

Series: Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

Sermon Text: John 15:9-13 (mini-series: "Abiding Undisturbed") **Key Word:** Attachment

(*The accounts in chapters 14-17 are only found in John)

This world conditions us to relate informationally--to think we fully know a person, place, thing, or idea by reading stuff without first-hand experience. John 15 describes Christianity as an *abiding* (attachment, connection) with God--an intimate relationship, not a series of religious transactions. Of course, not everyone is okay with "intimacy". Ask some folks how they know God exists and they'll say, "Because the Bible says this and that, and I believe these verses and these doctrines." Their faith may be "evidential", but it's rarely, if ever, "experiential." That was me before discovering the Bible describes [2 equally important ways to know God](#): Intellectual knowledge (Greek "Gnosis": factual knowledge, which by itself produces loveless legalism); Experiential knowledge (Greek "Epignosis": deep, relational knowledge, which by itself produces chaotic mysticism). Listen to Jesus from John 14:23, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we'll come to him and make our home with him." What's more relationally intimate than God creating a home within His people? True disciples receive more than facts about Jesus, we get to experience an inner life that's supernaturally connected with Him. And think about this...if God lives inside our fellow church members, shouldn't we desire relationship with them as a form of valuing God?

Over the next 4 weeks we'll learn how healthy relationships are rooted in love, not just truth and morals; and how growth and ministry occur to the degree God's love penetrates our affections. John 15 defines discipleship as more than classes and books. It's no less than changed beliefs (doctrine), transformed living (morals), and supernatural experience (relationship). We're subtitled the next 4 messages: "Abiding Undisturbed" because they delve into how disciples are people who...enjoy attachment with God and others (9-13); bear fruit that remains (14-17); endure hatred from the world (18-25); and witness when persecuted (15:26-16:4). Today, we'll tackle the first...

BIG IDEA: Disciples are people who enjoy attachment with God and others.

In *verses 9-13*, I see 3 principles of attachment with God:

Principle #1 Jesus wants us to enjoy our relationship with Him.

Last week we determined this passage isn't about becoming saved, it's about how we'll bear fruit once we're connected with Jesus by grace through faith. In *verses 9-10* Jesus said, *as the Father has loved me, so have I 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. Like Jesus, we obey God's *commands* not to get or keep connection but because we *love* Him and realize His righteous ways nourish us. In *verses 11-13* Jesus also asserted, *these things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

Verses 9 and 13 are parallel points: How has *Jesus loved us? He laid down His life*. He died once for sin, so we're not being asked to repeat that. *Verse 13* begs us to adopt the self-sacrificing mind of Christ--to *love* and *befriend* by "*dying to self*" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1). *Verses 10 and 12* are parallel points too: What *command* did Jesus have in mind? *Love one another as I've loved you*. While *love* can't be forced or legislated, it can be expected by a *commander* who supplies every resource and example we need. Now, *verse 11* cries out from the center of these 5 verses to prove discipleship is not *loveless*, dutiful learning and doing. What Jesus offers is no cold, robotic duty but a warm and wonderful gift...to *fill* us with *overflowing joy* we experience by relational attachment to a sacred community that includes God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and their church! Hebrews 12:2 illustrates this by saying, "*look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*" How did Jesus endure horrors like His wilderness temptation or the torturous cross? He drew strength from a *joyous*, permanent connection to His *Father*. God has weaved this into the fabric of humanity, right? In life's darkest moments, we can draw support from our relationships! They don't remove our pain, but they do strengthen us in our weakness. Why is isolation so unhelpful? Because God and the people in whom He resides are the only community with the power to sustain us. This leads us into...

Principle #2 Attachment doesn't lessen our humanity, it restores it.

God is different than other worldly influences. He's no dictator, puppet master, or programmer. He is our loving Creator who seeks to restore us to all He knows we can be--fully human, which involves the freedom to choose without being compelled by outside forces. Isn't that the context God set up in Eden? The first people were free to *enjoy* all God created and equally free to walk away. Remember, Godly love always creates contexts where others are free to be human. For example, *loving* parents create contexts where their children are free to *love* them back. The same is true of friendships and romance. It falls short of Godly *love* to force others to reciprocate through control or coercion. While

Greek language had a word for pure *love* (Agape), it was hardly understood or practiced until Jesus demonstrated it for the world. That's a profound way Christ's work forever changed history! After that, passages like 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 John 4 were penned to define and illustrate Godly *love* for us. Of course, to produce this unique and seldom seen *love*, we must constantly *abide* in His Word and draw from the true vine. This leads us into...

Principle #3: Joy is the fruit of being attached to Jesus.

Did you know qualities like *love* and *joy* are constants? They're not circumstantial, so we can experience *love* and *joy* alongside anger, sadness, etc. (cf. Proverbs 3:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; James 1:2-3). *Joy* is not a wishful work we strive for like "*icing on the cake*"; it's a constant reality we tap into relationally. *Joy* is eternal--it existed in the Holy Community prior to creation. It's therefore a gift we bring into trauma to enable resilience, not only for ourselves but more to the point of this passage...*joy* enables us to be present in the trials of a *friend* in a way that, like God, says, "*I'm sad about your trial, but I'm glad to go through it with you.*" To view *joy* as a gift we possess helps in at least 3 ways: 1) It proves that "*fixing*" isn't the only way we contribute; 2) It takes us from detached observer to co-participant--we experience God in the trial with our *friend*. 3) It enables us to *love* friends and foes. Pastor Chuck Swindoll put it this way, "*The love relationship that characterizes the oneness of the Trinity is the same kind of love relationship the Lord desires for His own. Further, our love for one another allows us to receive the love of God...Deep, contented joy comes from a place of complete security and confidence—even during a trial... 'Joy is the flag that flies over the castle of our hearts, announcing that the King is in residence.'*"

While we often *love* God and others theoretically or logically (i.e., with the left half/logic side of our brain), didn't Jesus say, "*love* with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength"? If we're to experience full-brained Christianity, we must practice it! Try this exercise: Jot down verses that describe God's posture towards His children. For instance, Psalm 16:11 says, "*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*" Zephaniah 3:17 says, "*The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*" Sit with any such verse for 5 minutes and picture yourself in God's *joyful* presence. Sometimes I picture Jesus' face looking back at me. Other times, He's walking beside me with His

arm around me or even hugging me. Such exercises revolutionize how we experience relationship with God because they alter our affections (right brain). This way of *abiding* daily in His inspired words helps them become whole-brained experiences.

Let's pray: Father, it makes my head hurt to ponder how you are one God and yet 3 distinct persons. Furthermore, it's mind blowing to consider how, before creation, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit existed as a perfect community of love and joy. You created the heavens and earth because you wanted to spread your glory, specifically imprinting your loving, joyous image on men and women. Sin took a shot at disturbing that image, but you sent your Son to break sin's power and show us the way back to a life-giving connection with you. May those who have not yet been restored realize it's as simple as accepting Jesus by grace through faith. For those of us who have been restored, help us to discover loving you with all our hearts, soul, mind, and strength. And furthermore, as we sing this next song, impress upon us how our suffering can somehow bring healing to others. Amen.

Let's sing: ISAIAH 53

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Crucial contextual considerations:** “First, this passage has meaning for believers only. Any nonbeliever trying to apply these truths will be hopelessly confused. Jesus was not describing how one becomes a Christian, but how one lives as a Christian after placing his or her trust in Him. Second, Jesus draws heavily on the metaphor of a vineyard, a powerful symbol with roots running deep into the soil of Israel's history (Ps. 80:8-9; Isa. 5:1-7; Ezek. 15:1-5; Hos. 10:1). Third, the primary subject of Christ's teaching is abiding, not bearing fruit. At no point in the discourse is the believer commanded to produce fruit. Instead, we are promised that if we abide, fruit will result. We must be careful not to milk every detail for symbolic meaning. Illustrations allow us to see the big picture—that must be our focus here... As Warren Wiersbe so succinctly states, It is unwise to build a theological doctrine on a parable or allegory. Jesus was teaching one main truth—the fruitful life of the believer—and we must not press the details too much.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Discipleship Defined:** “John 15 emphasizes that neither doctrine nor ethics can alone define Christian discipleship. Without a transforming spirituality that creates a supernatural life, doctrine and ethics lose their value... This means that Christianity is not simply about believing the right things (though this is important). Nor is it simply a matter of living a Christ-like life (though this is important too). To be a disciple means having the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit living in us (14:23–26). It is a way of believing (doctrine) and a way of living (ethics), but these are nurtured by the life-giving connection with Jesus Christ.” Professor Gary Burge
- **Our connection with Jesus:** “Jesus followed this assurance with a command to “abide.” The verb means “to remain” or “to stay in place,” very often in reference to one's home. Andrew

and John asked Him, “where are You staying (or abiding)?” (1:38). A key to understanding what Jesus meant by “abiding” is the expression “in Me,” which reflects a theological concept called “positional truth” or “identification.” Jesus used this illustration to discuss the Christian life after salvation. He turned from the issue of position—“in Me”—to that of production. Once an individual chooses to believe and receives the assurance of eternal life, what is our purpose? How then shall we live? Like branches on a vine, we live to bear fruit (15:2).” Pastor Chuck Swindoll

- **Relationship is key:** “Here he teaches that their relationship with him is also fundamental to fruit-bearing. Fruit-bearing for God is not a human possibility; it is Christ’s work through us... ‘communing’ with him through the Holy Spirit...The fruit-bearing which glorifies the Father, and is the product of ‘pruning’ and ‘remaining’, is finally inclusive of all the works, graces and ministries of the living Lord in his people...It is a mark of a worldly church and of a worldly discipleship when we are content with short-lived ‘fruit’ that feeds the fallen appetite for praise, but effects no long-term changes.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **When a believer abides:** “His or her mind dwells on the kinds of thoughts that God thinks. The believer’s heart begins to reflect the values of God (Jer. 31:31-33). But how does one ‘abide in Christ’? According to Jesus, the question is answered in one word: obedience. ‘Keeping commandments’ and ‘abiding in love’ are synonymous. Take note of the parallel relationships established by Jesus. His connection with the Father is the pattern for our connection with Him. Because our relationship with Christ is just like His with the Father, we will receive the same benefit, which He called ‘joy.’ The Greek word describes someone in a state of gladness, such as at harvesttime (4:36) or at a wedding feast (3:29). It’s an emotive word intended to be the very opposite of fear. As the dialogue opened, Jesus noted the disciples’ fear at the announcement of His departure. He gave us a remedy against fear and a means to experience His ongoing presence despite His physical absence: obedience (15:1-11). When we obey, confidence displaces fear (1 Jn. 2:28), resulting in joy.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **More to joy:** “Note that this joy is not merely a human happiness. Jesus desires “that my joy may be in you” (italics added). It is likewise a gift of the Spirit, a gift of Jesus dwelling within, that makes this joy supernatural and substantial. Jesus’ joy has come through his reliance on God and his obedience to his Father’s will. We inherit not only his joy but the capacity given through the Spirit to enjoy God in the same manner. The theme of joy will return in the discourse (16:20–24; 17:3) and will remain a personal emphasis for John (1 John 1:4; 2 John 12; 3 John 4).” Professor Gary Burge
- **Attachment with God:** “The disciples’ lives will be continuation of Jesus’ life in the world... Jesus is promising not simply to fill his disciples with the Spirit, but to come to the disciples himself and there take residence... Christians were reproducing not merely the work of Jesus; they were continuing the presence of Jesus in the world. Perhaps we could put it this way: As the Son incarnated the Father’s presence in the world, so now the Spirit brings the Son’s presence into the world through the life of the believer. As God was at work on the cross in Christ to save us, so now God is at work in the Spirit to transform us. I cannot underscore sufficiently how important this is. God is on our side. He is at work renewing us and loving us. This is the gospel.” Professor Gary Burge
- **Working WITH God:** “It’s possible to run a business as a Christian, to teach Bible classes, to be a wife or a husband, and even to counsel people, all without abiding in Christ. However,

any good we do and any success we enjoy will not have a lasting impact. Conversely, when we obey, when we allow His strength to flow through us, the Lord produces results that defy natural explanation—powerfully effective prayers, God-honoring blessings, unbounded love, and inexplicable joy.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Full life:** John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” Chapters 1-12 contain 3 years of real-life stories where people met Jesus during His public ministry. Chapters 13-21 slow way down as Jesus began to reveal His (God’s) heart to His disciples in the week leading up to the cross and resurrection.
- **The bigger picture:** *Chapters 13-17* form a unit, which is often called His “*Farewell Address.*” **13:1** begins, “*Jesus knew his hour had come to depart out of this world*”, and **17:1** begins, “*Father, the hour has come*”. The middle 3 chapters (**14-16**) are about another Comforter. The bullseye of this unit is the parable of the true vine, making it the central theme of the entire unit (**13-17**) “*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me*” (John 15:4). Why such a huge section on comfort and abiding in Christ? Well, because the disciples were becoming uneasy as Jesus ramped up the cryptic talk about His departure and death. Anxiety is evident in their questions (**13:36, 14:5, 8, 22**), and Jesus affirms His purpose for this address in **chapter 16:1**, “*I’ve said all these things to keep you from falling away*”; **16:6**, “*Because I’ve said these things, sorrow has filled your heart*”; **16:25**, “*I’ve said these things in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father*”; and **16:33**, “*I’ve said these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*” This unit of Scripture gives the church her marching orders (i.e., *to glorify God by loving one another like Jesus loves us*) and is filled with comfort for when the world wears us down and we lose sight of the goal.
- **Farewell Addresses:** “Academic studies have compared Jesus’ Farewell Discourse with those of dying teachers and leaders in antiquity. Jacob’s last words in Genesis 49 are typical of this form, as is Moses’ farewell in Deuteronomy 31–34. Not only does Moses identify his successor, but he gives teachings that must be recorded and a final blessing. Apocryphal Jewish literature from Jesus’ day offers more tantalizing parallels. In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs each of the twelve sons of Jacob give farewell instructions, blessings, and prayers. In the Testament of Moses, we overhear Moses’ final words to Israel and Joshua. We even possess ‘testaments’ of Solomon, Job, Isaac, and Adam³⁰—fictionalized farewells imagined by Jewish authors between 100 B.C. and A.D. 200. Jewish testaments imagine the dying (or departing) person surrounded by his most intimate friends and family. Standard literary elements generally appear. For instance, they always show a concern for the comfort and encouragement of those left behind. Often there is an exhortation to obey the law, and a deposit of writings is left behind.³¹ In some cases, the departing person passes his ‘spirit’ to his followers or successor. Moses and Elijah do this respectively for Joshua and Elisha (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9; 2 Kings 2:9–14). In the farewell of Jesus many of these elements appear. He encourages his disciples and comforts them (John 14:1). He also urges them to be obedient (13:34; 15:12), and from John’s perspective the ‘literary deposit’ Jesus leaves behind is the

Fourth Gospel itself. Moreover, Jesus promises that his Spirit will indwell and empower his followers following his death (14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:3, 13). In other words, we have in John 13–17 all of the elements of a Jewish farewell.” Professor Gary Burge

- **Change of focus in Chapter 13:** “This section signals a change of focus as Jesus turns to ‘his own’ and shows them his love...In the end there is no explanation of the cross other than the love of God. There can be no other, for we certainly do not deserve it and can never earn it.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **The heart of God:** “Here, in five chapters (13-17), in only 155 verses, and in less than four thousand words we are given what the Puritan writer Thomas Goodwin called “‘a window into Christ’s heart.’” Professor Sinclair Ferguson
- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it's “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to all such as trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be 'the life' of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”

Other Articles/Songs/Videos:

Direction for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the discussion around 30mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparation questions for John 15:9-13.

- Do yourself a favor...carve out some time to read through this section. Better yet, [grab a copy](#) of last Sunday's sermon notes and listen to the audio on our website. There's so much life-giving, life-changing truth in this chapter. You'll just want to soak in it. I sure do!

Application questions from John 15:9-13.

- Jesus already died for sin, but He calls us to love and befriend others by “dying to self” daily. How is that going? Examine your calendar...Do you tend to fill it with activities to make you feel productive and loved, or are you leaving space for “God moments”, rest, and deep connection with God and others? How can overly busy calendars limit our ability to abide in joy and remain open to holy interruptions (opportunities to love and be loved)?
- Those who feel like God and others are trying to control them generally try to control others. God, however, creates a context where people are free to love Him and others. Do you tend to relate through control or love? Which of your relationships might experience transformation or breakthrough if you were to love like God loves you? Please explain how that might look.
- Try this exercise to engage your whole mind (logic and affection): Choose either Psalm 16:11, “*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*”; or Zephaniah 3:17, “*The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*” Start your day by sitting with one of these verses for just 5 minutes, picturing yourself in God’s **joyful** presence. Do this daily as we go through John 15, and occasionally let us know how it’s impacting you.

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://tod dengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://tod dengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>