

Enjoying God – V - ABIDING IN JOY

1. Review ~ we all have motivations for seeking God
 - a. Some of us seek Him because we need something.
 - b. Some of us seek Him because we have already gotten something.
 - c. But there is another reason we have been talking about these past few weeks.
 - i. It is the motive of Joy.
 - ii. We are discouraged from doing a lot of things for the wrong motives in the bible...
 1. Discouraged from praying in such a way that people will hear us and applaud our prayers.
 2. Discouraged from doing our good deeds so people will think highly of us.
 3. Discouraged from trying to *earn* God's approval through our actions.
 - iii. But we are ENCOURAGED to do things for a HEAVENLY Reward!
 1. That reward isn't about getting into heaven. Last week we learned that is something we can not ever do because Jesus did it for us.
 2. But the heavenly reward we must learn to pursue is JOY. God's JOY.
 - a. Joy is the felt pleasure and presence of God.
 - b. That is our goal, our motive, the driving force in our lives.
 - iv. Our series has been about seeking, finding, pursuing, & preserving God's Joy in our lives.
2. Big Picture:
 - a. Joy sometimes seems elusive for us. Does it seem far away at times for you?
 - i. Someone once made the observation, "*We are born naked, wet, and hungry. And then things get worse*"
 - ii. Life never goes well very long for anyone.
 1. I heard former Senator Bob Dole talk about his new book that deals with hard times in life. You might know Bob Dole was wounded by a mortar fragment trying to come to the aid of a fellow wounded soldier during WWII. He was paralyzed on the battlefield and only after months of therapy, was able to regain most of the use of his body, except for his arm. In the interview he told of the bitterness of that experience and shared that "hard times" is the common human experience.
 2. If there is one thing we can count on, it is that we will have struggles.
 3. Jesus promised tough times for His followers, He promised persecution, family friction, trials and struggles. But He promised something else. He said, "**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" (Mt. 28:20).
 4. In those words, Jesus promised His PRESENCE to His followers forever.
 5. He promises us one of the two components of JOY: His Presence.
 6. But we need both components.
 - a. We need His Presence and His Pleasure to experience joy.
 - iii. Why does His pleasure (and our experience of joy) seem so far away?
 1. Maybe we aren't looking in the direction of the source of Joy: God,
 2. If we are missing God's pleasure and presence, then we are joyless!
 3. Why would we be missing Him?
 - a. I believe that we make choices that lead us out of His presence and out of His pleasure (and consequently into His displeasure).
 - b. If we want to find the pleasure and presence of God, we need to determine what God ascribes His own joy to.

3. Let's take a step backward and look at how Christians view church.
 - a. Why does the church exist? Does it exist so you can worship God and feel safe?
 - b. Amil Bruner, a renowned German theologian, said that the church is the only organization that exists for the outsiders, its non-members.
 - i. The temptation that always faces the church is to exist primarily for its members.
 - ii. The temptation says, "Let's exist for ourselves and be happy."
 1. Lets create some activities for US; some things to do for US, some trips for US to take.
 - iii. When you live for yourself, life is easier.
 - iv. I think that we dislike change and being stretched by God.
 1. Imagine saying, "Gosh, that visitor took MY seat last week...I hope they sit somewhere else next week." (surely no one here has ever thought that while we have doubled in attendance over the past 2 years ~ we certainly have been stretched!)
 2. I remember being a part of a church in Texas where our Sunday school class... about 20 families, young couples, and they all sat together in the same two rows. Imagine our reaction when one week a couple of visiting families sat right in the middle of 'OUR' section! Who do they think they are?
 - c. But there is a consequence to living for ourselves.
 - i. **When we live for ourselves we will live joyless lives.**
 - ii. Remember what joy is? Joy is the felt pleasure and presence of God.
 1. Joy is always God's joy.
 2. When is God celebrating?
 - a. When people are experiencing His destiny for their lives, when they turn from a self-led life to one directed and led by Him.
 - b. When they love His Son like He does. This is God's joy.
 - c. And when we are a part of the process of these things happening, we get to experience His pleasure and His joy.
 - iii. **The principal reason we are living joyless lives is that we aren't involved in what God is involved with!**
 1. Maybe we are "doing our own thing"
 2. Maybe we are "living for ourselves."
 3. Maybe we are not living lives that elicit the pleasure of God.
 4. Maybe we are not living in God's presence. (but hiding from Him).
 5. Christ did not come to die so we could have life made easy and have a paved highway to heaven. He did not die on the cross so that we could "do our own thing" for the rest of our lives.
 - a. **Jesus came to save us FOR something as well as FROM something.**
 - i. **Jesus came to save us FROM sin**, its effects and its consequences
 1. From self rule
 2. And from our separation from God.
 - ii. **Jesus came to save us FOR JOY!**
 1. He saved us FOR the experience of His Presence and Pleasure!

4. Fruit and Abiding (being stretched!)
- a. I would like you to imagine in your mind a picture of a farm here in Lake or Ashtabula county, where the wineries exist.
 - i. Most of us have driven by the lush vineyards, nicely kept, and some of us have even bought a few pounds of the delicious concord grapes that are sold on the roadside stands.
 - ii. Imagine if you would, that at one of those vineyards, that the vines had a conspiracy. *They all get together one night and say, "We are tired of bearing grapes. What does the farmer know anyway. I want to grow some nice lush leaves and get bigger and stronger as a vine. I am going to go ahead and send all my vine energy to the leaves and vines instead of to fruit."*
 - iii. In fact, it is the NATURE of a grapevine to keep growing and to spread itself out. The grapevine by NATURE doesn't want to produce the amounts of fruit that we coax them to do in our vineyards.
 - iv. Bearing huge amounts of grapes **is not** the vine's NATURAL inclination.
 1. Left to its own devices, a vine will produce very little fruit and become as gangly as it possibly can.
 - v. Yet, it is the fruit of the vine...the grapes that contain the seeds to more life.
 1. Without bearing fruit, the vine will get big and fat, but it will not reproduce!
 2. And no one will get to enjoy the benefit of the fruit of the vine...the grape and the sugary juice it can make.
 - b. This story has an application for you and I today...
5. Lets examine our key passage today. It is one that most of us gloss over as an exercise in horticulture.
- a. John 15:1-11,
 - b. *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes (binds up) away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, (if you aren't connected to the root) he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are 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 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also 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 so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*
 - i. There are two key ideas that are connected in this passage.
 1. **Jesus connects the concepts of abiding and of joy together.**
 2. Verse 11 tells us that the reason Jesus spoke the first ten verses to his disciples (you) is so that *My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full*
 - c. Remember the story I told you a minute ago about the grapevine conspiracy?
 - i. A vine grows its branches which get big and happy.
 - ii. The branches grow very attractive leaves, and the vines get long and fat.
 - iii. Each vine compliments the other on how good they look.
 - iv. But because the branches have gotten long and fat, it means that the energy from the root of the plants has been wasted on branches and there is not enough energy and nutrients left over for fruit bearing.

- v. We have in the center of our woods an area where the deer like to hide. It is filled with old, abandoned grapevines that tower up the trees and hang like lace from branches above.
 - 1. But you will never ever find grapes on these vines.
 - 2. It is because they have been left to their own devices and have never suffered the discipline of pruning.
 - 3. They have no left-over energy from their vine growth to produce fruit.
 - d. In the same way, God did not send His Son just to make our lives comfy and happy.
 - i. **And He didn't come to make it so we can use our *left-over energies* (if we have any) for Him.**
 - ii. He came to do what we would never have a NATURAL inclination to do.
 - iii. He came cause us to bear FRUIT.
6. What is fruit?
- a. **Fruit is the result of the life that is in the root.**
 - b. And the root is the life within us.
 - i. Mt. 7:16-17 says, "*You shall know them by their fruits.*"
 - 1. It has been said that if you want to find out what is inside someone, just watch him when his life is shaken up... whatever is inside will come spilling out.
 - 2. If you want to see what you are made of, look how you respond when trouble, stress, difficulty strikes.
 - 3. Look at your fruit if you want to know what root you have.
 - c. There are two possible roots for you and I:
 - i. The Root of Adam
 - ii. And the Root of Christ.
 - d. Which do you have?
 - i. A person who has not surrendered to Jesus Christ has the root of Adam in their life.
 - 1. That root contains the life of fallen humanity.
 - 2. That is the root of the flesh controlled life.
 - 3. Romans 6:5 *For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.*
 - 4. The fruit that a person without Christ produces is obvious the bible says, Galatians 5:19-21 *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God*
 - ii. But the person who has Christ in control of their life produces different fruit. This is because there is a different root giving them life.
 - 1. Galatians 5:22-24 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*
 - iii. There is something about fruit bearing that you need to know before you say, "*Gee, I better get busy and stop doing these bad things and start doing these good things.*"
 - 1. Fruit is not something that you can produce through your efforts.
 - 2. **Fruit is always the result of the nature of the root.**
 - 3. If you are "in Adam" you will produce the fruits in the first list.
 - 4. If you are "in Christ" you will produce the fruits in the second list.

- a. **The fruit of the Holy Spirit is experienced when the life of the Holy Spirit works through you.**
 - b. When you give your life over to Christ and ALLOW God to have control of your life, your choices, your decisions...you will see the fruit of God in your life...of which JOY is one.
 - c. The act of repentance is not about saying "I'm going to try harder."
 - d. To repent means to turn around, change directions and set a new course in life. If you're going south, you do an about face and go north!
 - e. The call to repentance comes when we realize that our lives are founded in the root of Adam instead of Christ, and that we are headed for hell.
 - f. We turn to Christ and seek Him because He alone can change the core being in our lives which eventually will bear the fruits we have named.
7. **Jesus calls this continuous action of turning to Him and seeking Him as Abiding.**
- a. The Christian life is less about do's and don'ts as it is more about learning to ABIDE in Christ.
 - i. When we focus on the rules and the do's and don'ts, we miss the root.
 - ii. It is like polishing up a car with a broken engine and expecting it to run better.
 - iii. We all need a new engine. The need of humanity is to become a new creation in Christ and to abide, live in Him.
 - b. Two elements to Abiding in Christ.
 - i. **Me in Christ:**
 1. How did we become "in Christ?"
 2. **I must first trust Jesus Christ to become My Savior.** I must come to a point where I enter into a relationship with Him where He is the reason I live.
 3. Abiding in Christ consists of
 - a. **I should read the bible in order to hear God.**
 - i. *John 15:7 "If you abide in me and my words abide in you ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you."*
 - ii. (Ps. 1:1-2) *"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."*
 1. Did you catch that?
 2. Delight is in God's word; meditates (mentally chews) on the word.
 3. Resulting in FRUIT BEARING and PROSPERITY.
 - b. **Obedience:** Not just listen to God's word but live it:
 - i. *"If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love."* (Jn 15:10)
 - ii. As you grow as a Christian, you discover that God has a way to live that you might not have known. Those things that everyone knows about you will become known to you as well. You will learn to WANT to change them.
 - ii. **Christ in Me:**
 1. Colossians 1:26-27, *"the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this MYSTERY, which is CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory."*
 - a. This is Christ working, living through you.

- b. It occurs as a result of
- c. Moment-by-moment listening
 - i. Not self-absorption
 - ii. Obey when you hear, and you will hear more clearly.
- 2. Shut out the voice of God = Grieve the Holy Spirit which is the opposite of walking by the Spirit and feeling the pleasure of God (JOY).

8. **Fruit bearing is tied intricately to our experience of the Joy of God.**

- a. We asked earlier what fruit was and I answered it in a somewhat ambiguous way. I simply told how fruit is produced and where it comes from.
- b. The fruit that Jesus is talking about, the fruit that is tied to Joy is the fruit of new life.
- c. God's heart and passion is for every man, woman and child on this earth to experience His Joy and His Son.
 - i. He desires that "*no one might perish but that all men might come to the knowledge of the truth.*"
 - ii. He desires that every person come to realize the destiny for which they were created.
 - iii. But new life requires you and I to do our part as coworkers with God.
 - 1. If we are living for ourselves, trying to make ourselves happy and comfy, we will be just gangly branches with pretty leaves.
 - 2. And we will be useless. There is no joy in that!
 - 3. There must be the reproduction of fruit. That is where God's joy is. And yours!
 - iv. If you want joy, then we need to ask God to prune us, to cut back our branches so that we can bear the fruit He desires.

9. **Obstacles to Fruit Bearing:**

a. **You don't realize you are barren of fruit**

- i. ½ of Christians produce NO fruit at all.
- ii. 1/3 bear some fruit
- iii. 5% bear the fruit that changes the world.
 - 1. Why is this so? Are we so consumed by our busy-ness and pursuit of our own comfort and happiness that we aren't abiding in Christ?
 - 2. Scariest yet is that most of the Christians who are not bearing fruit would tell you...oh sure I am... I go to church! Or I don't swear or steal or do drugs! Aren't I good?
 - 3. If you aren't bearing fruit, you should expect discipline from God for the purposes of restoration.
 - 4. "*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit he takes (airo) away.*"
 - a. It doesn't mean "cut off" as some translations make it out to be. The same word is used to describe the disciples picking up the 12 baskets of bread and fish fragments.
 - b. It means to pick up.
 - 5. A vine may not be producing fruit because...
 - a. It comes loose from the trellis and falls on the ground where it gets wet, dirty, and mildew inhibits the production of fruit.
 - b. The vinedresser doesn't destroy a branch during fruitbearing season! They are much too valuable.
 - c. He washes the leaves, binds the branch in cloth and ties it to the trellis again. Before long, they begin to bear fruit.
 - 6. So, we become "loose" from the trellis of our relationship with God.
 - a. We get caught up in life's distractions and pleasures.

- b. We get consumed by a sin – such as bitterness, anger, or a consuming habit.
 - c. And our ability to bear fruit is compromised.
 - d. God has to discipline you – to bring you back to fruit bearing.
 - e. If you are harboring sin in your life, you will be unable to bear fruit.
 - i. Abiding will keep you from sin and sin will keep you from abiding in Christ, and choke off the potential for fruit, very much like a weed.
7. Won't you return to the Vinedresser today?
- b. You may think you can produce fruit by your efforts. (I have touched on this already)
 - i. V. 5 “apart from me you can do NOTHING”
 - ii. Do we see fruit as our work?
 - 1. Fruit is the work of the ROOT not the branch! (Eph. 2;8-9)
 - 2. Fruit is the natural result of a branch abiding in the vine.
 - 3. Fruit is the supernatural result of a person abiding in Christ.
 - 4. An apple tree doesn't strain to produce apples. ARRG. Can you see it now, an orchard of apple trees straining and groaning to produce apples? No way! The fruit is the result of the branches getting their nutrients from their roots.
 - c. We run from discomfort (pruning).
 - i. Pruning is the process of getting the most from the branches.
 - ii. His word is his pruning tool. (v3).
 - iii. Pruning/discipline is painful but necessary. V. 2 says, “Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more FRUIT.”
 - 1. Pruning is a process of adding by subtracting.
 - 2. Pruning cuts away waste. (works of the flesh).
 - 3. Our natural inclination is to produce branches and leaves.
 - 4. And without pruning we will not produce fruit.
 - a. God's ways aren't our ways!
 - b. If you die, you will live
 - c. If you subtract, you will add.
 - iv. Mature branches often require the most intensive pruning!
 - 1. It is easier to produce busy-ness than to obey God's prompting.
 - d. Differences between pruning and discipline
 - i. Discipline – is about sin and works of the flesh.
 - 1. It is needed so that we may begin to bear fruit.
 - 2. Our response to discipline is repentance. Turn toward God.
 - 3. When will the discipline stop? When you repent.
 - 4. Do you feel God's discipline in your life? Find the area where your flesh has been in charge. Repent. Turn your attention away from the flesh, away from “pleasing yourself” and begin to think about the pleasure of God.
 - ii. Pruning – is about self rule, the soul life.
 - 1. Self: dying to our desires, letting Jesus rule, seeking God's help.
 - 2. Our response to pruning is give God permission to have His way in our lives..
 - 3. When will it stop? When God is finished with whatever He is doing in our lives.
 - 4. Pruning is SEASONAL. It does come to an end for a time,

10. What will you do today? Do you want to pursue joy...The pleasure of God vs. your own pleasure?
- a. Let Christ in.
 - b. Allow God to prune you. Give Him permission.

- c.
- d. And finally, pursue God's joy.
 - i. God's joy is new creations.
 - ii. Be a part of what He is doing.
 - iii. The next 2 years will be filled with opportunities to experience the joy of watching folks come to Christ. Don't you want to experience the joy that God feels when one of His creatures becomes His child? You can!
 - iv. Tonight, come and help us process and prepare for the next 2 years of new births!