

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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. 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. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 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. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

Blessed Be the Name of the Lord? (Slide?).

I want to thank Mary for introducing our “Season of fruit series. Mary and I would like to share with you a handout we used when planning our summer together. The handout is a single page, refrigerator summary based on take aways from the Bible study book, Galatians 4 You, written by Reverend Timothy Keller, a Presbyterian pastor and author. Mary spoke of each of these, and I just want to do just a quick recap of 4 of them that are listed on the handouts.

1. The growth of fruit is gradual – we don't control the growth, and the growth is seasonal. There are dormant rest periods as well as growing seasons. During the dormant periods, the tree is doing exactly as it should, it's preparing to produce fruit, but the fruit is not visible,

2. The growth of fruit is inevitable – the Holy Spirit will grow mature fruit when we center our lives on Jesus. It is inevitable. 26 years ago, when we bought our house, I planted a green table grape and a marionberry. We honestly had no idea what monsters we were creating. We could not have kept these plants from producing fruit unless we cut them down, and even then, we would have to dig out the roots. Like those plants, when we are living in the ultimate growing conditions, we will produce fruit. By the way, the fruit from those two plants feed every bird in the neighborhood.

3. The growth of fruit is internal (You can't tie an apple to a tree and call it an apple tree; something is within a tree which makes it grow apples.)

4. The growth of fruit is symmetrical (Although some traits may be naturally stronger in you than others, they will all grow together). A friend told me her mother always said this, and Tim Keller agrees - it's "fruit" (singular) not "fruits"

(plural). All grow together as one when we keep rooted in Christ Jesus.m

And so, keeping all of that in mind, we begin our look at Joy. Reverend Keller defines Joy as “A delight in God for the sheer beauty and worth of who God is. Focussing on the Bless-er, and not just the bless-ings.”

During bible study at the women’s prison at Coffee Creek Correctional, I was often shown that spiritual joy is not dependent on circumstances. A few weeks ago at our youth service, on Pentecost Sunday we were blessed by-a song called “No place I would rather be, with words “No place I would rather be than here in God’s love and when we would sing that song in the prison chapel, the women would sing very earnestly, because for those few moments singing and communing with God in the chapel, they were not mindful of their daily circumstances. they felt Joy, from God, from Jesus, but also Joy from the love they felt for each other as a Christian family. Joy is our natural response to God’s goodness and to the saving work of Jesus in our lives.

The Webster definition of joy is “a feeling or state of well-being and contentment”. The Webster definition of Happiness is also “a feeling or state of well-being and contentment.” But those are the general speaking definitions. Biblical Joy is a long-lasting state of being.

Wedding story – second couple to last couple – last couple “forever”.

John 15:11 – Jesus said These things I have spoken to you, so that my joy may be *in* you, and that your joy may be full. So, Joy is something in us. Happiness is such a wonderful gift from God, but happiness can quickly disappear with a phone call, a misspoken word or sometimes, by just watching the evening news. The Scottish pastor, David Murray, identifies seven different kinds of happiness. He talks about happiness in nature, happiness being with other people, happiness with our vocation or work, health happiness, intellectual happiness, and humor happiness. The seventh and final one, he calls “spiritual happiness.” He calls it “a joy that at times contains more pleasure and delight than the other six put together.” Spiritual happiness for a Christian is a relationship with the Triune God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And God, in everlasting wisdom, gave us a way to stay connected, in spite of our circumstances. If we are to abide in Jesus, we must stay in communication with God, but as Mary also said, that can be difficult in different seasons of our life.

Joy is mentioned in the NASB bible 185 times and so it can be easy to think that there is something wrong with feelings of grief, anger or sadness. “Rejoice in the Lord always” can

be difficult to hear when we are in the midst of own weeping. In all the grief classes I attended at the women's prison, there was common theme of someone telling the grieving person that God is working all things together for good. To a widow, or a grieving parent, the death of their loved one is not good and that is not something they can accept, nor should they have to. People in pain have enough problems without some well-meaning folks trying to short-circuit the grief process by declaring that everything is a good event sent from God. God will heal other people in God's time, we don't have to help. To make matters worse, modern Christian culture often says that to complain to God is to "act as if we could run the world better, as if God is mismanaging things". I read that in one of my favorite devotionals "Jesus Calling" a few weeks ago, and I realized quickly that those words are not from Jesus. In John 20 the very first words Jesus spoke after leaving the tomb were "Mary, why are you weeping?" Jesus cares about our tears and wants to know about the "why". I also recently read a social media post by a popular pastor that said complaining to God is disrespectful, the same way our kids complaining to us is disrespectful. OK, that is attributing a human thought process to God, but even going down that path, I would want to restore relationship with my family, not have them be afraid to voice their complaints or hurts to me,

especially just because I think my ego deserves respect. Now, habitual negativity, continual grumbling can keep us from seeing the good things that God is doing in our lives, and God tells us to respect our parents, but that is not what I am talking about. I'm talking about taking our hurts to God when the really big stuff hits. When we are feeling separated from God because we just don't understand. When we take our complaints to God and Jesus, instead of our own people, it puts God and Jesus in the rightful place on the throne. God is more than able. Taking everything to God, even complaints, is proof of a relationship where we feel so totally accepted and loved by God, that we can be completely honest and know it's ok, we are still loved and accepted just the way we are. As Mary said, it can be so hard to wrap our heads around that kind of love and unconditional acceptance, but when we do, we find such sweet joy. We can talk to God, because Jesus made a way for us to have relationship with God, on the cross, where Jesus also lamented. Let's get rid of this idea that God's love is dependent on what we do or don't do, how we act or don't act, what we say or don't say. The Holy Spirit will mature the fruit.

An abode is a place we live. To abide is to stay in...to live with it. If you can't abide your sister's clarinet practice – then you can't live with it right? If you abide by the rules – you live with

the rules.... You follow them. So put simply, to abide in the Vine is to live in Jesus.

But using our fruit metaphor, stress, lack of nutrients, wind, ice, and other bad conditions can make fruit to not set, fail to mature, and fall off. So, using our metaphor, how do we stay connected to the vine through, as the hymn says, the fiercest drought and storms in our own lives.

Keeping connected is about cultivating spiritual practices and rhythms in our everyday lives which let us hear from God's word and speak to Jesus in prayer and worship; because staying connected is what enables the Spirit to develop the fruit. One of the least talked about spiritual practices is Lament. If we learn to grieve and lament our losses to God and Jesus, then we are able to cherish what we do have and carry on.

Lament may seem counterintuitive when we are talking about joy, but there are 5 steps to lament I am going to share. The final step of lament is praise and thankfulness, and so in this form, lament ends with a desire to connect to God, our source of lasting joy. Because Lament ends with praise, it makes it possible to give thanks in all circumstances

There is precedent for lament. There are about 65 Psalms of lament in the Bible, – that's over 1/3 of all the psalms. Not to mention the entire book of Lamentations. The five steps are

a prayer guide that allow us to lament to God and yet still stay in Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians "Let joy be your continual feast. Make your life a prayer. And in the midst of everything be always giving thanks, for this is God's perfect plan for you in Christ Jesus."

Today we are going to apply those five steps to Psalm 22, thought to be written by King David.

Psalm 22 vs 1-2

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest."

This is Step 1 - we address God directly. We tell God we are sad, angry, worried, whatever we feel, we put a name to it. This is also known as "the darkness". In vs. 2, King David can't stop crying and he doesn't feel God..

This is the 2nd step – we put to words the complaint or problem. I don't really think this is for God's sake, the Holy Spirit knows our thoughts, but we must articulate the problem to ourselves. Our brains just work that way. Saying things aloud helps us process. We find the source of weeping in vs. 16-18. And while it was King David who wrote these words, these verses are a prophetic vision of the crucifixion. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and

my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.”

In our own laments, perhaps we are surrounded by sickness and disease, maybe grief is encircling us, or we are overwhelmed with caregiving. Maybe we just lost our income, our home, our marriage or we lament racism, political conflict, violence, pollution and intolerance. It could be we are just mad at God for our general circumstances or a past traumatic event. Crying out to God and Jesus with honesty helps to bring healing. It does not replace seeking professional help for depression when needed.

Step 3 is to ask for help. We pray for God’s intervention and deliverance. In Psalm 22, this prayer comes in vs. 19 – 21 “But You, O Lord, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my assistance. Deliver my soul from the sword, My only life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth;

Step 4 is a statement of trust in the Lord. This affirmation of trust usually begins with words such as “Yet”, “As for me”, or “Nevertheless”. In Psalm 22, the statement of trust is found in vs 3-5 “Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; They trusted,

and You delivered them. To You they cried out and were delivered; In You they trusted and were not disappointed.”

The word “Yet” is the transition point in our lament. It the place where we change the focus from the darkness, our own troubles, and we begin to remember who God is, and God’s loving kindness.

Step 5 is to give praise! Vs. 25 -26 “From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever! It concludes in vs. 30-31. “Posterity will serve Him; It will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it.”

What a transformative prayer! The tone at the end of the lament is so different than the beginning. What started with the Psalmist weeping and not being able to feel God’s presence, ends in praise and affirmation with the words “He has performed it it!” “He has done it”! These are words of joy! When we are walking alongside a grieving person, may I suggest that we share and pray the steps of lament, and then they will find their own way when God reveals it to them. It’s not for us to heal them with our own thoughts or beliefs. The

healing and understanding comes from God in God's own time.

Chris Llewellyn and Gareth Gilkeson are songwriters for an Irish Christian band called Rend Collective. They cowrote a song of lament called "Weep With Me", and interestingly, all of the five steps of lament are found in the song. They post about the song "A lament is a song of raw, unedited, unpolished brokenness. We don't sing a lot of them on Sunday mornings, but we do find a lot of them right in the center of our Bibles - in the Psalms.

God can handle your disappointment, frustration, lack of faith and even anger. A lament is an opportunity to bring the "what just got real" to the real God."

I think the lyrics make a beautiful poem and I will wrap up by sharing them.

– Weep with me, Lord will You weep with me? I don't need answers! All I need is to know that You care for me

Hear my plea! Are You even listening? Lord I will wrestle with Your heart! But I won't let You go

You know I believe! Help my unbelief

Yet I will praise You yet I will sing of Your name! Here in the shadows here I will offer my praise

What's true in the light is still true in the dark! You're good
and You're kind! And You care for this heart

Lord I believe that You weep with me

Part the seas! Lord make a way for me! Here in the midst of
my lament I have faith

Yes I still believe! That You love me Your plans are to prosper
me

You're working everything for good! Even when I can't see

Turn my lament into a love song, and from this lament raise
up an anthem

Lord I believe that You weep with me

In conclusion “To wrestle with God is a form of intimacy - a
close relative of embracing Him. Wrestlers embrace. A
lament and a wrestle are a lot better than running from God
in our hurt and loss.” In God’s infinite goodness, we are
provided a way to stay connected to the Vine, to Jesus and
the Holy Spirit, our never-ending source of Joy, and when we
stay connected, when we are abiding, our fruit can mature
and produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

Let us pray,

God, we thank You for Your joy. Please lead us away from all forms of bitterness, hate and anxiety. Give us the ability to experience Your joy so fully that it overflows onto others and feeds the whole neighborhood. Help us to sense the Holy Spirit in ourselves, and also in others, every day and to allow the Spirit to bring Your light and grace all over the world and into every corner of our hearts. Thank You, Jesus, that we are resting in Your hands. Amen and amen!