

Our Number One Job - Embracing the Mutual Indwelling

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[0 : 00] thank you Jesus thank you for helping the Apostle John remember what you said thank you for helping him write it down accurately thank you for saving this text all of these years and now I pray in your mercy and grace that you will take us more deeply into the reality of which the text is speaking for we pray this in your name Amen in in in in in in a little preposition which on the lips of Jesus speaks enormous implications for our lives in in did you hear the way

Jesus used it in the text we just read do you see what he's doing with it in this metaphor of the vine and the branches in I in you and you in me in not just with I with you you with me as wonderful as that is not just alongside alongside you I along you alongside me as wonderful as that is not just toward I towards you you toward me as wonderful as that is not just for I for you you for me as wonderfully wonderful as that is do not fear as he says elsewhere for I am with you and for you do not fear when you go through the valley for I am with you and for you but more more than with more than alongside more than toward more than for in

I in you and you in me with wonderfully enormous implications for our lives it is the miracle of the Christian life it is the mystery of the Christian life it is the essence of the Christian life as the apostle Paul makes so clear the apostle Paul loved this little preposition in he uses it 97 times in his letters in Jesus Christ in Christ Jesus in Jesus in Christ the hope of glory in I in you and you and you in me and what better way to help us understand that than by working with the metaphor or parable of the vine and branches I am the true vine my father is the vine dresser as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine so you abide in me

I am the vine you are the branches they who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing in he says it six times in in in in in in true vine I am the true vine why does Jesus put it that way true vine real vine in the first testament God had called his chosen people the people of Abraham Isaac and Jacob to be his vine we read in the prophet Ezekiel for instance your mother was like a vine in the vineyard planted by the waters we read in the prophet Hosea Israel was a luxurious vine God called the people of Abraham Isaac and Jacob to be his vine in the world to bear the fruit of the vine in the world it was Israel's reason for being in the world which is why one of the most notable ornaments in the temple of Jerusalem is a golden vine made of cedar as high as a man and this is why during the

Jewish revolt under Roman occupation in 80 66 to 70 the rebels minted coins with a vine and branches stamped on them God chose Israel to be his vine in the world to bear fruit for God in the world Israel was chosen not for her own sake but to bear the life of God in the world Israel was chosen to bear such a contagious witness to Yahweh that the people around her would be attracted to Yahweh and would stream to Jerusalem searching for this amazing God but Israel of all did not fulfill her role she did not bear the fruit God wanted to be born so we read in the prophet Isaiah let me now sing for my well beloved a song for my beloved for his vineyard my well beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill he dug around it removed its stones and planted it with choicest vine then then he expected it to produce good grapes but it produced only worthless ones why when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless grapes sadly

[6 : 26] Israel of old did not bear the fruit she was called to bear in the world so God planted a new vine I am the vine says Jesus I am the true vine literally it is I am the vine the true the real what God wanted his people to be in and for the world he himself becomes in Jesus Jesus is what Israel was called to be Jesus is the vine that finally bears fruit for God in the world and here is the surprising thing Jesus then calls disciples Jews and Gentiles slave and free male and female you and me to be branches in him through whom he bears fruit for the father I am the vine you are the branches

they who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit much fruit he says that six times those who abide in

Jesus bear much fruit in the world abide in me those who abide in me it turns out to be our number one job in the world abide in Jesus and everything else follows now you would think wouldn't you that our number one job in the world is to love love the Lord your God with all your heart all your soul all your strength love your neighbors as yourself and the new commandment he gives us love one another as I have loved you he says it twice as he works with this metaphor of vine and branches love one another as I have loved you but love is not our number one job for the simple reason that we cannot love unless we do our number one job we cannot love unless we abide as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine so neither can you unless you abide in me

I'm the vine you are the branches abide in me and I in you for apart from me you can do nothing I think it was John Stott who commented that many people are out to prove Jesus wrong apart from me you can do nothing nothing nothing Jesus is telling us we cannot think we cannot discern accurately we cannot act wisely apart from him apart from me you can do nothing we cannot do marriage apart from him we cannot do parenting apart from him we cannot do physics or medicine or law or economics or politics or education or business apart from him nothing nothing apart from me you can do nothing so abide in me everything else depends on doing this number one job in life the verb abide simply means to dwell as in dwell in a house so we can render this word abide as make your home make your home in me

I am making my home in you you make your home in me I wonder how the first disciples processed Jesus words that night dwell in a person persons can dwell in a person dwell in a grand idea we can get our heads around that dwell in a world changing movement that's easy to grasp dwell in a kingdom that makes sense but dwell in a person persons can dwell in a person and a person can dwell in persons what did John and Peter and James and Mary and Joanna and Susanna think Jesus was talking about and how can we do it when we cannot see or hear or touch the person you see Jesus teaches his metaphor of the vine and the branches on the night he goes before he goes to the cross and during the meal he prepared for his disciples that night he told them he was going to leave them after spending three years in this face to face relationship with them he was now going to leave them he come from the father and he was going back to the father he promised that they would not be left as orphans he would send another but he did say that he himself would not be with them physically anymore and that they would have to go on in the absence of his physical presence so how can his first disciples abide in him how can they or we make our home in him in I in you and you in me he's speaking you can see this of a double abiding I in you you and me Jesus in us we in Jesus or you can put it another way he's speaking of a mutual indwelling Jesus dwelling with alongside toward and in us we dwelling with alongside and toward Jesus again it is the miracle of the Christian life it's the mystery of the Christian life it's the essence of the Christian life and it is therefore our number one job in life embracing this mutual indwelling is our number one job in life in I in you and you and me boy I wish I could know what was going on in your mind and hearts right now I'm trying to read you I wish I knew how you were processing these words of Jesus there's so many questions we would want to ask him right let me suggest three one what is happening in the mutual indwelling what is going on as

[13 : 01] Jesus abides in us and we abide in him two what happens when the mutual indwelling happens are there objective indications that this miracle and mystery is actually taking place and three what needs to happen for this mutual indwelling to happen what do we need to do what does Jesus do what does Jesus father who is the vine dresser do so question one what is happening in this mutual indwelling oh my oh my oh my what is happening is that we are sharing life we are sharing the life of another the life of someone other than me is now moving in me someone other than me is now living and moving in me

I'm the vine you're the branches suggesting this deeply intertwined interconnectedness the branches of the vine share the life of the vine the sap of the vine is moving in the branches of the vine the vitality of the vine is pulsating in and through the branches of the vine I am the vine you are the branches we're sharing in the very life of the crucified risen ascended and coming Jesus his sap if you will is now moving through us his life juices are flowing in and through us his vitality his eternal vitality is pulsating in and through us in and through our brains in and through our hearts in and through our hands and feet and eyes and ears and we do not have to understand this for this to

happen it does not depend on our understanding this is not just a cognitive thing it does not require our understanding for it to happen the living

Jesus takes up residence in us in our mortal bodies the immortal one takes up residence in our mortal bodies whether or not we can figure it out which is why should we ever lose the capacity to understand which is one of my great fears should we ever lose the capacity to understand the reality will not change even if we have to go through some form of dementia for example the reality will not change the living one is moving in and through our lives in any and every circumstance life himself is in us in every and any circumstance rich abundant inexhaustible indestructible life dwells in us i keep in the opening pages of my journal what scottish preacher james s stuart says about this wonder in his book on the apostle paul named a man in christ these are the words to be in union with christ means the joy of possessing inner resources of a supernatural order and a feeling within you the power of an endless life that is what is happening in the mutual indwelling someone say hallelujah in i in you you in me now the person who helps me the most to understand this mutual indwelling is e stanley jones those of you who know me know that i owe a great debt to e stanley jones one of the first things i intend to do when i get to the new heavens and the new earth is greet my grandmother and my father and my son and then e stanley jones missionary to India in the 20th century he's become the most significant mentor i ever had i never met him but i've read just about everything he wrote and the book i cherish the most is his little devotional book simply entitled in christ what he does is he works with all the in christ through christ with christ statements in the bible 365 one for each day of the year and joan keeps coming back to his major affirmation namely that if jesus is in us then everything in jesus is in us let me say that again if jesus is in us then everything that is in jesus is in us his life is in us his vitality is in us his creativity is in us his power and strength are in us his purity is in us his light his holiness his beauty his mercy his truth his grace his courage his patience his hope his love his joy his peace it is all in us and says jones if we are in him then we are in everything that is in him we are in his life his eternal life we are in his vitality we are in his creativity we are in his power and strength we are in his purity we are in his light and holiness and beauty and mercy and truth and grace his courage and patience his hope his love his joy and peace we are in it all

I love the way Jones puts it again and again in the book we are alive in his everything that is what is happening in this mutual indwelling the life of another is living and moving through us so question two what happens when this mutual indwelling happens something ought to happen what are the objective indications that this miracle and mystery is actually taking place bear much fruit six times he says it bear much fruit you did not choose me I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear much fruit and that your fruit should remain what is this fruit the life of Jesus the life of Jesus in us and through us in the world but of course grape vines bear what grapes fig trees bear what figs apple trees bear the

[20 : 33] Jesus vine bears what Jesus branches in the Jesus vine bear what the life of Jesus the character traits of Jesus the deeds of Jesus the thoughts and feelings and attitudes of Jesus now this is what the apostle Paul was getting at in his letter to the Galatians in Galatians 5 23 to 24 many of you know this text very well where he speaks of the fruit of the spirit the fruit of living with and alongside and in the spirit Jesus and his father sends to those who belong to Jesus the fruit of the of his peace the cluster of fruit people immediately encountered in him he related to people with unusual patience with unusual kindness with unusual goodness the cluster of fruit that marked his own inner maturity faithfulness gentleness self control self control that is what happens in the branches that abide in the vine they began to bear the life and character and behavior of

Jesus in last Tuesday's edition of the Vancouver Sun there was an interview with New York Times editor Douglas Brooks about a new book entitled The Road to Character the interviewer asked Brooks you write that this book emerged from a personal sense of crisis about being paid to be a narcissistic blow hard and you wrote that writing the book saved my soul what went wrong Brooks responds it was more dissatisfaction or inefficiency in part because as journalists we're sometimes skating along the surface of life but in part just like everybody else regardless of profession you're involved in the business of life distractions of social media the normal frenetic pace of things and you get distracted from the things that matter and occasionally who had this incredible inner light and seemed like a remarkable person they had a joy and tranquility a loving nature that I didn't have in me there was this settledness that I felt a lack for and I wanted it when I read those words I thought he's describing Jesus this incredible inner light joy and tranquility a loving nature

settled ness and I thought that is who those who abide in Jesus are to become and I said I want it Lord love joy peace his love joy and peace patience kindness goodness his patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness self control his faithfulness gentleness self control especially love his quality of love which is why he speaks of love so much that night before going to the cross that which most clearly marked his life he says is now going to most clearly mark the lives of those who abide in him this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you you love one another as I have loved you talk about being radical and talk about being radicalized love one another as I have loved you greater love has no one than they lay their life down for their friends says

Jesus that is the objective indication that this mystery and miracle is taking place in us a different kind of love as James K.

Smith is helping us understand being a disciple of Jesus is not simply a matter of thinking rightly but of loving rightly being a disciple of Jesus he says is a matter of becoming the kind of person who loves rightly who loves as Jesus loves who abiding in Jesus finds the sap of the vine coming through their life so question three what needs to be done in order for this mutual indwelling to happen in John 15 Jesus says that we need to do something and he says the father is doing something we need to do something but the father is already doing something what we need to do abide we need to make the choice to abide it's a choice we are branches not the vine that news for anybody no one in the room hears the vine no one not even the senior minister joke no one no is the vine we are the branches and branches only live if they stay on the vine the choice is to stay on the vine we make the choice to make our home in him we are going to choose to go to our apartment or condo or house afterwards and so we have to make the choice we are also going to go to the

[26 : 42] Jesus house we are going to make our home in him all the time how well listen to what Jesus says when he uses the verb abide in other places so John 15 7 if you abide in me and my words abide in you my words we abide in Jesus by letting his words abide in us we dwell in Jesus by letting his words dwell in us we make our home in Jesus by letting his words home in us and we do that by living in his words as we have them in the word the scripture this is just so basic but it's as straightforward as this live in the Bible day in day out daytime nighttime Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday every day dwell in the

Bible let the words of the Bible dwell in us why because we're inundated with words all the time right words are coming at us all the time and here's the thing we need to understand those words start to make their home in us and those words start to bear their fruit in us which words are we going to allow to shape us which words are we going to allow to tell us who we are which words are we going to allow to tell us what is right and wrong I discovered this the other day when I want to relax I turn on to that station HGTV and I love watching the remodel thing my son in-law is a carpenter so I I love watching that and so I watch that every time they do a remodel either the husband or wife will say you know

I like the bathroom but we need two sinks not one and I go up to our bedroom I go yeah yeah we got one sink we need two nothing wrong with two sinks but wow it hit me how powerful those words were shaping me changing my desires making me dissatisfied with what Jesus had already given us and now wanting something I fundamentally don't need human words are powerful they not only inform they perform what if I were to now yell fire you'd see the power of words Jesus words are powerful they not only inform they perform they transform so whose words are we going to let shape us we cannot see him or hear him or touch him not yet anyway so he comes to us in his word he makes his home in us through his words and we make our home in him by making our home in his word it's the only way to know

Jesus only he can tell us who he is he calls us his friends did you see that in the text you are my friends boy that would have been a shocker for those first century disciples because friendship in the first century meant a whole lot more than it does in our century being a friend meant sharing your most intimate thoughts it meant sharing the most important things on your mind and the most cherished things on your heart you're my friends I no longer call you servants you're my friends because I'm telling you everything the father told me and the way he shares his most intimate thoughts and his most cherished emotions with us is by speaking to us through his words he tells us who he is and who we are in him and so without his words we do not know him another way to put that is without his words we can only imagine him and then we begin to relate to the Jesus we

imagine and this Jesus we imagine may not be

Jesus as he is I wonder if part of the reason that we do not always bear the Jesus fruit is because we are not relating to Jesus as he is but we're relating to Jesus as we want him to be and it happens when his words are not abiding in us we need his word to know the father only Jesus knows the father only Jesus can tell us who the father is and we cannot rightly relate to the father without Jesus words about the father without Jesus words we're going to relate to the father as we imagine him and if you're like me I'm going to misimagine the father he's going to be less than and other than he actually is if my words abide in you think of it this way think of his words as the way Jesus skypes himself to us each morning

[32 : 12] I sit in my chair and open the text and from wherever he is he skypes himself into my consciousness so that I might know him as he is abide in my words there's no other way and abide in his love 15 9 just as the father has loved me and I have also loved you abide in my love well that's the natural thing for him to say after talking about his words abiding in us because his words are all about love his words are all helping us move towards love the love the love he has for the father the love he has for us and the love the father has for us we make our home in him as we abide in his love his merciful love his gracious love his tough love his relentless love his extravagant love his transforming love which we can only know by letting his words abide in us on our own we do not know love am I right without his words we're going to project our understanding of love which is always limited onto him and his father him tell us what his love is this is why

I think it's good to memorize texts of scripture especially texts about his love it's also reason why we want to sing scripture especially texts about his love because when we sing the love goes deeper we all seek love we all seek to dwell in love right we all seek to dwell in someone's love and it's often what gets us in trouble because we seek a love that does not hang in there with us we seek a love that does not give us life abide in my love stay on the vine and let me love you let my love be in you and through you and Jesus uses this verb abide in another place in his famous bread of life sermon John 6 55 to 58 listen to these words for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and

I in them I do not know what Jesus means by that I don't understand all that in fact the first people who heard him say that were so scandalized they quit following him I do not know how what Jesus says relates to the meal he established later on this is my body given for you this cup is the new covenant in my blood but what is clear is Jesus is saying that we need him and that we need him more than we need our next meal he's the living bread he's the bread of life he's saying we need to take him we know or understand the bread remains bread the wine remains brine but somehow in the eating and the drinking Jesus gives himself to us those who eat me and drink me abide in me and I in them we make our home in him by eating and drinking him through his word and through the table more than once a month

I submit I do not know how it all happens but I do wherever he is every time he invites us to dinner so this mutual indwelling happens as we do something but here's the good news now this mutual indwelling happens when the father does something I'm the true vine and my father is the vine dresser in the text we discover the father does three things for us first the father lifts up branches that are having trouble john 15 to every branch in me that does not bear fruit every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away takes away the father takes away branches that are in Jesus the verb translated takes away is used that way in many contexts but in other contexts it has the meaning lift up after

Jesus feeds 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish john tells us that the disciples lift up they take up 12 baskets of leftovers john tells us that as Jesus makes his way up the hill to be crucified he has to lift up he has to take up his own cross every branch in me that does not bear fruit he lifts up not to get rid of but to enable them to be and do all he intends for them to be and do in the first sermon I preached here after being installed as senior minister six years ago I told of a conversation that Bruce Wilkinson had with a vine grower the man told Bruce that new branches particularly have this tendency to trail down and grow along the ground and they cannot bear fruit adequately because they're lying on the ground the leaves get coated with dust then when it rains the dust and the branches get sick ever feel that way ever feel you're that you're never going to manifest the life of

[38 : 07] Jesus in you what do you do with such branches Bruce asked the vine grower cut them off and throw them away oh no exclaimed the vine grower the branch is far too valuable for that

note the branch is too valuable every branch in me is too valuable the vine grower continued we go through the vineyard and with a bucket of water looking for those branches that are down low and we lift them up and we wash them off makes sense does it not I asked some friends of my son living in the Okanagan who have grape vines about this and they agreed the branches lying in the ground are much too valuable to discard lift them up they wash them off they tie them to a fence pole so that they can bear grapes oh what love when the father sees a branch that is in Jesus which has for whatever reason fallen to the ground and gotten covered with mud he does not cut it off the branch is far too valuable to cut off you are far too valuable to cut off

I am far too valuable to cut off no the father lifts up the branch and washes it enabling it to bear fruit because the father really wants to see the life of his son reproduced in the world and when he sees one of the branches in the vine not bearing fruit he lifts it up so that it can bear more fruit that was worth the price of admission today right there when you get weary discouraged because the fruit's not on you I'm telling you the father's going to come he's going to lift you up because he wants that fruit in you father does the second thing 15 2 again every branch in me that bears fruit he prunes so that it will bear more fruit to ensure a quality greater quality of fruit he prunes the branch getting rid of whatever is in the way bless his name snip here snip there cut here cut there so that we bear more of the

Jesus fruit in us pruning can be very painful boy do I know but I know but paradoxically pruning is so life-giving for someone notice once observed the gardener is never so near the branch as with his own hands he is pruning it the word Jesus uses can also be translated cleanse every branch in Jesus that is bearing Jesus fruit he cleanses it so that it may bear more fruit and what he's doing for us individually he does for us collectively what he's doing for you and for me he's doing for the whole church the father is regularly pruning the church getting rid of that which is in the way of the life of his son being produced in us the father does a third thing the thing that makes it all happen he breathes the holy spirit into us john 14 16 and 17 jesus says i will ask the father and he will give you another helper that he may be with you forever another helper is another paraclete another one called in alongside jesus continues that is the spirit of truth and the world cannot receive because it does not behold him or know him but you know him because he abides with you and will be in you that finally is how the mutual indwelling happens the father the vine dresser breathes his spirit into those who are on the jesus vine the father sends his holy spirit into those who are in jesus the spirit comes and makes jesus real the spirit comes and makes the presence of jesus real the spirit comes and lives the life of jesus in us we cannot make it without his words and we cannot make it without his spirit i will ask the father and he will give you the spirit who will abide in you that is how this mutual indwelling happens you know at the beginning of his public ministry two disciples of john the baptist were following jesus down the road and jesus turns around and says to them what are you seeking and they said to him rabbi where are you staying staying is the verb abide where are you abiding jesus and he says to them come and you will see it turns out jesus is abiding in his father he's making his home in his father and it turns out jesus is abiding in us he's making his home in us in i in you and you and me for apart from me you can do nothing and embracing this double abiding this mutual indwelling is our number one job in the world everything else flows from this embracing his words embracing his love embracing him as living bread embracing his lifting up his bracing his pruning and embracing the father giving the spirit let us pray this

is the air I breathe this is the air I breathe your holy presence living in me this is my daily bread this is my daily bread your very word spoken to me and I'm I'm desperate for you and I'm I'm lost without you this is the air I breathe this is the air

I breathe you are the air I breathe you are the air I breathe you are the air I breathe este asip.