

Discipleship 101: Abide

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, February 27th. So we've got a pretty modest-sized yard. It's not huge. It's not tiny. And yet, when we bought our house, there were four large mature trees in that yard.

And I'm not talking mature as in eight feet. I'm talking 20 feet, 30 feet, four of them. And then at least, we had at least 50 more feet of cotoneaster hedge around the perimeter of our yard. Across the back, right across the back, and one entire side of our yard. We had a lot of tree for very little yard in relation. So over time, we've found a need to reclaim some of that yard to get our over-arbored space under control.

So while we both love trees very much, we had to say goodbye to a few of them, and that was a pretty intense process at times. And against my father's better judgment, I climbed an extension ladder at one point with a chainsaw.

You got it. To gradually take down two pine trees that we had in our yard. And I'm still here, so it went okay. And then early in the pandemic, after falling about 13 feet from a ladder to the ground, still here, God is good, we had an arborist ultimately come to remove a part of another tree that had developed black knot.

[1 : 34] And if you know black knot, it is insidious, and it's really tree cancer. So there isn't much chance of recovering your tree from that. But I recognize in all of these trees, our process, our removal process, has begun by cutting off branches from the trunk.

And when branches are separated from the trunk, you have probably recognized this yourself, they're separated from an invisible connection that we don't see and forget about quite often. And that's the roots, the root system, right? Trees are sustained by their root system. And it's their source of life that is located in their roots.

There's one thing that I've always noticed whenever we have pruned or cut down trees. And that's that as you trim branches with healthy growth on them, it doesn't take long before all that green, all those green leaves turn brown.

There's a fairly quick transformation that I've seen, and before long, leaves and branches can go from looking vital and alive to looking like they've been dead for quite a long time.

[2 : 47] Over a short period, that can happen. And ultimately, those leaves and branches needed to be connected, needed to remain connected to their roots to live.

And with no connection to their roots, they began to shrivel and die quickly. So I believe that there are some truly valuable lessons that we can learn from trees and their leaves.

And you probably already know where I'm going. Jesus recognized this connection himself because he talked about the relationship between a vine and its branches.

Jesus taught this lesson in John 15, 1-5. So if you want to turn there, you can, or you can listen.

Jesus said, I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You're already clean because of the word I've spoken to you.

[3 : 53] Jesus continues, Remain in me as I also remain in you. 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. So this morning, we're continuing in our sermon series called Discipleship 101.

And through this series, we're continuing to look at the importance of discipleship, both in our individual lives and in our lives as a church. So discipleship is, we've talked about before, a journey of growth and learning for us as individuals, but it's also a journey we take together in a community of believers as we're disciplined by others, hopefully, and as we seek to support and encourage other people around us in their own discipleship journeys.

And over the past few weeks, we've been talking about disciples and discipleship. We began by asking the question, what is a Christian? There it is.

[5 : 16] And we learned that a Christian is someone who hears the gospel. This is a quick refresher. Hears the gospel, believes it, turns to Jesus, experiences God's grace, and then ultimately is a disciple.

And then we considered the question from there, what is a disciple then? Well, we identified that as being someone who follows Jesus, no matter the cost.

And then last week, we talked about what it looks like to become a disciple. Those are the steps when someone answers the call of Jesus in their life, when they drop the nets that may be focusing, the focus of their attention, or their, their, the priorities in their life.

Someone who gets out of the boat, takes a step potentially out of their comfort zone to follow Jesus in an intentional way, and then follows Jesus, ongoing.

Right? Reconnects with him and follows him. So this morning, we're actually going to be moving into being a disciple. So we've looked at a lot of kind of theory, right?

[6 : 35] A lot of context. And next week, we'll get even deeper into the, the practical parts. And I think next week's sermon is actually called The Practical Stuff. So there you go.

So by now, I hope you get a sense, or you have a sense, of where you stand with Jesus. And I hope you've been prompted to consider seriously where you're at with him.

Consider where you're at in that journey, at what point you're at, how you can continue. And if you're someone who believes in Jesus, then it's important for you to recognize that you're called to be a follower as well.

Right? We talked a little bit last week about are you a fan or are you a follower? And if you're a follower, then, intentionally, you're called to be a disciple.

So today, we're going to begin exploring the ways you can become a complete disciple. A disciple that Jesus wants you to be.

[7 : 40] And our sermon this morning is titled Abide. When we hear that word abide, we may think of it as bearing or maybe even enduring or perhaps even tolerating.

So when you think of that word, it can be along the lines of, well, I'll abide by your decision. Right? You've heard that before. You've maybe even said that yourself.

With the subtext being obviously, I'll abide by your decision, but it doesn't mean I have to like it. It doesn't mean I agree with it. Right? There's a sense of resistance there potentially.

But for Christians, to abide in God means to trust him. It means to stay or remain with him and in him.

To abide in the Lord, if you want to take a particular note, this is one of those, if you remember nothing else from this sermon, to abide in the Lord means that we continually receive, believe, and trust that Jesus is everything we need.

[8 : 55] To abide in the Lord means that we continually receive, believe, and trust that Jesus is everything we need. In our passage from John that I read a moment ago, did you recognize that recurring theme of abiding in Jesus?

When we abide in Jesus, it means we remain faithful as we walk with him, as we depend on him, and that we are people who are intentional with acts of faith and trust in Jesus.

To abide in Jesus means that we're connected to him in deep, meaningful, and intentional ways. So this morning we've heard Jesus talk about a vine and branches.

And clearly there's a relationship between the vine and the branches, right? And so it may be clear to you, but Jesus is using the grapevine as an illustration to relate to himself and his people.

In verses one and five, in that passage, Jesus describes himself as the true vine at one point, and just as the vine.

[10 : 14] So Jesus is the central focus here. He is, to go back to what I said at the beginning, he's our root. And we, his people, are the extension then of the vine itself.

We're not just along for the ride. We're the extension of Jesus. We grow from, we should grow from, and we are connected to Jesus himself.

So that means our relationship with Jesus and our connection to him is vital. It should be intimate and personal. It's the relationship between disciple and master, between Jesus and each of us. And we're called to abide in him. So when we look at a tree, we don't generally see the individual parts, right?

We see the whole. When I look at a tree, I see almost as though it's a respiratory system.

[11 : 25] I've tried to explain how I see that to people before and some scratch their heads. But do you see how a tree is a little bit like your respiratory system in your Bible, in your body?

You see lungs, you see exchange of oxygen, you see oxygen and carbon dioxide being exchanged. There's a vital and intimate network of life there in any tree.

And as I said, we see the whole. We don't generally see the parts. But all of the parts have such an intimate and interdependent relationship with one another.

And that's why we see that unified whole. We don't see separate parts generally. You don't generally look at a tree and say, oh, look at the leaves. And there's leaves there and there's more leaves.

We see the whole tree. And our connection to Jesus is equally, should be equally as intimate. No one will ever confuse us for Jesus, right?

[12 : 27] That should make you chuckle. But when we accept Jesus or when we have accepted him and yielded our lives to him, that relationship should change us.

And if it doesn't, that should be a red flag for you. If your connection with Jesus doesn't intimately and fundamentally change your attitude, your words, your actions, I'd say that's a problem.

So in Romans 11, the Apostle Paul talks about how we've been like branches. And that may be familiar, or perhaps not.

But it talks about, Paul talks about their being grafted into the life-giving vine that is Jesus Christ.

And when that happened, when we became grafted to Jesus, when we accept him, when we began a relationship with him that will last for all eternity, we assume that role of a follower, of a disciple.

But do you know the best part? We don't have to wait until we die to have a relationship with Jesus. Can you recognize that? That we didn't accept Jesus?

[13 : 43] I've said this before, it's not like a bus ticket. Jesus punched our ticket, now we just wait for him to come back. Perfect. Ready to go.

My bags are packed. We can live for and should live for and with Jesus in an intimate relationship right now, in every moment. Jesus never said you'll be branches eventually, just wait for it.

He never said that. He's clear that when we give our lives to him and follow him as a disciple, we are connected to him. We become part of God's family immediately.

It's an instantaneous acceptance, that grafting into the family of God. So let's recognize something this morning.

We all have close and intimate relationships in our lives, right? I'm sure even as I say that, there are faces and names popping into your mind. with our parents, perhaps, for some of us.

[14 : 49] For some of us, our remembrance of parents is a memory. But with our children, with our grandchildren, spouses, siblings, friends, and I think we can all recognize that we have a hardwired need to belong to a tribe, right?

To belong to a group that values us. It's hard coded into our DNA, that desire to belong. And we recognize that sense of connection in relationship resonates with us, should resonate with us, on a deep heart kind of level.

And for each of us, we can hopefully recognize the relationships in our lives that are not superficial. They're important, they're critical, they're not casual acquaintances that have no deeper meaning.

And in many cases, our relationships may define who we are and what matters most to us. They determine what we live for, and they probably determine that our lives revolve around them to a great extent.

And I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but we need to recognize that this kind of relationship, this abiding kind of relationship, relationship, is the one that a disciple should have with Jesus Christ.

[16 : 21] Jesus doesn't have to be, shouldn't be for you, some far away mythical figure who you can only imagine having a relationship with.

Sometimes, and this is, Leah doesn't do this, but sometimes if you listen to praise and worship songs, there's a sense of longing for connection with Jesus, you can have it.

So this sense of I'm striving for a relationship with Jesus that we hear sometimes in worship songs to me feels broken because the relationship is here. Jesus is here for you.

If you're disconnected from him, it may be of your own doing. It's likely of your own doing in some way. Jesus doesn't have to be someone that other people seem to have a connection with, that other people seem to know well, really, really well, but you only know casually.

Friends, Jesus wants to have that intimate and personal relationship with you. He wants his connection with you to be the central focus of your life.

[17 : 35] He wants your will and your heart to be aligned with his in such a way that the boundary of where you end and where Jesus begins becomes less and less evident over time.

Can you recognize that? As a Christian, as I said a moment ago, that type of relationship with Jesus is not some unattainable thing.

It's possible right now. And that's how a disciple should relate to Jesus. us. So recognizing that, recognizing that possibility and that opportunity, how do we as disciples get that type of relationship with Jesus?

Well, how did you develop the intimate and deeply connected relationships you have in your life right now? With your spouse, with your children, with your friends, or anyone else who is important to you?

I'm going to suggest that you recognized at some point in your life, in your relationship with them, that you get out of the relationship what you put into it.

[18 : 53] You made it a priority to get to know the other person. You made it a priority to spend time with them. Do you see that? So those important relationships that you've cultivated in your life over time, at some point they consumed your time.

They may have consumed your heart and your thoughts. And that's a good thing. That's how you deepen those connections. And guess what?

We develop a relationship like that with Jesus in the same way. way. It's not, there's no secret. It's not like someone has the answer or there's a book coming out eventually that'll make it possible.

It's that simple. If we make it our priority to know Jesus, to spend time with him, whether that's through reading God's word, the Bible, or talking to Jesus in prayer, let Jesus consume your time.

Let him consume your heart and your life. Let him be your obsession. When I begin to feel anxious in my life, sometimes I recognize that it's because I am trying to figure it out on my own.

[20 : 17] Can you relate to that? Do you start to feel worried and anxious and nervous and or angry or irritated? Those are signs of disconnection from God.

The next time you feel anxious or nervous or angry, take a moment moment and just say, hey, Lord, show me where the root of this is.

Help me to remember that I don't need to figure this out, that you've got me. And I have a feeling you'll recognize peace again. Because when we seek to strengthen our connection with Jesus, our connection to the vine, that's when we become grounded again.

So in John 15, we can also recognize that the branches are reliant upon, dependent upon, the vine. And as we considered at the start this morning, when tree limbs are severed from the tree and from their source, the root, they quickly wither and die.

Without a connection to the root, without a direct source of life, they die. The root provides the water the limbs and leaves need.

[21 : 36] The root provides the nutrients they need. The root provides the life-giving sap that courses through essentially the veins of the tree. Jesus said that disciples are limbs of the vine.

That they are extensions of Jesus himself. So as I've alluded to a little bit, when we remove our ourselves from relationship with Jesus, or when we neglect that relationship, can you recognize at times in your life when that's happened, you begin to feel dry.

We begin to shrivel in some ways. So maybe you know a Christian for whom that's happened. Or as I said, maybe you felt it in yourself in the past, or maybe even you feel it right now.

And maybe that relationship with Jesus has been neglected. You know, as I've said before, people might be thinking, well, I'm here this morning, aren't I?

I'm committed. Only you and Jesus know for sure. Right? So maybe that relationship has become distant, or disconnected.

[22 : 51] connected. And you've become more of a fan of Jesus than a follower. Yeah, I'll sing his praises, but I just don't feel that connected. And maybe somewhere along the line, it became more about being self-reliant than about relying on Jesus for you.

Along the way, you can maybe recognize that those decisions have caused a separation between you and your essential source of life.

So whether this is true of you, or of someone you know, it's hard to know for sure, right? But you can probably recognize with disconnection, that sense of removal comes a sense of going through the motions, right?

A lack of purpose, a lack of focus. Our hearts tend to become cold and hard when they're removed from a connection with Jesus. Maybe your life has become more painful than pleasant.

Or maybe you feel like you have a path, but no clear direction. You feel like you're living, but you feel drained of energy and maybe like you're lacking a sense of purpose.

[24 : 11] friends, when we're connected to Jesus and fully depending on him, anything is possible according to his will.

And when we're connected to the creator of everything, there's no limit to what Jesus can do in and through us, to what he will do.

So if this sense of having lost your way or drifted from your source and the plan for your life, God's plan for your life is true, seek to reestablish the Bible as your compass for life.

Seek to reconnect with Jesus in prayer. And prayer, prayer's not always easy. I'd be the first person to say that. It's a conversation.

It doesn't have to begin with dear Lord and end with in Jesus name we pray, amen. Absolutely, there's context for that.

[25 : 15] But talk to Jesus like you would to anyone else. He's right there and he is listening. Seek to reconnect with other people, other Christians, the people of God in family, in community.

And that's not easy in the pandemic, but we're getting there, right? Bless you. Reconnect yourself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in every waking moment of your life.

Let the Holy Spirit guide your steps. Ask him to guide your steps. God so those things, reconnecting with the Bible, reconnecting in prayer, reconnecting with other Christians, committing yourself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, those are the life habits that identify a disciple of Jesus.

So remember that just as a branch is fully reliant on the vine, as disciples, we are fully reliant on Jesus Christ.

So remain in him. I'm not even done yet. So hang on. But the Christian life is not solely about remaining connected to Jesus.

[26 : 39] Right? I could have stopped there and said, remain connected to Jesus and you got it covered. Well, John 15 5 makes it clear that the vines, the vine, the branches have a job to do.

The branches are to bear fruit. And without their connection to the vine, it's impossible. Right? So with the vine's purpose, with the branches' purpose to bear fruit, that's what they're created for, trees make buds, they have leaves or seeds or fruit, they have a purpose.

And so just as leaves and limbs play a vital role in the life and health of a tree, as branches to the vine of Jesus, we have a purpose as well.

We are called to bear fruit for and of the vine. fruit. We're called to do the things that should come naturally for a disciple.

And that fruit, then, should be a natural byproduct of a close connection to Jesus. And hopefully this idea of bearing fruit has appealed to you.

[27 : 57] Come on. that was one of my best puns. But what should some of the fruit be, right? We hear this language in the Bible, we should bear fruit.

Okay, I have no idea what that looks like. I have no idea what that is. Let me help. what should some of the fruit of a disciple look like? It should look like love.

Love for one another, love for yourself, not in a selfish way, but recognizing that you are loved by God, you should love yourself. That's what the root has.

The root has love. Jesus is love. So we should have that too. Service to Jesus and to each other. Jesus came to serve, friends. He served to the greatest extent possible. So we should serve, be people who serve.

[28 : 58] Sacrifice for Jesus and for others. It's getting out of the boat, right? Jesus sacrificed for us and we should be people who are willing to sacrifice for him and for other people.

forgiveness. Forgiveness towards others. Jesus demonstrated it over and over. And so as his branches, branches of the vine, we should be people who forgive.

Compassion. Jesus showed compassion in his earthly ministry and has a compassionate heart for his children to this day. And so we should be compassionate.

compassionate. We should also be people who talk about Jesus. Is that a shock to you? Talk about what he's done for us. What he can do for others and will do for others.

And our relationship, last on that list, certainly not least, should bring us joy and hope. In a world that is struggling and exhausted and torn apart in so many ways, we can be a sign of joy and hope that points people to Jesus.

[30 : 18] this. So it's a time for honesty and I'm not going to ask anyone to raise their hand. But as you hear what the fruit of a disciple should look like, as you saw that list, do you perhaps recognize that some of these things may not be evident in your life?

Maybe you're thinking or you're asking yourself, wow, I don't see this fruit in my life. What do I do?

Well, barrenness, a lack of fruit in our lives, it points to a deficiency in our relationship with Jesus.

A deficiency in our reliance on him. So if you look at that list and say, well, I'm not a joyful person, that's just who I am. Oh, you could be.

Or I find it hard to forgive someone. Or I find it hard to show compassion to toward someone who drives me bananas. You could do all those things if you relied on Jesus and the fruit that he can give you rather than your own effort.

A relationship that's distant from Jesus will never bear fruit. Or the crop will be thin.

[31 : 42] relying on anything other than Jesus will never produce fruit. Not the kind that lasts.

So this morning when you hear this, does your life feel like it's barren? If that's the case for you, examine your life with Jesus.

Jesus, are you depending on him? Are you connected to your source? Friends, the natural byproduct of your relationship with and your reliance on the Lord should be a natural occurrence in your life as a disciple.

It's not optional. You need to rely on him and you need to be in intimate relationship with him. So

are you becoming a disciple? Are you seeking to grow as a disciple?

Are you connected to the vine? To the master? To Jesus Christ? Are you abiding in him?

[32 : 58] Have you accepted Jesus as the Lord of your life and surrendered, continue to surrender, all your plans, your priorities for his will in your life?

I encourage each of us to take time each day to examine our hearts and our relationship with Jesus. He will pursue you your entire life.

I promise you that. And it's never too late to turn or return to the vine. Amen.