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## ABIDING IN CHRIST

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### Part 26 of The Gospel of John

Pastor Mark Driscoll | John 15:1-17 | July 08, 2001

We're gonna show you a video. I'll tell you what the video's going to be about. We are a church that is highly committed to church planting. Every day in this church, between nine and ten churches close, over 3,000 churches in U.S. close every year. We are now the fourth largest mission field in the United States of America. So, we believe, as Jesus desires for us, that the Gospel should go Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the Earth, that you've got to begin where you are, but that you should work out from there. We have been privileged to work and help in various ways, a church in Kirkland, Portland, Mount Vernon, our sister churches. We've put together, with a pastor in Florida, a church planting network where we give away money to help fund church plants. And we do that all over the world. This year we're starting churches in Mexico, Haiti, Brazil, India, the U.S., and that far away world of Canada. And – no, we love the Canadian guys; they're up in Toronto.

And so, what we do is we start churches. This year we are starting 54 churches in those six nations. Most of the pastors are very young. The youngest is a 19-year-old guy, named Justin. He was in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and God spoke to him and told him to go plant a church in Amarillo, Texas. I am not sure what grievous sin he committed to get that assignment, but God sent him to Amarillo, Texas. And Justin is 19 years old, and he is going to be with us at the end of the month. I will introduce you to him – he's a great guy. Eric, who is our former administrator here – runs the network – he put together a little video for us so you could see some of the works that are going on internationally. And what we do, is once a month we take a special offering. The reason being, we believe that not only should the people in the church tithe, but that the church itself should tithe, and so we give 10 percent of our money as a church, to church planters, and to help them out. And so, we're doing a special offering this week, the baskets are up at the side, and I would encourage you to give to that. So, I'll let just see the video, and then we'll get going.

This year alone, we're gonna do 12 churches in the U.S., one church in Canada, and do an additional 41 churches in four other nations. And by God's grace, we're gonna give away about half a million dollars, and we want to see that increase. The goal is to plant 1,000 churches in less than 10 years, and right now we're on track to do that, and it's been great. Some of the places that we've seen some of the most fruit are places where American missionaries have traditionally greatly failed. For example, in Haiti. Millions of dollars have been wasted in Haiti. It's a cashless bartering society that's about 75, 80 percent illiterate, and it's a completely different world to try and plant a church in. God has graced us with two young brothers, Donnie and Louis, and they have a great plan. You buy a piece of land for them and they will plant a church there. Half of that land will be used for agriculture that'll provide their salary; the other half is used for the church. And so then, the church, from day one, is self-sufficient as opposed to sending American missionaries and having to fund them for, you know, years and years and years. We can just buy pieces of land, do some initial start-up costs, and be in and out of a church and recycle that money very quickly.

We are, as a church, doing that same thing in Visakhapatnam, Southeast India this year; we are funding about a dozen churches there. Just purchases six acres of land, we purchased an additional couple of acres of land for a Bible College to train young men to go out in the rural areas. All that to say; we have now hundreds of people applying and we need more money. So we're just asking that the Lord would continue to develop the money. And I encourage you to pray, too. I've got a meeting in Hawaii, coming up in October, and we're gonna talk with some donors there and ask for about a four or five hundred thousand dollar gift that we can give away as well.

So, all to say, as we talk about fruit and fruit that lasts, our heart really is to see the Gospel go forward. God has been very kind to this church; we want to tithe as a church and to help other people get their churches started. And that's part of the special offering this morning. All the money you give will go directly to that. And the good news is, in a lot of organizations, about 20 percent of the money that is raised goes to administrative and overhead costs. None of the money you give will go to administrative overhead costs – 100 percent of it goes right to the guys in the field, and a lot of them are real young – teens and twenties. So, that's my pitch for the planting situation that we find ourselves in.

If you guys could, go to John 15, we'll continue our trek through John's Gospel. We'll finish it this summer and do Proverbs in the fall. I'll pray. Lord God, thank you for a chance to get together to study the Scriptures, we ask for your Holy Spirit to do the work of convicting and leading and instructing and in guiding us. Lord God, pray that we would just walk away from Jesus' words this morning with some things to meditate upon; some seeds that will birth a lot of fruit in our own souls and that would give glory to you. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Topic today, really, out of John 15 is fruitfulness. It's interesting, because all the way back in Genesis Chapter 1, we are told that that is the purpose for which we were created. God says, "Be fruitful, increase the number, fill the Earth, and subdue it." And so, Adam and Eve are told to be fruitful people that have children who are also fruitful, thereby, sort of extending God's influence, and extending God's purposes throughout all of God's creation on this planet. Throughout the Old Testament then, on a number of occasions that I've put in your notes, God continues to use this metaphor of

fruitfulness to indicate people who love him, and people who are serving, and people who are living in him. And on a few occasions, the Scripture refers to those who are not bearing fruit and speaks of those peoples as being in rebellion, or those people being in sin.

Vine tending and gardening, the work of a viticulturalist, in the Middle East, is something that has continued to this very day. Isaiah 5:1-7, talks about some of the work that a viticulturalist does. He plows ground, he plants seed, he waters, he waits patiently for crops to begin. As they begin to grow he prunes dead and dying vines and branches, as fruit begins to be born he harvests that fruit and continues to tend and nurture to his crops. One of the things that the Old Testament speaks of is a watching place where animals or thieves would come to rob, and they would set up sort of a tower where you could watch and keep protection over one's flock. All of this is imagery that's used throughout the Bible to describe our relationship with God. Jesus is building on this very common theme throughout the Old Testament in the 15th Chapter of John's Gospel.

And in the New Testament, this language is used frequently, as well. Again, in your notes it says throughout the Scripture that fruitfulness can refer to a number of things. It's generally just a description of overall Christian and Christ-like character. Loving people, repenting of sin, serving in ministry, giving money to God's work, doing the things that demonstrate our love for God and our love for our neighbor are demonstrations of fruitfulness. And so, that really is the backdrop for what we find ourselves in today. And so, in John 15, Jesus begins his instruction shortly before his death. He says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." And so, Jesus begins this analogy, basically, laying out the characters for this metaphor he's going to use. The first is that God is the gardener. He is the viticulturalist. He oversees his garden. He does the tending, the pruning, the planting, the growing, and the harvesting.

In addition to that, Jesus tells us that, "He is the vine," that out of him comes branches and his children, his people, are those branches. That we connected to Christ, can bear fruit and be fruitful and God tends to us, and he connects us to Christ, so that we can live and bear fruit and be fruitful. That's the backdrop. Then, we hit Verse 2 and everything goes sideways – one of the most debated sections in all the New Testament. I'll give you my take on it, which, of course, is God's take. I'll give that to you in just a moment. We got to do a little theology, which is – isn't that wonderful? Don't you love doing a little theology? "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit," and if you go down in Verse 6, it tells you what he does with those branches, "He throws them into the fire to be burned." That should scare you a little bit; because what it appears like, is Jesus is saying God the Father, has certain amount of work that he wants done from you. If you don't do that and he gets sick of you, he's going to cut you off from salvation, throw you into the fires of hell, and burn you up.

That's troubling, to say the very least. The question is what in the world is Jesus talking about, because this seems to run antithetical and counter to everything else that we find in the teaching of the Scriptures. Even everything else that we found in John's Gospel, Jesus tells us that he comes to give us eternal life. It seems like if you cut off and thrown into hell, that's not very eternal. That's definitely against what Christ has taught. In John, Chapter 10, Verses 28 and 29, he gives this picture of salvation, being that we are in the hands of God who is our Father, that God is stronger than everyone, and no one can snatch us from his hand, and that we rest secure, and our salvation is confidently placed in the hands of God our Father, and there is nothing to trouble us, because God could never lose one of his children.

This is a beautiful metaphor, I love the fact that Jesus uses it, and it really distinguishes between two varying theologies that really are counter, and very much are different. I used to believe that they were not as antithetical as they really are, and I've come to believe that they are indeed, very antithetical. Anyone know the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism. Not – you know, of course you don't. Nobody knows what that is, but I'll give you a simple metaphor and a picture. There are two basic views of God and how God works with us; one is, I would say more of a human and man-centered view, whereby we seek for God, we look for God, we find God, we choose God, we embrace God, we do good works for God, so God loves us, because we have earned his favor.

There is another view that says, "No, we do not seek God, that God seeks us. That we do not find God, but God finds us. We do not choose God, but God chooses us, and we do not hold onto God, but God holds onto us." I would say that is the biblical view, this is not. That's something else. And Jesus' picture is that our salvation is secure, not because we are little children, like newborn babies holding on to the neck of our father, and if at any moment we cease doing enough good works we fall to the ground and die. The picture that Jesus gives is that God is our Father and like a newborn child, he holds us and we are secure, because we have a loving father who is very strong and never drops his children on their head. That's a good dad. So, the question is then, Jesus seems to be stating here, if you don't do enough work you're gonna get cast into hell. And have you've ever been told that? "You're not doing enough. God's gonna be done with you and throw you into the fires of hell." That is just the most Godless teaching I have ever heard.

I believed that until I became a Christian. I was – I consider myself to be a very good person, I thought if you do good things and you're a good person, then you get to go to heaven. So, I thought I was a great guy; I never drank, I never smoked, I never did drugs. Everyone I beat up had it coming. You know, I was a great guy and had a great resume; most likely to succeed, man of the year, four-year letterman, intelligent, good looking. All of that. Humble – very humble, and I was so proud of my humility. You know, I just was so humble. And so then, someone asked me this great question in College, they said, "Well, how good do you have to be to go heaven?" I thought, "Well, that's a good question," so I started reading the Bible – one of the reasons was to answer that question. And Jesus said something that was very troubling, he said, "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." And I thought, "Well, I mean that's – I'm not that good – I'm not that good," and I don't know anybody that's – there's never been anybody that's that good.

So, it really confused me, because I thought, "Well, if good people who do good things get to go to heaven, that's really not the standard that God has set. God has set the standard of perfection, and I'm not perfect." And then, I started reading the Bible and it started talking about pride, and individualism, and autonomy, and self-sufficiency, and I thought, "I'm a wicked man." Even the fact that I think that I'm good, proves beyond a shadow

of doubt, that I am, as Scripture says; blind, dumb, deaf, and dead, and that I don't seek God and that I'm not righteous. And it led to this real crisis for me, realizing I'm not a great guy. In fact, I'm an enemy of God, Paul says. So, I realized I can't earn God's love. I can't earn God's favor. I can't do enough good works to please God. So, the question is, what is Jesus talking about here? Anyone here ever have a season in their life where they were not producing good fruit, right. And the issue is how did you come back to the place where you began producing good fruit; love, and joy, and peace, and patience, and goodness, and kindness, and gentleness, and self – how did you get back to that place?

Well, what happened was, the Lord in his kindness, he lifted you up. He raised you up out of the dirt that you were in; he raised you up out of the place that you found yourself. He gave you grace so that you could start to grow and mature and strengthen and bear good fruit. I believe, in light of context, in light of the heart of God, in light of all of the rest of the teachings of scripture, that nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. That Jesus is instructing us here, a word of caution, but a word of comfort. He goes on to say, then, "While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Some of you may have been in this place in your life where you say, "Well, I love God and I'm bearing fruit. I'm doing what I can to serve the Lord, to participate in his Kingdom, to help people, to show the love of Christ, yet I keep undergoing trial. I keep undergoing strife. I keep getting knocked down. Things do not go well. Why is the Lord doing that? Does he hate me? Does he not love me? Has he abandoned me? Is he not for me? And Jesus' word is no, he's pruning you. That there are certain things in your character, or maybe certain things in your understanding of him, or certain practices or habitual conduct, or whatever it might be; attitudes, thoughts, behaviors, that are just wasting energy, wasting time. They're not efficiently, and effectively, and fruitfully using what God has given you, and so God takes those parts of your character, takes those dead branches off of you, and he prunes them away. He cuts them.

For you, what – you tell me, pruning. What does that look like? What does it mean that God prunes us? What is that? How does God prune us? What things does he use in life to prune us?

Response: Pain.

Pain. Sometimes we get our hearts broken, or sometimes we go through a physical injury, or sometimes terrible happens, and through that we get pruned, and it is unpleasant, for a season, to be pruned. Scripture in Hebrews and Proverbs says that God disciplines the children that he loves, and for a season, that discipline is painful. Sometimes, God's discipline comes to us, or sometimes life's circumstances come to us that are painful, but what we find is, after it's all said and done, that God is gracious and God has worked it out for good, because we do love him. And he has pruned certain things out of our character that now make us more fruitful. What else?

Response: Failure.

Failure. Sometimes failure is a definite pruning process. That we commit ourselves to something, we throw ourselves into it, and it fails, and we're humbled and we wonder what in the world is going on? Well, God is using this as an opportunity to prune some things out of us, to grow us. And it's not that we have been without fruit. We – Jesus says this is for people who have been fruitful, and could be more fruitful with a little pruning. And what you find, is after you go through failure, or struggle, or trial, or pain, or difficulty, or discipline. When it's all said and done, you're more fruitful. You're birthing life out of you that looks more like the Lord Jesus, as a result of what you have gone through.

That's why when someone loves God; you'll find them to go through a terrible circumstance, and at the end, they will say, "I wouldn't change a thing. I'm glad that I went through that. It is the most important and beautiful thing that has ever happened to me in my whole life." They say, "I would have never chosen that, but what it gave me as a subsequent result of the pruning, was worth it." That's Jesus' words to us. He goes on, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you," – Verse 4 – "Remain in me." Some of your translations will say, "Abide in me, and I will remain or abide in you." That's the whole crux of what we are discussing this morning. "No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much tremendous fruit. Apart from me, however, you can do nothing."

Jesus summarizes our life in this way. "You want to bear fruit, abide in me and I'll abide in you. And as a result of that, you'll bear much fruit. But apart from me, you can do nothing. Nothing that is fruitful." The whole theme of what Jesus is getting at today is abiding in him. That out of abiding in him comes all of these other things. But let me ask you this, for you, what does that look like? What does that mean? A.W. Tozer says, rightly, I believe, that John is really the mystic of the New Testament. He uses this language, "Abide in Christ, as he abides in you." Sort of this concept that you need to ponder, and you need to consider and think about, and let your mind spend some time steeping on it. But for you, when you think of abiding in Christ, what does that mean? What comes to mind? How does that look? What is that?

Response: Confession.

Part of it could be confession. That as we sin, we are sort of rebelling against God, and walking from him, and in confessing our sin and repenting, we're coming back into right relationship with him, and abiding. Absolutely.

Response: Conforming to his image.

So, conforming to his image, which means, in those areas that the Scriptures and God, through his Spirit, is convicting us that there needs to be change, that we need to discipline ourselves, as Paul says, "For the purposes of Godliness." As we yield ourselves to that, we are abiding in Christ. We're remaining under his yoke. What else?

Response: A long obedience in a same direction.

Yeah, Eugene Peterson's got a great book on this. He calls it, A Long Obedience in a Same Direction. That fruitfulness often comes from not just doing things once or twice, but selecting a course of action throughout our lives that God has chosen us toward, and continuing, continuing – keeping with it. Sometimes, we do something for 15 minutes, it hasn't born fruit, and we say, "Well. What else?" And our world is filled with tricks, and gimmicks, and gadgets, and magical prayers, and super beings, and all these kinds of things that you can get to have instantaneous fruit, and sometimes, fruit takes awhile.

For a viticulturalist, according to Isaiah 5:1-7, it takes a little time to plow, to plant, to water, to wait for fruit. It might two, three, or four years for a gardener before they actually have a harvest. And so, it might take you awhile of abiding in Christ in the same direction, continuing in the things he's called you to before the fruit really begins to start. Now, I learned this planting this church. I mean it has been just sticking with what God has called us to, and fruit begins to come and then the harvest increases every year. But, I tell you, man, the first few weeks out of the box, you're like, "I don't know if we're gonna ever bear any fruit?" But we're gonna stick with it until we do, because God has called us to it. Let's abide in Christ, and fruit will come. And by God's grace, fruit does come. But, sometimes you got to stick with it for a few years before you see anything.

Anyone who's been married or has children knows exactly how this works. You get married, and you think, "Oh, we're just gonna be fruitful. We're just gonna love each other. It's gonna – you know, Garden of Eden's gonna be right here at our address." You say, "No. No." But, what we need to do is we need to abide in Christ, and continue in the things that he's given us, and then fruitfulness will begin to increase for sure. What else? What does this look like for you?

Response: Does it involve like pretty regularly like actually talking with him?

Jesus is gonna get into this in a minute. Part of it definitely involves prayer. Prayer, whereby we speak to God, and prayer, whereby we listen to God. I mean, if you can imagine, friendships, marriages, any other covenantal sort of relationship. If there was no dialog, there wouldn't be much of a relationship. But, relationships, and intimacy, and trust, and oneness is built through conversation and life journey and dialog, and so prayer is most certainly a part of that. How about silence and solitude? You need to abide in Christ in the midst of your daily routine, but sometimes you need to Sabbath. You need to fast from, you know, your cell phone, and your email, and your computer, and all of your friends, and all of your busy life. And just get some time to be quiet and to be with the Lord. Just to pray and to listen.

One of my favorite things – I love to mediate. Not on the Eastern concept where you empty your mind and become one with nothing, but in the Biblical concept – that doesn't seem like a real goal. Someday I'm gonna get to nothing, and boy when I'm there, that's gonna be the – congratulations. No, the Biblical concept of meditation is that you take a word or a phrase or a concept, or a verse from Scripture, and you ponder that and you think about that, and you chew on that, and you wrestle on that. You take something like, "What does it mean to abide in Christ," and just think about that for a couple weeks or a couple months, or a couple years, and you keep praying and thinking about that, so that it begins to steep in your soul, and God begins to instruct you through his word. I believe that is definitely part of abiding in Christ. He talks in here about his words, the words that he's spoken to us. Those words that make us clean. Part of that abiding, I believe, I definitely meditating on those words.

And so, I believe there's so much here, I just would commission you to spend the rest of your life prayerfully meditating on what does it mean for me to abide in Christ? For me to be in Jesus, or for Jesus to be in me, as he says, that we have this relationship of loving, unity, and oneness, that he has provided through his grace for me. How does that look? And am I abiding in Christ, or am I resisting the things that he's given me? Am I refusing to obey him? Am I running away from his discipline? Am I rejecting the pruning that he's bringing, or am I really abiding? And then he begins to talk about what happens as we abide in him. What this births. First, however, he tells us what happens if we do not. In Verse 6, he refers to unbelievers, people who do not know God. He says, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned." In Ezekiel 15, we find in the Old Testament, that speaking about these vine braches that the wood is so soft and it is so fragile, that it is good for nothing other than bearing fruit. If it is not fruit bearing, then those branches are worthless. You can't build anything with them. And so, they are just bundled up and thrown into the fire to be burned.

And Jesus is basically saying that, sadly enough, that is the way some people are. Some people do not know God in Christ. They do not love God. They do not abide in him. They are unbelievers, and subsequently, they are not profitable to Gods work, and they will meet their fate. It should be a concern for you. You need to look at your life and say, "If I am not bearing fruit, why is that? Is that because I am an unbeliever that is not connected to Christ? Or is that because I am not abiding in Christ, and I need his grace to lift me up so I can start to grow and bear fruit. Jesus opposes that in Verse 7. He says, "If anyone – excuse me – if you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you." What first happens when you abide in Christ is that you begin to pray. Any of you find that the more you abide in Christ the more you talk to him. You just do. If any of you have ever struggled with prayer, what you are not struggling with is prayer. You're struggling with abiding. I find that the more I love my wife, the more I speak with her about everything that I'm thinking and doing, because I view all of my life as connected with hers, and as Genesis says, we're one.

The same thing happens with God. The more that you're abiding in Christ and that unity is developing, and that relationship is cultivated and nurtured, the more you speak to God. It just happens. You may not even be consciously aware of it. Like, "Okay, I need to set a prayer time. I need to pray every day from da-da –." You'll be at that place where you start to, as scripture says, "Pray without ceasing." In the midst of your day, you're just talking to God. You're bringing a request before him, or people come to mind and you're interceding for them, or you've sinned and you feel convicted, and so you bring that before the Lord. Or God lays something on your heart, and you bring it before him, you're – you know, letting your request be known to him. As he provides, you're thanking him.

As grace comes into your life, just pause to give gratitude. Recognize that, that was God. As James says, "That every good and perfect gift comes from God." As you start to see the good things in your life you say, "Thank you, Lord. Thank you. I appreciate that. That was great. Thank you." Jesus says as you abide in me, here's what's going to happen. You're going to pray, and you're going to pray to the Father, and what will the Father do? He'll answer those prayers. He'll answer those prayers that you ask. But then, Jesus lays down a condition as to our request. "This is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves, proving yourselves, demonstrating yourselves to be my disciples." Jesus says that if we abide in him, we're gonna talk to him all the time. It'll be a natural course of conversation. And that God will answer those prayers, providing one condition is met, and that is what? Those prayers need to be for what purpose? God's glory – God's glory. That as we abide in Christ, we will pray more and got will answer those prayers, providing they are for his glory.

What that means is simply this; we exist for God's glory. God does not exist for our own. God does not exist so that we will have good self-esteem and be successful, actualize our potential, fulfill our destiny, be somebody. We exist so that God would get glory. That's why we exist. And I will challenge you in this. If at any point, we are not seeking God's glory, that is a good indication that we are not abiding in Christ. As we become self-seeking, self-serving, as we become self-interested, we need to continually pray as we abide in Christ, that God would give us that John the Baptist. Where decreased, God increased, and that is good. And I know this runs antithetical to everything you've ever been taught. You've been taught this teaching from a behavior psychologist named Maslow, which says that, "Your greatest need is to actualize your potential to be somebody, to seek your glory, and to obtain your glory." It has been hardwired in you from Adam, it has been nurtured in you since you were a little child, and every day you are fed heaping spoonfuls of self-esteem, so that if you just thought you were more glorious, you would be more glorious. ~~W~~Jesus says, "No, that's not why we're here. We're here for God's glory. We're here so that God might be honored. God might be praised. God might be loved. God might be adored. God might be respected." And something in us cries out, "Well, what about me? What do I get from all of this?" Do you know what we get? We get joy – we get absolute joy. That's exactly where Jesus is going to go next. Jonathan Edwards, my favorite – one of my favorite theologians, says it well. He says, "When God is most glorified, God's people are most happy." Have you ever met anyone that got all of their own glory and was miserable? Powerful, educated, rich, successful, actualized, all potential met, and they sit there like Solomon and just say, "Meaningless – meaningless – meaningless. I'm grasping the wind with two hands. I have no joy. This was a waste of time." But you find someone who glorifies God, and they see God lifted up and highly exalted, and people drawn to him as Jesus promised would happen – those people are happy. They have joy. They really love their life. Not because it's great, they may be getting pruned all the time, so they can bear more fruit. Not because their glory is manifest and everybody adores them – they may be no one, but they see God getting his glory and that gives them joy, because that is the purpose they were created for.

Like, Paul says, "To God be the glory both now and forever. Amen." That's his little worship song that he sings in Romans. "To God be the glory," and when God gets his glory, I promise you, you will be happy. If you look back, those times in your life when you have been the most joyous, those are the times when God was most glorified. Now, you know, this is the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, for the right reason, this feels like I was created for this. I like this. This is beautiful. This is enjoyable. And that's exactly where the Lord Jesus goes in Verse 9. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Jesus says, "Abide in me, so you can bear fruit, you'll only bear fruit if you pray for it, and your prayers are only gonna get answered if you do it for God's glory." But, I'll tell you what, if you know that God loves you and you abide in that love, you will have so much joy, as you bear fruit and see him be glorified, you will have joy. I love the words that Jesus uses – not just joy, but joy that is complete. It's a full joy. It's an abiding, lasting joy.

And so, I will tell you very simply. If you struggle with bearing fruit, if you struggle with having joy, if you struggle with loving and being loved, if you struggle with prayer, what do you really struggle with? Abiding in Christ. All of those other things are symptoms of a far greater issue. So, the issue is not, "Well, how do I pray more," wrong question. "How do I do more," wrong question. "How do I love more," wrong question. The question is, "Where am I not abiding in Christ, because if I were rightly connected to that vine, I would naturally bear that kind of fruit. It would just happen – I would love people, unconsciously. I would do things that Christ would have me do, unconsciously. I would talk to God and I probably wouldn't even be consciously aware that I was always talking to him and it was prayer time. I would just be talking to God. And I would have joy – not that I'm working to have it, but it would just be with me, as a friend." Do you understand the difference?

So much of our life is spent diagnosing symptoms. And what Jesus does for us here, is he summarizes the whole function of their life in Christ is abiding, and then out of that it comes. So, he gives us a command, a command that'll give us joy and God glory. "My command is this: Love each other," well how? "As I have loved you," love each other. You want to bear fruit, you want to glorify God, you want to have joy – love people. Love people as God has loved. He demonstrates this love, "Greater love has no one than this, he lay down his life for his friend." How do you know if your love and your sacrifice you're giving, you're emptying yourself, you're pouring into another, so that they might be blessed instead of you. That's exactly what the Lord Jesus has done. Jesus demonstrates his full love for us in this, Paul says, "We were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus laid down his life for us, Jesus says that, "If we love, we will lay down our lives for our friends." What that tells me is that Jesus has laid down his life, because he is our friend. That's exactly where he goes.

He says, "You are my friends," I think we could spend the rest of our lives just pondering that, "You are my friends." It's just sort of amazes me. What Jesus doesn't say, "You're my buddy," you know. It's not like Jesus is just one of the guys, hanging out, he's a peer, he's good with everything, but he's our friend. And for me, as a new Christian, I had a very easy time understanding God is King, Lord, Ruler, Father, Boss, no problem. Friend? That was a weird one for me – friend – because I started thinking about it, I thought, "Well, I don't," well first of all, one of the hard things for me is that I think that friendship with Jesus has been completely manipulated to where Jesus' glory and his Holiness and his honor has been greatly diminished. Jesus just becomes one of the guys and he hangs with us. God is my co-pilot. Like I drive and he fiddles with the radio. I don't know what that is, you know. I have a very high view of God, and I don't want to make God into my little buddy, like the Buddy Christ in Dogma, you know. I don't want

that, because I believe that is a dishonoring of God.

But, Jesus does say that he is our friend. And if you start thinking about it, how many friends do you really have? I have a lot of acquaintances and out of the sea of humanity; I pick a few people to be my friend – very few people to be my friend. And I love them and I covenant with them and I walk with them, and I invest in them in a way that is particular to them – my dearest friend is my wife. I enjoy my wife. I love my wife. Primarily because she puts up with me, and for that I am eternally grateful. She is tremendous. She is the only person I can spend 24 consecutive hours with without killing. And so, I know that she is my best friend. I just spent a whole month on vacation with my wife and my kids, all day, every day, and I liked it. No one else could I do that with, other than the Lord Jesus. Everyone else, I would end up preaching their funeral. But, I enjoy my wife, and I think that is the key to friendship, is you are friends with what kind of people? People you enjoy – people that you really enjoy. Working relationships are predicated upon task, sort of, judicial relationships are predicated upon power, “Oh, you’re the cop, I’ll do what you tell me to do,” “You’re the Judge; I have to obey the law.”

Friendships, though, are predicated upon enjoying and one of the most liberating things that I have learned in all my Christian life is that I very simply need God – I need God. And not only do I need God, I enjoy God. And that enjoyment of God and that need for God is not a sin or a weakness. I was created that way. I was created to need God, and I was created in such a way that I should enjoy God. That’s where joy comes out of – joy comes out of enjoying. I enjoy God, I really – I love God. I appreciate God, but I enjoy God. And as a result of enjoying him, obeying him, loving him, serving – it becomes very easy, why, because he has treated me as a friend. I don’t know why God would select me as a friend. I have no idea. That is a mind bender. I have no idea. I can see where I would want God to my friend, that makes perfect sense, but for God to choose me as his friend, that makes no sense to me at all. That is purely a grace-based friendship.

But, the fact that God wants to be my friend – I’ll take it. If God wants to be my friend, I’m there. Praise be to God, I’ll take that deal every day. And I love the fact that he says, “You are my friends.” How much easier does it become to abide in Christ, to talk with him, to serve him, to journey with him, to love him, if you enjoy him, and you know that he has extended a hand of friendship to you. God has made it very easy for us to abide in him, “You are my friends if you do what I command.” Friendship with Jesus – and this is, I guess, the part of friendship with Jesus that gets lost. Jesus says, “You are my friends if you obey what I command.” What that does not mean is if you obey me, then you’ll be my friend. What it does mean is if you are my friend, that’ll be demonstrated with obedience. Jesus says that earlier, “If you love me, then you’ll obey my commands.”

Jesus says, “Don’t do whatever you want and sin like crazy and blasphemy my name, and then pretend like we’re buddies. If you were really my friend, you’d respect me, you’d trust me, you’d follow me, you’d abide in me, you’d do the things that I’ve told you to do.” So, again, if you struggle with obedience, you don’t just struggle with obedience, you struggle with abiding in Christ. “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends,” – unbelievable – “For everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you.” Jesus is our friend, and as our friend, he has taught us – he has taught us all the things that God the Father has taught him. It’s just sort of overwhelming isn’t it? And when you start to think about it – I first read this and I thought, “Why in the world do I get this deal?” I mean, I get my sins forgiven in Christ. I get to be a friend of God. I get to bear fruit that will last, and not just fruit that will last, but much fruit. I get to be loved by God, and love God, and love others. I get to talk to God and have God answers my prayers. I get to glorify God. You say, “Why in the world do I have that privilege? Why is this affection lavished on me?”

And Jesus answers that question in the next verse, with one of the most debated theological topics in all of the Bible, only debated for one reason – we are self-deceived. When we go to answer that question, we want to say, “Well, Jesus loves me and he picks me, because I have a lot of potential. I could be a real help to him.” I remember when I was new Christian, people would say, “Oh, pray for this rock star, and pray for that athlete,” “Why?” “Because they could really do big things for God.” Like God couldn’t change the world with a janitor, you know. Like God needs really important, special, magnificent, wonderful people, no. God just needs people who will abide – that’s all he needs. If they happen to be successful, or if they happen to be unsuccessful, abiding is really the issue and not their resume.

So, we can’t say, “Jesus chose me for this, because I’m a good person, or I loved him, or I sought him, or I found him, or I picked him, or I’m helpful to him, or I can do so much, I have so much potential he just had to have me on his team.” No. Jesus tells us in the next verse exactly how we come to this place of lavish kindness that God has bestowed upon us. “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” I love that – I love that. I can’t claim anything other than the fact that God has selected me as a recipient of his love and grace. Why? For his glory – that’s all. There is no vestige of goodness in me to claim, “I deserved it. I earned it. I had it coming.” Jesus says, “You didn’t choose me, you didn’t choose this life.” How many of you, before you were Christian knew that you would get joy, that you would get love. That you would get – how many of you knew even what you were getting into? I had no concept of what I was getting into. I didn’t choose any of this. I didn’t choose God. I didn’t choose my career. I didn’t choose my wife.

You know what, God has been nice to me – that’s it – and I’m grateful. I thank him, I praise him, I don’t even pretend to understand, but I’m happy in his love. Jesus says, “You didn’t choose me,” you sometimes hear that from people when they tell their testament. “Yeah, you know, when I chose Christ, and then I got a good job and a good wife and good kids and my life’s borne a lot of fruit,” and you’re going, “No you didn’t, God chose you and you were connected to the vine and through you he bore much fruit. Glory be to God.” “You didn’t choose me, I chose you,” for what purpose? “Well, I appointed you to go and bear fruit. To get out there and extend my loving influence and to bear what kind of fruit, fruit that will last, fruit that will endure.” Not simply 15 or 20 minutes of real, great spiritual fervor, but a lifetime of fruitfulness, and not only that multiple generations of fruitfulness, lineage, and legacy. We are here, because God’s people, for a few thousand years, have been bearing fruit, much fruit, and fruit that has lasted. And we are a part of that family of God – privileged to be chosen – appointed by God, sent out into work, and school, and home, and wherever we might be, to bear lots of fruit, and fruit that will continue to last.

Jesus closes, then, with a few words, "Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." As we're going, as we're abiding as we're doing, then we begin to pray and God answers. "He will give you whatever you ask in my name," it's a nice way of saying according to his will, "And this is my command: Love one another – love each other." But, Jesus tells us this, "Pray – pray to the Father and he will answer." So, I ask you this, Mars Hill, what should we be praying for?

Response: God's will.

For God's will? Jesus prayed for it. What things are leaping out of John 15 at you; words, phrases, concept, that you say, "I need to be praying that the Father would give that," and when we pray, we need to pray in this way. We pray that these things would glorify God and make us happy. If you want to know what to pray for, pray for things that glorify God and gives joy to God's people. What are those things that are leaping out – that are sticking in your mind out of John 15 that we desperately need to be praying for?

Response: Fruitfulness.

Fruitfulness, absolutely.

Response: Obedience.

Obedience – that we would abide in him and that we would demonstrate our love for him by doing what he tells us to do.

Response: I suppose, like lacking things that we need to have in our heads and our hearts, maybe, that will let us abide in him.

If there are sin, or heresy, or error in us, we need to bringing that before God, and in our prayers confessing that, and requesting that he cleanse us, change us, renew us. What should we be praying for?

Response: Love each other.

If we would just love each other, then we would be a people known by love. Jesus says, "That if we do that, everyone will know that we are his disciples." Just that we love each other. What else? What should we be asking the Father for? What would give him glory and make us happy?

Response: Friends.

Absolutely.

Response: Do unto others as I have done unto you.

Jesus says he's our friend. He has built us for friendship. We should pray. That God would make us the kind of people that are good friends and extending hands of love and friendship to others, absolutely.

Response: Salvation to others.

That people would come to know Christ and his love. I mean, how fun is it to see someone you know go from death to life. How much joy is there in that, and what kind of fruit comes out of that, and how long does that fruit last? I came to Christ at age 19. I can still remember going from death to life. I tell you, there's nothing funner than seeing somebody not know God, have their eyes open, their ears open, they're hearts open, receive God's grace, and become a new creation in Christ. That glorifies God and that makes us all tremendously happy. That is just joyous.

I have had the privilege in this church of seeing. I know of at least – I could probably do a list off the top of my head – a hundred people that have come to Christ in the last five years. And just the transition, the joy, and the love, and the fruitfulness that comes to those people as a result of being connected to Christ, the vine. It is joyous; it is wonderful to see. We're in the least church city in the United States of America. We need to pray that we would not be that way for much longer. What else should we be praying for?

Response: Opportunities.

For what?

Response: For service.

Opportunities for service. Places where we could go to bear fruit. And it's amazing to me, because if we are all honest, myself included, we probably know in our hearts, that we really don't pray about these things very much. And the issue is, "Well, why aren't we?" Well, I don't know if I should just give you a big guilty conscious and a lot of works, or I should just tell you, "Maybe there's a problem with our abiding." It seems to me, if we were abiding in Christ and Christ was abiding in us, joy would come out. Love would come out. Good works would come out. Fruit would come out. The salvation of others would come out. Life would explode out of the hearts of the children of God, where God has placed his spirit and his grace.

Will you promise and covenant with me that you'll be praying for these things? We need to abide in Christ and we need to be requesting of the Father these specific things that would give him glory and give us joy. And then as God answers those prayers, and that fruit continues, we should have joy. It should be beautiful and glorious for us to see. I mean, this has been my whole life, is just God's grace. I remember sitting around a table having a cup of coffee, talking about what it would be like if God started to bear some fruit in Seattle. That was five years ago, right around this time of year, you know. And now, on a good Sunday, we see 700 people here, and we're seeing, you know, 54 churches planted around the world this year. And we're

seeing all of this fruit; God gives us a building, God multiplies – even in the last few months, every single week I've had the privilege of seeing at least one person come to know the Lord Jesus.

You say, "Okay, maybe it's that long obedience in the same direction." Maybe the Lord has been bearing fruit and he's been good. What we want to see is much fruit and fruit that lasts," so, that he would have tremendous glory, we would have tremendous joy – that's what we want to see. We've had the privilege of seeing – I've gotten to do pre-marital counseling for a hundred couples. You know, we see all these babies getting born in Psalms, and children were referred to as fruit, as a wife is referred to as a fruitful vine. Just there is life. There is health. God is alive. God is working. God is gracious. God is present. God is wonderful, and God is bearing fruit and we just need to continue to besiege the Father to teach us to abide, to receive his love, to taste his joy, to do his works, to obey his commands, so that there'd be a lot of fruit that would be here until he comes back for us.

We believe that in Scripture, God is always initiated with us and he calls us to respond, as you respond, that's our worship. Today we respond through singing, partaking of communion, which is remembering Jesus' body and blood shed for us, to deliver us from our enemies of Satan, sin, and death. And to give us, as John is describing here, eternal life – life that is full – joy that is complete. So, we celebrate and remember the Lord Jesus died for our sins, risen from death, coming again for his bride. We collect an offering in Romans 15 – money for ministry is referred to, interestingly enough, as fruit. It is part of our fruitfulness, and money you put in the baskets will go to the church planters. I would encourage you, though, please do not take this as a work – guilt – these are the things we have to do. I want you to focus on abiding in Christ and enjoying him, receiving his love, and then out of that will come all that God has intended for a fruitful life – love and joy.

So, Lord God, I thank you so much for Jesus' words to us. I thank you Lord God that Jesus was kind enough to, actually, instruct his children. I thank you that, Lord God, you have written down Jesus' instruction in your Word, and that you have preserved it and handed it to us so that we might study it. Lord God, for some of us that are fruitful and undergoing pruning, we pray for patients, and perseverance, and joy. That as you reform our character and change us, that we would, in the midst of that, have love and joy for you and see it as profitable to you and to us. Lord God, for those of us who are in Christ, and not bearing any fruit, or very little fruit, I pray Lord God for you kindness and grace to lift them up, to get them off of the dirt, and to pick them up so that they might begin to become healthy, and to press forward, and to bear much and abiding fruit.

Lord God, for those whom are here, that are not in Christ, I pray Lord Jesus, that they would not be cast into the fire – seen as worthless. But that this morning, you would love them toward yourself, that you would embrace them, and hold them, and forgive them for their sins, and give them love and joy and peace and life. Lord god, I thank you for the promises that Jesus gives us here. We pray that you would give us fruit – much fruit – fruit that would last. That you would teach us to pray, and that our prayers would glorify you and give us joy as they are answered. We pray that we would gladly receive your love and share it with each other.

We thank you, Lord God, that you are our friend, and that you have called us into friendship with each other. We thank you that Jesus continues to make you known. And Lord God, we ask for the transformation of our souls and our lives and our church and our city and our world, that everyone might taste and see that you, indeed, are good. We love you and we thank you and we come in joy. Amen.