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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

March 5, 2017

The Purpose, Climate and Power of Fruit Bearing

John 15

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you and praise you for your goodness. I thank you for the cross. I thank you for the opportunity that we have once a month to look into what it is you've done at the cross, how you have gifted us through the cross. And Lord, this morning once again I just continue to pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit. Father, it's your Spirit alone that can make these words of your word make sense, and so we pray for that Spirit, we pray that you would give us the ability to make this of lasting value and I pray this in Jesus' name.*

Well again, this is the first Sunday of the month, again the Sunday that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and for the last time, he celebrated a Passover supper with them. This is from *Matthew 26:26-29*. It says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it,*

all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood, and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and to drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and symbolically drink his blood. And then he asked them to remember that sacrifice on a regular basis, and that's what we call the Lord's table. And we celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, that's asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing our sin and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says this: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well, you probably know we've been following the life of Jesus, and we've made it so far to the 15th chapter of the gospel of John. And Jesus is now at the point where he's going away. His time as his disciple's teacher is coming to an end and he's beginning to prepare for his sacrifice. And chapter 15 starts out speaking about the importance of bearing fruit and then it transitions into the hatred that Jesus himself bore, and the hatred that the

disciples were going to bear by identifying with him and then finally the chapter ends with the promise of the comforter who's going to come after Jesus finally leaves them. In essence the chapter is all about fruit and fruit bearing. And as I said, it starts out by speaking about the purpose of fruit bearing and then it shifts to the climate that produces this fruit and then finally to the power that enables fruit bearing in the first place. You have the purpose of fruit, the climate that produces fruit and the power that produces that fruit.

Now we've spent a number of messages already speaking about the purpose of fruit bearing and I think it's pretty clear that fruit bearing is all about the glory of God. *John 15:8* says: "*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*" One of the things that I don't know that we emphasize enough is just what we're talking about though when we use this word "glory." The fruit that we bear to glorify God is what we've seen many, many times in *Galatians 5:22*, it's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. And you've heard of me speak about these things many, many different times, and I've often said that these are the nine characteristics that make up the loveliness of Christ and that God is determined to grow that fruit, that loveliness in you and me. I want to explore this morning the question of why. Why is it

that God is calling on us to do this? And the simple answer is that it's so we could glorify our creator by displaying these fruits. Now for some folks, that really is a point of stumbling. They wonder why is it that God seeks glory from me? John Piper points out that the idea of God jealously pursuing his own glory through us is what drove both Oprah Winfrey and Brad Pitt from the gospel. He says this, he says: "Oprah walked away from orthodox Christianity when she was about 27 because of the biblical teaching that God is jealous -- he demands that he and no one else gets our highest allegiance and affection. It didn't sound loving to her. Brad Pitt turned away from his boyhood faith, he says, because God says, "You have to say that I'm the best. It seemed to be about ego." Well, neither Oprah nor Brad Pitt got what God was after in pursuing his own glory through us. And maybe you have a hard time with this as well. And so I want to ask the question why does God appear to be constantly pursuing his own glory? And first we have to understand that God does everything according to the standards of his perfection and that means nothing is done by God for one single set purpose such as his glory alone. There are multiple reasons why God does everything and that includes his glory but it also includes benefits to us. This is a deep topic and it's very easy to get stuck in the weeds here but I think one simple answer as to why God pursues his glory through us is because we are the ultimate beneficiaries of that glory. You see, we are creatures

designed by God to find our greatest joy and deepest pleasure by offering praise. That's just the way God designed us, and that is our ultimate purpose. You see, the glory of a creature, of any creature lies in its capturing the essence of what it was designed for. You know, we can look at all kinds of creatures and we look at creatures in their glory and we recognize that's when they are doing exactly what it is they were designed to do, at the very peak of what that means. You know, an eagle soaring is a creature that's in its glory. So is a great white shark when it is on the hunt.

You know, I love to watch the Discovery Channel. They usually feature this clip when they're advertising Shark Week, they show this clip of a 3500 pound 14-foot great white shark leaping high out of the water. In fact, rather than try to display it or speak of it, I have it cued up, I think. Do you have that? I mean, you've probably seen that commercial. And what that shows is that -- can you go? (Video playing) That's a creature in its glory. And what they had to do in order to get it, they filmed that with a high speed camera and they slowed it down tremendously so you can see exactly the power and the grace of this creature literally at the height of its glory. You know, and they spoke about how difficult it was getting that shot. They had to tow a decoy behind a boat and they had to have a cameraman with his face in the water

for hours and hours just hoping to get the right shot. And when they finally did, they're all standing there pumping their fists and jumping up and down because they knew, they knew they had captured an apex predator at the height of its glory doing precisely what it was designed to do with an incredible sense of power and grace and beauty.

Now in contrast to that, I remember a photograph I once saw of a great white shark that had been caught off the coast of Montauk. It was an even bigger creature. It was huge, a 17-footer, but it was lifted up by its tail and hauled on a -- it was a backhoe holding it on a dock and because sharks are animals that are designed to have their internal organs supported by the water, all of its internal organs had slid forward, and so it was this hugely bulging belly and it was twisted, and it was distorted and it barely resembled the creature that I knew that it once was. And so I see this grotesque contrast. You have the glory of this high speed video from Discovery and then we compare that to a picture of a distorted, twisted, bloated, very dead creature in which there's no glory at all. And we conclude that seeing a carcass twisted into a caricature of what it's supposed to be is not glorious and that the glory comes from seeing the creature doing what it was designed to do.

We know that God's creatures often demonstrate their purpose by virtue of their design. You can look at a shark and you can say, well, that's a creature that's designed to swim. You can look at an eagle, you can say clearly this creature is designed to fly. You can look at a cheetah and say it's designed for speed. But when you look at a human being, you have to ask yourself, okay, what was he or she designed for? What is their purpose? Well, we were designed for praise. And we, too, have a unique glory associated with us. It's a glory far higher than an eagle or a great white shark. You see, we were created to reach our highest creaturely glory when we worship the God who created us. God created sharks as apex predators. He created human beings as apex worshipers. When we're offering up God's praise and worship, we are fulfilling precisely what we were designed for. Like an eagle soaring or a great white shark leaping out of the water, we're doing precisely what God intended us to do because we are creatures created to bring glory to our Creator.

Now Jesus told the disciples in our text this morning that fruit bearing is the way that we do this. In *John 15:8* he said: "*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*" He went on to say that those to whom the gospel makes sense are those who have been chosen by God for the express purpose of bearing that fruit. And God says that he's the

one that does the choosing. He says in *John 15:16*, he says: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

So this brings us back to the question, so why is our giving glory to God a gift from God to us? I mean why isn't it the other way around? Well, the answer to that question lies in understanding the role of an eagle or of a great white shark when its behavior is gloriously on display. You know, if you could actually sit down and speak to an eagle or speak to a great white shark and ask them what's the high point of your existence? My guess is they would tell you it's when they are at their most glorious, when they are doing exactly what they were designed to do to the very fullest extent of their abilities. Well, would it not then follow that our greatest joy, that our deepest pleasure would be in doing exactly what we were designed for? And we were designed for praise. This is how God puts it in *Ephesians 1:11-12*, he says: *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.* See, you and I were designed to be to the praise of his glory. And because of that, God is determined to point the crown of his creation to the greatest good and the

highest honor there is in existence. And so we ask, who or what is that? Well, who do you think? That's got to be God. You know, if God were to direct our worship to anything else but himself, that in fact would be God. Do you see that? Do you see the problem that God has? God is determined to pursue what is best. He just happens to be what is best. And so he's determined to bless us with himself at the risk of sounding like he somehow needs our approval. He does not.

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Reflections on the Psalms* this, he said: "The miserable idea that God should in any sense need, or crave for, our worship like a vain woman wanting compliments, or a vain author presenting his new books to people who never met or heard him, is implicitly answered by the words 'If I be hungry I will not tell thee.' (Psalm 50) Even if such an absurd Deity could be conceived, He would hardly come to us, the lowest of rational creatures, to gratify His appetite. I don't want my dog to bark approval of my books." Furthermore God says in *Acts 17:24*, he says: *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. So what we have here is we understand that the reason why God insists on our worship is for our sake. It's not for his. We need to*

worship him far more than he has any need whatsoever of our worship because we were designed for praise. Again, C.S. Lewis brilliantly points this out. Listen to what he says. He says: "The most obvious fact about praise -- whether of God or any thing -- strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise" -- I need to repeat that. "All enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise -- lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside. I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious" -- that's open -- "minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least. I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: 'Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?' I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed."

We're the only creatures on the entire planet who experience the

pleasure of praise. Let's say you went to a restaurant and you got the best steak that you had ever tasted. One of the first things you would want to do is to share that experience with the person that you're there with. You would say, "Oh, you've got to try this. This is incredible." I mean isn't that exactly what we would do? And we say that because our pleasure in the steak is increased by our ability to praise it. Like I said, there's no other creature on the planet that's designed that way. My household has increased in one population. I now have three dogs. We have Bella, Beanie and Eli. So let's say I brought home that very same steak. Okay. I brought home that steak and I tossed it to Bella and Bella's eating away. And let's say Bella's experiencing the best steak she has ever, ever had. How interested in praising that steak by sharing it with Beanie and Eli do you think Bella is? I can hear the growls already. You see, dogs have no capacity or desire to praise something to enjoy it. It's something uniquely human, and that's because we alone were designed for that unique pleasure because we were designed for praise and worship.

Again, let me put this in terms of sport. I don't want to turn this into sports center but I was going to talk about Odell Beckham's catch which was a catch that a football player made a couple years ago. Just -- it's much simpler for me to just show

it, what it consisted of. Okay? This was a catch from a football player. Okay. Simple as that. (video playing) Okay. That's good. Now, he made that catch, Mr. Beckham, just a football player, he made that catch a few years back. I happened to be watching the game while he made that. I turned to Janice and said, "That's the best catch I've ever seen in my life." What was interesting to me was my phone started lighting up with texts and it was texts from my kids and they were affirming exactly what I had just said. Now my kids were not trying to give me any information. They knew I was watching the same game that they were watching, although they were on the other side of the country, but what they were really doing was they were increasing their pleasure of having seen this glorious thing by praising it. Only humans do that. Nobody else does that. And that's an incredible thing that is limited just to us. I've said the same thing about seeing a mountain sunset. If you're in the dessert of Arizona and you see this incredible mountain sunset and you're walking down in there, how much more would your pleasure at seeing that be increased if you simply had someone to say, "Check that out." That would be wonderful to see it by yourself but seeing it with somebody else makes it uniquely different. We are creatures designed to seek out the pleasure of praise. And far greater than any sunset or catch or creature is the source of ultimate glory which is God. And so it follows that our peak experience as humans comes from glorifying

God. John Piper has created what's almost become a Christian mantra and it's rooted in this exact truth. He says this: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." That's our purpose in praising. It's God's glory and our deep satisfaction.

Now the second part of John 15 is one in which Jesus discusses the climate in which that fruit that glorifies God is produced. Now I'm a gardener and I also grow fruit trees, so I get lots and lots of catalogs from all over the country. And so you might know if you're looking to buy a fruit tree, they'll usually give you a climate map to tell you what's the most appropriate tree for your climate. If you live in Florida, you're not going to be growing apples because apples require a certain amount of cold days in order to produce good apples, and in order to produce the best peaches, what state would you probably be in? Florida, Georgia, any of those states down south. The point is there is a climate that best produces different of fruits. Jesus spends most of the middle of chapter 15 talking about the climate that produces fruit in human beings, but it's not an easy climate at all. This is what Jesus says in *John 15:18-21*, he says: *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world*

hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me." Well, Jesus is telling us that the best climate for fruit production, for the kind of fruit that really matters to human beings is a climate where hostility towards Jesus Christ and his gospel is simply a given. Jesus stepped into a world that he knew would hate him for who he was, and now he's telling the disciples and through the disciples he's telling us that we now need to assume that role in his place. We know that many of our brothers and sisters overseas experience loss of liberty, loss of life because they identify with the Lord Jesus Christ. We also know that that persecution has never been an issue in our country since its founding. But that doesn't mean that the same visceral hatred for who Christ is in our country is not there. It just means we've been protected by our constitution and our history and our culture. Just last week I was looking at it in the news. They were talking about a town meeting that took place in Louisiana. And you could tell there was lots and lots of tension in the room. The blue folks were going after the red folks. And they opened up the meeting as they always do. This is Louisiana, it's down south. They opened up the meeting by asking a pastor to open it with a prayer. Instantly people started booing.

And you could see and sense the hostility. And they're booing and they're hollering as the pastor is trying to pray. But then the pastor had the gall to end his prayer by saying: "And I pray this in Jesus' name," and the entire room just erupts in jeers. At that name the crowd erupted in anger. You know, that kind of scene just gives you a taste of what lies unconsciously in the gut feelings of every single one who is outside the kingdom.

You know, we tend to think there are all different kinds of groups in the world. Basically there's three, there's the committed Christians, there's the committed atheists, and then there's this vast ocean of folks who are in between somewhere who are neutral, they don't really care one way or another. Well, this third class of citizen that perceives themselves as neutral in the battle between the forces of light and darkness may see themselves as neutral but I can tell you this much, God does not. As far as God is concerned, you are a child of the kingdom or you are an enemy of the kingdom. There's no middle ground. This is how God describes every single one of us when we were still thinking that we were part of that huge ocean of undecideds. He says this in *Ephesians 2*. He says: *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -- among whom we all once lived in the*

passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. These are God's words. These are not mine. And what he's saying is, what he's really pointing out to is this is where the climate of hostility comes from. We're all like this. This is the way we all start out. He describes it starting out as a natural state like children of wrath. He says you were all children of wrath like the rest of mankind. There's no neutrality there. Says you're born following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that's at work in the sons of disobedience. That's where everybody who is outside of the kingdom is. Thank God it doesn't end there. God goes on to say in verse 4: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ -- by grace you have been saved.* What God is telling us here is that he reached into that ocean of hostility and he grabbed you and he yanked you out. And by grace you have been saved. By grace every one of us has been saved and so we praise God for that. But understand something, what Jesus was calling his disciples to, what that climate is that produces this fruit is a base level of hostility to the gospel seldom expressed but always there. And if you doubt that, consider, consider the following topics for discussion in a mixed group. Consider the topic of sports or movies or the weather or politics or the lordship of

Jesus Christ. You know one of those topics is toxic. You know one of those topics is absolutely verboten. And Jesus understood that perfectly because the climate he operated in was one of unrelenting hostility. Again, this is what he said in *John 15*. He said: *"But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'"*

See, Jesus understood and we need to understand that the climate that God has allowed the gospel to thrive in is also one and the same with hostility. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, gentleness, self-control, they're all best expressed in a climate of hostility. Just like apples need a certain amount of frigid days to develop properly, so too we find that the fruit of the spirit grows best in the frigid arena of a Godless climate. And Jesus spent most of chapter 15 preparing his disciples to live and operate in that kind of a climate. And yet we find when push comes to shove that much of his training went right out the window. I mean, in spite of the fact that he warned

them way before time that his death was imminent and that he told them specifically and exactly how it would take place, that he would be arrested, that he would be tried, that he would be crucified and then would rise, he still had to witness their abandonment. He even predicted it. He said in *John 16:32*:
"Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone." What happened is the disciples saw that hostility ripped open, they saw it exposed and it terrified them and they did indeed scatter. They left Jesus alone and abandoned in his deepest hour of need, but even though Jesus knew they would scatter, he was still thinking of them. This is what he said in *John 15:26*, he said: *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning."*

As the elders begin to distribute the bread, I want us to consider the love of Jesus. Hated without a cause, stepping into his own execution and yet determined to bless those who were about to abandon him. We need also to consider this morning that God gives about communion itself. This is in *1 Corinthians 11:28-32*. It says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an*

unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. I repeat this warning each time. I said communion is extremely serious business and if you enter into it in an unworthy manner, you are courting disaster. If you're not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted Christ as your Savior, or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother and sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then just don't participate as the elements come along. I often said no one's going to think you're strange, nobody's going to think there's something wrong with you, they may in fact see you as wise. But on the other hand, I often point out as well that we can make the mistake of thinking that unless I am absolutely flawless and spotless, I'm unworthy to receive communion and that, too, is a mistake. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that we don't sin, it doesn't mean that we never fail. What it means is that we recognize that salvation is a gift that no one has ever been able to earn because it's impossible to earn and no one ever gets to heaven by "being good." I quote this each month, this is Dane Ortlund, he says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is

thinking that you do." It also means that when we fail, we're aware that we fail. And there's a reason why we're aware that we fail and it has to do with what we're speaking about today. We have the Holy Spirit of God living within us. And when we fail, we understand and we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are sinless. It means that we understand that when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, someone speaking in heaven on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the righteous one.* And so because we understand that we have Jesus's own righteousness and not ours, we are therefore then free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. He lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserve to die so that we could be made worthy of heaven. So this morning as you receive the elements, just pause for a moment and take a few moments to ask yourself, do I really understand what it is I was designed for? And am I able to recognize the climate, the climate for fruit bearing is a climate of complete hostility and how do I react and respond to that? Just think on that for a

few moments.

1 Corinthians the 11th chapter, the 23rd verse says this: *"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"* So take, and eat.

Will the elders begin distributing the cup. We're now at the end of chapter 15, and Jesus ends this chapter with this statement in *John 15:26-27*, he says: *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning."* Now at this stage, the disciples couldn't have had the slightest clue what Jesus was talking about. I mean we know because the scriptures instruct us that Jesus was telling the disciples that God himself in the form of the Holy Spirit was going to take the place of Jesus once Jesus departed. And we often think what must it have been like to have actually been with Jesus? What must it have been like to have God in the flesh walking beside you, somebody you could speak to, somebody that you can inquire of? Well, the one thing that we've seen over these last few chapters is that even though the disciples had Jesus physically right there with them for three

whole years, we know that after three whole years, they had a stunning level of cluelessness about who he was and what his purpose on earth was all about. I mean even after three years.

If you remember a few weeks back we were looking at chapter 14, and we'd come across this incident of Philip asking Jesus to show him and the rest of the disciples who God was. This is *John 14:8*, it says: *Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'"* I've said I pictured Jesus doing face plant after face plant, just doing one of these kinds of things, saying, I just don't believe this. Three years. The whole point of Jesus's ministry was to show the world in general and the disciples in particular who the Father was. And Philip after three years of in Jesus's presence, well, he demonstrates by his question that he knows next to nothing. Well, Jesus's answer to Philip's profound ignorance was the same back then as it is now in chapter 15 as he's about to depart, he tells Philip and his disciples, this is back in *John 14*, he says: *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."* Jesus is basically

telling the disciples after this incredibly disappointing question that Philip raises, he's telling the disciples actually I've got something better for you than my physical presence. He goes on to say that specifically in *John 16:7*, he says: *"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."*

What can possibly be better than God living with you, God walking every journey with you, God being able to talk to you, you being able to inquire of him? What could be better than that? Well, we ask what took Philip from being this incredibly clueless disciple to what we see of Philip in *Acts 8:5* where he's boldly declaring the gospel? It says this, says: *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.* We wonder what took Peter from the cowardice of denying Jesus three times to boldly proclaiming the gospel along with John to the very people responsible for crucifying Christ. How did these scattered, terrified nobodies become the very core of a faith that now numbers 2.2 billion people? Well, what Jesus had

promised the disciples as being a greater advantage than his physical presence was that God himself would come and take up residence in every one of his children. Jesus was a physical presence but he was outside of the disciples, he was in his own flesh. Well, the Holy Spirit is God himself in the spirit literally coming to live inside you. *1 Corinthians 6:19* says: *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.* You know what God is saying, in the Old Testament he lived in a temple that was made of stone and of wood. And he's saying in this the New Testament, God now lives in living stones, in human beings. He says you are a living temple made up of living stones. I don't live in this old building made out of stone and wood, I live inside you.

So Jesus in this chapter is telling us three different things. He's told us that the point of fruit bearing is to bring glory to God and that glory and worship is exactly what we were created for. He's told us secondly that the best climate for fruit bearing is one of unremitting hostility. Jesus saw it constantly and he told us that we were to identify with him, and the more that we identified with him, the more we could expect that same kind of hostility. But thirdly, he told the disciples to wait. He told

them to wait for the Comforter, the Spirit who would enter them and give them a direct connection to the unlimited power of God himself. We have so much untapped potential in each of us as believers in Christ because God literally lives inside us. We're going to be spending some considerable time on the role of the Holy Spirit within us because that's where Jesus is leading us next.

And so the question we want to deal with this morning is the question that Romans 8 raises. This is *Romans 8:9*. It says: *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if --* and this is a gigantic "if," a critical "if," the most important "if" you will ever come across -- *if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his.*

Here's the most important question you will ever ask yourself. Is the Spirit of Christ living within me? This is communion, this is a time for self-examination. God says very, very clearly if there's no spirit, there is no life. If the Spirit of Christ is not inside you, you are not one of his. But here's the good news. God says if you seek, you will find. And if he's convicting you here and now that that spirit is not inside you, all you have to do is ask. All you have to do is say, God, I have been convicted, your Spirit does not live within me and welcome that spirit within and ask Christ to be your Savior.

I want to leave you with these thoughts about the Holy Spirit from Francis Chan, and I'll tell you why I even raise the question, he kind of explains why. In his book *Forgotten God*, he says this: "This is the question I just can't get around: If it's true that the Spirit of God dwells in us and that our bodies are the Holy Spirit's temple, then shouldn't there be a huge difference between the person who has the Spirit of God living inside of him or her and the person who does not? This may be a silly illustration, but if I told you that I had an encounter with God where he entered my body and gave me a supernatural ability to play basketball, wouldn't you expect to see an amazing improvement in my jump shot, my defense, and my speed on the court? After all, this is God we're talking about. And if you saw no change in my athleticism, wouldn't you question the validity of my "encounter"? Churchgoers all across the nation say the Holy Spirit has entered them. They claim that God has given them a supernatural ability to follow Christ, put their sin to death, and serve the church. Christians talk about being born again and say that they were dead but now they have come to life. We have become hardened to those words, but they are powerful words that have significant meaning. Yet when those outside the church see no difference in our lives, they begin to question our integrity, our sanity, or even worse, our God. And can you blame them?" So to reiterate the question: Does your life demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit within you?

Take a moment to ponder that.

1 Corinthians the 11th chapter, the 25th verse says: *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."* So take, and drink.

This is the part that I call heads, heart and feet, where we try to express some practical application of what it means to remember Jesus Christ. And we've spoken at length about fruit production and Jesus spoke about fruit production. He said this in *Matthew 7*. He said: *"Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."* Just to continue the analogy, where on a tree do you think the best fruit grows? You know, if you look at a typical fruit tree, there's this very, very safe kind of dark place right next to the trunk that the fruit can grow in, or there's this scary kind of place out there at the last branches where the fruits in the wind and it's in the elements, and predators ask come by and swipe it, where do you think the best place to grow the fruit is? That's right. Way out there in the scary places. You know, Jesus said I'm going to send you the Comforter. And just to continue the

same idea of fruit bearing and fruit production, he talks about grafting us, Paul talks about grafting us into the tree. Jesus says I am the vine, you are the branches. He says you are locked in, you are connected to God himself. And so one of the things I think of in terms of potential is we are constantly pushed back by being afraid, we are constantly being pushed back by thinking this is too scary. What am I going to do? I'm not equipped enough, I'm not smart enough, I'm not clever enough, I don't want somebody to think less of me and so we back away. And what God is saying is you have to understand that you are tapped in to me. I live inside you. And I think one of the things that keeps us away from an experience of God that is real is our fear, our fear of risk.

You know, one of the things that David Chan was -- or that Francis Chan was speaking about in his book, he talked about having lunch with one of the -- I don't know if you remember this, but back in 2007 there were 23 missionaries from Korea who were kidnapped by the Taliban in Afghanistan. They executed two of them and they -- they were together, at one point there was 23 of them that were together, it was actually the last night that they were all together, they split them all up afterwards. But while they were together they had a portion of scripture they divided into 23 different pieces and each of them memorized and held on to that as if their very lives depended on it. And while they were there,

they individually said, "We are here for Christ's sake" and they each gave their lives anew knowing this was serious, they had already killed two of them. They wound up having an argument, if they were going to ask for volunteers, who would get to give up his life first. And then they came back, they were released. They came back and he was speaking to this man who had been back in Korea a number of months, and he was saying, "As hard as it is to imagine this, I wish I was back there." Of course we think how in the world could you want -- I mean, your life could end in a moment. You're a captive, you're a captive by these brutal, awful, terrible people. And I go back to this book *The Insanity of God* and in *The Insanity of God* is basically dealing with people who are under this kind of incredible stress. These are people who are being persecuted, who at any moment can lose their liberty, certainly could lose their life. And they're being dogged and these are people who have lost everything in some cases and yet they consider themselves to be blessed. And I said they look at themselves under all of this pressure, under all of this terrible stuff, living lives of deprivation, starving, not being able to have food and they look at themselves as blessed and us as desperately in need of a blessing. Their point is we have the living God right here, we can sense him, we can feel him in a way that you could never even imagine. What do you have? You got Wal-Mart. Is that what we want? You see, what I hear God saying

to us is that if you want to experience God as a real presence in your life, you got to take some risks. You know, if you want life to be incredibly safe, if you want to be that piece of fruit that's right next to the trunk and it's nice and shady, you're never going to get shook and you're never going to get nailed with a predator, you're going to have a relationship not with God but with religion. And you can say I go to church every week and we talk about God and do God stuff and that's nice, but you're never going to see the living God until you're in a place when you say, "God, if you don't come through for me right now, I am in deep stuff." Why is it the people who are thrust into that circumstance say it is so precious, it is so wonderful that as difficult and as terrible as that is, I prefer that, because they sense and they see and they know the living God. What God is telling us in this chapter, he said you were designed to praise and worship me. I am the center of your universe. That's the way you are. You know, sharks are designed to hunt and birds and eagles are designed to soar, but we're designed to praise and worship. And if you don't have a personal relationship with that God, if you don't ever take any risks to find out that he really is real, it's really just a bunch of words written on a piece of paper. That doesn't do anything for anybody.

And so my challenge to us this morning is, look, I'm not saying you got to go over to Afghanistan and just volunteer as a missionary,

but you do have to start saying, "I'm willing to take some risks." If you want to see God in your life, if you don't want to have religion but a relationship with the real living God, you have to take some risks. And the risks for us primarily are social. Somebody's going to think you're a doofus. That's not going to kill you. You know, so when you start to think I need to take some risks with my family, with my friends, with my fellow co-workers, with circumstances, with my paycheck, with my -- I need to get out there on the outside of the tree where the wind is whipping it, where it's a little bit scary but that's where I find out that God is real. And so my prayer for each of us today -- and I'm going to end us in prayer this way -- is that we would be willing to take some risks this month. So let's pray.

Father, we want to see the living God. We want to know your presence. We want to see what it's like to be having a relationship, not with a set of words but with a living God. And so Father, we want to see you and we want to take some risks but we're frightened. We're kind of like the disciples. When they really saw that hostility in its unbridled version, they just bolted. Lord, we want to take risks to see who you are and so I pray for each individual in this room, Lord, whether it's a risk among their family, whether it's a risk amongst their friends, their co-workers, somebody at school, it's just saying something

that puts you outside of the mainstream and puts you in a place where you just might have a difficult time. I pray, Lord, that you would give each of us the wisdom to seek out that risk so that we might see you as something more than just words written on a piece of paper, that we might sense your presence, that we might see the living God in our lives. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.