



# FORMED FOR JOY

SERIES: FORMED INTO CHRIST

John 15:1–11

12th Message

Shawn Reese

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Good morning! Well, that's pretty cute isn't it? That clip is from our trip to Liberia last spring. That little girl, Josephine is super cute and the boy, Clarence, is a little bit ornery. And, for those of us who grew up in the church, we recognize that song right? "I've Got The Joy." It's a common song that we sing when we are children. In fact, we sing a lot about joy as children. Songs like "Rejoice in the Lord Always," "The Joy of the Lord is my Strength" and "This is the Day." Now what is amazing to me is that when I go to Liberia, it seems to me that they are always joyful—or at least more joyful than I am. After all their most common refrain during church there is "God is good all the time; all the time God is good." It strikes me that people living in extreme poverty can have a lightness to life and joyfulness to life that many of us living in extreme comfort here in the West never realize. Why is that?

Joy. That's our topic for today. It's Family Fun Day so we thought it would be a good day to focus on joy. Today we celebrate with joy our church family while we enjoy dunking Brian Morgan in the dunk tank. I'm pretty sure there will be an ALS challenge as well in honor of Jim Ziegler so you'll want to come out and join us.

This is also our last Sunday in our summer series. We've called this series "Formed into Christ," using some of Paul's texts to lead us. Texts such as Ephesians 4 where Paul says, the body of Christ should be built up to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... growing up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

This summer we have worked our way through topics such as "Formed in Love," "Formed through Suffering" and "Formed through Waiting," and at the center of the summer, we spent two weeks on the themes of word and prayer, which hopefully stand at the center of our lives. These last few weeks, then, we've focused on what Christ formation looks like in the midst of our relationships, namely in forgiving each other, in loving each other, and in serving each other. And, today, we get to talk about joy. We are formed into the image of Christ for joy.

The text I chose this morning is from the Gospel of John which we read for our Scripture reading. If you have been around the church for any length of time, you are probably familiar with this text, the vine and branches text. Jesus says He is the vine and we are the branches. He then elaborates on what that means. But, as familiar as many of us are with this text, how many of you knew that it ended with verse 11:

These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full.

## Happiness vs. Joy

What is joy? It seems to be a fairly tough word to define, at least to me. It's also not a common word in our vocabulary, at least I don't think so.

As I've been preparing for this Sunday for the last few months, I've been looking for the word 'joy'. I didn't notice it in the newspaper. I didn't notice it in any movies I've watched. And, I haven't noticed it on ESPN.

I did notice the word happiness though—a lot!

The Niners fans are happy that Levi's stadium is built and ready to go (except for the sod).

Everyone is happy that the iPhone 6 is coming out soon.

The word happy was used a lot in my house this week when I beat my wife in cribbage.

Disneyland is the happiest place on earth. Is it the most joyful place too?

But, is happiness the same as joy? I don't think so. Happiness and joy are related, but happiness does not go as deep as joy. Happiness is related to the word happenings. So, happiness comes and goes according to our happenings, according to our circumstances.

At this point, I always think of Mary Poppins. Remember the Uncle Albert scene? I think that scene describes happiness well for us. Happiness is flying high on jokes and laughing. But, then, everyone comes down to the ground with sadness when the children have to leave. Happiness is connected to our circumstances and comes and goes according to them.

Joy on the other hand goes much deeper, much wider and much higher than happiness. Joy is not contingent on circumstances. How do I know that? For two reasons:

If you can remember when we were way back in Luke 6 and were talking through Luke's sermon on the plain, Jesus says that we are blessed when we are persecuted. Do you remember how He follows that good news? "Rejoice and leap for joy" (Lk 6:23)

In Paul's letter to the Philippians—many of you know it well and you will know that joy is a main theme in that letter—the word joy is used 23 times in 4 short chapters, despite the fact that Paul was under house arrest, chained 24 hours a day to one of the imperial guards. Throughout the letter, Paul speaks of himself rejoicing while he encourages his readers to also rejoice as in verse 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice."

Joy cannot be related to our circumstances. Joy transcends our circumstances. So, what is joy? Well, you could define it like this: *a settled state of contentment, gratitude, delight and hope knowing that God is in control*. You could define it like that, but an even simpler definition could be this: joy is the emotion that says I am home. As Darrel Johnson says, "Joy is that life-giving, life-filling sense of at-home-ness"<sup>1</sup>. It's that place of rest with the feeling of *this is what I was made for; this is where I belong*.

"These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full." (John 15:11)

## The Theme of Joy

Joy has a long and rich history with the people of God. As we trace the theme through the OT, joy was consistently recognized as a characteristic of the people of God both personally and corporately. It also had many different aspects to it. For instance,

Joy was a quality grounded in God and derived from God. God is the giver of all the good things in life, hence He is the source of all joy (cf. 1 Ki 8:66).

Joy is found in the Word of the Lord, and is found in meditating on His Words (cf. Jer 15:16, Ps 1).

Joy enables men to endure hard times until God turns mourning into joy (cf. Ps 126:5).

And, finally, Joy had an eschatological aspect to it. The people of God were called to rejoice because of the ultimate salvation and peace brought by the Lord (cf. Joel 2:21).

As we move to the New Testament, these aspects continue, but the chief aspect of joy is found in the saving work of Christ through the cross.

As we come to our vine and branches text this morning, this text is part of what has been called the Upper Room discourse in the book of John. Jesus has gathered his disciples into an upper room for a meal somewhere in downtown Jerusalem. There they are in their final moments with Jesus, probably all very much enjoying a delicious meal. During the festivities, Jesus shares with them his final teaching. What He is doing is preparing them for life without his physical presence. Throughout the teaching, joy is a dominant theme. In chapter 16, Jesus talks of the helper, the paraclete, who will come and transform sorrow into joy. And in chapter 17, in the High Priestly prayer, Jesus prays for his disciples and specifically prays that they may know His joy. Here in chapter 15, Jesus wants His joy in us and our joy to be full.

“These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full.” (John 15:11)

“These things.” What are “these things”? They at least include what he has just spoken about in the previous 10 verses. Things like:

- I am the vine; you are the branches
- Abide in me to bear much fruit
- Every branch that does bear fruit my Father prunes to bear more fruit
- By bearing fruit, the father is glorified
- By bearing fruit, you prove to be His disciples

A lot of talk of fruit in there.

When I taught this to the Jr. Highers last year, I went to a nursery to buy a grapevine to help explain each part of this metaphor. After I was done teaching it that Sunday morning, I planted the grapevine just to see if it would grow (or more to see if I could keep it alive). Well, it is still alive, but there is no fruit. So, I feel like it's kind of worthless. After all, that's the whole point of the vine, right? The whole point of a vine is to bear fruit.

In the same way, as branches in the vine of Christ, we are made to bear fruit. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ says that they will know us by our fruit (Matt 7:21-23). One of the fruits we are made to bear is joy, a fruit of the Spirit according to Paul (Gal 5:22). We are formed into the image of Christ so that Jesus' joy may be in us and our joy may be full, so that we may bear the fruit of joy.

So, how do we bear the fruit of joy? What are some keys to bearing this fruit of joy, specifically from this text? Here are a few:

## The Fruit of Joy

1. The fruit of joy emerges as we abide in Jesus, as we stay connected to the vine which is Jesus. Abide. It's a key word in John. It means to remain in or to continue in. If we want a life of joy, we must remain in and be connected to the source of life and joy, the vine, namely Jesus. As a branch abides in the vine, so we abide in Jesus. But, what does that look like? It's not an easy thing to explain. But, if I take my relationship with my wife as an example, maybe that will help.

We've been married 16 years and what I have found from these short 16 years is that if we are not spending time together, talking with each other, listening to each other, connecting with each other on a daily basis, our relationship becomes unfruitful. We begin to have misunderstandings, which leads to being short with each other, then resentment sets in. Next the barrier comes up and the talking stops. We are out of tune. Even though we are living in the same house, we are not connected internally. Our hearts are out of sync. It's like they are beating to 2 different rhythms.

So, after 16 years, what think I've realized is that an abiding connection in our relationship requires not just quality of time spent together but also quantity of time together, continually remaining/staying with each other.

Our relationship with Jesus is similar. Abiding with Him requires continually connecting with Him so that our hearts sync up with His, like syncing our gadgets to our computers. How do we connect with Him? We can go back to the center of our summer series: By Word and By Prayer. When we connect to Him on a regular basis through His Word and through prayer, not in a legalistic kind of way, but hopefully following the desires of our heart, our relationship will bear the fruit of joy. So, a good question to ask ourselves is where do I abide? Or, am I abiding in Jesus or not?

2. The fruit of joy is found in obedience to Jesus. Joy is a byproduct of keeping His commandments. Jesus sums up his commandments in John verses 12 and 13:

**12 This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**

Joy happens when we obey Jesus' command to love one another and give ourselves away in servant love. Unfortunately I see the opposite side of this more often in my life. As I grow more and more selfish and self-centered, I grow less and less joyful. But, when we move beyond ourselves to love and serve others, we grow more and more joyful. Do you know the name Jean Vanier? He's the founder of the L'Arche communities which serve developmentally disabled people as well as those who care for them around the world. The organization happens to be turning 50 this year. He says, “There is no greater joy than to love people abundantly and to participate in the creative, life-giving activity of God with a sense of divine life flowing through us.”<sup>2</sup> When we love and serve others, we are taking the life of God and giving it away to others.

And the result is joy.

3. The fruit of joy is found in authentic community. As we abide with Jesus, we abide with other branches. We were never designed to be lone rangers or lone branches. The problem with today's culture is that we've lost our sense of community. That's why one writer can

say, “we’ve never been so “connected” — and yet so isolated at the same time.”<sup>3</sup> We are great at networking. On-line, we have lots of Facebook friends, and are members of forums and gamer groups. In the real world, we are members of clubs and gyms and the PTA. We are members and coaches of teams. And, so on and so forth. These groups aren’t bad in and of themselves. But, they can never take the place of authentic community. What do authentic communities look like? Authentic communities are typically small and intimate. They encourage active participation. They foster a giving mentality versus a getting mentality. They are face-to-face; a physical presence so people can be held accountable. They are designed for deep, authentic, personal relationships, not designed for efficiency and growth. They are a gift from God and directed by the Holy Spirit. Alan Fadling says in his book, *An Unhurried Life*, true joy comes from “being part of an extended community of men and women with whom I’ve shared a journey with Jesus, living out his life in our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces and schools, and the church communities where God has planted us.”<sup>4</sup>

4. The fruit of joy glorifies the Father. We honor God when we are joyful. We honor Him because we are making known Jesus’ joyful character to the world, and that brings glory to God. Jesus wants his joy in us and filled up in us, so that it overflows to the world around us. And, you know what? That will also attract people to Him. Who isn’t attracted to a bunch of grapes? To authentically joyful people? Joy is what attracted people to Jesus. Joy is what attracted people to the early church. And, in our culture, joy may be the ingredient that attracts people the most today. It makes sense right? If we claim to follow Him and then radiate His joy, it says something about Him. It says He is alive, and there is a lot of life and vitality in following Him. Our joy, which is His joy, will bring glory to God.

5. Lastly, there are those things which are obstacles to joy. These are the things which the Father is pruning out of our lives so that we can bear more fruit, more joy, more love, more obedience. The fact is that the Father wants fruit, so pruning is necessary! Now, it will be painful. It is always painful. But, someone has said, “the gardener is never so close to the branch as when he is pruning it.”<sup>5</sup> So, remember through the pain that the Father is doing this to get stuff out of the way so that more fruit will grow. What are some of these things? I’ve chosen a few based on my life, maybe they will speak to you.

Things like perfectionism and the need to control will hinder the fruit of joy (2 Cor 12:9-10). When we learn to let things go, our joy will increase. Easier said than done, I know full well.

Things like materialism and our consumerism rob us of joy (1 Tim 6:9-10). Greed simply leads to more greed and will rob us of joy as we will never have enough.

Things like comparison to others and competition with others are obstacles to joy (Eph 4:31-32). If we are always trying to humiliate, critique or defeat others to make ourselves look better, we will lose our joy.

Things like always being frenzied and being in a hurry hinders our joy. (Prov 19:2) When people ask me how I’m doing and I answer with, “yeah, I’m busy”—which is my answer most of the time—that’s a red flag that my joy is not full. To abide with Jesus, we must live at an abiding pace, which is his pace, a pace that allows for as much prayer and downtime as He showed in His life.

Things like obsession with securing your future financially will rob you of joy (Phil 4:6-7). That includes being obsessed with your

grades, you high schoolers. As Jesus Himself says, “do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself.”

These are the things that He must prune from us so that his joy will become our joy and our joy will be full.

Are you abiding in Jesus so that His joy is deep down in your heart? I began with a video of a few children in Liberia singing that song. And, as you all know, Liberia is struggling right now with the Ebola virus. It is pretty scary, and I know many of you have been prayer warriors for our friends over there.

Robert Sondah, the VisionTrust director in Liberia, who was here last fall and met many of you, is one of the most joyful people I know. A few weeks ago, VisionTrust interviewed him and posted the interview on their blog. This is what it said:

He first shared the grim realities of the situation. His home is close to the “hospital” that is caring for the sick. He shared about the number of dead he has seen carried out and the reality of how it is closing everything down (much like the war just a few years ago). He shared an update about his sister-in-law, a nurse who has become infected, reporting that she appears to be stable at this point and hopes to share her testimony of God’s healing power. The situation has become very personal for him and his family.

Robert then shared the peace he has received from our prayers and how he can see God’s hand at work to calm fears. He shared that the intense sunlight kills the virus and in the midst of the rainy season the sun is SHINING and he feels God’s power in the sun’s rays. He sees how God is using this to strengthen his faith and he is trusting God to give him the wisdom to lead and guide his team.<sup>6</sup>

Extraordinary. Here is a man who abides in Jesus. Karl Barth once described joy as “a defiant nevertheless.”<sup>7</sup> I believe that’s how Robert or any other Liberian would define joy.

**Life is hard and  
this ebola virus is awful and  
death seems to be everywhere;  
nevertheless, God is in control,  
nevertheless, He is bigger than this virus and  
nevertheless, He is good all the time; all the time God is good.**

*For you shall go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall break forth into singing,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*  
Is. 55:12

Enjoy Family Fun Day!

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3. McKay, Brett & Kate. “Communities Vs. Networks: To Which Do You Belong?” no pages. Cited August 2014. Online: [http://www.artofmanliness.com/2014/07/01/communities-vs-networks-to-which-do-you-belong/#disqus\\_thread](http://www.artofmanliness.com/2014/07/01/communities-vs-networks-to-which-do-you-belong/#disqus_thread)

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6. Sondah, Robert on VisionTrust blog. <http://blog.visiontrust.org/peace-in-the-storm-ebola-update/>

7. Barth, Karl. *The Epistle to the Philippians*. [London:SCM, 1962], 120f.

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