

Fuel for joy

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Date: 12 February 2023

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[0 : 00] But John 15, 1 through 11. It says, And it will be done for you.

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

May God grant us understanding of his word. Well, if you noticed, there's a title for this message, and it's called Fuel for Joy.

Fuel for Joy. Joy is difficult to define. Something like happiness, but not quite.

[1 : 53] Someone sees you smiling, and they say, Oh, you look pretty happy today. And you say, Well, you know, I struck the ball pretty well out of the course today. I got a good mark on that paper I was studying for.

My team, my team won the match last night. You know, the flat I applied for, I'm able to let. Those are things that make us happy.

But I would submit that joy is something that involves happiness, but in a more substantive, and frankly, a more profound way.

In one of the available Greek lexicons, particularly this is one that's used by people who want to translate from the original to whatever languages that they happen to be in, so it tends to be a little bit more idiomatic, they suggest this.

In a number of languages, joy is expressed idiomatically. For example, my heart is dancing, or my heart shouts because I'm happy.

[2 : 57] I think the joy is happiness attached to something that is fulfilling, that strikes the right chord, that has a sense of the numinous, the spiritual about it, something ineffable, something that says, yes, yes, this is how it ought to be.

This is how it is meant to be. Psalm 4, verse 7 says, you have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. You can imagine, right, the harvest coming in, and the silo is full, the barns are chocks, whatever it is that they've been harvesting, it is done.

And there's a kind of joy attached to that. Happiness that, yes, they have that, but it's done, it's been done, it's been done. This is the way it ought to be. We ought to have bountiful harvests.

Now, there are circumstances in which someone might have joy which we would consider to be horrifying. Like some gang leader who managed to wipe out the leadership of another gang and he says, that's the way it ought to be.

[4 : 17] Or Vladimir Putin who thinks that, you know, the lands that he thinks belongs to Russia really get back to him. I'm sure he'll experience joy at that moment. But even in those kind of immoral situations, we can get a sense of what joy is.

Something that is complete. Something that is the way it ought to be. A human's capacity for joy, however immoral or morally experienced, is something that comes as our having been made in the image of God.

Think about it. What does God do at the end of creating everything when he ceases from his labors? He says, it is very good. You know what's interesting about that language? It's language that's kind of attached to somebody wanting to call attention to something, to pointing to it.

It's like he's saying, look at that. Look at that. That is good. So when God expresses his joy, we, as image bearers, express joy.

In fact, we were created for joy. I think the Westminster Assembly got it right. What's the chief end? What's the principal goal of a human being's existence? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to what?

[5 : 39] to enjoy him forever. And what I hope to communicate is that Jesus understood this and it is the reason he came from heaven to earth to live and to die as one of us.

He didn't just come to save us from judgment, though that he certainly did. He came to open up the pathway to joy. Pray with me for a minute.

Father, thank you for this opportunity to share your word together and I pray you help me. God, may your spirit enable me and all of us, Lord, to hear what you are saying that we might grasp hold of what you have for us here tonight.

Thank you for my brothers and sisters in this room and ask your blessing upon us all, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. When a person is brought to the realization that they're at odds with God, that is, as the Bible says, that they're enemies of God, they stand at the edge of eternal life or on the outskirts of heaven, as you will.

That is, that they see themselves as God sees them. They're sinful. They're corrupt. They're justly condemned. And such a person under that conviction is also brought to a place of recognizing that they need someone to save them from their peril.

[6 : 57] Someone, something, who will it be? Such conviction comes from hearing the gospel. The message, the message of the church, the good news that God, the God of the Bible, the one true and living God, has acted to save sinful, corrupt, condemned human beings.

God uses that proclamation to generate faith in people, faith that what God says about them is true, that they need a rescuer, and that Jesus is the appointed rescuer and none other.

Remember what Peter declared to his religious rulers of that day. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

No other name but the name of Jesus by which we must be saved. No other person is salvation to be found. And when a person grasps that reality, they do so by faith.

That is that they believe the assertion to be true. And though they have not met Jesus personally, they have not sat at his feet to learn from him, they believe that what the Bible says about Jesus and they submit to the truth of who he is, what he has done, as their only hope.

[8 : 19] Faith causes that person to cling to Jesus for the purity, the righteousness that they are going to need when they stand before God on the day of judgment. The hearing of the gospel, the message of the church, is what generates the kind of faith that unites the lost human being to the hope of eternal life.

And without which, a person would face an unimaginable eternity described in terrifyingly graphic terms by Jesus. But united by faith to Jesus, united to him, all is new.

Rather than condemnation, there is for the believer in the words of the apostle Peter, an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed to the last time.

The circumstances have completely and radically changed. We now no longer stand under condemnation, but we stand with the hope of the eternal life, an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

All is new. And when I say all is new, I don't want us just to think in terms of that eternal life to the eternal amazing destiny that is kept for us in heaven for the believer.

[9 : 42] That is the ultimate hope that we have, and that is indeed secure, as the apostle says. But for the one who embraces the reality that the gospel proclaims, there is also new life to be lived here and now.

It is a life that is increasingly animated by the same life that was, that is, in Jesus. Without that life, without Jesus' life in us, we human beings remain what we have been, what we are, what we will always be.

And what that is, is less than fully human, less than fully alive. I mentioned C.S. Lewis this morning. I'm going to do it again. C.S. Lewis talks about this in this way.

What man, what a human being is in his natural condition, what he calls his biological life, what that one has not got is spiritual life, the higher and different sort of life that exists in God.

We use the same word life for both, but if you thought that both must therefore be the same sort of thing, that would be like thinking that the greatness of space and the greatness of God were the same sort of greatness.

[10:55] In reality, the difference between biological life and spiritual life is so important that I'm going to give them two distinct names, he says. The biological sort, which comes to us through nature, and which, like everything else in nature, is always tending to run down and decay so that it can only be kept up by the incessant subsidies from nature in the form of air, water, food, etc., we'll call that bios.

The spiritual life, which is in God from all eternity, and which made the whole natural universe, he calls zoe, Greek for life. Bios has to be assured a certain shadowy and symbolic resemblance to zoe, but only the sort of resemblance that is between a photo and a place, a statue, and a man. A man who changed from having bios to having zoe would have gone through as big a change as a statue which has changed from being carved stone into being a real man.

Now, I don't know if that quote, sometimes long quotes are not great. I don't know if that quote from Lewis was helpful to illustrate what I'm speaking about, but the image of a statue coming to life, something really, frankly, only imagined movies created by CGI is in truth an accurate analogy. God's life in us makes us alive. It makes everything new. What does Paul say? If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old has gone, the new is here.

[12:27] One translator said, anyone is in Christ, a whole new world. It's a new existence. In our passage, in John 15, Jesus gives us a very vivid metaphor, a vivid metaphor about the notion of this zoe life being imparted to us.

He says, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned. It's an easy metaphor to grasp.

It's being in the vine that has changed everything for the one who is united by faith to Jesus. And it's a powerful metaphor because we can immediately get what he's talking about. The life of the branches need to be attached to the vine, otherwise they wither and they die.

And if branches are not in the vine, the life of the vine is not in the branches. And, indeed, they wither. But if the branches are in the vine, then the life of the vine floods the branches and the branches bear fruit, indeed, much fruit.

[13:57] Now, if we look through that passage again, what's the dominant verb there? The dominant verb is remain. Some translations say abide. And the term really has to do with, like, staying, but, like, residing.

Kind of staying and living there. And it shows up 11 times in 11 verses. So it's to stay with a sense of residing, to stay attached to the vine, to reside in the vine.

And what does Jesus say? We are to remain in Jesus as a branch needs to remain in the vine so that the life that is in the vine will be in the branches so that the life that is in Jesus will be in us, his disciples.

Additionally, his words is to remain in us. His word is to remain in us. All that he has spoken, commanded, is to remain in us, reside in us. And we are to remain in his love. And our example, our model, our predecessors, indeed, Jesus, who remain in his Father's love.

And what will having our life of Jesus, what will having the life of Jesus and the words of Jesus and the love of Jesus in us, residing in us, do? It will make us more like Jesus.

[15:08] It will transform us from what we are into who we are in Christ. And as C.S. Lewis is right, that means that we are becoming more and more human, truly human.

Because Jesus was the only human being who ever and will ever walk on the face of the earth who was what a human being was meant to be. Yeah?

Jesus is the only normal human being. Fully God, fully man. We don't detract any of his divinity from him when we say that he was clothed, those two natures in one person.

And we shouldn't detract any of his humanity from him when we say he was fully human. In fact, why we say he's the only real, truly human, normal human being that walked because he wasn't in conflict with his father, his creator.

He loves his father. He loves his father's will. He lived as a human being is supposed to live. Now, I think that's a thoroughly transforming understanding of the nature of things.

[16 : 13] Jesus tells his disciples, if you've seen me, you've seen the father. You want to know what God really is like? Look at Jesus. And if you want to know what a human being is really like, look at Jesus.

And Orthodox Christianity has asserted and rigorously defended the teaching that Jesus was both fully God and fully human in one person. And the irony of that is that the presence of Jesus has made the incomprehensible God more comprehensible and the seemingly comprehensible human being more incomprehensible.

See, when we think that God is not way out there, that he's just hidden from us, possessing attributes, qualities that we can't really understand, well, surely, indeed, God is incomprehensible in so much that he is unlike any other being that is.

But he has taken pains to make himself understood. And he's done that by clothing himself in flesh and living among us. We see the face of God, the beauty of God, the truth of God in the person of Jesus.

On the other hand, we're human beings and we're surrounded by human beings and as much as they can shock us at times with the things that they do, we think we know them. But then along comes Jesus who has never been tainted by sin, never ran after another God, never created an idol, literal or metaphorical, never bowed down to it, never used the name of the God frivolously, failed to worship God not just on one day but every day, all day, never dishonored his parents, never murdered, never committed adultery, never stole, never bore false witness, never coveted.

[17 : 51] There has never been nor will there ever be another human being who has lived a life from conception until death free from sin and all its corruption.

He is the only one who has lived a human life as a human life was meant to be lived. Out of all the billions and billions and billions of people who have walked in the face of this planet or who will walk in the face of this planet, only one has been truly human.

That is incomprehensible. fruitful. But we ask the question, what does becoming more like Jesus do for us? Well, it makes us fruitful.

Very fruitful. But before we consider that, we need to remember that it is being in the vine that makes us fruitful. That is, we aren't about the business of being fruitful so that we can be in the vine. We're in the vine so that we can be fruitful. It was the father and the son who acted first to establish this relationship. Remember, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believed in him.

[18 : 56] And in this encounter, what does Jesus say? You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Jesus has acted to bring them in and attach them to the vine. And that's so important for us to remember.

The disciples hearing these words and we are in the vine by the grace of God and by the grace of God alone. That being said, it is our being in the vine and remaining in the vine that will make us fruitful.

What does Jesus say? Again, no branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine.

You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. Now, why is it important for us to be fruitful?

Well, Jesus says, this is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourself to be my disciples. See, there's an Old Testament background to this imagery.

[20 : 00] This imagery of vine and branches. Israel, in a number of passages in the Old Testament, is referred to as a vine, as a vineyard that God has planted, but they produced bad fruit, even though he had provided everything for them.

Listen to this language from Isaiah chapter 5. I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard. My loved one has a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

He dug it up and cleared it out stones and planted it with its choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. And he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, Isaiah says. And the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed, for righteousness, but

heard cries of distress.

See, God had planted Israel and expected the vine that he planted to bear the fruit of righteousness, but they failed. Listen again, though, to the beginning of this passage.

[21 : 03] Jesus says, I am the true vine and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of meat that bears the fruit, while every branch that does not bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

See, where Israel failed to bear fruit, Jesus, the true Israel, the true vine, will succeed. He will bear fruit suitable for the one who has every right to expect it, his heavenly father.

This is Jesus' intent in speaking to his disciples as he does. They are to remain in him that they might bear fruit so that his father will be glorified and thereby proving that they are Jesus' disciples. He is the true Israel and we are the branches bearing fruit to the glory of God. Now, I know you might think I've wandered very far away from talking about joy, but we're getting there.

Jesus' desire, Jesus' desire is that his heavenly father would receive much glory through the fruit born due to his life-giving relationship with those who have been united to him by faith.

[22 : 06] So the next question, what does he mean by fruit? I think, I think he gets at this when he says this in verse 7.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, whatever you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

He says, this is to my father's glory, that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples. Here it would seem that our fruitfulness is tied to prayer. But it's not an open invitation to pray for anything that we think somehow would be good.

There's a condition. He says, if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask what you will and it will be done for you. Now we've already talked about this idea of being transformed to be more and more like Jesus.

The more his life is animating us and his word is transforming our thinking, our understanding, shaping our desires and will, the more will our prayer life reflect the will of God.

[23 : 16] One commentator says, the model of Jesus in life and word must permeate the life and words of the disciple. When this happens, praying ceases to be a selfish asking and becomes aligned with the will and purposes of God in Christ.

See, that suggests, right, this process of being made new. We are being molded into what we were created to be, what we have been redeemed to be.

And if we examine Jesus' own life, what we discover is that he was a man under submission to his father in constant communion and communication and communion with him, seeking at all turns and in all circumstances to do his will.

Jesus says this in John 5, Very truly, I tell you, the son can do nothing by himself. He can do only what he sees his father doing because whatever the father does, the son also does.

For the father loves the son and shows him all that he does. See, if we remain in Jesus and his words remain in us, a similar intimacy of understanding and loving obedience that characterizes his own life will be ours.

[24 : 25] And so, as we pray, because out of this fact that Jesus remains in us and his word remains in us and we remain in his love, as we pray, then our whole view of what wants to be done, what needs to be done, what ought to be done, is changed.

It's new. Our prayers are suddenly enlivened by the life of Jesus, shaped by the life of Jesus, pleaded with the life of Jesus, with the faith of the life of Jesus.

This is what our prayers now become, and they bear fruit. As the father has loved me, so I have loved you, he says. Now remain in my love.

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my father's commands and remain in his love. It's in this, remaining, in his word remaining in us and we remaining in his love and his love remaining in us is where we begin to discover this gift, I think Jesus gives us.

His loving purpose that stands behind his charge that they remain in him, that his word remain in them, that they obey his commands, that they remain in his love. His desire, his desire is that they would live in what he lived in day to day.

[25 : 42] Joy. Joy. Joy. What does he say? I have told you this. I have told you this about remaining in me. My word remaining in you. You're remaining in the father's love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete or full. Jesus' joy was that of experiencing the father's love.

The joy of bearing fruit to the glory of God. The joy of knowing his will. The joy of obeying his will to the point of death, even death upon a cross. What does the writer of Hebrews say?

Fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

There was joy at the end of his labors here on earth. There was joy in waiting him. He experienced it as he obeyed and listened to his father and followed his will. desired what the father wanted.

[26 : 46] As he pursued that, there was joy in him and joy awaited him. D.A. Carson, New Testament scholar, lest the constraints of unqualified obedience that Jesus calls for seems gray and joyless.

Jesus insists that his own obedience to the father is the ground of his joy. And he promises that those who obey him will share the same joy. Indeed, that his very purpose in laying down such demands is that their joy may be complete.

And Carson goes on to say something that I think is on the one hand discouraging, but on the other hand encouraging. He says, what is presupposed is that human joy in a fallen world will at best be ephemeral, shallow, incomplete, until human existence is overtaken by an experience of the love of God in Christ, the love for which we were created, a mutual love that issues in obedience without reserve.

See, our experiences of joy, what I said earlier was a happiness attached to something fulfilling that strikes the right chord that has a sense that, yes, this is how it ought to be.

Such things are indeed transient. They're impermanent. No matter how moving they are, and that can be very discouraging. But what Jesus is offering to us is that does not disregard or negate those experiences, but encourages us to want more.

[28 : 17] And what he offers is a fruitful life that is generated by our being and remaining in him. Jesus wants us to experience joy. And we experience joy when we become more and more like Jesus because Jesus lived in joy.

He calls us to remain in him, for his word to abide in us, for us to remain in his love, and we'll do this when we obey, excuse me, when he obey his commands.

And having done those things, it's a genuine reflection, an absolute reflection of what Jesus and how he lived his life. And Jesus says, I have joy in me, and I want your joy that I have to be in you, and I want it to be full.

Now, I would be remiss before I close if I didn't note something that Jesus says at the very beginning of this passage from John 15.

He says, I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener or the vine dresser. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

[29 : 26] See, again, through faith, we're united to Christ, to the vine. That union is the basis of our being fruitful. Without Jesus, we can do nothing, but in him, we can be fruitful.

And we consider how we're being transformed more and more to be like Jesus, that our desires and wills are being reordered so that our prayers reflect God's righteous and good desires, and not those which come from the parts of our heart that are still dominated by the old self, as Paul calls it. Yeah, the more we put off the old self and we put on the new self, the self we are in Christ, the more fruitful we will be, and therefore the more joyful we will be. However, as Jesus indicates, that process is not always pleasant.

I am the vine and my Father is the gardener. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. He says, you're already clean because of the word that I've spoken to you, but my Father will continue to prune so that you'll be more fruitful.

You're in the vine, he says. That's not an issue. The vine dresser is not so unwise as to cut off branches that are secure to the vine to receive its life. Those are branches that bear fruit and that's what he desires, but what he does do is he prunes them.

[30 : 48] Now, I know a lot of you keep gardens and I have never kept a garden. I have only killed plants in my house, but I know pruning is an important part of being a gardener.

Here's a definition I found of pruning. Pruning is the practice of selectively removing plant parts, branches, buds, spent flowers, etc., to manipulate the plant for a horticultural and landscape

purposes.

Does that sound right? Let's change that as God, the Father, our vine dresser, prunes us. Pruning is the practice of intentionally removing the old nature's sinful parts, unrighteous desires, self-serving behavior, loveless indifference, willful disobedience, to shape the child of God for holy and God-glorifying purposes.

That's what God is doing when he prunes. And again, with Jesus as our model, what does the writer of Hebrews say? Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered. And once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

God will indeed prune us and the image of a knife cutting off a dead branch or something that will cut back so that it will continue to bear fruit and even more fruit is not an easy one for us to want to accept, but Paul sees this as something that is vital to his growth in the new self that he is in Christ. [32 : 16] Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, he says, you're in the vine, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. All that is settled. He says, but not only so, we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, character, hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

See, God uses the suffering, the difficulties in our life to prune us so that more and more we are shaped, more and more we leave off the old self and we put on the new self who we are in Christ. It builds us, strengthens us, and makes us fruitful. Peter says, dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice in so much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Can you hear that? God says he's promising that as we go through sufferings, as he prunes more and more the old self away from us, we are going to rejoice upon Jesus' return.

[33 : 36] Not just because we're finally done with this life, but because we've finally seen the realization, the completeness of all that has been going on from the moment of our profession of faith to the moment when we breathe our last breath and Jesus returns to gather us.

We will rejoice. Again, what the writer of Hebrews says, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith for the joy set before him.

He endured the cross, scorning its shame, sat down at the right hand in the throne of God. Jesus wants us to experience the kind of joy that he himself walked in, lived in, every day.

A joy that is attached to something that does indeed cause us to feel elated. It might even make us feel happy. But more importantly, it makes us feel that everything is as it ought to be.

And that's what it will be when finally we stand before him face to face. We will see, yes, this is the way things are supposed to be. And that will be a time of exceeding joy, unending, eternal joy.

[34 : 51] Between now and then, then we're told to remain in the vine. To remain in the vine, allow Jesus' words to remain in us, to remain in his love as his love remains in us. And in that process, as we begin to seek God's will for our life and for his creation, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we begin to pray accordingly.

And we begin to have our eyes and our, our, our clarified and our ears open and our hearts shaped so that we will begin to want what God wants. And when our hearts and minds and loves align with God's heart, mind, and love, that's where we experience joy.

The process is not going to be easy. It will be fraught with challenges because we live in a fallen world. We're trying to indeed put off a very tenacious old self as we have put on the new.

But it is a promise that it can happen and it will happen. One day, in the twinkling of an eye, we will all be changed and joy will be full. Between now and then, we look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, that we hold fast to him and allow his life in us to transform us, to make us new, so that we might experience his joy in this life.

Let's pray. Gracious God, you have promised to us joy. It's hard for us to even comprehend what that looks like, at least it is for me, that we can rejoice.

[36 : 24] We look at the Apostle Paul, it says to rejoice in sufferings, to rejoice at all times. And Lord, we don't do that. I don't do it. But we want to learn what that means.

And so, Lord Jesus, as you so graciously attached us to your vine, by your spirit, let your life flow in us to make us new. And may your word transform our hearts and minds so that how we think, how we understand things, will be in alignment with what is true, what is real.

And may we joyfully, joyfully heed your command to heed your word and to live by it. Again, let us just direct our steps so that we might really experience what it means to be human, to be a creature of the creator, to bear the image of God, that we might experience the joy that was in you.

We thank you for doing all that was necessary so that the joy that is in you can be in us. And we want to heed what you have to say as to how that will be experienced.

We commit ourselves to it by your grace. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.