the Spirit. The fullness of our joy comes from Jesus. As we are plugged into Him, the joy that comes from Him develops, increases, and becomes full.

When your whole life becomes about Jesus, you find joy. You stay deeply connected to the source of joy.

Lastly, to maintain joy, we must abide in Him.

3. To maintain joy, we must abide in Him.

For many of us, our joy seems to leak out because we wonder.

a) *We need to park our lives on the source of joy.*

Look with me at verse 4, “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.” **The word abide means to remain in Him. We need to remain in a place that we can continue to thrive and experience lasting joy.** We need to develop patterns in our life that help us thrive and stay in close relationship with God. Attending a small group, feeding on the Word of God, being involved in ministry, prayer, and having people in our life that are going to push you to the source. We need to park our lives on the source of joy. We need discipleship.

b) *To maintain joy, we need discipleship.*

Jesus is really talking about discipleship, which is learning how to follow Jesus in all areas of life. His own joy is available to us, and He wants to see it abiding in us. Verse 8 says, *“by this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”*

Notice that Jesus says “That you bear much fruit and so **“prove”** to be my disciples.” A follower of Jesus produces fruit. Are you producing fruit?

It was only in the final verse of this passage that Jesus explained why He had taught the disciples these things: **“that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.”** We need each other to teach and learn together so that we may grow to remain in connection with God. There and only there, your joy may be full. Joy is the result of maintaining a good relationship with Jesus. We also see other fruit produced: **Galatians 5:22-23** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

In chapter 14:27, “The “peace” promised is now matched to “joy” in 15:11. **It is a gift of the Spirit,** a gift of Jesus dwelling within, that makes this joy supernatural and substantial. Jesus’ joy has

come through his reliance on God and his obedience to his Father's will. **We inherit not only his joy, but also the ability to delight in God through the Spirit.**

The story that I started with today has a happy ending. My wife and I realized that if we wanted to feel love and joy, we needed to reconnect. Looking after each other needed to be a priority. If our relationship was left on the backburner, we both knew we would remain in a disconnected state. After nourishing our relationship with intentional time, acts of love, honest communication, sacrifice (doing things you didn't want to do), and being present, the connection grew and deepened. A deeper love and connection developed that was more fulfilling than the day we said: "I do".

How is your connection with God? Do you see His joy in your life?

T A Davies said it well, "He wants us to have a permanent joy, not a roller-coaster ride of moods shifting between joy and misery. If we want to be consistently joyful, we need to abide in Him." T A Davies

If you are being really honest with yourself... do you have His joy?

*As we are singing the last song... If you want the Joy of God in your life you need to start a relationship with him. If you want to maintain that joy you need to remain in Him. Do you need discipleship?

I want to end with a quote from John Piper, "When we turn from all the pop and fizz and bottled beverage of the world and get down on our knees beside the mountain spring of God's living water, we honor him and glorify him and magnify him as the only source of lasting joy. And in the very act of magnifying him, we satisfy ourselves because this is the water we were made to live by."

Romans 15:13 "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."