

John 15:7-17 - Because of Jesus - Love, Joy, and Community¹

Before the Lesson: Make copies of the handout, “Happiness or Joy?” / “Joy in John” (for the Information session) with the scripture passage on the other side (for the Transformational Exercise).

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

What gives you joy - a person, an experience, a place, a thing?

Which is easier for you to remember - facts, figures, or faces?

Information

- Have a class member read John 15:7-11.

Abide

John’s Gospel frequently refers to the radical image of our living in God and God living in us. “Remain, abide, stay” are some words that translators give to the Greek word *menein*.

The first account of this word comes from the testimony of John the Baptist.

- Have a class member read John 1:32-33.

“Curiously, the Gospel does not describe or even mention the baptism of Jesus. It does, however, speak of the descending and *remaining* upon Jesus. The word *remain* contrasts the permanence of the Spirit’s resting on Jesus with the sporadic inspiration of the prophets and teachers.”²

Just as the Spirit remained on Jesus, Jesus insists that we remain in him.

“‘Abide in me as I abide in you’ is as much a longing and an invitation as it is a command....In the first words he speaks in this Gospel Jesus asks his first disciples what they desire, and when they ask him where he is staying/abiding he tells them, ‘Come and see’ (1:38-39); and in the prayer that culminates the Farewell Discourses Jesus longs for their mutual indwelling and unity in love with him, his Father, and one another, and he prays, ‘Father I desire that those also, whom

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2024. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 47. Author’s emphasis.

you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”³

“A series of conditional statements pair implicit exhortations with generous promises: if the disciples abide ‘in [Jesus]’ (15:4,5,7,9), ‘in [his] love’ (vv. 9-10), and in the Father’s love (v. 10); if they keep his commandments (v. 10) and if his words abide in them (v.7) - then they will bear fruit, receive what they ask for, be assured of Jesus’ love, and have joy. Although couched in conditional form, these statements are intended to produce assurance in the disciples, not anxiety.”⁴

“You may ask whatever you want, and it will happen for you” sounds too good to be true, doesn’t it? But Jesus again says something like this a few verses later.

- Have a class member read John 15:16.

We all have prayed for things or people or events that we wanted but have been left empty-handed. Why, then, would Jesus say this?

“Perhaps the promise that whatever the disciples ask will be done for them has to do particularly with petitions about abiding in the vine and bearing fruit to the glory of God. The model here is Jesus himself, who has assurance that the Father always hears him and so calls Lazarus out of the tomb to life so that God is glorified.”⁵

“The repetition of this astonishing promise goes with a reminder of who and what is to inspire and orient ‘whatever you wish’: the desire to glorify God through bearing much fruit and becoming disciples of Jesus - learners who receive his words and abide in him.”⁶

When we abide in Christ we live with the one who loves us most. Part of loving someone means not giving them what they ask for. It may seem to be a “tough love” not to let your children eat only dessert. If they ask for an extra helping of green vegetables, though, you are suddenly generous.

“‘If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love’ is not the laying down of some external condition for abiding in the love of Jesus but is revealing the secret of that life of love:

³ David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 294.

⁴ Thompson, 326.

⁵ Thompson, 327.

⁶ Ford, 294.

not keeping the commandments means that the love cannot be mutual and, as the next verse says, joyful.”⁷

Joy

- Distribute the handout, “Happiness or Joy?” / “Joy in John.”

Take a few minutes to read the quote from Frederick Buechner’s book, *The Hungering Dark*. Then, we will talk about the differences between happiness and joy.

- After allowing time to read the page, ask some reflective questions, such as:

Tell me your first impressions.

What did you like about this reading?

What did you disagree with?

When is a time you have experienced happiness?

When is a time you have experienced joy?

“Joy is presented as flowing from the obedience and love of which Jesus has spoken. Jesus’ own joy springs from his union with the Father which finds expression in obedience and love (14:31)...So also in the present instance [15:11], if joy flows from the disciples’ union with Jesus, it comes to fulfillment in their continuing his mission and bearing fruit.”⁸

“The theme being underscored is that of enduring relationship with Jesus on the part of each disciple and the joyous outcome of this relationship. Notice how this segment contrasts with 15:18-16:4a, which underscores the opposite themes of hatred and exclusion.”⁹

Love

The basis of our joy comes from love. God loves us, and we rejoice in that realization. We are obedient because of our love for the One who loves us. This mutual love produces mutual joy.

“Love can subsist only if it produces more love. Notice the chain of love that is found in vss. 9 and 12: the Father loves Jesus; Jesus loves the disciples; they must love one another.”¹⁰

- Have a class member read John 15:12-17

⁷ Ford, 296. Author’s italics.

⁸ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 681.

⁹ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 233.

¹⁰ Brown, 682.

Love One Another

Loving God is easy compared to loving God's children. Yet, if we are modeling our lives after the life of Jesus, we must love one another.

“This is the central segment of Jesus' final conversation with his friends. The passage is marked off by an inclusion in vv. 12 and 17: ‘This I command you, that you love one another.’ By its very location, this passage underscores the heart and chief concern of the whole final conversation in chapters 13-17.”¹¹

Remember that although some of the disciples were brothers or friends and had a brotherly love for one another, most of the disciples did not know one another. For some, the only thing they had in common with the other disciples was the invitation from Jesus to become a follower. Also, all were Jews living in a land ruled by a foreign power. Among the Jews, there were dramatic differences of opinion about this Empire. Some wanted to fight against the Roman government, some were willing to accommodate, and some wanted a full partnership. Those different political philosophies were floating among these twelve men. How difficult is it to love someone with different beliefs?

How great a love would it take to be willing to die for those who have different political or religious views?

“The differences of temperament among them and the jealousies that had arisen over the positions which they were expected to hold in the coming kingdom made their group unstable. Jesus knew that if they were to maintain an adequate testimony for Him they could only do so as a unit. Disunity would mar their work, if indeed it did not vitiate that work altogether. For this reason He gave them the eleventh commandment: ‘This is my commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you.’ (12).”¹²

¹¹ Malina and Rohrbaugh, 235.

¹² Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1948), 229.

Transformational Exercise

Let's think again about what Jesus said in verse 7: "If you abide in me and my words abide in you..."

"To receive and digest the words of Jesus, taking them to heart and giving them constant attention, learning from him – that is to have him abiding in us."¹³

Today's focal passage, John 15:7-17 is on the other side of your handout. They are separated into eleven separate statements.

Read through these statements slowly. Maybe one of them will "tug" at you. Which of these statements do you need to invite to abide/remain within you in this next week?

Write that statement at the bottom of the page, then write it again and once more.

Why did I ask you to write the verse three times? Writing a verse over and again is one way to help us reflect on and memorize a verse of scripture.

Close in a prayer something like this: *Lord Jesus, as the Holy Spirit remained on you, remain in us. Guide us, teach us, correct us through your words. Help us to love you and to love one another. Amen.*

¹³ Ford, 294.

John 15:7-17 (NRSVUE)

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

8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have 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 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15 I do not call you servants^[d] any longer, because the servant^[e] does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Happiness or Joy?

Joy is not the same as happiness.

Happiness is man-made—a happy home, a happy marriage, a happy relationship with our friends and within our jobs. We work for these things, and if we are careful and wise and lucky, we can usually achieve them. Happiness is one of the highest achievements of which we are capable, and when it is ours, we take credit for it, and properly so.

But we never take credit for our moments of joy because we know that they are not man-made and that we are never really responsible for them. They come when they come. They are always sudden and quick and unrepeatable.

The unspeakable joy sometimes of just being alive. The miracle sometimes of being just who we are with the blue sky and the green grass, the faces of our friends and the waves of the ocean, being just what they are. The joy of release, of being suddenly well when before we were sick, of being forgiven when before we were ashamed and afraid, of finding ourselves loved when we were lost and alone. The joy of love, which is the joy of the flesh as well as the spirit.

Joy is always all-encompassing; there is nothing of us left over to hate with or to be afraid with, to feel guilty with or to be selfish about. Joy is where the whole being is pointed in one direction, and it is something that by its nature a man never hoards but always wants to share.

Joy is a mystery because it can happen anywhere, anytime, even under the most unpromising circumstances, even in the midst of suffering, with tears in its eyes. Even nailed to a tree.

- Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*.
- <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2019/10/28/touched-with-joy>
accessed 10/3/2024