

Abide in Me

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 January 2024

Preacher: Dr. Wes Feltner

- [0 : 0 0] skill skill All right, if you got your Bible, go to John chapter 15, Gospel of John chapter 15. We're not ready really to start a new series this year, so what I want to do is just kind of start the year off with kind of a New Year's challenge for us. And my challenge is really just going to be that this will be a year where we will pursue Christ more, that we will know Christ more, that we will abide in Christ unlike any other time in our life.
- In fact, this is actually a really good verse. It's not our main passage for this evening, but it's a really good verse to kind of start the year off of what the Apostle Paul says in Philippians chapter 3, verse 12.
- He says, not that I have already obtained this, and if you know what the this is, it's coming right after Paul has talked about, I consider everything of this world as rubbish compared to knowing Christ.
- Like what I want is to know Christ more. And so he's saying, it's not that I've already obtained the full knowledge of Christ or am already perfect.
- [1 : 3 5] Anybody already perfect? Show of hands. That's what I thought. Not that we already fully know Christ. Not that we are already perfected. It's not that we're there, but I press on to make it.
- What's the it? It's the knowledge of God, the knowledge of Christ, my own, because Christ has made me his own.
- Everybody with me? Paul is saying, listen, I don't want you to think that I'm perfect. I don't want you to think that I've fully understand everything there is to know about Christ. But here's what I do know.
- I haven't arrived, and therefore I want to press on and press forward. This is where Paul says, I'm forgetting all that that lies behind, and I'm going to strive forward to know Jesus more.
- Now that's a way to start a new year, amen? That's the kind of focus and intensity that we as Christians ought to come into a new year with spiritually.
- [2 : 3 5] We are far from perfect. There is so much that we do not know, but we strive to know Christ more, because there is absolutely nothing more valuable than knowing Jesus.
- He is the pearl of great price. There is nothing more valuable in all of life than knowing Jesus. So that's what our challenge is going to be tonight. And the main focus, the main passage is actually going to be in John chapter 15, where we are challenged to abide in him, to pursue him, and that will be our focus this evening.
- So if you've got your Bibles and you're ready, please stand as we honor the reading of God's word. John 15, and beginning at verse 1, Jesus says, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser.
- And every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it would bear more fruit. Already you are clean because the word that I have spoken to you abide in me, and I in you.

As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

[3 : 54] I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do what, faith family?

Nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away like a branch and withers, and the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this, my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

Let's pray. Help us tonight, Father, understand these words. Help us as we begin this new year to think like the Apostle Paul, and that is to strive forward to know Christ more, that we would enter into this year with intentionality in our spiritual life to want to know you more, pursue you, to strive after you.

That we would say everything in this world is ultimately rubbish. It fails in comparison to the surpassing knowledge of knowing Christ Jesus as our Lord.

[5 : 05] So, Lord, use these words tonight to inspire us and challenge us to pursue you unlike any other time in our life as we follow Christ, and we pray it in his name.

And God's people said, amen. You can be seated. Well, it gives a whole new meaning to the phrase, a man's best friend. Now, faith family, I wish the story that I'm about to tell you was not true.

I wish it was made up, but it's not. According to the New York Post and several other news outlets, a couple of months ago, there was a Japanese man who goes by the name of Toko online.

He decided to take his very first walk ever, only not as a man, as a border collie. That's right.

There's Toko right there. He spent \$14,000 on a custom-made collie costume in order to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming a dog.

[6 : 07] And his video of his first walk as a dog went viral. Here it is. See, he can play on the ground.

He can roll over, can even shake hands. He was interviewed about this, and he said this, quote, Do you remember your dreams when you were little? You wanted to be a hero or a wizard.

By the way, I don't ever remember wanting to be a wizard. But anyways, he said, I remember writing in my grade school graduation book that I wanted to grow up and be a dog. He went on to add this.

He said, quote, I rarely tell my friends because I'm afraid they'll think I'm weird. Even my family seemed to be very surprised to learn, listen to this phrase, they were very surprised to learn that I have become a dog.

Faith family, what in the world is going on in our society, right? What does our world come to? You and I, you know this very well. We are living in some very confusing times.

[7 : 38] We are surrounded by people that think they can identify as anything regardless of any objective reality. Amen? Like all you have to do is buy a \$14,000 dog costume, and guess what?

You actually are a dog. Now, we giggle a little bit, and please understand the intent of my heart. It's not that I'm above making fun of that. It's not really my desire.

My intent here is not to make fun of this or pick on this individual or be incensive in any way. Here's what I am saying, and I don't apologize for this. In the fog of our cultural subjectivity, we have lost the fact that it actually means something to be something.

It actually means something to be something. You can fire at me. You can call me narrow-minded or bigoted or hateful or just an old soul, but I actually hold to a biblical worldview where it actually means something to be a man, and it actually means something to be a woman, and it actually means something to be an animal, and you can't simply say you are something when you categorically are not.

Now, before you get upset with me, and some of you are like, you really started the new year out like this? Yeah, why not? You know? Why not? Before you get uncomfortable or upset with me by calling out, and there are a multitude of false identifications that we could talk about in our culture, I want you to be encouraged.

[9 : 10] That's actually not my main point. It's just one example of a host of examples we could talk about, but there's one specific example I want to talk about. Are you listening?

Say yes. My issue tonight is not the false identifications that frequently happen in the culture. My concern is the false identifications that frequently happen in the church.

Listen to me. Listen. Listen. Whether we want to admit it or not in examples like this, we do the same thing. You say, how so?

Here's how so. Listen to me. Just as there are people in this world who think that buying a \$14,000 dog suit makes them a dog, there are people that think that being in the church makes them a Christian.

I mean, after all, you're wearing the right costume. You have all the external things to identify as a Christian. But what I want to declare to you tonight is this.

[10 : 16] Being a Christian actually means something. You can't just identify as a Christian because you want to identify as a Christian. Being a Christian actually comes with meaning.

The question is, are you a true disciple? Do you actually belong to Jesus? Not whether or not you identify as a Christian, but are you actually in Christ?

That's the concern that John 15 has. That's the concern that Jesus is actually after as he's speaking to his disciples. In fact, let me set the stage for you.

Jesus has just finished the Passover meal with his disciples in John chapter 13. You with me? Say yes. At the end of that meal, do you remember what Jesus does? He washes the disciples' feet.

And right after that, he reveals that there's actually someone in the group that doesn't belong to him. There's someone that's going to betray him. And you remember the conversation. Is it I?

[11 : 16] Is it I? Is it I? It would never be me. I would never do something like that. And then after Judas is exposed, what happens? He gets up and leaves. That's very important.

Jesus takes the rest of the disciples and they go where? To the Garden of Gethsemane. And on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, they actually pass by a vineyard. And Jesus stops at this vineyard and he says something that is unbelievably important and extremely profound John chapter 15 verse 1.

I am the true vine. And my Father is the vine dresser. Jesus says, I am the true vine.

Now, why in the world would Jesus use that imagery? Why would he say, I am the true vine? Was Jesus just like looking for an illustration or a metaphor?

Like, I'm like a stone. No, that's not really good. I'm like a tree. No, that's not. I'm like a star. No, no, no, no, no.

[12 : 23] I got it. I got it. I'm like a vine. That's a good one. No, Jesus is not randomly coming up with some type of illustration or metaphor. In fact, if you know your Old Testament, you know that that imagery of a vine is pregnant with significance.

Why? Israel in the Old Testament was repeatedly called God's vineyard. Listen to me. I'm already a page ahead in my notes and I'm already getting excited, right?

Because listen, this is so incredibly important for us to understand. Israel repeatedly in the Old Testament was called God's vineyard. In fact, this vine imagery was so connected with the nation, pun intended, it would almost be like our stars and stripes or the eagle.

You know, you mentioned stars and stripes, you mentioned eagle, and you immediately think America, United States. It was just so intertwined, this imagery of a vine. Printed on their coins, put on plaques above the door.

There was a golden vineyard in the temple. Israel was, in every real sense, listen, God's vineyard. But there was a problem.

[13 : 38] The problem is, even though they had the law, even though they had the prophets, even though they had the animal sacrifices, even though they had the priests, they repeatedly were a vineyard that produced no fruit.

This is more like what Israel looked like, that they were dead. They were sinful. And even though they had the law and the prophets and the sacrifices, it wasn't enough.

They were not a vineyard that produced fruit. In fact, listen to what Isaiah says of the nation of Israel in Isaiah chapter 5, verse 1. Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his, say it, vineyard.

My beloved had a? On a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it.

He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done with it? When I looked for it, it yielded grapes.

[14 : 49] Why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge. It shall be devoured. I will break down its wall and it shall be trampled down.

The problem was Israel, as God's vineyard, produced no fruit. Listen to me. I need you to hear that. Israel, as God's vineyard, produced no fruit.

Why? Because at the core of the nation of Israel was sin. Notice this on the screen. You don't even need a PhD to figure this out. They're overrated anyways. But anyways, when the vine is dead, guess what happens?

The branches don't produce any fruit. You all get that, right? If the vine's dead, if the source is dead, if the foundation is dead, then whatever branch is connected to that isn't going to produce anything.

Amen? And that's what the Bible says was true of Israel. And here's why I'm saying the implications of that are so profound. And it's why you really need to listen to this. This is a message for every Christian in every church, not just in America, but everywhere.

[15 : 58] The implications are this. Listen, you can be a moral person, that is, you have the law, just like Israel had the law. You can be doing things for God, that is, offering sacrifices, just like Israel offered up sacrifices to God.

You can be listening to me preach a sermon tonight, just like Israel had the prophets who said, thus saith the Lord, and be completely dead. In other words, you can identify as a Christian, but not be one.

You can say, I belong to the church, or I belong to Christ, but not actually be a Christian. You can sing the songs and give the money, say the Hail Marys, do the pittance, and still not be a Christian.

You say, what does all this have to do with John 15? Notice again, Jesus comes along and says, but I am the true vine. What's he saying?

Listen, listen, he's saying this. There is no spiritual life apart from me. Notice this on the screen. There is no spiritual life apart from me.

[17 : 05] It's a good place to say an amen. I mean, I realize you clearly ate too much for Christmas, and it's still lingering into the new year. I'm fired up and ready to go, but hey, I'll be excited for you.

Jesus is saying, listen, there's no life in the law. There's no life in offering sacrifices. There's no life in morality. The only way you are spiritually alive is if you are in me.

Why? Because I am the true vine. Listen to me. Some of you wonder why you don't grow. You wonder why your spiritual life isn't full of vitality.

The problem may very well be that you've been in church but never been in Jesus. That you've been involved in religious things but never actually in union with Christ.

Because there is no spiritual life outside the true vine. You say, well, how do I know if I'm connected to the vine? Jesus tells us, verse 2.

[18 : 13] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit. So here's the flow of thought, right?

Everybody still with me? This must be such a profound sermon. You're just so engaged, right? It feels like you're asleep in here. But I'm excited, right? So Jesus says, I'm the true vine.

I'm the source of all spiritual life. There is no spiritual life outside of me. I am the true vine. So here's how you know if you're connected to the true vine.

You bear fruit. Duh. Like, of course, if Jesus is the source of spiritual life, then the way we know we have spiritual life is if we bear fruit.

We know we're connected to Jesus. In other words, notice this here on the screen. The evidence of real or true faith is real fruit. We know we're in the vine when fruit is being produced.

[19 : 10] That's why here in John 15, fruit is the distinguishing mark of a disciple. Look at verse 8 of chapter 15. By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit.

And so, everybody say this phrase with me, so prove to be my disciples. In other words, here's how you know if you're a true disciple. You bear fruit. Here's how you know if you're in the vine.

You produce fruit. And this is said in the present active tense. That is, it is an ongoing part of the Christian life. Now, of course, there are seasons that are different than others.

But if you've been following, if you've been in Jesus for 10 years, there should be levels and signs of growth. And this is produced at various degrees. Okay? This is very, very, very, very important.

Everybody with me? If you've zoned out, what do you do? You've been trained so well. Right? Yeah, you zoned back in. This is not check the fruit of the person next to you.

[20 : 11] This is your fruit. Right? This is the fruit that's being produced in your life. You don't look at somebody else and say, you're really bad at this whole fruit bearing thing. Right? You should really listen to the sermon.

No, this is not. You're not checking somebody else's life. You're examining your own life. This is the distinguishing mark of a disciple. And it is what glorifies Jesus. Look at verse 8 again.

Verse 8 says, By this, that is by fruit bearing, my Father is glorified. So it's the producing of fruit in our life that glorifies God with our life.

Now, here's the big question. What's fruit? If Jesus is the true vine, and you know you're in Jesus, not in church, not in religion, you know you're in Jesus when you bear fruit, what is fruit?

Apples and bananas? It's a person that shares their faith a lot. No, no, no. It's a person that gives a lot of money. No, no, no, no.

[21 : 16] It's a person that's got a real servant's heart and helps a lot of people. What's fruit? If fruit bearing is the distinguishing mark of a true disciple, we better know what fruit is.

I mean, if that's the very thing that tells us whether or not we're in Jesus or not in Jesus, we might want to figure out what that is. What is the fruit that Jesus is talking about in John 15?

Well, keep in mind that John 15 is a continuing conversation from previous chapters. So when Jesus says this bearing fruit glorifies the Father, there's actually something they've already talked about that would have been readily in their mind so that they would have understood what Jesus was saying.

Go back to John 14 and verse 13 and notice this. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Now, let's leave this verse up here for just a moment because I want to unpack it for a moment. Question number one. Who is doing... Are you all with me? I'm so excited. Who's doing the action of this verse?

[22 : 29] Whatever you ask in my name, this... Do you know your pronouns? I will do. So who's doing the action? You or Christ?

Christ is doing the action, not you. Second question. What's the purpose? Okay, let's look at it. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do for what purpose? That the Father may be glorified.

So Jesus is going to do something, not us. He's going to do something that glorifies the Father. Third question. What is it that brings the Father glory in this?

So whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified... Say it with me. ...in the Son. That is, the Father is glorified in what the Son does.

In other words, listen, listen, listen. Fruit is the life of Jesus. Fruit is the life of Jesus.

[23 : 37] Notice this on the screen. In other words, fruit is the life of Jesus that gets lived out in you. Follow me.

Come on. This is... I can't believe you're not more excited than you are. This is good stuff. I mean, anyways. Jesus is the source of all spiritual life. You know you're in Him because you produce fruit.

What is the fruit? It's His life. It's the very life of the Son that is produced in you. It's not something you produce. It's something God does in you.

And you know this. It's the only thing that makes sense out of the metaphor, right? I mean, fruit is the life of the vine that's just simply coming out in the branches, right? The reason why there are apples on the apple branch is not because you attached an apple branch to a tree.

That's not how it works, right? There's apples on that branch. Why? Because it's connected to an apple tree. And so it's... What's happening is the branch is simply having squeezed out of it the very life of the tree.

[24 : 47] And here's why this is so good. A Christian is... And talk about a New Year's message when everybody's trying to make New Year's resolutions and I'm going to be better at weight loss and I'm going to be better at eating right and I'm going to be better with my finances.

Let me just tell you some good news. A Christian is not someone who's trying to be better. A Christian is someone who's growing in the life of Jesus.

A Christian is someone who's growing in the life of Jesus. It's the life of Jesus being pressed out of you. Notice this on the screen. So it is impossible to be connected to Christ and not be conforming in some way to Christ.

Not being better, not being more moral, but actually beginning to resemble more of the characteristics and the life of Jesus Christ.

After all, he's the true vine. And what's coming out of the branches is what's true of the vine. Don't you see?

[25 : 52] Jesus isn't asking you to be better. He's asking you to pursue him. Now let's take a moment and talk about who are these fruitless vines that get mentioned in verse 2.

Look back at that. Every branch that's in me does not bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit. And this is heavily debated.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on it. We're pretty clear on what this is about here at Faith Family. But a lot of people will take verse 2 to talk about Christians that have lost their salvation. Which to say that is to not understand the gospel of John at all.

John, throughout his gospel, is trying to compare people that have a temporary surface belief that just doesn't last. And those that actually have a true belief that perseveres and endures.

And only one of them is true faith. It's why I told you earlier that it was important that Judas got up and left. Because as John tells us in 1 John, they went out from us proving they were never really of us.

[26 : 59] In other words, how do you know if someone's really in Christ? Give them time. Give them time. Do they persevere? Do they bear fruit and last? Or is this some type of surface, a temporary response that doesn't have genuine faith?

J.C. Ross says it perfectly. This is what he says, quote, There are myriads of professing Christians in every church whose union with Christ is only outward and formal.

Some of them are joined to Christ by baptism and church membership. Some go further and are regular attendees or talkers about religion. But they all lack the one needful thing.

Notwithstanding services, sermons, and sacrament, they have no grace in their hearts. No faith. No inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ and Christ with them.

Their union with him is not real. They have a, quote, reputation of being alive. But in the sight of God, they are dead. The point here being that true disciples are those who, because of their union with Christ, have been changed on the inside.

[28 : 10] And that change on the inside begins to impact their fruit bearing on the outside. Now, if I've been excited up to this point, this is the thing I really want you to get as we enter into this new year.

Okay? Jesus is the source of all spiritual life. You with me? Say yes. Yes. You're to be connected with him. If you want spiritual life, and how do you know you're connected with a true vine?

You bear fruit. What's fruit? It's the very life of Jesus. It's the very life of Christ that's being lived in you. So how do we produce fruit?

Okay? How do we produce fruit? Because obviously, that's the most important thing to prove that we're a disciple of Jesus is to produce fruit. And here's the radical shift that I want you to get.

Notice it on the screen. While bearing fruit is the evidence of a genuine disciple, it's not the focus of a genuine disciple.

[29 : 09] Keep that up there. While bearing fruit is the evidence of a genuine disciple, that's what Jesus is saying in John 15, bearing fruit is actually not the focus of a genuine disciple.

You say, how can that be? How can you put so much emphasis on bearing fruit as being significant and then tell me, don't focus on it? Actually, it's not me that wants you to not focus on it.

It's Jesus that does not want you to focus on bearing fruit. Listen to me. In John chapter 15, do you realize there's only one command?

There is only one command, and that one command is not, go bear fruit. Let 2024 be the most fruit-bearing year ever, and I want you every day to focus.

Like, get up and say, I'm going to bear more fruit. I'm going to bear more fruit. I'm going to bear more fruit for Jesus. No, no, that's not the command of John 15. Here's the command. Look at it, verse 4 and 5. Say it loudly.

[30 : 13] Abide. Abide. Abide in me, and I in you. And the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine.

Neither can you unless you abide in me. I'm the vine. You're the branches. Whoever abides in me, and I in him, he is that that bears much fruit. For apart from me, say it, you can do nothing.

In fact, 10 times in these 12 verses, the emphasis is not for you to bear fruit. Why? Because you can't bear fruit.

You can't bear fruit. You can't force the life of Jesus out of you. That's why the command of the chapter is not bear fruit.

It's abide in Jesus. Abide here means to remain, to aggressively pursue. It's in the aorist active, meaning the responsibility is on us.

[31 : 19] Abiding in Christ is running to him and clinging to him and worshiping him and praying to him. That's abiding. So this is the paradigm shift for us believers is this.

Notice it on the screen. The preoccupation of our spiritual life is not to bear fruit, but to abide in Christ. In other words, listen, listen, listen.

You can stop doing, that is in terms of your main focus, and start being. Let me say that again. Stop doing and start being.

You see, I think a lot of us are evangelical Catholics. You go figure that one out later, okay? We are evangelical Catholics. I didn't know there could be such a bird.

Well, there's a whole flock of them here potentially. The evangelical Catholic is someone who is simply focused on what am I doing for God? What am I doing for God? I got to do more for God.

[32 : 19] I got to be better for God. I got to be at church more, and I got to read my Bible more, and I got to pray more, and I got to... And it's do, do, do, do, do, do, do. I got to do more. I got to do more. I got to do more.

I got to do more. And Jesus is saying, stop. I'm not asking you to bear fruit. I'm asking you to abide in me. I'm not asking you to produce the life you can't produce.

I'm going to do that. And that happens when you, like the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3, say, I'm just going to strive after knowing Jesus more.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm going to go to church, and yeah, I'm going to read my Bible, and yeah, I'm going to do those things. But I'm going to do those things not as checking off my do list, but that's my time to be with Jesus.

And so I'm going to go to church not because I want to feel better about myself this week. I'm going to go to church because there's something about the congregational worship of God that helps me abide in Christ.

[33 : 22] And man, I'm going to get up, and I'm going to spend some time in the Word, not because I feel like if I don't, I'm going to be guilty. And, you know, they always told me in youth group I was supposed to have quiet time. And no, no, no, no, no. Listen, when I open this book and I spend time with Jesus, I'm not checking a to-do list.

I'm abiding. And so as I pursue him and love him and know him more, that's my focus. Guess what naturally happens, not of my own doing.

The life of Jesus begins to be squeezed out of you. Why do you think Paul says the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace and patience?

Do you think he just randomly came up with fruit of the Spirit? He's like, no. Fruit of the Spirit is the life of Jesus. And as you walk by the Spirit, as you walk, as you abide in Jesus, his life gets produced in you while you focus on him.

I'm telling you what, you get this right, it's going to change your Christian life completely. Because it's why I told you earlier it was so important for us to understand Israel as a vineyard that produced no fruit.

[34 : 48] Why? Because Israel took the law. Are you with me? I got another hour, so we're good. Israel took the law and took something that was meant to prove you can't produce it.

You can't produce this. And they tried to follow it. And what it created was deadness. You turn Christianity into about what you do, you will kill yourself spiritually.

Because the law kills, but the Spirit gives life. So what I want us to do this year is not just how can we do more for God, but how can we abide more with Jesus?

How can we abide more in him? How can we pursue him and love him more? And let completing this filthy work that he began, I'm going to leave all that to him.

I'm not going to try to reconstruct my spiritual life. I'm going to let the builder take care of the work that only he can do. And I'm going to focus on loving Jesus.

[36 : 08] Amen? Amen. That's what changes everything in this passage. One final thing, one final thing. I don't even know where in the world I am in my notes.

I just went off, so that's fine. There's one more part, one more part of bearing fruit. And it's not just pursuing, the abiding part.

But there's another part, and that is the pruning. We'll end on this, verse 2. It says that every branch in me that does not bear fruit is taken away, and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it would bear more fruit.

So the role that the Father plays, Jesus is the one that lives his life through us, that produces his life in us. And the role that the Father plays is that he will regularly prune the Christian for greater fruitfulness.

Now, show of hands, how many love pain? Exactly. No one likes pain. No one likes suffering. We don't like to go through trials. But it's important for us to remember that it is suffering is how God prunes our life to help us be more in line with the vine, to help us bear more fruit.

[37 : 22] Listen to what Peter says in 1 Peter 1, verse 6. I'm almost done, I promise. In this you rejoice, that is in this inheritance that's yours, though now for a little while if necessary you've been grieved by various trials.

So that, so here's the purpose of these trials, the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it's tested by fire, may be found to result in the praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, God brings trials in our life. Trials happen in our life. And these things are to test us, to purify us as gold that is tested by fire, that we would even more praise.

Because what does fruit do? It praises God. It glorifies God. So when God prunes through suffering, when God prunes through trials, it's to produce more fruit, which in turn produces more glory to God.

Now man, if we have that perspective on suffering, and you say, well what does that look like? It looks like about 150 different things. It looks like you coming and hearing a sermon and the word of God convicts you.

[38 : 34] It might be a relationship that stirs you to say, hey man, I want to encourage you. And it encourages you to run your race and picks you up. It could be trials or suffering that you go through in life.

But all of these things are things that God uses to prune us. Paul had his thorn in the flesh. Moses, his 40 years. Joseph, his time in the dungeon. And so eventually, and this is so important, I'm done.

And eventually, a mature Christian changes their mindset to this. Notice it here. Maturity stops asking, why me? And it starts asking, what's the purpose?

Not why me? Why am I going through this? Why does God always seem to be out to get me? But God, what is your purpose in this? What are you doing here? How are you using this to prune me so that I would produce, or so that more fruit would be produced?

See, I caught myself. Would be produced in me through these trials, through this suffering. God, you're the vine dresser. And you want my joy.

[39 : 41] And nothing brings me more joy than bringing glory to you. So God, not why me? But what purpose do you have? And at the end of the day, faith family, remember that this is at the very core of the gospel itself.

Because listen to me. Jesus was the good shepherd, right? That became the sacrificed lamb. Jesus is the firstborn son with all the inheritance that became the lowly servant.

Jesus is rich and at the cross became poor. I want you to listen to me. Listen to me. Here's why you know that suffering and pruning and trials God is using for your good.

Notice this on the screen. It's because Jesus is the true vine that became the pruned branch. Jesus is the true vine that became the pruned branch.

Because Jesus, as the true vine, took on the greatest pruning in human history when he died for our sins on the cross.

[40 : 49] It is the book of Hebrews that says this. Jesus learned obedience through his suffering. And so we can know that in our suffering, Christian, that God is conforming us to the vine.

God, the vine dresser, is conforming us to the true vine. So let's make this year a year to abide. Not a year where we focus on bearing fruit.

A year where we focus on knowing Jesus. Did you hear me? Not a year where we focus on bearing fruit. A year we focus on knowing Jesus. Because we want to be true disciples.

In a world that loves to identify as something that they are categorically not. Let's not be a Christian that wears the costume. But a Christian that abides in Christ.

And all God's people said, amen. Let's pray. God, thank you for this. I hope it's been both challenging and encouraging to understand the way the Christian life works.

[41 : 55] Lord, we do not want to be a people that are focused on the wrong thing. How can I pursue Christ? How can I worship Christ? How can I, like Paul said, know Christ more?

And I pray, God, that you would give us the grace and strength to run after you in this new year. Unlike any other time ever in our Christian walk.

And if there's someone here tonight that's not a Christian, what I pray that right now would be that moment. That they would trust you. They would surrender to you. And by faith be connected to the true source of spiritual life.

The true vine. The Lord Jesus. So we thank you for this time. And guide us now as we remember how you as the true vine became the pruned branch. As you suffered for us on the cross.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[42 : 58] Thank you.