

GOOD NEWS, GREAT JOY

"THE CULTIVATION OF GREAT JOY"

JOHN 15:1-17

This Week's Core Competency

Joy – I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances. John 15:11, *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

I'm not sure how to adequately express what I sense, but I sense that joy, thanksgiving, and praise are inextricably related. Are they somehow sequential? If so, which comes first? Are thanksgiving and praise two sides of the same coin? Is joy implicit to both?

In the Upper Room discourse (Jn 15-17), Jesus tells his disciples, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (15:11). To understand what he meant his disciples had to identify what "this" refers to, they had to recognize the implication of the logical relationship indicated by "so that," and they had to admit his emphasis on the repeated term "joy."

The nearest antecedent of the pronoun "this" is found in verse 10. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." In other words, I have commanded you to "remain in my love" (v. 9b); to do that you must obey my commands. And he tells them for a specific *purpose*, i.e., that their joy might be complete. And what commands does Jesus have in mind? He

We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise completes the enjoyment.

– C. S. Lewis

answers that question without hesitating to take a breath. "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (v. 12). In a nutshell, Jesus is telling them if they will obey his commands, they will remain in his love, and as a result experience fullness of joy.

Clearly, joy is found in Christ. The joy that belongs to him can belong to us also. His joy can become our joy. Remaining in him and his love, the result of obeying his commands, is the key. What Jesus tells his disciples is not unrelated to what Paul tells his readers. Since joy is found in Christ, the apostle says: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Php 4:4). C. S. Lewis explores and comments on relationship between joy and rejoicing, enjoyment and praise, suggesting that one completes the other. He writes:

"I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with (the perfect hearer died a year ago). This is so even when our expressions are inadequate, as of course they usually are. But how if one could really and fully praise even such things to perfection-utterly 'get out' in poetry or music or paint the

con't pg. 2

the upsurge of appreciation which almost bursts you? Then indeed the object would be fully appreciated and our delight would have attained perfect development. The worthier the object, the more intense this delight would be. If it were possible for a created soul fully (I mean, up to the full measure conceivable in a finite being) to 'appreciate', that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude. It is along these lines that I find it easiest to understand the Christian doctrine that 'Heaven' is a state in which angels now, and men hereafter, are perpetually employed in praising God. This does not mean, as it can so dismally suggest, that it is like 'being in Church'. For our 'services' both in their conduct and in our power to participate, are merely attempts at worship; never fully successful, often 99.9 per cent failures, sometimes total failures. We are not riders but pupils in the riding school; for most of us the falls and bruises, the aching muscles and the severity of the exercise, far outweigh those few moments in which we were, to our own astonishment, actually galloping without terror and without disaster. To see what the doctrine really means, we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God—drunk with, downed in, dissolved by, that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable, hence hardly tolerable, bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression, our joy no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds. The Scotch catechism says that man's chief end is 'to glorify God and enjoy Him forever'. But we shall then know that these are the same thing. Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him" (*Reflections on the Psalms*, 95-96).

Rejoicing in the Lord and remaining in Christ are both related to our experience of joy.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

John 15:1-17

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you

bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

* Highlight vv. 1, 5.

* Circle "cuts off" and "prunes" in v. 2.

* Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in vv. 2, 11 and "because" indicating *reason* in v. 3.

* Underline "fruit" and "fruitful" throughout.

* Circle "remain" throughout.

* Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 6.

* Highlight the "if" clauses, in vv. 5, 10.

* Bracket "showing yourselves to be my disciples" in v. 8.

* Box "as" and "so" indicating *comparison* in v. 9.

* Box "just as" indicating *comparison* in v. 10.

* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 16.

* Double Underline "command/s" in vv. 10, 12, 14, 17.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Jesus is "the true vine" and God is "the gardener." Identify the divine vinedresser's ultimate objective and explain what he does to accomplish it.
2. What do you infer from verse 3?
3. Fruit bearing is *conditional*. How so?
4. Explain the *comparison* in verse 6.
5. Receiving what you wish from God is *conditional*. How so?
6. What does "bearing *much* fruit" show? Given your answer, what does bearing *little* or *no* fruit show?
7. Explain the *comparison* in verse 10.
8. In verse 11, what did Jesus tell his disciples (i.e., "this") and for what purpose (i.e., "so that")?
9. In what sense is friendship with Jesus *conditional*?
10. **Discussion:** Talk about the relationship of obedience to joy.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In John 15:1-11 Jesus uses the analogy of the vine to emphasize that our Heavenly Father wants us to lead fruitful Christian lives and to explain that we must remain in him to do so. He opens by identifying himself as "the true vine" and his Father as "the gardener." It follows that believers, those who are "clean because of his word" (v. 3), are "the branches." His Father tends the vine with loving care to make it as fruitful as possible.

The sense of verse 2 rides on the meaning of the Greek words translated "cut off" and "prunes" in the NIV. While their meaning can be construed in a number of ways, it might be better to translate them literally "lifts up" and "cleanses." One author describes vinedresser's first task this way. "The Greek word translated 'cuts off' normally is rendered 'lifts up.' This may be preferable here. To conserve moisture in a dry land, vines were allowed to run on the ground until the blossoms began to appear. It was then necessary for the gardener to lift vines off the ground so that the blossoms could germinate. Vines were lifted up either on sticks or on [piles of] stones. The vines thus were put in a place where they could produce fruit. Thus Christ was saying the His Father had the responsibility of putting each branch in a place where it could bear fruit" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 441). Then the same author goes on to describe his second task in these words. "The cleansing of the vine required not only the removal of sterile branches, or old growth, but also the removal of insects that would consume the vine. This had to be done tediously by hand. In the dry climate in which the vine would grow, the leaves would accumulate a thick layer of dust. This dust would weaken the vine. It was necessary for a gardener to sponge the leaves to remove the accumulated dust so that the vine could remain healthy. When Christ spoke of the Father as cleansing the vine so that it would be fruitful, He had in mind the Father's work of removing *from the branch* anything that would interfere with the production of fruit" (441 italics added). Here's the point. The vinedresser isn't lopping off branches right and left; he's tending them—lifting up on sticks or piles of stones the fruitless ones so they might produce and removing random shoots, insects, and dirt from the fruitful

ones so they might produce more fruit. Obviously, "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine" (v. 4), and lest the disciples miss it, Jesus clarifies the point of his analogy by explaining, "Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." One commentator summarizes the importance of Jesus' analogy in these words, "The allegory of the vine brings before us the importance of fruitfulness in the Christian life and the truth that this is the result, not of human achievement, but of abiding in Christ" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, NICNT, 668).

In verses 5-8 Jesus goes on to explain what will happen if believers do not remain in him and what will happen if they do. Since apart from him we can do nothing (v. 5), if we do not remain in him, we will be unproductive—useless as far as bearing fruit is concerned—like discarded branches that have been left to dry and later be burned. The point of his comparison is that unproductive believers are like unproductive branches; they are useless since their purpose is bearing fruit; it's not that unproductive believers will be burned up like unproductive branches, i.e., thrown into hell, either because they did not remain in him, i.e., lost their salvation, or were never truly saved in the first place. And if we remain in him our prayers will be answered because we will pray in accord with his words to us and we will bear much fruit showing that we are his disciples. Verse 8 makes it perfectly clear that Jesus is talking about *fellowship* and discipleship not *relationship* and salvation.

Finally, in verses 9-17 Jesus concludes by exhorting us to remain in his love by obeying his commands just as he remains in his Father's love having obeyed his commands—indicating once more that obedience is the key to remaining in him and his love. All of what he said he said so that his joy might be in us and our joy might be complete. One author calls Christian joy a "defiant 'Nevertheless'" (Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 120) because it is grounded in the spiritual blessings that God has given us in Christ Jesus that can never be taken away or diminished by our circumstances no matter how trying. And the command Jesus has in mind, should there be any doubt following 13:34, 35, is that his disciples love one another—as he has loved them. "The

words as I have loved you not only remind us of the immeasurable high standard Jesus himself provides, but explicitly tie this passage to the new commandment (13:34-35), and anticipates the next verse. As John says elsewhere, 'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers' (1 Jn. 3:16)" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC, 521). He wants

his friends, i.e., those to whom he has made known everything he learned from his Father, to be friends and to love each other. He wants his friends, i.e., those whom he chose, to go and bear fruit that will last—perhaps fruit "that emerges from mission," i.e., new converts (523).

The Message of the Passage

Believers who remain in Jesus, the true vine, by obeying his commands—especially the command to love one another—experience his joy and glorify God by bearing much fruit.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **true vine** Israel is often referred to as a vine in the OT (Ps 80:8, 9; Isa 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Eze 15; 19:10; Hos 10:1). Later the vine became a symbol for Israel and is found on coins minted by the Maccabees. Although God had planted Israel like "a choice vine of sound and reliable stock," the nation turned into "a corrupt, wild vine" (Jer 2:21) in contrast to Jesus "the true vine" (cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, 668).

v. 1 **gardener** The Greek word translated here is the common word for "farmer," but this word is seldom used in English in connection with raising grapes, and "viticulturist" is unfamiliar. Other possible translations include: "vinedresser" (NKJV; cf. "husbandman" KJV), "vinegrower" (NRSV), or simply "gardener" (TEV, NEB, the NET Bible).

v. 2 **cuts off** The Gk. word can mean "lift up, take up, pick up"; "take or carry"; "carry away, remove"; "take away, remove" with no suggestion of lifting up (*BAGD*, s.v., *airo*). Its meaning must be determined by the context. Here it may refer to removing unproductive branches by cutting them off, but it may also refer to something else. Vines were often lifted up and placed on sticks or piles of stones so that they might bear fruit (Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, 104-106).

v. 2 **prunes** The Gk. word means literally "make clean" (*BAGD*, s.v., *kathairo*). Its meaning must also be determined from the context. Here it may refer to "cleansing" a vine by pruning the branches but it may also refer to something more. Dust and insects had to be removed from vines by hand so as to increase the production of grapes (Pentecost, 441).

v. 4 **remain** Jesus was referring to remaining in *fellowship* with him rather than remaining in *relationship* with him for the consequence of not remaining in him is fruitlessness which is the mark of his disciples (v. 8). "As is well known, however, many have read the metaphor of the vine and the branches as though it described the state of salvation. They have then concluded that salvation can be lost since a branch can obviously be separated from the vine . . . If the vine/branch relationship describes the state of salvation, then no unsaved person was ever a branch to begin with. How, then, can such a person be described as a branch that is withered and burned? It is a serious—and totally unnecessary—mistake to view the vine/branch metaphor as a picture of salvation. Nothing at all in the text suggests this. On the contrary, the text does suggest that the metaphor is related to discipleship. Thus, in His final words about this significant analogy, Jesus says "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (Jn 15:8 italics added)" (Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 135, 36).

v. 5 **bear** "The man who so abides in Christ and has Christ abide in him keeps on bearing fruit in quantity. In isolation from Him no spiritual achievement is possible" (Morris, 670).

v. 6 **like** Anyone who does not remain in Christ is fruitless like a dried, discarded branch. Such branches were used to fire ovens in which daily bread was baked.

v. 6 **fire** Identifying this as a reference to hell fire amounts to "an unjustified interpretive leap" (Hodges, 137). Pruned vine branches were burned because they were useless for fruit bearing (cf. Eze 15:3-5)—as is the believer who does not abide in Jesus and hence can do nothing (cf. v. 5)—but useful for fuel.

v. 7 **whatever** "Whatever" is conditional, not absolute. This recalls 14:13-14, where the disciples were promised that if they asked anything in Jesus' name it would be done for them. The two thoughts are really quite similar, since here it is conditioned on the disciples' remaining in Jesus and his words remaining in them. When both of these qualifications are met, the disciples would in fact be asking in Jesus' name and therefore according to his will. "Those whose lives are so in harmony with Jesus will find their prayers controlled by his word, and such prayers will be answered and bring added glory to God (15:7b; cf. 14:10-12)" (Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 418).

v. 10 **my commands** I.e., "love each other as I have loved you" (vv. 12, 17).

v. 11 **my joy** Does he mean so that I may have joy in you, or so that you may have the joy that I will give you, or so that you might have the joy that comes from obeying my commands, the same joy that I have from obeying my Father's commands? I'm inclined to the final nuance.

v. 16 **chose** "It was not they who chose Him, as was normally the case when disciples attached themselves to a particular Rabbi . . . But Jesus' disciples did not hold the initiative. On the contrary it was He who chose them" (Morris, 676).

v. 14 **friends if** "Friend" is another relative term such as 'abiding' or 'fellowship.' A person can be a casual friend, a close friend, or an intimate friend depending on his or her love and loyalty. Likewise all believers are God's friends in one sense, but abiding believers are His friends on a deeper level because they seek to obey Him consistently (cf. Ps. 25:14)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Dr. Constable's Notes on John," 230-32, www.soniclight.com).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Unlike me, my sister has a green thumb. I have killed plants that professional gardeners told me were invincible. I must get it from my mom. Growing up our home was filled with beautiful green plants. There were trees and hanging baskets of flowing green. I don't remember how old I was when I discovered they were all fake. I remember feeling a little deceived and then foolish as I realized the baskets never changed and were never watered. My sister, on the other hand, can make beautiful things grow out of concrete. She can keep a rose bush alive that spouted on a tiny crack in her driveway. The vegetables out of her garden are big and tasty. My mouth is watering just thinking about her tomatoes. When we sit down at a meal with her delicious vegetables, we don't praise the veggies for the good job they did growing. We don't tell the tomato that it picked itself at just the perfect time in the ripening process. We give all the credit and praise to my sister, for she is the gardener. She plants and tends and weeds and harvests. Likewise, you and I when we are connected to the Lord, produce beautiful fruit. Our lives are a bountiful testimony of the Gardener's care and tending. May His joy and love bloom in your life this Christmas for His glory and praise!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read John 15:1-17

1. Who is the vine? The Gardener? The branches?
2. How do the branches produce fruit?
3. What is the final command of this passage?

What Do You Think

1. What do you think it means to remain in the vine?
2. Have you developed habits that help you remain connected to Jesus? What are they?

What R U Going To Do

Rather than buy a gift for someone special this Christmas, why not make something out of love and hard work? Do you paint? Do you like to cook? Can you sing? Do you like to build things? Bless someone with the gifts you have been given.

Core Comp

Joy - I am happy on the inside no matter what's happening on the outside.

Memory Verse

Lk 2:10-11 – *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."*

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

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