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The Fruit of the Vine

1 John 4:11-21
John 15:1-8

We all have days when we're just not feeling it. Our energy level might be low. We can't work up the motivation to do anything productive. Maybe life seems futile, like nothing is going to make a difference anyway, so why bother.

We also probably all have days when we can't wait for the day to get started. When we're full of energy and excited about getting out of bed in the morning. When we enjoy life and look forward to experiencing new things, people, and places.

These are the times when we feel truly alive. When the day ahead is full of possibility and opportunity. When life feels abundant.

But when we're having that blah, low energy day, how do we find the abundant feeling? How do we find our motivation and increase our energy? Can we change our attitude?

I think we can. I think it is possible to change our attitude when we are down on ourselves, to nurture the energy and passion that motivates us. Now, I'm not talking about someone who is clinically depressed or when there might be medical reasons for low energy. In those cases, of course, we'll want to see a doctor.

But what about times when we are just in a rut? Or when the world feels like a little bit too much? How do we get back our motivation, our joy for living?

The gospel of John tells us that Jesus is our source for abundant life. Jesus is the source of our joy.

In today's reading, we're given a new metaphor for our relationship with Jesus. He is the vine and those that choose to follow him are the branches.

Just as the vine provides nourishment for its branches, Jesus is the source of love that nurtures us and allows us to grow and lead an abundant life. When we are down and struggling, we can draw strength and energy and inspiration from the love we know in Christ.

We find and connect to that love by looking within. The first epistle of John says that God dwells within us as love and Jesus, the incarnation of God, talks about living within us and us within him.

If we want to experience the joy of life, we need to look into our own hearts and tap into the inexhaustible fountain of love that we find there.

Of course, meditation and prayer can help us do that. But there are other things we can do that as well that will help us find inspiration and a joy for living.

I went searching for ideas and found a lot of articles that mostly offered similar suggestions. One article offered what they called eight ways to get psyched up about life again and I think they go well with what our scriptures are telling us.

Their suggestions were:¹

1. Figure out what's actually causing the lack of motivation. For me, this is the need to look within. Is there something keeping us from connecting to the source of joy and love that is God? Am I feeling down or fearful about something? Getting to the root cause of

1 <https://www.wondermind.com/article/how-to-be-motivated/>

our blockages, being able to name them, can help us figure out what to do to get by them.

2. Find one joyful thing you can do each day. Even doing one simple thing that can make us smile and feel good for a few minutes can begin to change the whole day. And then give God thanks for that moment of joy. When we experience joy and gratitude we begin to lead an abundant life.
3. Get outside and connect with nature. Staying indoors all day sitting in front of the computer or television can become a routine that demotivates us. One way to connect with God is by connecting with God's good Creation.
4. Try a new hobby. A new experience, especially one that is creative, can help chase away the doldrums and offer new perspectives on life.
5. Recall a person or activity that inspired you in the past. Our attitudes are influenced by past experiences. Connecting to what has inspired us in the past can motivate us for the future. Knowing that God has blessed us in the past reminds us that God will continue to bless us in the future.
6. Pay it forward. Doing something nice or supportive for someone else is good for us too. It can help give us a sense of purpose. The first epistle of John says that we must love one another as God loves us. I think it's kind of like priming a pump. We can connect to the love inside us through doing something loving for someone else. It gets the love flowing.
7. Show yourself some grace. Guilt and shame won't help us change our attitude. They'll just quicken the downward spiral. So, instead, be patient and

compassionate with yourself. Love yourself as God loves you.

8. Ask for help if you need it. Don't be afraid to reach out to God, to friends, to a therapist if needed. We are here to support each other so let someone support and love you.

So many of these suggestions for reconnecting to our motivation and inspiration are things that help us get outside of ourselves. When we get lost and down on life, I think it's often because we've become too internally focused.

Love is intrinsically relational. It is all about getting outside of ourselves. We tap into the love within that is the source of abundant life by loving others.

Jesus tells us that when we live in him and he lives in us – when God's love flows through us and into the world – we will receive what we need. We will have fruitful, abundant lives, enjoying life, connecting with each other in meaningful relationship.

In the words of the first epistle of John, God's love is perfected in Jesus. We see what love really is in the life and teachings of Jesus. This is love with no fear. Totally committed to helping those in need, healing and caring for the world. These are the fruits of love.

And this is relationship we are meant to have with God and with the world. When love flows from the vine to the branches, we bear the fruit of the vine, the fruit of God's love in our lives. Not only do we find abundant life, but we help to bring it to the world.

And when we live in that love, it becomes perfected in us. That doesn't mean we become perfect people, never doing anything

wrong. But if God's love never gets past our lips or finger tips, then it is stunted, thwarted by our own inaction.

But if we let the love of God that fills us move from within to the outer world in our speech and actions, it is perfected because it is filling its purpose and we begin to blossom and bear the fruit of the vine: compassion, joy, peace, healing and wholeness.

We need God's love to lead an abundant life, but God also needs us to carry that love into the world. You might remember several weeks ago, we heard the poem from Theresa of Avila in which she reminds us that we are God's feet and hands in the world.

Without the branches the vine does nothing.
Without the vine, the branches wither and die.
We need God and God needs us.
Together, the vine and the branches can bear fruit abundantly.

As the epistle says, no one has ever seen God. Yet we know God through the love that dwells in us. And as we let that love move through and out of us, the world will come to know God's love, come to know that that love flows through them as well.

Amen.