**More – Week 2 - More Joy (Celebrate)**

**Message Big Idea**: Jesus offers us more joy as we remain closely linked to him.

**Scripture:** John 15:1-11

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**Introduction: Counterfeit**

*(Series Graphic)* Have you ever had an experience where you’re shopping for something online and then all of the sudden you run across the deal of a lifetime? You know what I mean, right? You’re looking for that one item you just have to have and suddenly you find it for half the price you were expecting to pay?

I (Jessie) had this experience recently with a pair of shoes. I was looking for a pair of comfortable dress shoes because my old shoes were killing my feet. After a ridiculous amount of research, I landed on the one particular pair of shoes I wanted to purchase. So I did what any reasonable person would do, I Googled the shoes to see how much they cost…and I almost passed out. They were SOOOO expensive.

Well, I decided I wasn’t going to be dissuaded by this crazy price tag, so I went on an online treasure hunt to find the shoes at a price I could afford. Finally after a few hours, I found the shoes on Amazon for 55% less than they were asking at every other online store. So I immediately bought them.

It wasn’t until they showed up that I began to worry that they were fake. I don’t know why, but somehow the idea that this deal was too good to be true began to take root in my mind. I became obsessed with fear that they were knockoffs. So much so, that I spent another 2 hours of research to prove to myself that they were, indeed, the real deal.

Has anyone ever accidentally purchased a counterfeit item? *(Show of hands)*

If you have, don’t feel bad. According to USA Today, a lot of us have! The global economy takes a $250 billion dollar hit every year because of counterfeit products. To make matters worse, the value and availability of these products is increasing at a staggering rate. Whether we realize it or not, there’s a good chance that each and every one of us has been the not-so-proud owner of a counterfeit product at least once in our lifetimes.

**Series Recap**

Well, today we’re continuing our series called **“More.”** At one time or another, most of us have experienced that nagging feeling, *“There’s got to be more.”* Last week we talked about the ongoing human pursuit of more life. And today we’re going to focus in on another thing we desperately want more of… joy. Don’t you long to experience joy? True joy?

Yet far too often we settle for counterfeit joy… counterfeit happiness. You see, we want real joy, but at the end of the day we find ourselves chasing after titles or material possessions or sex…things that will only bring us a temporary feeling of pleasure, not true, lasting joy.

And it seems that what we’ve been chasing after isn’t just failing to fulfill us; it’s actually destroying us.

Think about it… We’re a society where depression, dissatisfaction, and anxiety are at epidemic levels. According to the World Health Organization, depression is now the most common serious medical or mental health disorder in the United States. Anxiety and depression affect over 40 million American adults every year. We are suffering from an epidemic lack of joy.

Listen, I’m telling you this not to shame any of us who may be suffering with these conditions. I want to make it perfectly clear that I’m in no way suggesting that we have a simple remedy to make depression or anxiety go away. Many times in our lives we need the help of mental health professionals… doctors and counselors… to fight through these conditions. One of the great things about being part of the family of God is that we don’t ever have to go it alone! If you’re struggling today with depression, anxiety, or anything else, and you need help working through those things, I want you to know you’re not alone. Please reach out for help so that we can come alongside you as brothers and sisters in Christ and assist you in getting the help you need.

But I do want us to recognize today that many of the achievements and objects and experiences we’re chasing aren’t bringing us the lasting joy we’re after. The “more” we long for can’t be found at the end of some proverbial rainbow. No, the joy we long for can only be found in one place, or rather, one person… Jesus.

Jesus’ teachings reveal his wisdom for living a life of **“more joy.”** In fact, he himself said:

***“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” -John 15:11***

So what exactly did Jesus teach us about the way to more joy? True, genuine joy?

**Word: John 15**

To answer that question, let’s look at one of Jesus’ teachings that includes an important metaphor from nature. For almost three years, Jesus has been going around healing, teaching, and proclaiming a message of hope and love to a hurting world. Towards the end of his earthly ministry, his disciples start to realize that he isn’t going to be around forever, and they start to freak out a little. How will they move forward without him? How will they accomplish anything apart from him?

Jesus, aware of their anxiety, says:

**“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also 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.” -John 15:1-4**

Now there’s some important imagery here that’s easy to miss. Jesus’ disciples would have immediately made a connection between the vine imagery and the Old Testament depiction of Israel as a vine of God. *(“The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in.” -Isaiah 5:7)* Over and over again in the Old Testament, Israel is depicted as a vineyard planted by God. And God expects good grapes to come from his vineyard, but unfortunately, Israel fails to yield good fruit.

Then comes Jesus who begins to replace and expand this Old Testament metaphor. He says that *he* is now the vine, not the nation of Israel, and that the branches that are connected to *him* are the ones that will bear good fruit.

*(John 15:1-4)* Now, if you look closely, there’s one word in Jesus’ teaching that we see over and over again. It’s the key idea in this entire passage: *(highlight all 4)* **“remain.”** Jesus instructs his followers to **“remain”** in him. And how do they “remain” in him? By being obedient to what he has taught them, to stay closely connected to him by following the words he has spoken. What he means by this is that in order for the disciples to 'remain' in Jesus, they must be obedient to God’s word through their relationship with him... they have to stay closely connected to him following his teachings.

And he continues:

**“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” -John 15:5-8**

Now parts of this teaching might sound a little harsh to us at first: branches being thrown away and tossed into a fire. But remember, Jesus’s audience clearly knows he’s referencing the disobedience of Israel… the failed vine… and contrasting it with himself, the true vine that will bear much fruit.

*(Highlight all 4)* And there’s that word **“remain”** again. In fact, the word **“remain”** appears 11 times in the first 10 verses of this passage! If Jesus repeats a word 11 times in just 10 verses, it’s probably a big deal!

**“Remaining”** in Jesus is key to living a fruitful life. In fact, Jesus says if we remain in him and his words remain in us, we can ask for whatever we wish and it will be done! Now, I want to pause here for a second because I think this promise often gets misunderstood. God is not a genie in a bottle waiting to grant our every request. What Jesus is saying is that when we remain in him and we internalize the words he spoke to us, we will be so closely connected to God that our hearts will align with his heart and we will desire the things that he desires. We will make requests that align with his will, and he will answer them.

Jesus continues:

**“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” –John 15:9-10**

Try to get your mind around that… Jesus loves you as God the Father loves him. Can we even grasp the depth of how much we are loved? And because we are loved so extravagantly, we can trust Jesus. We can be confident that what he taught us is true, and that following his commands is the best way to live. And why is he telling us this? Well, the next verse is the verse I read earlier:

***“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” -John 15:11***

Joy. True joy. Lasting joy. Jesus says to us today: “Remain in me – which means to stay as close to me as you possibly can, and do what I tell you to do, and you will experience life as it was meant to be – a life of more joy!”

**“Remain”**

So let’s get very practical now. And to do that, I want to go back to this one word that we find eleven times in this section of Jesus’ teaching. It’s that word, **“remain.”**

Here’s the deal: The way we remain in Jesus is to spend time with him. And I know, as soon as say that word “time,” you’re thinking “Jon, I am already tapped out when it comes to time. I’m not liking where this is going.” Well, stay with me for a few more minutes.

**Story**

Several years ago I read a story in the Chicago Tribune about Robert Hyland. Hyland received the title from the Wall Street Journal as “the nation’s most notorious workaholic.” Listen to his schedule:

* Six days a week he gets up and **starts** his day at 1 am.
* That way he’s at the office and starts his **workday** by 2 am.
* He then works until 6 pm each day.

We’re talking about working 96 hours a week! That’s pretty busy!

When I first heard Hyland’s story, I thought this is a perfect example of how **NOT** to get **MORE** out of life. So we called his office to set up an appointment to interview him. And for 30 minutes Hyland talked about his schedule, his priorities, and his pace of life. And there were three things he said that totally surprised us:

1. First of all, it turned out that **he would leave work every morning around 6 am and go to a nearby church to pray** for at least an hour. He prayed every day for an hour.
2. On top of that, he said **he had a leisurely dinner with his wife every night**. They’d sit and talk and spend the entire evening mealtime together. Who do you know who spends at least an hour in prayer a day and the evening meal with his family every night?
3. And thirdly Hyland said, “And **every 7th day I don’t work at all**. I take a full day off. But yeah, in between I work and I work real hard!”

I thought and thought about this. Here is my take away: My point is **NOT to work 96 hours a week**. As they say, “Don’t try this at home.” My point is that if a guy who is that busy can maintain his sanity and his relationships – maybe the **ONLY** reason he’s sane is because he has figured out what it truly means to live a life of **MORE**. And for him, it was about taking time to remain in Jesus.

**Two Dares**

I believe if Jesus were here he would **dare** us to re-orient our lives in order remain in him. I think he might even double dog dare us! So here we go…

**Two dares. One is PERSONAL, and one is INTERPERSONAL**. Here’s the first dare - the personal one: If you want more joy from this life, take time to remain in Jesus through **PERSONAL CELEBRATION**.

**Personal Celebration**

*(3C Graphic)* At Community, we want everyone to become a 3C Christ-follower – someone who is Celebrating, Connecting, and Contributing. *(Celebrate symbol only)* Celebrating is about strengthening our relationship with God in Jesus. This includes *(add)* **PERSONAL CELEBRATION** – time alone, just you and God.

One of the tools we have developed to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus is a Big Idea Bible Reading Plan. Early in the morning, before you wake up, a section of scripture that is based on our weekend Big Idea arrives in your inbox. All you have to do is open your email.

So, here is my double dog dare challenge to you. Starting this week will you set aside time to read God’s Word. Reflect on it. Pray over it. Just 10-15 minutes every day! 3 or 4 minutes to read God’s word and the rest just sitting and reflecting on it - whatever that looks like for you. I dare you!

**Interpersonal Celebration**

The second dare is this: You ready? *(Switch for “Personal”)* Make **INTERPERSONAL CELEBRATION** a weekly priority. Give someone near you a fist bump or a high five – cause you are all here and you got this one right this week! Congratulations!

Friends, we need to be here to celebrate the good things that God is doing in and through us. We need times like this to remain in Jesus and recalibrate our hearts and minds to God. And I gotta be honest with you, sometimes I don't feel like showing up myself. Is it ok if I say that? Doesn’t sound very pastor-like, does it?

But I try to remind myself that even though **I** may not feel like it, there may be someone that needs **me** to be here. That’s why we chose to call it **inter**personal. This is not just about you and God. This time here is about **US** and God. Just your presence or a simple encouraging word may be the very thing someone needs to get through their week. Jesus made it a priority to show up in a place like this with other people to hear from God and focus on God.

So, here is the double dog dare – Will you make personal and interpersonal celebration a priority between now and Thanksgiving? Celebrate with God personally every day, and celebrate with us and God interpersonally every Sunday for the next 8 weeks?

Why 8 weeks? Maybe this will help . . .

Phillippa Lally, a health psychology researcher at University College London, examined the habits of 96 people over a 12-week period. Each person chose one new habit for the 12 weeks and reported each day on whether or not they carried out the behavior and how automatic the behavior felt.

Some people chose simple habits like “drinking a bottle of water with lunch.” Others chose more difficult tasks like “running for 15 minutes before dinner.” At the end of the 12 weeks, the researchers analyzed the data to determine how long it took each person to go from starting a new behavior to automatically doing it.

The answer? **On average, it takes 2 months.**

**So we’re giving you 2 months. Aren’t we kind?**

Here is the question: Will you remain in Jesus and make it a priority set aside time every day for personal celebration? And will you remain in Jesus and make it a priority to be here every week for interpersonal celebration? Let’s challenge one another to this between now and Thanksgiving that’s 8 weeks.

**Conclusion**

I want to go back to where we started. We began by collectively admitting that there is something in all of us that thinks, *“There’s got to be more.”* We know that too often we settle for counterfeit happiness when what we really desire is true joy. Jesus said:

***“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” -John 15:11***

He offers us not just joy, but complete joy, whole joy, lasting joy. Isn’t that what we long for?

If you are feeling unfinished . . . incomplete – maybe like something is missing, the creator of the universe is saying to us that staying close to him is our best opportunity to live this love-giving, fruit-bearing life that results in a joy that is **COMPLETE** – not **partial**, not **close** to the real thing, but complete. It doesn’t mean that everything will suddenly be roses or every day you will wake up and hear birds singing, but it does mean you will have a joy that is anchored in something that even the worst of life’s circumstances can’t take away. It’s a joy anchored in Jesus. **WE EXPERIENCE COMPLETE JOY WHEN WE REMAIN IN JESUS.**

Today, Jesus is saying to us: “You remain in me – which is to stay as close to me as you can, and you will experience more of life as it was meant to be – a life of complete joy!” -- Will you do that? I double dog dare you? ☺

**Communion**

The writer of Hebrews penned these words:

***“And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross . . .” -Hebrews 12:1b-3***

The “joy set before” Jesus was you. It was you who got him through the cross. It was you he had in mind when he endured the horrific beating at the hands of the Roman soldiers. It was you he was thinking about when he breathed his last breath. Yes, the one who loved us enough to die for us, says, “You can run this race with perseverance when you fix your eyes on me. You remain in me and I will give you a joy that is complete.”

We can bet our lives on all sorts of people, promises, and ideas. At communion, we are reminded that when we choose to follow Jesus, we are betting our lives on the one who gave his life so that we could experience a that is complete. Let us remember his death and resurrection. The bread represents his body and the juice represents his blood.