

John 15:1-11 “Bearing Fruit in Christ”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Can a selfish person really become loving and generous?! Can a fearful, anxious person ever be at peace?

Can a hothead really become patient? We have our doubts, don't we?

But Jesus has good news for us this morning along those lines as we continue to learn about our union with Christ, about abiding in Christ. This summer we've been hearing God's Word tell us about this wonderful reality that God has placed us, has defined us, has blessed us, has loved us so completely in Christ that nothing can take us out of Jesus or take Jesus out of us.

We've seen how unbreakable that union is, right? That gives us hope and confidence in Christ. But now as we kind of move towards the later part of the summer, we're considering how even the difficult parts of life are a part of this.

[1 : 28] There's a dynamic or developing aspect of that union. Last week Bill Nash really helpfully led us in considering how the suffering that we go through, right? We grow in knowing Jesus better, further up, further in. Now to be clear, we can't be united to Jesus any more truly than we already are, okay? But our awareness of that union, our living out of it, our drawing strength from it can and must grow over time. It's dynamic. That's what I mean by that word. In that sense, it's kind of like a marriage relationship which is one of the biblical pictures that God gives us for our union with Christ.

Christy and I celebrated 21 years of marriage this week. That's really, really exciting. But we were just as officially married on that day 21 years ago as we are now. Legally, technically, officially, we are equally married as we were then. But the relationship has definitely deepened in 21 years, right? I mean, we can order for each other at most any restaurant pretty effectively.

We know what the other one will feel in most situations. That really wasn't true 21 years ago. Now what happens is I'm like going along and just pretending to be happy with something. Christy will say to me, why are you frustrated? And I will say, me? Frustrated? Now I'm frustrated that you knew I was frustrated. How did you pick up on that? She knows everything.

You're either married or you're not, right? You can't be half married. We're no more married than we ever were, but we're growing, right? In knowledge, in love, in the blessing of this dynamic relationship.

We're growing because the reality of the relationship is secure. So in our relationship with God, God loves us, graces us, blesses us right where we are.

[3 : 59] Those realities don't change. They don't ebb and flow each day. And God longs for us to be shaped into His image the way that He created us to be and the way He envisioned us to be when He united us to His Son so that transformation would actually be possible for us. It could happen in our lives.

That's what we're going to be talking about these next two weeks. How that relationship with Jesus that's so secure actually produces change, growth in otherwise stagnant or decaying people like you and me, who otherwise we'd care only about ourselves, who as we get older would just get more ornery and more sore.

That's the way things trend. Instead, I want you to think of someone who's aging, someone older that you know of. Maybe their mind's not quite as sharp as before. Maybe their body is getting weaker, but you know someone and they're just a beautiful person, right? You know someone like this, full of love and joy and peace.

This week we're going to look at the positive side of that change in bearing fruit. Next week we're going to look at the flip side in battling sin. Don't skip.

Let's turn together to John chapter 15. This is Jesus' classic explanation of this reality to His disciples the night before the cross. As He's sending them as His representatives on His mission, He gives them a vital picture of their ongoing relationship with Him even though He's going away.

[5 : 48] It's John 15 at verse 1. Jesus Himself says, I am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit He takes away and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes that it may bear more fruit.

Already you are clean because of 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.

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 nothing.

If anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away like a branch and withers. And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. But 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. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

[7 : 04] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

This is God's word. Join me as we ask for His help. Father, we do pray that you would draw us close and teach us to abide.

We need your help with that. Even with coming to you for help, we need your help. We are desperately needy. We ask that you would meet us in our need, that you would change us, that you would, as you promised, make us like Jesus.

That's our hope and it's our request of you today. Do that work in each of us. For Jesus' sake, we ask. Amen. We saw a few months ago in our study of John's Gospel that Jesus here in this passage is drawing on an Old Testament image of God's relationship with His people, right?

They were to be for Him. They were to be for Him a fruitful vine. He wanted His people to produce righteousness and justice and reflect His image.

[8 : 33] But Isaiah says, While the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are as pleasant planting, God comes to look through His vineyard and find all of the wonderful fruit.

He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed. For righteousness, but behold, an outcry. It's that rotten fruit, right?

Repeatedly, God's people are a vine that bears bad fruit. And so, the reason I point that out briefly is that Jesus is making a massive statement when He stands to say, I am the true vine.

He's saying, I'm the one who will be obedient, faithful, just, merciful, a reflection of the King, a light to the nations.

I'm gonna do that, Jesus says. That's who I am. And so, if we want to be fruitful branches, a part of God's people, we have to be connected to Jesus.

[9 : 40] Grafted in, if you will, to the true vine. You'll notice that throughout this passage. That's what makes all the difference, isn't it? Jesus says it a number of different ways.

It's our vital connection to Him. Just notice for a minute before we move on how amazing and wonderful Jesus must be for that to be true.

What life must be pulsing through Him to be the source of life for all of God's children. What utter goodness to please the perfectly righteous King.

The vine dresser Himself is seeing the fruit that He longs for. What power Jesus must have to hold together in one branch all of these diverse branches of God's family from every tribe and tongue and nation all in Christ.

He is the vine that we can count on. It's like what Paul says when he describes our ongoing life in this world and he reminds us to live the same way that we were saved in Jesus, in total dependence.

[10 : 53] As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Colossians chapter 2. Rooted and built up in Him.

Put those roots down deeper into Jesus. Further up, further in. That will be the source of fruit in our lives. Let's not get confused and look for it anywhere else.

Now we're gonna get to how that works. Right now that's pretty theoretical. But it's where we have to start. And don't you love what Jesus is saying? Notice what else.

It's not just that He's the vine, but there's a promise here for us. Look, verse 5. Abide in me and I in you.

That's what we've been talking about this summer. Christ in us. Us in Christ. This beautiful union. And bear much fruit.

[11 : 49] Not maybe. Not a little bit here and some there. But definitely, certainly, inevitably, you can count on much fruit.

Perhaps we think first of the fruit of the Spirit, right? Like we read earlier. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control starting to grow in our lives.

Later in this passage, the fruit of answered prayers is mentioned. Clearly in this context, Jesus is sending His disciples on His mission to bear the fruit of others joining them in relationship with Jesus.

Lots of different kinds of fruit. But listen, in any of those areas, because of what Jesus is saying, don't give up because you're down on yourself.

And because you're feeling weak or stuck or hopeless. If you are united to Christ by faith, Jesus says change is coming.

[12 : 58] Growth is certain because He is the true vine, the life-giving vine. In fact, when we see even just a little fruit in our lives, that shouldn't discourage us.

That should encourage us. What happens when there's a little fruit? What does Jesus say? Expect more to come because our Father, the vine dresser, is so good.

Even in the painful seasons, He is pruning us. Right? So that what happens? So that we're miserable and give up? No. So that we bear more fruit.

He is so good. Even when you can hardly see it, it's just a little blossom. God, it feels like He's cutting on you. It feels like, oh, this is painful.

If you're a gardener, it might look like death. Right? There's all this stuff all over the lawn, but He's bringing more fruit. I mean, that makes sense, doesn't it?

[13 : 55] How could it be that we could be in such close, vital relationship with Jesus like we've been talking about and not be changed? Not bear fruit?

It wouldn't make sense, would it as powerful as He is? That is the vital, dynamic nature of this picture for our union with Christ. Maybe I picture Jesus walking with His disciples, you know, toward the garden that night after they've left the upper room, and He maybe picks up a branch like this and He's holding it and saying, look, this kind of fruit.

He's saying the life of the vine flows into the branches so that they bear fruit. And He's saying, I might be leaving, but this is the kind of relationship we have. Expect it.

Count on it. There's fruit coming in your life. And side note, we need to believe that not only in our own lives, but if it's true for us, where else can we believe it?

What about others? Don't give up on them. Don't decide that He's too far gone, that she's not worth having any hope for, because Jesus brings fruit.

[15 : 11] Don't give up. He promises there's fruit coming. But it's not just this automatic transaction, is it? It's not that everyone united to Christ bears exactly the same fruit at exactly the same time, right?

That's not our experience. Jesus takes great pains here, repeating over and over, what are we supposed to do? Abide.

Abide. If you abide. He's saying, apart from me, you can do nothing. Not much fruit.

Not even a little fruit. No fruit. It's a big difference. So don't just, don't just stop by and visit me occasionally, Jesus is saying.

Make your home with me. Will it be fruitful to go this afternoon and find a dead branch in your yard and hold it up to a tree or a vine?

[16 : 18] Will you start to see fruit grow all of a sudden? What if you did it overnight? If you stood out there a long time holding the dead branch up next to the vine, would that help?

What if you held them close, like a few minutes every day all year, you know? Five or ten minutes in the morning. Would that do it? No.

You have to connect to them vitally. If you just go around and there's another option, you could find some good fruit and you could tape it to the dead branch, right?

And that would look good for a few minutes and then pretty soon that's not gonna last, is it? The fruit's gonna go bad. The branch won't look good. No, for real lasting fruit, the branch has to make its home in the vine so that it is actually connected in a way that draws life and nourishment and power from the source of that life.

That's what has to happen, right? I've showed you pictures of Team Hoyt before. It's not a perfect illustration for everything, but it does picture this aspect of our union with Christ really well.

[17 : 34] The branch draws its power from the vine. Dick and Rick Hoyt are father and son triathletes. They have competed together in triathlons and marathons around the world.

Rick, the son in the chair there, has cerebral palsy. And so, Rick really can't compete on his own in triathlons.

But his father, Dick, powers the team. Rick's job is to stay connected to the power source, not just occasionally, not just checking in during the race, but constantly.

They have a wheelchair adapted for Dick to push Rick as they run and then when they get to the biking part, there's a special chair that Rick sits in while Dick is riding and then you gotta swim and so they've got this special little boat and Rick gets in the boat, Dick ties it around his arm and starts to swim because apart from Dick, Rick can do nothing of the completion of a triathlon, right?

In fact, Rick would be crazy to go even for a little while outside of the boat or out of his chair. but connected to Dick, Rick competes with power and life and joy when you see the picture reveling not only that he's finishing the race but I think there's joy.

[19 : 10] They say this, that this is their favorite thing to do together. He's reveling in the relationship with his father that they get to do this together and there we are with Jesus, right?

who promises as we draw our life from him rather than wandering out on our own to rely on our own strength that we will bear much fruit.

And as Jesus continues talking he explains a bit more of how that works itself out in our lives. He tells us to abide which Pastor Andrew Murray helpfully reminds us is weakness entrusting itself to a mighty one an unfaithful one casting self on one altogether trustworthy and true.

That's what abiding is. Jesus indeed is a home we can count on. Making our home with him. That's the idea of abiding.

That's what I mean by that. We make our home in him as he makes his home in us. He assures us over and over here that this process of trusting in him making the reality of our relationship with him the core of our identity the center of our reality our home will produce fruit.

[20 : 33] But we don't really understand that very easily. How? How does that happen? I'm going to give you three things that he says in this passage and then I want to give you a picture of what it looks like. Some of us need both of those some of us are more helped by one than the other.

Three ways that this works itself out in our lives. First Jesus' words being at home in you. Verse 7 If you abide in me and my words abide in you ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

This is repeated throughout scripture that the word of Christ should dwell in us richly to shape our lives together as God's people. That we are to hide God's word in our heart that we might not sin against him because his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path right?

So abiding in his word means reading it yes for sure and meditating on its direction for my life even memorizing it so that I hear it in my head throughout the day even when I don't have a Bible in my hands I'm hearing God's word it's shaping my day his word at home in me right?

And particularly here the promise is that as God's word shapes our desires shapes our prayers our prayers for fruit are answered that's what we're praying for here see they're not selfish prayers they're prayers for the Father's glory when you pray for him to make you fruitful and gentle generous like him God make me more like you his words dwell in us and they make our desires obedient to his will for his glory in verse 9 we make our home in Jesus' love as the Father has loved me so have I loved you abide in my love this is that mind-blowing truth that we saw again a couple of weeks ago right?

[22 : 43] Because we're united to Jesus as the Father has loved Jesus how is that? I couldn't exhaust it for you but full knowledge of everything eternal perfection complete sharing of all good things it's this unending Trinitarian love within the God who is love everything possible you could

say about love just in that way Jesus has loved you so much so that Paul says this is a love that surpasses knowledge and yet he prays that we will actually know how long and how wide and how high and how deep is this measureless love because why do we need to know all the dimensions?

because we're told to live there to make our home there to abide there in his love to have this reality that is really beyond our comprehension shape our lives listen his love is there it's not changing the question is are we resting living being empowered in it don't get out of the wheelchair or out of the boat and try to make it on your own and try to produce your own fruit if you're disconnected from Jesus' love self-sacrificing love like God's love will grow in our lives as we soak constantly in his love for us and then Jesus says one more thing about abiding it's his joy making its home in you verse 11 these things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy as a result may be full

Jesus' joy we know Jesus' joy is not based on happy circumstances right because it was for the joy that was set before him that he endured the cross his joy we see here involves obedience to his father and it must have involved rescuing us right to bring us into this relationship that joy that was set before him he delights in you it's a joy that knows no matter what happens even death on a cross good is coming from his loving father it's a joy that feels certain that satisfaction in God's provision what he knows we need is more fulfilling than anything that this world offers it's that kind of joy it's a joy that trust God's eternal inheritance relationship with him is more lasting than any other relationship we've ever known or will know it's a joy that celebrates

Jesus' victory right he is the one who has driven this and achieved this victory but it celebrates his victory as ours as we're delightfully connected to him and crossing the finish line yes he conquered sin and death we have conquered sin and death what joy in what he has done so wake up and sit in my presence Jesus says come with your your honest tears and your genuine heartache about the really hard things you're walking through and open my word and open your heart to me and I will pour my joy into you so that it's at home in your heart a joy that comes from knowing you're the apple of my eye you're the delight of my heart you're the ones for whom I gave my life so that you would share in the greatest thing ever life with me and my father

I've given my life so that my joy can start to fill your heart when it's the joy of Christ that fills your heart then your joy is full so when your kid wanders away when your house burns when you get mocked by co-workers or friends you hurt and you grieve and you rejoice see that's different right that's something that's gotta change this is what Jesus tells us will change us in time we're so at home in him that his word and his love and his joy flow into us branches and bear fruit in our lives let me help us feel what this looks like in our lives to think how this abiding in the vine could actually bear fruit for us

[27 : 40] I wanna do that just give you one example this morning I wanna talk about loving someone who's hard to love I mean can we all agree that love is gonna be at the top of the list of the kind of fruit we want showing up in our lives and in our relationships and man that can be really hard sometimes imagine you're the parent of a difficult two year old for some of you that's really painful right now I get that if you're not presently the parent of a difficult two year old you can apply this equally well to a childish co-worker or friend right kids what does it look like to love a sibling sometimes the people closest to us can be hard to love you know someone hard to love people for whom love is not naturally in your hearts it's not the first thing that comes to mind think of someone okay in your life but for sake of one example your parent and your two year old is wearing you out disobeying everything that you say wreaking havoc around the house all day and refusing to go to bed at night so that the chaos just continues and it never stops and you never get a break and in those tired moments that you've started to experience more and more of you've started losing your temper quite often losing control it seems like just about every night lately and you're discouraged you're ashamed you're angry you don't want to be like this so here you are now you're driving home from work again and you know that you are entering the whirlwind that's what you're coming home to you have a few minutes before you get there you want to reset in those few minutes you could feel defeated and just decide that this child is too wild and I am too short tempered so I'm just going to lose it again tonight nothing can help that's it

I've been there okay those feelings are real and can be overwhelming but Jesus says don't give up he says he's still working on you there's hope so let's suppose you're not there yet and you're not willing to give up on your evening you really want to be patient you really want to love your child you really want to be a good dad you really want to think of yourself like that right you have two basic

options for how to do it that night okay there's the option of growth in self by striving really hard or growth in grace in union with Christ let me try to paint two different pictures you could spend those few minutes like most of us do making your home in yourself it's a very tempting thing to do because we want to be good right

I want to do this I want to find this in myself making my home in my own efforts this is my default I'm locking in on the way home I am giving myself a pep talk I can be a good dad I won't lose to a toddler again that is so embarrassing I can outlast him I'm going to do it he can't make me lose my temper tonight in other words what are you doing as those thoughts start to go through your head you're seeking to shape your own identity aren't you to tell yourself who you are I'm going to be like this I insist on it this is who I'm going to be you could say it this way you're trying to decorate your branch with some good fruit it's the fruit that you should want put a little patience and love on it I want to look good tonight and some of us will have better nights than others some will have a little bit more success might depend on what kind of night your two year old has but at the end of the night no matter how it went you're still going to resent your child aren't you for all of the effort you're having to put in you're exerting all of this effort and you're feeling resentful rather than loving the child you see that there's no love growing except perhaps self-love growing in your heart is there as a result there's going to be a night again soon where that toddler disturbs your peace and you're going to break again or you could spend those few moments that you have in the car ride home making your home if you will in Christ abiding in him maybe you know you struggle to do that and someone in your grace group texts you to remind you of the wonder of Jesus and your relationship with him right as you're walking out the door and you're getting in the car and so you start to pray because you're desperate

God I want to be a good dad but I need your help I need your power God I see my selfishness when I lose my temper with my kid man I know I'm just like him parents you've felt that before if I'm honest God and slow down long enough I am just like my child no one respects me at work I feel out of control in life and so I'm coming home to that chaos it just attacks my longing for peace and for control and for having success at something and I'm just a mess God and in that moment you say but God I can tell you that I'm in Christ so even when I tell you what a mess I am I'm still loved I'm so loved by you God that even my toddler level fits and God I confess that's what they are when I lose my temper even those fits don't diminish your love for me in fact they motivated you to send your son for me when I was a sinner like that so I know that even as a sinner God coming to you now asking for your help

I know your word tells me nothing can separate me from your love in Christ I love that verse God thank you thank you I am loved right now what starts to happen now God I am longing for my toddler to experience that kind of love God there's nothing better than your love so I am asking you to empower me by your spirit because you're sending me as his dad back into this chaos I need you to empower me by your spirit within me with love and patience for tonight remind me that nothing he can do will make me love him less father even if it's a hard night I'm going to take that as painful as it is to be a part of your pruning me because you want me to bear more fruit and you're doing something in the life of my child that I don't even recognize so I'm going to go and trust you thank you that I have nothing to prove to you or to anyone else tonight but that from the peace I have with you

[35 : 35] I can really love as you have loved me see how real love is starting to grow you're going to have a perfect night quite possibly not but there's actually real fruit starting to grow there's going to be pruning there will be another hard night when you'll feel like you really blew it again and God will use that to drive you back to him and back to his love and give you the joy of letting that love that you're now abiding in be love that flows through you again because you really are starting to love in a new way that's the difference that growth in grace growth in Christ makes from growth in self I'm commending it to you not as a technique it's not some magic formula it's a reality in which God made you to live that produces lasting fruit he promises it might make you increasingly patient with a whiny toddler it might make you love someone enough to share the good news of Jesus with her even though you don't know how she'll respond it might make you an agent of peace as you pray daily for someone who's struggling and you encourage him in his pain

I don't know what sorts of things it will do what it will assuredly do is if you're making your home in Jesus it will help you delight in him as the source of your life see no matter how well you do our fruit the amount of it the quality of it does not connect us to Jesus that's not how it works right that's not

how vines and branches work it's not the fruit that connects the branch to the vine no what it does is assure us that we are in the boat with him pulling we start to feel his strength we say I don't love like this God but you do it reminds us of the gracious power of our Savior for us that he loves us where we are and longs for us to bear fruit in him because he made us for that fruit so I'm not stuck I'm not hopeless I'm not a lost cause because Jesus has attached himself to me he's attached me to himself and so he'll enable me to bear much fruit divine love full joy lasting peace and more and more let's ask for his help

Jesus what an amazing promise I confess to you that that I know there's skepticism in hearing that because I feel it in my own heart Jesus this is not what I experience all the time in fact we have to trust that you're bearing fruit that we don't see or recognize but Jesus we ask you to help us abide that we might not be striving in our own strength we know that's fruitless by your spirit bring fruit and life and love in us and for you we ask in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org