

What Jesus Says About A Joy-Filled Life

TARA DEW

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Throughout this book, the author has added italics or bold for emphasis in Scripture.

Cover design by Tim Greene, FaceOut Studio. Illustration by miniwide/shutterstock. Author photo by Joseph Duke, NOBTS. To my husband, Jamie, and our children, Natalie, Nathan, Samantha, and Samuel,

Other than Jesus, you are the sources of never-ending joy in my life.

God has used you to make me more like Him.

I love you.

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Introduction

Overflowing Joy in a World That Is Joyless

'm so glad that you have opened this book. I've been praying for you as I've written these pages. I wish so much that we were able to sit down at a local coffee shop and talk in person. After all, it'd be a lot more fun to get to know you, hear your story, and walk through Scripture side by side. Sometimes, words flow so much easier face-to-face anyway.

But since it is not possible to enjoy a vanilla latte with you, I am so thankful to do this instead. I know you are busy. It is my prayer that you can pick this book up whenever you have a few spare minutes. Whether you are in a coffee shop, in the carpool line, or on your back porch, I have written each

chapter so that it can be read in short increments. You could even tack it to the end of your daily time in Scripture.

Wherever you are right now, I pray that you would not feel alone. I hope that as you read this book, you would feel like you have a friend sitting right there with you. I sense these truths to the core of my being and have lived, breathed, and experienced the lessons found in these pages.

And I am so glad to study these truths with you, because, after all, you too may be struggling through the very same seasons I've faced. The seasons where we are juggling many things. Where we are tired and worn. Where we feel just plain weary. Sadly, we live in a world where most women would say the same thing. Anxiety, depression, weariness, and disappointment seem to be the basic descriptors of our lives. And many days, we can lack a sense of joy.

Jesus said that life doesn't have to be this way. On the night before His crucifixion—when He should have been filled with the utmost anxiety and depression—He told His disciples: "I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!" (John 15:11 NLT). How could Jesus have such joy when He knew one of His very own disciples would betray Him, that He would be arrested, tried, beaten, flogged, and that ultimately His death was imminent? And how can we, too, have this joy that overflows in the anxious, depressed world we live in?

Look at the beginning of the sentence in John 15:11. Jesus said, "I have told you these things." In order to know "these

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things" that Jesus is referring to, we have to go back and look at the ten verses right before it in John 15:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.

"As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. 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.

"I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." (John 15:1–11)

That last word *complete* in the Christian Standard Bible is the same word as *overflowing* in the New Living Translation. Other translations use the words *full*, *real*, *genuine*, *spilling over*, or *contagious*. However your translation puts it, this is the truth: Jesus wants us to have a joy that is so full, so real, so genuine, so overflowing that we can't keep it to ourselves!

Three Pathways to Joy

In a world filled with anxiety and weariness, Jesus presents His followers with something markedly different. He offers complete, abundant, overflowing joy. And Jesus reveals three very surprising pathways to finding this type of joy: (1) pruning by our heavenly Father, (2) the promise of His presence, and (3) our perseverance in His command to love others. It's interesting that of these three pathways to joy, the first two are something He does in us, and the last one is something we are commanded to do in response. This book will unpack "these things" that lead to a joy in Jesus that is overflowing.

You might be really confused. After all, the verses in John 15 talked a lot about vines, branches, and fruit. How are these

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pathways to finding joy? Well, in these eleven verses, Jesus is using a gardening metaphor. (A metaphor is just a literary tool that uses something you know a lot about to explain something that you might not know a lot about.) Since Jesus is a master teacher, He uses metaphors often. In this gardening metaphor, He is teaching His followers about the relationship between them and God, and where to find true joy. And He is using an illustration about gardening, because His listeners were living in an agricultural society and would have known a lot about vines, branches, and fruit. We are much more removed from this type of society today, as we live in cities and communities surrounded by industrial farming and grocery stores—both of which keep us a step or two away from direct contact with the ground. But the lessons Jesus taught two thousand years ago still teach us so much today, especially if we understand Jesus's gardening illustration.

Image One: The Vine

Let's make sure we understand the metaphor in John 15 before we move on. In verse 1, Jesus says, "I am the true *vine*." In verse 5, He repeats this truth: "I am the *vine*..." In these two verses, Jesus likens Himself to a beautiful vine, planted in a vineyard. In Israel, vineyards would have been as common as grapes in California or peach orchards in Georgia. His disciples would have known exactly what Jesus was describing. But for us, just imagine a beautiful vine native to your area. Maybe that is an ivy vine or a clematis vine. My family

and I live in New Orleans and recently planted a jasmine vine right outside our back porch. It has grown up so quickly, and has now wrapped itself totally around my red dinner bell that once belonged to my great-grandmother. It is a beautiful vine, strong and woody. In this illustration, Jesus wants us to know that He is the Vine. It is "in Him" that we find our strength, our sustenance and our very life. Just as an isolated branch separated from the life of its vine cannot possibly survive, likewise, we as little branches can do nothing without being connected to Him (more on branches in a moment!). He is life and beauty and goodness and joy.

Image Two: The Gardener

Jesus continues, ". . . and my Father is the *gardener*" (15:1). God the Father tends to us as a gardener tends to His plants. God is the owner and caretaker of His vineyard. He is responsible for its health and growth. Some translations call Him the Vinedresser. He Himself is the Gardener who prunes and cares for His plants. And if you remember back in Genesis 1–2, He created a garden and would walk with Adam and Eve there. And in Revelation 21–22, the garden imagery returns again. I think it's safe to say that our God is a loving and wise Gardener, who is personally and intimately involved with His creation.

Image Three: The Branches

Jesus talks about branches starting in verse 2 and continuing through verse 5: "Every *branch* in me that does not produce

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fruit he removes, and he prunes every *branch* that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a *branch* is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the *branches*."

So Jesus is our Vine, God is our Gardener, and we are His branches. This means we find our existence in Him and we come from Him. Without Him, we don't exist. We originate from Him, we are joined to Him, and we find our nutrients in Him. If you are a follower of Christ—a disciple, a Christian—then you are a branch found on the true Vine.

Image Four: The Fruit

In these verses, Jesus also talks about fruit: "Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce *fruit* by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much *fruit*, because you can do nothing without me" (John 15:4–5). He repeats this truth in verse 8: "My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much *fruit* and prove to be my disciples." Jesus is talking about our lives bearing fruit, but it is not a fruit that comes from us. This spiritual fruit comes from remaining in Christ, and Christ remaining in us. (Other translations may use the term "abiding" in Christ, and Christ "abiding" in us.) And how does a Christian abide in Christ? On the other hand, how

does Christ abide in a Christian? Through the third person of the Godhead: the Holy Spirit. Sometimes called "the Spirit of Christ," He indwells us and works through us (Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14). The result of the Holy Spirit's work in us is described in Galatians 5:22–23 as "fruit of the Spirit." If you are like me, you might have grown up singing these words: "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." A life that is attached to the Vine will bear fruit. And John's descriptions of God's will spilled over in John 15 is for us to bear "fruit" (v. 2), "more fruit" (v. 2), and "much fruit" (vv. 5, 8). Jesus wants our lives to have complete, true, abundant, *overflowing* fruit in increasing proportions—especially JOY!

Overview of this Book

If we can understand these four images in the metaphor, we will be able to better understand Jesus's teaching on how to have this overflowing joy. Let's recap:

- Who is our Vine? Jesus.
- Who is our Gardener? God.
- Who are the branches? His followers.
- How do we bear fruit? The Holy Spirit.

Do you see the Trinity? Yep, all three persons of the Divine Godhead are involved in our joy overflowing. And we will learn that our joy often comes less from what we do and

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more through what God does in us. It is the work of God in and through us that allows us to have true, complete, over-flowing joy (Phil. 2:13). So cool!

Now, as you read through this book, you will find it broken down into three parts. As we explore Jesus's words in John 15, the first part will focus on verses 1–2 and we will see that our joy comes from God's pruning. The second part will focus on verses 4–8 where Jesus teaches us that our joy is found only in God's presence. And the last section will focus on verses 9–12, showing us that our joy is complete when we persevere in God's commands.

Friend, Jesus invites us to have complete, abundant, genuine joy that is only found in Him. Let's join Him on this journey as we learn about three surprising pathways to overflowing joy!

Abiding in His joy, *Tara*

Part 1



Joy Comes from God's Pruning

"Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he *prunes* every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit."

John 15:2

Chapter 1

God's Pruning Is Purposeful

hen you hear the word *prune*, what comes to mind? For many years, my mind immediately went back to my grandparents' breakfast table. They lived on the top of a mountain in North Carolina, surrounded by 300 acres of beautiful trees and valleys. Their driveway itself was more than a mile long. It wound through big oak trees, wildflower fields, and past small creeks. My Grammy and Pop-Pop were so interesting to me, because they were removed from the hustle and bustle of the busy world that we lived in. They spent their retired days taking walks, doing woodworking or sewing projects, and working in their garden. They'd sit on their swing and watch the hummingbirds fight at the feeder. I soon came to realize that these two enjoyed doing the same

things, day after day. And just like their daily activities, they also ate the same thing for breakfast every single day: oatmeal and a prune.

The first time I saw the prunes, I had no idea why these little purple "squishy rocks" would be on the breakfast table. But I soon learned that they were just dried plums. And my Grammy and Pop-Pop ate one prune every morning. I didn't know at the time why they ate it; I thought maybe it complemented the oatmeal or was like a vitamin. But as I've gotten older, I now know how much prunes encourage your digestive tract. My grandparents loved routine in every sense of the word. And so for many years, whenever I heard the word *prune*, I thought about that dried plum on my grandparents' breakfast table.

But friend, this is not the type of pruning that Jesus is teaching us about!

The Purpose of Pruning

Jesus says in John 15:1–2, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he *prunes* every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit." In these verses, Jesus is teaching His listeners to look to their heavenly Gardener's ways—and in His pruning they will find surprising joy.

Let's begin by talking about the purpose of pruning. Now, you might be a gardener, and if so, you've got a leg up

here. But perhaps you're like me, having a lot to learn about this agricultural process. Plants left to themselves will grow unevenly and wildly. They get overextended and lanky. They begin encroaching on spaces around them and getting out of control. So a knowledgeable gardener must routinely prune the plants back. Pruning is simply when a gardener cuts back superfluous, extra, or unwanted parts of a plant. It is a way to train and discipline a plant in the way that the gardener wants it to grow. Pruning is for the plant's good, health, and beauty.

To the inexperienced eye, pruning can look a lot like loss. An unknowledgeable onlooker can see branches being pruned and think that something must be wrong with the plant. Why on earth would a gardener be cutting off these branches? You see, it is easy to mistake pruning with removing, but even Jesus makes a distinction between these two gardening methods in verse 2.

Gardening Methods

Removing versus Pruning

When a gardener removes the branches that are dead, damaged, and diseased, that is not pruning. That is basic care for the plant. If a branch is dead, meaning it is unproductive and not bearing fruit, it needs to be removed so that the plant can pour its nutrients and energies into the healthy branches. You can often tell if a branch is dead by just looking at it. It will

be brown and withered. It will not have leaves or flowers. It is clearly not like the rest of the plant. It is lifeless. And for the overall health of the plant, dead branches need to be removed.

But pruning is not the same as removing. So how does a gardener decide whether to remove or prune? He looks for one thing, and either removes or prunes based on this one distinction. We have a hint of it in verse 2. The branches that are dead, that produce no fruit, are removed. And what happens to the branches that do produce fruit? They are pruned. If the branch is not producing fruit, it is cut off. And if the branch is bearing fruit, it is pruned. Why? Because pruning is purposeful. And a good gardener knows to either remove or prune based on one thing: fruit or no fruit.

When a gardener prunes, he has a purpose in that pruning: It stimulates new healthy growth in the plant. Jesus says in John 15:2, "He *prunes* every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit." MORE fruit is the goal of the gardener. And the same is true for our lives: God's pruning is for our health and for our good! And surprisingly, it is the first pathway to having a joy that is overflowing.

Pruning Requires Trust

In October 2012, my husband, Jamie, and I signed what seemed like millions of papers to buy our very first home. It was an old, 1956 brick ranch, set in the historic district of Wake Forest, North Carolina. It was only two blocks from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where Jamie was

teaching at the time, and just one block from my former high school. We loved the location, and that was the main reason we bought this house. We surely didn't buy the house because of how it looked. As a matter of fact, I cancelled the showing on it two times. I just couldn't see past the wallpaper, knotty pine paneling, pinkish kitchen cabinets, and gray linoleum floors.

But, when we finally took the house tour, we wound our way from the gravel driveway along a mossy path to the front door. We ducked under lanky azaleas and weaved around large pine trees. To our surprise, the house had a beautiful and large covered front porch. You just couldn't see it for all the overgrown trees and bushes. And after walking through the house, Jamie just kept saying, "It's got good bones." He was right. In just eight years, and with a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, we transformed that house into a beautiful home that we absolutely loved.



The biggest transformation, however, happened in the front yard. The first winter, we hired a contractor to come in and remove fifty-six pine trees in the front yard of a .75-acre lot. They were everywhere! Those tall skinny pines towered over the house and would have sliced it right in half if they had fallen on it. You could stand on the front porch and touch four of them! And under the pines, azaleas had multiplied and grown without restraint for years. They were taller than me, lanky, and many had brown parts. But as the pines were taken down, the azaleas were crushed and needed to be removed too. Within a week's time, we went from not being able to see the house, to not having a single stitch of landscaping in the front yard.

A dear friend from church, Mrs. Julie, loved landscaping and offered to come and help me replant my new front beds. On several occasions, the kids and I would pile into the minivan, and Mrs. Julie would take us down to the local farmer's market where we picked out all sorts of plants that had two things in common: low maintenance and easy to grow! She understood that I was a very inexperienced gardener and knew absolutely nothing about flowers, shrubs, or bushes. I have so many happy memories of riding home with my kids' heads peeking out from among all the new plants.

Once we got home, I would watch as Mrs. Julie placed the new plants along the front of the house. She put the taller ones along the house, then spaced out the lower ones in front. She beautifully mixed the variety and colors, putting the dark

green leaved plants in between the lime green varieties. I was amazed and tried to glean everything I could from this experienced gardener, who knew exactly where to plant each species, how far apart they needed to be, how deep to bury their root bundle, and so on. After they were planted, she taught me how to water and how to fertilize. And that first spring, when the buds began to flower, my heart burst with joy! What once was an overgrown-jungle-turned-bare-dirt was now a garden of colors. The new plants were beautiful. They were thriving, they were flowering, and they were growing!



But that fall, Mrs. Julie taught me another lesson: plants need to be pruned. So she brought her sharp gardening shears over and got to work. I was mortified! She was cutting off the new branches on my abelia that flowered and attracted all

sorts of butterflies and hummingbirds! The new flowers on my drift rosebush were being trimmed back. My spirea with its gorgeous purple clusters . . . pruned. Didn't she know that would hurt the plant? I couldn't help but ask, "Why are you doing that? Those branches are so pretty and we've worked so hard to get them to flower!"

I'll never forget her words: "Tara, do you trust me?"

She continued, "A good gardener knows that a plant needs to be pruned. Pruning is for its good. And where there was one branch, soon there will be three." I couldn't help but to nod my head. "Yes, Mrs. Julie, I trust you. You know way more than I do about plants. And you know what needs to happen to get them to grow." My goodness, come the next spring, Mrs. Julie was right. The pruning was purposeful: the plants that were pruned were now bursting with more blooms. They had spread new branches. They were even more full and beautiful. And yes, now they indeed would produce more fruit.

Pruning for Our Joy

When we endure pruning, it is helpful to remember that our Gardener has a purpose for it. It is surprising, but God's pruning is one of the ways we learn to have joy that is complete and overflowing. In our pruning, we experience the intimacy and faithfulness of God in ways we might not have before. And when we look back on the seasons of pruning, we see His purposes and His ways.

I have gone through many different seasons of pruning. A particular season that is seared into my memory came right before we bought our beloved historic home. My husband, Jamie, had been serving as the senior pastor of a small country church, while also teaching adjunctively at our local seminary. (You probably do, but just in case you don't know what a seminary is, it's an academic institution that trains pastors, missionaries, counselors, and other men and women who are called to ministry.) Since he was the senior pastor, we lived in the parsonage, and my parents happened to be our nextdoor neighbors. The children and I enjoyed walking barefoot through the woods to their house for snacks and visits. But after a year of juggling the senior pastorate with a full-time teaching load, Jamie and I sensed that God was calling us away from the pastoral ministry and into academia full-time. It was so hard as we contemplated leaving church members we loved, not to mention moving our children away from their grandparents. We didn't know how we were going to make ends meet, because the church provided our income, housing, and insurance. But we also knew that God was pruning this part of our lives back. As a couple, our joint attention was to now be primarily focused on pupils in the classroom, not congregants in the church.

One Saturday afternoon, I sat on the front porch of the parsonage crying before the Lord. "How are we going to make ends meet, God?" and "Where are we going to live?" and "If I'm going to remain a stay-at-home mom, how can we make it

on only a professor's salary?" We knew that God was calling us to leave this church, home, and community, but we were scared. All we could see was loss. Out of nowhere, a little brown bird flew onto the porch and landed within five feet of me. In its mouth, he held a tiny worm. God reminded my grieving and fearful heart of these verses in Matthew 6:25–27:

"Therefore I tell you: Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Consider the birds of the sky: They don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they? Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying?"

God does care for the birds and He cares for us. Just two days later, after resigning from the church and not knowing what we were going to do, Jamie was asked to take on the Dean's role at the College at Southeastern Seminary. God had provided a job with an administrative stipend that would meet our budgetary income needs. And in less than a week, He led us to sign a contract on that brick ranch house hidden behind pine trees and azaleas.

Indeed, God had pruned us, yet He taught us so much through that experience. We realized that instead of serving the believers in just one church, we would get to pour into

hundreds of college and seminary students, many of whom were already serving in other churches. Our ministry in one church was just multiplied into hundreds of churches. In the words of our gardening metaphor: where there was one branch, there were now three. God's pruning was indeed purposeful. And friend, I discovered that my true joy is found in such pruning. His plan for our life was best, and true joy was found in following His call.

Another season of pruning came in the spring of 2019. Jamie was approached by the presidential search committee at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. This is not a job he sought after, applied for, or "worked the back channels" to get. We were very happy with our life in North Carolina. We lived minutes from family, had just finished renovating our house, were serving in our local church, and God was blessing the ministry at the college. To us, it seemed like our lives were flourishing, blossoming, and thriving. But when that search committee came to us, God began to prune us again. He was asking us to release to Him the very things we loved most. He was asking us to lay it all down. To trust Him as He was doing a new thing. I can remember weeping as I read this verse in Luke 9:23-24: "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it."

There were many days that spring, as we went through the interview process, that our hearts were filled with grief. All we

could see was what we were losing, what God was pruning away from us. And in the midst of it all, my dad, who had been battling cancer, went home to be with the Lord. I can remember asking Jamie one day, "Am I ever going to stop crying? Is there ever going to be joy from this pain?"

But yet, we knew that our heavenly Father loved us and we needed to trust Him. These words from Isaiah 55:8–13 were like a balm to my soul:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways."

This is the LORD's declaration.

"For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For just as the rain and snow fall from heaven.

and do not return there
without saturating the earth
and making it germinate and sprout,
and providing seed to sow
and food to eat,
so my word that comes from my mouth
will not return to me empty,
but it will accomplish what I please
and will prosper in what I send it to do."

You will indeed go out with joy
and be peacefully guided;
the mountains and the hills will break into
singing before you,
and all the trees of the field will clap their
hands.

Instead of the thornbush, a cypress will
come up,
and instead of the brier, a myrtle will come
up;
this will stand as a monument for the LORD,
an everlasting sign that will not be
destroyed.

Friend, I now sit on the other side of that grief and pruning. I've lived in my new city for a couple of years. I have witnessed God's faithfulness and His good hand as He has sustained us. My husband is doing an amazing job in his new role, our family is thriving, and though we miss our friends and extended family in North Carolina, we love our new life in New Orleans. Though it came with the pain of scaling back and refocusing our resources in not just one, but many seasons, I can confidently say that at each juncture, we became healthier than we were in the season prior. In these seasons of pruning—and so many more—I have learned to trust God. He is our good Gardener and what seems like loss to us, ends up being for our growth and our good. He is never closer to us than when He is pruning us.

An Intimate Gardener

Mrs. Julie is a wonderful gardener and one from whom I learned so very much about plants, pruning, and gardening. She taught me to trust her methods, even when I didn't understand. And she never left me alone as I tried to mimic her ways. Year after year, she would come over with her shears and prune my plants with me. When she was pruning, she would almost be swallowed up by the plant. She had to get way in to the center, to prune it in just the right place. And this I learned: a gardener is never as intimate and personal with their plants as they are when they are pruning.

We have a very good Gardener who asks us to trust Him too, even when we don't understand. God says in Isaiah 43:18–19, "Do not remember the past events; pay no attention to things of old. Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it?" Just like Mrs. Julie, God asks us to trust Him and His ways. He is doing something new.

Our heavenly Gardener loves to see growth and knows just where our lives need to be pruned back. Maybe we have become overextended and lanky. Maybe we have become too undisciplined and wild. We will talk more about this in the next two chapters. But for now, I want you to know: God is never as intimate and personal with us as He is when He is pruning us. Pruning is a hands-on endeavor that God refuses to perform carelessly. He is our Gardener, our Vinedresser, and the One whose ways are precise and purposeful.

If He is pruning you, it doesn't mean you have done something wrong. It means that your life bore fruit, and He desires for you to bear *more* fruit. Where there was one branch, soon there will be three. And my friend, this is just one pathway to a joy that is overflowing.

Questions to Consider

- 1. What is the difference between removing and pruning? In your life, what things has God removed? What things has He pruned? In regard to the pruning seasons, in what ways did you experience God's intimate presence with you in those seasons?
- 2. Even though it looks like loss, pruning has a purpose. How does knowing that the Gardener has a purpose help you to endure pruning? Why?
- 3. What attribute of God as our heavenly Gardener struck you the most?
- 4. Can you look back on any seasons of pruning and see now that there is more fruit?
- 5. Is there something God may be trying to prune in your life right now? If so, are you cooperating in this process with a trusting heart toward Him, or are you resisting the process? Why?

Verses for Reflection

HEBREWS 12:5-11

And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons:

"My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reproved by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives."

Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to

them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

JOB 5:17-18

See how happy is the person whom God corrects;

so do not reject the discipline of the Almighty.

For he wounds but he also bandages; he strikes, but his hands also heal.

PROVERBS 3:5-12

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight. Don't be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. This will be healing for your body and strengthening for your bones.

Honor the LORD with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest;

then your barns will be completely filled,

and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Do not despise the LORD's instruction, my son,

and do not loathe his discipline; for the LORD disciplines the one he loves,

just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights.



hether you're facing the ordinary, daily pressures of squaring away today's to-do list or an unexpected season of suffering that seems to have no end, it sometimes feels like Jesus's promise of "overflowing joy" is simply not within reach for your real life.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

By journeying with you through Jesus's words in John 15, author and Bible teacher Tara Dew reveals three surprising paths to a truly joy-filled life. If you're willing to take Jesus up on His teaching, you'll find that God's pruning, God's presence, and God's commands have the power to deliver not just a taste of joy as a fruit God is developing in your life, but an overflowing bushel of it! The question is, Are you willing?

If so, prepare to experience a truly, fully, and genuinely joy-filled life—no matter the season or circumstance!

TARA DEW has loved Jesus for as long as she can remember. She was saved as a child at a Billy Graham crusade and was then called into ministry as a teenager. A few years later, she married her high school sweetheart, Dr. Jamie Dew (current president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary). Together, they have two sets of twins: Natalie & Nathan and Samuel

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