

“The Gift of the Spirit” John 14:15-31 Shane Hatfield 2/28/21

Alright, we’re going to continue our study of John this evening, and we’re going to start in John 15. So, if you have a Bible open it up to John 15 and we’re going to start in verse 1. Our sermon series is called “A Glorious Farewell” and tonight we’re going to talk about spiritual intimacy. If you’re a young listener tonight, let me give you three things to listen for. First question, who is the true vine? Second question, what does it mean to abide? And third question, what is one fruit of abiding?

We’ve been studying Jesus’ farewell words to His disciples. We looked at John 14 and now we’re going to look at John 15 and we’re going to see a shift. John 14 takes place in the upper room with His disciples; John 15 probably takes place outside of there when they’re walking together to the garden of Gethsemane, either as they walk by the temple and they see a vine that represents Israel over the temple, or when they walk by a literal vine. Jesus may have used one of those as a teaching moment for His disciples. In John 14, Jesus talked primarily about His going away and then His coming in the Holy Spirit or coming at the last day. In John 15, Jesus is going to talk about how we can abide in Him while He’s gone. So, we’re going to read this glorious passage together and I hope that this will help us develop spiritual intimacy with Jesus and each other while Jesus is gone. So, we’re going to start reading John 15:1; this is the ESV.

“¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

This is God’s word, let’s give our full attention to it.

Whenever Shari and I, that’s my wife, decided to accept the job at Ethos, there was a lot of uncertainty around when we would sell our house in Stillwater and then buy a house and move to Tulsa. So, Shari’s parents graciously offered to let us live with them in the meantime, after we had sold our house in Stillwater, before we move to Tulsa. So, about a month ago, we moved in with Shari’s parents. Now keep in mind, I have known Shari’s parents for about fifteen or sixteen years, and I thought I knew them really well. You think you know somebody really well, until you move in with them, and then you learn everything about them. I can tell you the general outline of every day of Greg and Sharon Hansen’s life, in general. Now that’s a little exaggeration, preacher exaggeration. They gave me permission to share this with you. But every morning, Greg wakes up at about 6 in the morning, he goes in and he makes his coffee and he prepares two pieces of toast with peanut butter on them, and then he sits and drinks his coffee and reads His Bible and eats his peanut butter toast. Sharon comes out later and grabs her coffee and then goes back to bed, or goes back to her room, to get herself ready for the day. They spend

the morning reading, talking, doing chores around the house, walking with friends, just doing the general tasks around the house. In the afternoon, they may go out and play with their grandchildren, then they go for another walk, read some more, talk with their friends, maybe take a nap. Around 4 o'clock or so, Sharon will start cooking dinner. Dinner is usually on the table by 5:30, they'll eat from 5:30-6. Around 6 they clear the table because Wheel of Fortune comes on at 6:30 and you've got to be ready for Wheel of Fortune. So, they make a fire, watch Wheel of Fortune. When that's over, it's time for Scrabble or college basketball, you know, whatever, if there's a good game on television, they'll do that and finish the night off with a bowl of icecream and a cookie and then head back to bed around 8:30 or 9 for bedtime.

Now, that is really getting to know somebody. I thought I really knew them, until I lived with them. And now because I live with them, I've been able to enter into the rhythms and routines of their life and I've experienced greater and greater intimacy with them. When Jesus invites us to abide with Him, He's inviting us to live with Him and to enter into the routines and rhythms of His life the way that we have entered into the rhythms and routines of Greg and Sharon's life. And what I want you to see tonight as we look at John 15 is that Jesus invites us to live with Him and grow in intimacy with Him and because He is the true life, because He is the source of true life, as we live with Him and He lives with us, we get to enter into His joy and His love and His peace and that changes us and that furthers His mission. So, He invites us to live with Him, experience Him and then experience His love, joy and peace and I think this is important to us, whether tonight is your first night in church or you've spent your entire life in church. I think we've all wondered, "How can I grow in intimacy with God?" Maybe you're a non-Christian in here and you've just thought, "I don't know if God exists, maybe He does, maybe He doesn't, I don't know. But if He does exist, how would I even know Him? And what would it even be like to spend time with Him?" Well, tonight will hopefully answer those questions. We're going to look at three things: the source of our spiritual intimacy, the invitation of spiritual intimacy, and the fruits of spiritual intimacy.

First, let's look at the source of spiritual intimacy, verses 1-5. Okay, so first Jesus starts off by telling us that He is the true vine. And He says that He's the true vine because there are several passages in the Old Testament that call Israel, God's vine. They are the vine of God. God promised that if they would worship Him, and Him alone, that they would grow and that they would bear fruit for Him and that other nations would come to Him through them. But if you've read the Old Testament, you know they were unfaithful. They worshipped other gods, and because they worshipped other gods, He allowed other nations to take them over so that they would come to repentance, and the whole Old Testament is this cycle of them rebelling against God, God sending other nations to discipline them, them repenting and coming back to God. So, what's happening here is Jesus is coming in and He's saying, 'I'm the true vine. I'm the fulfillment of what Israel was supposed to be. God promised that a true vine was going to come and bless the nations and I'm that true vine. I am the true source of spiritual life for Israel and for everyone else.'

That's the first thing that we see that Jesus says. He's the true vine. And then, He tells us about the Father, and He says, "The Father is the vinedresser." Okay? Now, this is where it gets really challenging, because it says that the Father cuts off branches that do not bear fruit, and He prunes branches that bear fruit to make them more fruitful. This is tough. I've got to do a little bit of theology or this is not going to make any sense, and it's challenging for everybody, but we've got to do a little bit of theology. So, you have two what we call covenant communities in the Bible. In the Old Testament, you have Israel; that's the visible covenant community of God. And

then in the New Testament, you have the church; that's the visible covenant community of God. Those are His people. In both Israel and the church, there's always a mix of true believers with saving faith, and false believers with presumptive faith, okay? In both Israel and in the church, there's always this mix. Inside those visible covenant communities, there's what we call the invisible church, and the invisible church is the church of true believers that have true saving faith in Christ, and over the course of their lives, that saving faith demonstrates itself by faithfulness and fruitfulness. There's also false faith or pretend faith, and over the course of someone's faith, within that covenant community, their unfaithfulness and their unfruitfulness will demonstrate that their faith was not true saving faith. And so, in the end, the true faith, the saving faith will continue to bear fruit for God and grow and abide with Him into the future, but over the course of life, those with false faith will fall away and in the end, they'll be separated from the covenant community.

Now I realize that that is really, really hard to hear, it's very challenging, and for most people when they read this passage and they begin to look at that, it's met with fear and confusion and anger for Christians and non-Christians alike. But let me tell you, I think that Jesus left this teaching for the disciples to comfort them. Remember He's already told them in this passage that He has cleansed them, and later on, we're going to look at it next week, He's going to tell them in this passage that the Father has chosen them. I think He's preparing them for the realities that are to come when He departs. That those with true faith will continue to be faithful to Him and bear fruit for Him and those with false faith are going to fall away, and you see that in the book of Acts. You see thousands of Jews come to faith in Christ, and you see thousands of Jews reject Him, and you see that throughout the history of the church, there are thousands and millions, untold millions, of people that have true faith in Christ and believe in Him, and then you see those that fall away for one reason or another. But I think He's trying to prepare them and comfort them and encourage them. I do think He's also giving a bit of a warning. I think He's trying to warn us against presumptive faith. Against just believing that because you came through the doors and you showed up that you're going to be saved. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:10 to make our calling and election sure, and I think what Jesus is doing is trying to motivate us to make our calling and our election sure in Christ.

Now, you are outside of the church, and you've never been here before, but you're here because somebody invited you or because you had some strange desire to go to church tonight. I just want to encourage you to not let this repulse you. Listen to the rest of the sermon and ask yourself if you actually believed this, what would it be like to live with Jesus? And I think what you'll find is that He is the true source of happiness that you've been looking for. In the big book of AA there's a really pregnant statement in there, it says that "addicts think that if they can just manage life well, then they'll find happiness in this life." And what Jesus is going to say here is that you can't find happiness in this life by managing well; you can only find true happiness from Him. And He's saying for all of us, true spiritual life starts with God, that we in the end choose Him because He chose us. I was talking with a friend recently who was in the church as a youth, and then she left for activities like many do, and then she came back as an adult. And when she came back as an adult, she realized that even when she didn't know God, He knew her, and that He was calling her to Himself. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a great preacher and theologian, describes Christian salvation this way. He says that "there is a sign on the outside of the house of God that says, 'Whoever believes the gospel can come through these doors.' and when you get on the inside there's another sign that says, 'I chose you before the foundation of the world.' God initiates this relationship with us. God is the source of our intimacy, but we must

respond, and that's the second thing that we see in this passage, this invitation to intimacy that we respond to.

Jesus tells us over and over in this passage to abide. Okay, what does that word abide mean? The word abide means to remain or to continue or to stick with. I like what one commentator said, he said that the Greek root word can be both abiding and abode, like a home. And so, he says when Jesus invites us to abide with Him, He's inviting us to come in and live with Him. And He's saying, the only way you can have true life, the only way you can have true fruitfulness in this life, is if I live with you, and you live with me. Now for Christians, there's a tendency once we've been in God's house for so long, that we think we've got to go, or maybe you're new to the faith and you come in for a little bit and you think, 'Okay I've kind of got this. I don't really need this as much now.' What Jesus is saying, is no, no, no, no, no. From non-Christian to elderly Christian, everywhere in between, true spiritual life comes from abiding with Him, from living with Him, and from letting Him produce fruit in your life.

Now, I was listening to a transformation story this week about a guy named Kip. And Kip has one of the worst stories of addiction I've ever heard. I'm going to share more about him next week, but after he began to go through recovery he moved in with his sponsor and he lived with his sponsor for a number of months and he began to grow and change and he called this sponsor one day and he said, "Hey, I think it's time for me to move out. I'm doing better." And his sponsor said, "No! Do not move out now. When people move out now, when they just start to recover, they never come back. They never keep growing. You need to stay. Stay here with me." And so, Kip stayed with him for years until he sobered up and he worked through the process of recovery and his life was transformed. That's the same thing for us in the household of God. We never grow out of leaving home. Children, you will grow out of your parent's home. You will grow out of your parent's home and at some point, you will leave, and they'll be happy for a little bit when you leave, but that's okay, we'll talk about that later. But you never outgrow living with Jesus. You always live with Him, and when you live with Him, He transforms you. He changes you, right? To live with somebody, to be intimate with somebody, is to be changed by them.

I learned this the hard way right after my honeymoon! Shari and I got married, we went on our honeymoon, we came back, and we thought, 'Hey, what are we going to do? It's a Sunday night, we don't have to work until Monday, let's be college students again!' We ordered some pizza and we watched a movie! Well, we get halfway through the movie and Shari falls asleep. Well, in my family when someone falls asleep during the movie, what do you do? You wake them up so they can finish it! So, I woke her up! Guess what happened? She yelled at me. She said, "Why did you wake me up!?" I said, "Well, don't you want to watch the movie? You don't want to finish the movie?" She's like, "No! In my family you don't wake people up during movies, you just let them sleep!" I said, "Okay, I guess the honeymoon's over. I will never wake you up again." To be intimate with her meant that I had to change. If that's true on the human level, how much more true is that with God? To be intimate with God means that we have to change and that He changes us. C.S. Lewis described it like this, he said when we first become a Christian, we think that God wants to change us, and He wants to just freshen us up a little bit by changing the carpet and painting the walls a little bit. And then, all of a sudden, God starts knocking down walls and adding new rooms onto the house and it's painful! And we realize that God doesn't just want to freshen us up a little bit, He wants to turn us into something entirely new. Living with Jesus changes you!

And I think what Jesus is getting at here when He talks about this pruning is the change. See, what God does is He prunes the vine. He changes us and for those with saving faith in Christ, when we go through suffering, the pruning produces more fruit. But for those who don't have true faith, the pruning causes death. They never grow more fruit. A friend of mine once had a vine that was growing in his backyard and it was filled with weeds. And every year, he couldn't separate the weeds from the vine, so he would just cut it all back, and the only way he knew what the vine was, is the vine would grow back and everything else would die. When God prunes us in our life, He is cutting everything back so that the fruit of your life can grow and so that your faith can be displayed. If you're going through suffering right now, cling to Jesus in the midst of your suffering. He wants to produce more and more fruit in your life. He's changing you because He loves you!

So, how do we abide? Well, Jesus gives us some clues here in this passage. He says that we abide with Jesus by talking with Him through prayer. Prayer is just a conversation with a person that you live with. It's a conversation with the Lord of your life who loves you. Calvin says that "prayer is the chief act of faith." To exercise your faith means to talk with God, to share everything that's going on in your heart with Him. So, we pray. We live with Him by feeding on His word. Verse 7 says that "God's word abides with us." We read the Scriptures, we meditate on them, we apply them to our lives. We pray through them! If you don't know how to pray, just pray God's word! The Psalms are a great place to start. Just open up to a Psalm and sit down and read it and make that your prayer and over time as you pray that Psalm, you will begin to engage your heart and your mind and you will be able to communicate with your heavenly Father more and more. So, we abide through prayer, through reading the word; we abide through obedience! We abide by ordering our lives around what's in God's word. Right? We make His word and His will the center of our lives. That's how we live with Him, and that's how He lives with us. There's one more thing we need to abide, and that's community. You cannot abide with Christ by yourself. It only takes place in community, and that's such an important point that my entire sermon next week is going to be on that one point, so come back. So, we abide in Christ through the word, through prayer, through obedience, and the Holy Spirit works in those things to produce fruit in our lives, and that's the last thing that we see in this passage is the fruit of intimacy.

So, Jesus is the source of intimacy and God sovereignly brings us into this relationship with Jesus. The invitation of intimacy is to abide with Christ, to live with Him and the fruit of intimacy is love, joy, peace, and glory! Jesus says that we want to glorify God as we abide with Him, right? When you become a Christian, when you live this life in Christ, your ambition doesn't go away, it changes. St. Augustine just wrote some marvelous stuff on this and if you ever read a book, you should read a book called "On the Road with St. Augustine," by James Smith. He has an entire chapter on Augustine's view of ambition and it's beautiful and he says, Augustine said that ambition for a Christian is not the giving up of ambition, it's the changing of the direction of ambition. Our ambition is no longer for us, it's for God. We want to glorify Him instead of glorifying ourselves. I had a conversation with my six-year-old recently that reminded me of this. Her name is Francis and Francis one day, she had this real confused look on her face and I said, "Francis, what's going on?" She said, "Well, I don't know what I love. I know that I love God, and my mind keeps telling me I'm supposed to love something else, but I don't know what it is!" I said, "Well you know what, Francis, if you love God, then eventually He's going to show you what else to love and everything else will take care of itself." You may not know what your future holds, you may not know what you're supposed to do this evening, or next month, or

next year. None of us do! We're in a pandemic! But if we love God and we make it our aim to glorify Him, then everything else is going to work out.

So, there's this fruit of a changed desire to glorify God. We bear the fruit of God's glory. Then, we bear the fruit of loving God. As we abide with Him and grow to love Him more and more, kids, you don't know this yet because you're kids, and your parents take care of you, but parents you know this, right? You pour tons of time and money and energy into your kids before they ever love you back! You love them so much. The more love you pour into them, the more love you end up receiving from them. It's the same way with our relationship with God, there's this reciprocal nature that the more God pours into us and the more He pours His love into us and we pour our love into Him through obedience and through abiding in Him, the more our love for Him grows. And the more our love for Him grows, the more we realize that He loves us, and our love grows even more, and there's this cycle of love that God enraptures us in the way a parent is enraptured in love with their children.

So, we bear the fruit of glory, we bear the fruit of love, we bear the fruit of joy! Jesus says that He gives us these commandments so that our joy may be full in Him! Life in Christ is not life in a prison. It is life in a house filled with joy and happiness with giggles and smiles and toys and bubbles and everything else that is so delightful in this universe. When I was a kid, I couldn't wait to leave home. I couldn't wait! I would sneak out, I would break rules, I would do whatever it took to get out of the house. Kids, you shouldn't do any of those things, okay? You should obey your parents. But the problem was I thought all my parents' rules were keeping me from joy, and now I love to go back because I realize that my parents' rules were there to give me joy. There is nothing like going home and seeing my brother who lives with my mother and embracing him and embracing my mom and embracing the rules of their house. My mom has house rules, you guys probably all have house rules. The house rules are meant to bring joy, not sorrow. God's house rules are meant to bring joy. They're meant to bring joy into your life. Embrace them and embrace His love in the process. We bear the fruit of joy.

We bear the fruit of peace! Living in this relationship with God transforms us and brings peace to us. I have a friend who I was talking to this week and he's struggled with doubts his entire life. He's a minister. He's a minister of the gospel that loves Jesus and has struggled with doubts his entire life until about a year ago. About a year ago he went over to his friend Jordan's house, and Jordan had passed away. And he began to do CPR on Jordan to try to resuscitate him, but he couldn't. He said, after that moment of trying to resuscitate his friend, Jordan, and not being able to, he said he had the most intimate experience with God that he had ever experienced in his life. He believed the resurrection more than he'd ever believed in his life, and at that moment, all his doubts went away, and he's never struggled with his doubts since then. Intimacy with Jesus gives us a peace that surpasses all understanding. When we abide with Him, we have the love, joy and peace that comes from loving God and enjoying being with Him, and as we do that, that furthers His mission, that furthers His kingdom. People are attracted to that. I hope tonight that even now you want more and more of that and you want to be with Jesus, because He wants to be with you. But if you're like me, the feeling is fickle, and it often wanes.

My affections for Jesus are often like warm fuzzies for a junior high kid that leave after a few moments, and I have to continually come back to each day how do I draw near to Jesus? How do I grow my intimacy with Him? How do I grow my joy for Him? And when I experience those moments, I look at the cross and on the cross I see Jesus: the true vine, the true life source who was cut off because of my sin, who was killed to give me life, whose blood was spilt to cleanse me like a grape is cut or smashed to make wine. You see, Jesus had a joy that was set

before Him. Do you know what His joy was? The joy that was set before Jesus was us. It was a heavenly home with us in it, to be intimate with us, and it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross. When you see that He endured the cross for you, that He endured the cross for your life, so that you could have His love, His joy, His peace, and as that melts your heart, you begin to draw near to Him, and He begins to draw near to you.

If you're sitting there tonight and you don't feel that and you don't think that, but you want to, wanting to want to is a good place to start. That's a good place to start. That means that God is at work in your life. If you're going, "I don't feel joy. I don't feel happiness. I don't feel love. I don't feel peace. But I want to!" God is at work and He can work with that. Bring your "want tos." Come to Him. Abide with Him. Live with Him. Make your home with Him. Experience His joy. It won't come without the Holy Spirit, like we talked about last week, so let's pray that the Holy Spirit would give us a sense of God's nearness and fruit in our lives. Let's pray.