

A Productive Relationship Part 2

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[0 : 00] John chapter 15, I'm reading verses 1 through 8. Jesus speaking. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser.

! Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, that it may be more fruitful. 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 is thrown away like a branch and withers. And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

[1 : 03] 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.

That is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you for seeing us again.

If you've studied business literature at all, read it, you'll know over the many years, American corporations and businesses and governments are always trying to improve.

They want to have productive relationships with their employees. They want to get the best out of them for the good of the organization.

Now, often churches turn to those same practices to try to grow. Things like this. Conducting thorough analysis of the entity.

[2 : 22] Setting clear goals. Motivating employees. Improving communication. Training and upskill their employees.

Use advanced tech. And then improve quality control. And that's how your job, if you're working, that's how your job thinks.

How can we improve this business? How can we improve this hospital? How can we improve this school? They're thinking along these lines and there are certainly things that the church can learn from these practices, from these ideas.

The same is happening when you talk about self-improvement. Right? There are things that we believe that we can do to improve ourselves. And we learn these from self-help gurus and other people.

And they can be very helpful. But they should never be the primary source for increasing production or improvement in our lives or in the church of God.

[3 : 36] They're helpful, but they should never be primary. You see, the kingdom of God functions on different software than the world does. To be more productive in this space, in this embassy of the kingdom, to be more productive in this space, we must learn to be more dependent.

Dependency is the way we grow. Dependency is the way a church grows in health. that's what Jesus is talking about.

He's telling, first of all, he's telling his disciples, I'm going back a bit in the context, he's telling his disciples how they will do greater works than he will, than he did.

How they, and also, how they will continue his work without his physical presence with them. This is what this is about.

Last time, we did what our Lord did. I gave an overview of what he's about to teach concerning, remember, we're still talking about the work of the Spirit.

[4 : 48] That's the context that flows into this. He's talking about the work of the Spirit and the life of the disciple. He uses, now, a well-known image or illustration!

to drive home what he's been saying about what the Spirit will do in our lives and in our churches. He says that, first of all, the Father is the vine dresser and professing disciples are the branches. The Father wants a great crop of grapes until this end. He must tend the vine by pruning and nurturing the branches, which we are.

now, we looked at that process in general last time, and now we're going to get a bit more specific as our Lord continues to hone in on what he's saying.

First of all, the Spirit causes our abiding to bear fruit. Verses 4 and 5, abiding 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.

[6 : 03] I am the vine, you are the branches, whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit from apart from me you can do nothing. Now, for the first time, he clearly identifies disciples as the branches.

And remember what we saw back in 1420 when Jesus says, I am in my Father and you in me and I in you. He's dealing with that same idea of mutual indwelling, him in us, us in him.

This is the work of the Spirit or the helper who is given to us forever. This is a spiritual union he is describing or what we saw some time ago, this is what it means to be in Christ.

to be in Christ is to be is to abide in the vine. But now this wonderful illustration takes over.

Now, okay, I gotta remember my high school biology. So if I get it wrong, tell me later. But if I remember correctly, plants have something called roots roots.

[7 : 26] And those roots go into the ground and receive nutrients which they pass along to the rest of the plant, in this case, a vine, which then causes branches to come up off the vine and then bear, in this case, fruit, grapes, we're thinking about.

Now, if the branch somehow becomes severed from the vine, that branch can't be any fruit. It's going to dry up and die.

There's no longer any life in it. So Jesus says, the secret to a disciple bearing fruit is that he or she abides in the vine.

So what does abide mean? He uses the word abide ten times. From verses four to sixteen, he uses that word ten times. So it's certainly the main idea here.

What does it mean to abide? It's mutual and dwelling. He even says, abide in me and I in you. Now, the word abide means to remain. There's nothing deep about the word itself.

[8 : 34] It simply means to remain, to stay, or to live. It would seem to suggest a constant dependence upon Jesus to live as productive disciples.

J.I. Packer and Callan Nystrom in a little study guide Abide in Christ says, abide means to stay put in him. That is to maintain dependence on him for vision, goodwill, and wisdom to act and help as they act.

I think that was pretty good. See, the spirit creates this relationship by revealing the majesty and the glory of Christ, living, crucified, resurrected, and ascending.

That's the Christ we serve. That's the Christ of the Bible. and the spirit allows us to see him in his reality, in his glory.

It's a way of reminding us about our salvation is truly and surely dependent upon all that he is and all that he has done.

[9 : 57] Salvation is of the Lord. Remember Jonah, the prophet learned that the hard way. salvation is a salvation that goes beyond our understanding and begins in eternity past and has fruit in this life and will take us into the future.

Now, Paul Tripp helps us here, I think. It won't be on the screen. He says, when Jesus says, apart from me you can do nothing, he means that in ourselves we do not have the desire or the power to live as he designed for us to live.

So, in other words, without Jesus, you have no desire to live for God. No desire or power or ability to live in the way that obeys him.

You can't follow him without this abiding. It's like getting into a car. You've all many, I'm sure, gotten into a car before and if you're a driver, you've gotten into the car, you put the key in the ignition and you turn the key.

Or, today, you put your foot on the brake and push the button. Soon, it'll be start car. I'm looking forward to that.

[11 : 19] Hey, does your test it? Never mind. So, you get in the car, you turn the key, nothing happens. So, what do men do?

Ladies, I can't speak for you, but what do men do? We get out and pop the hood. We don't know what we're looking at, but that's what we do. We pop the hood and we look.

Oh, look, I see an engine. Some of us who are more gifted, oh, the starter looks good. I see wires. Then we might even get more ambitious and look under the car.

Oh, look, a tranny, a transmission is there. That's great. So, you get back up, everything's in place, but the car won't start.

So, you call your mechanic or, more embarrassing, triple A. and they show up and they look at the hood and in two seconds they say, you don't have a battery, man.

[12 : 25] You missed the battery. There's no battery in the car because that's the job of the battery is to start the engine. That's all it really does is start the engine. And without a battery, nothing happens.

You may have all the parts, everything's in place. But without a battery, car won't move. Car won't start. Jesus says, I am the battery.

And as long as we are connected to him, we move. We can go. We can do. We can live the way he's come. You can, listen, listen, you can attend church Sunday after Sunday, small group on Wednesday, Sunday school, Sunday morning.

Bible study with some friends on another day. But if you are not abiding in Christ, all you have done is get a bunch of head knowledge.

You will be wondering why am I getting all this Bible knowledge and I still hate people. Or I'm still with this anger problem.

[13 : 38] Or I'm still dealing with this lust problem. I don't seem to be growing as a Christian. My behavior isn't, how come I can't move? How come Jesus is not becoming more real to me?

Maybe you're not depending on Christ. We're not abiding in him so that that relationship is what fuels you.

You see, there's a lot of things that can fuel a Christian's behavior. Tradition can fuel our behavior. Pride can fuel our behavior.

I'm a part of a church can fuel peer pressure can fuel our behavior. But it won't last and it won't produce.

only living a life of dependence upon Christ and his spirit will your life begin to be transformed and produce the fruit that Jesus is talking about.

[14 : 54] You see, without him, he says, you can do nothing. And so, the Christian life, much of the Christian life is about helping us learn to depend on Jesus more.

I just thought of something. There's a passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 1. It just really fits. 2 Corinthians chapter 1. I don't know where Corinthians are.

Okay, there we go. Okay, just a note, if you don't know the books of the Bible in order, memorize your table of contents. That's how I did it. I'm telling you, you can learn the books of the Bible in order that way.

But in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, Paul is talking about the suffering that we go through and he's talking about God being a God who comforts us in our need.

Now, if you got in front of you, drop down to verse 8 of chapter 1. Here's what Paul says. For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia.

[16 : 06] Now, affliction here is bad. Okay, this is strong opposition. This is painful. So painful, he calls it affliction. We don't know exactly what it was, but it was bad.

How bad was it, Paul? For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. that's pretty bad.

Whatever the great apostle was going through, he thought this was it. I will not make it out of the situation. I'm going to Jesus. Okay?

But why did it happen? Verse 9. For we do, I'm sorry, indeed, we felt that we have received the sentence of death, death.

But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us.

[17 : 09] On him, we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. What I want you to notice here is that the apostle, this is Paul, he's weighing into his discipleship.

God is using him to plant churches. He's been used to do miracles. And he still says this, that he needs to learn not to rely on himself but to rely on God.

That's what abiding is. It's just not relying on yourself to be productive, not relying on your wisdom or your degrees and education, not relying upon worldly methods of success and building an empire or self-improvement.

That's not how we grow in Jesus. How we grow in Jesus is by learning that you are weak, have no strength to do anything for his glory.

and so coming to him daily and a sense of dependence and need.

[18:30] We were talking about in Sunday school and my brother Dan brought this out about the fact that desperation. Do you feel, Paul, desperate in that situation?

Didn't he sound desperate? I felt the sentence of death. Ah, but it happened.

Because see, God's at work in that sentence. Listen, wherever you are, God's at work in it if you belong to him for his glory and that you might bear fruit for his son. He's at work in it.

It's going to be painful. Yes. Not always, though, but a lot of times, yes, sometimes you may even feel the sentence of death.

And it might be true, because the worst thing that can happen to a Christian is that I die. No. That's one of the best things that can happen to a Christian because I go to Jesus.

[19:30] Paul says that, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Gain. Gain. He's learning and I love the fact that he says he's playing on words here a little bit.

He felt the sentence of death so that he would learn to rely not on himself, but on the one who raises the dead. So if I die in the midst of this, I'm destined for resurrection in Jesus.

Death is not the end for me. Abiding in Jesus is learning that dependence. Yes, and he will allow affliction.

He will allow hard times in our lives so that you and I would learn we don't got it. I can't.

Somebody in the class this morning mentioned AA. Was that you, Dan, again? Man, I'm just quoting you all the time. Why don't you come up here and do this? Sheesh. Talking about AA and one of the key tenets of all those anonymouses is that you are helpless.

[20:50] Key tenet, helplessness. But see, it doesn't, but that's just for addiction. We're talking about for life. Jesus says you're helpless for life. Life in me, you're helpless.

You need me. You must always have me. You must always be coming to me. You must always be depending on me. You must always be abiding in me. You must always be calling upon me.

Dependence is the way we grow.

And so Jesus calls us to this. And here's the thing. He gives us certain things to remind us of our dependence, not just afflictions or problems, but certain good things.

He gives us his word. If you read the Bible and you see God saying, Jesus didn't follow me and do this, you recognize probably, hmm, that's going to be hard. Or you may say to yourself, I can't do that.

It's a reminder. When you come to the sacraments, the sacraments are not so much about what the pastor is doing, it's about what God is doing in the sacrament.

[21:56] We come to the Lord's table because Jesus is the host of the table, holding up his body and blood for you. Baptism is about God cleansing, God bringing us into the fellowship of the saints.

So we come to the sacrament, we're reminded that it's God at work. We go to prayer, the most dependent thing I can do, and I think for you too, is to pray. When you get on your knees, this is a very humbling position, isn't it?

That's how we do it. Kneeling before God or laying flat on your face before God is a position of submission and helplessness.

And you cry out to him who is glorious and good, who is love. You're expressing dependence.

That might be one reason why prayer is so hard. I don't like being dependent. I wasn't raised that way. Were you?

[23:06] I was raised to be strong, to make a way in the world, to get a good job and finish school, whatever. I was raised to do it for myself, to do you, Kev.

Get out there and make something. That's how I was raised. So when you tell, when Jesus comes and says, you are screwed up and you need me every day, every second.

My flesh kind of says, hold it now. I'm not that bad. So prayer reminds me, here's something, oh, here's here.

Fellowship of the church reminds me of my need, of my dependence. He says, should. When you, if you feel independent in the church, you are not really part of the church.

You don't know what it means to be part of the church. You may not even be a Christian. I don't know. I don't know. That's God's thing. The church, the fellowship of the saints, is interdependence. [24 : 11] We are called the what? Body of Christ. Which means every part of the body is needed for the body to function and achieve what Jesus has called us to do.

So if you are part of the church and you are taking your spiritual gift and keeping it in a corner somewhere, you come to worship and go home and go to Bible study somewhere else, but you ain't part of the church.

You have forgotten what it means to be, in some part, a Christian. Because as a Christian, you are part of the body of Christ.

you are a brick in the temple of Christ. So when we get together, we should be reminded time and time again of how needy we are, how much we need each other, and how much we together need Jesus.

So as we are abiding, there is this change taking place. The life of Christ is flowing in us. Now, here's the thing about the life of Christ.

[25 : 30] He never shows up to do nothing. The Spirit of God does not enter your life to do nothing. When he joins you to Christ, he means and will do a work of changing you.

because as beautiful as you are, and as sweet as you are, you're not sweet and beautiful enough for God.

He's perfection. So we look pretty bad. We're a homely bride. And Jesus is working to beautify us together.

Together. So what does that look like? Well, the fruit that Jesus is talking about that he wants to manifest, you know where I'm going.

Where am I going? See it? I thought somebody said it. Fruit of the Spirit. Galatians chapter 5. Galatians 5, 22 to 24.

[26 : 34] Here is what the Spirit produces in God's people as we depend or abide in Christ. It's first of verses. It's not the only thing, but it's first of all about character.

He's changing you. So what does it look like? But the fruit of the Spirit is love. Some postulate that love is actually the fruit and everything else is under love.

I don't know if that's true or not, but it's a thought. Love. Then, I love the, I don't know the order is important, but the first two or three probably are.

Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Do you see yourself yet? Are you in there, anywhere in there? Kindness.

Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. Against such things, there is no law.

[27 : 41] Now, here's the truth. Those are all qualities of Jesus. That's what Jesus looks like in perfection. He comes to mold and shape that in us.

Now, let me go back to another thought, a first thought. the body of Christ is needed for you to manifest these traits. It's easy to be loving, patient, peaceful, and kind until you get out of bed. Until you start interacting with people. Until you start interacting with the body of Christ. Christ. This is why the body, this is why the church is, is, is, is an entity all, I don't care, parachurch, Bible studies on the side, they're all good, but there's nothing like the church.

That's the thing that Jesus said he would build, by the way. And it gets to hell, can't stop it. It's the church. Now, listen, within the church, you've got people who like Star Trek, like I do.

and then we have unenlightened people who don't like Star Trek, or know what I even mean by Star Trek. Then you've got people, okay, here we go, who vote consistently the opposite of what you vote.

[29 : 04] Consistently. And then you've got people who are of different ethnic background. I told you, I mentioned when we were in England a couple months ago, I was preaching, and I noticed this row of African women all sitting next to each other.

And they were beautiful, dressed out in an African garb. And so one of them was a church secretary. And I asked her, I said, hey, were they all sisters? Were they all together?

She said, each one of them was from a different country in Africa. Now, watch this. Some of them don't get along.

But in Christ, come on somebody, in Christ, as they abide in Jesus, and the fruit of the Spirit is manifest, all of those divisive barriers that we put up as human beings, those take a back seat to the fact that we are in Christ.

Christ. And that's what we need in the church because our Bible studies tend to be like us. Nothing against Bible studies. You know, I love Bible studies. Nothing.

[30 : 22] But when you come to the church, now there are people sitting around you who don't look like you, don't think like you, don't vote like you, don't like the same music.

Some of y'all like country. Hey, that song, that hard fought hallelujah. I love that song. Jolly Roll and Brandon Lake. I'm Jolly Roll. Jim, you're Brandon Lake. we're going to do that next year. Is that country? I like it.

Whatever it is, I love it. But see, we need the body because the body is now reminding us of our dependence, reminds us that we have to learn to love people who are not like us.

We should change seats. right now. No, just kidding. So we need the body. Let me wrap this up for today. Christ's character, this fruit of the spirit, does not exist without action or interaction.

[31 : 38] Read it. How do you know you have self-control? Something's happened. How do you know you're gentle? You've got to deal with somebody who may be getting on your nerves.

How do you know you're kind? Because you're interacting with somebody who's maybe in need. How do you know you're loving? Because somebody really is testing you in some way.

All of these attributes have to have some type of interaction interaction. In order for them to be manifest. And a lot of them tend to be interactions that are stressful.

But that is the work of the fruit of the spirit. Christ is forming in you his people. That's what he's doing. As you trust in Jesus and live in dependence on him every single day of your life, as you call out to him, he is working to create in you this kind of person.

Now, I'm told that there are two types of tea drinkers. I'm told, because I only know one.

[32 : 58] There are those who like dipping their tea bag in the hot water. They're just dipping. Some Christians are like that, too. They dip into church, dip in and out, never really staying long enough to get anything, but they just dip in and out, dip, dip, show up once a month, maybe twice, if we're lucky, and I use that word sincerely.

You don't believe in luck. They dip in and out. Well, when you're dipping, your tea doesn't get as strong as it could.

Now, maybe you don't like strong tea, so maybe you're happy dipping. But if you want a good cuppa, what you do is you allow the bag to steep.

Come on, somebody. You allow the tea bag to sit in that boiling hot water. You know what I do? I like to cover mine. Keep that moisture and steam heat in there.

And what happens is the tea bag begins to just soak and all of that yummy, delicious tea fills that cup and it gets dark and it's strong tea.

[34 : 15] Not no weak tea. Strong tea. That's the kind of tea I want. I'm going to be to taste my tea. With sugar, thank you.

when you abide in Jesus, you're steeping. You're steeping. You're steeping in the warm hot embrace of your savior.

And see, the depth of your abiding will determine your spiritual growth. See, you're lucky dipping over here. You ain't growing. Maybe a little, but you ain't happening.

You may not even be really in the thing. I don't know. But the steeper, the one who sits and remains in Christ living their life daily in dependence, growing in dependence, recognizing their weakness.

I can't love my wife as Christ loved the church unless I'm abiding in Jesus, and even then, I fail. I can't put away pornography unless I'm abiding in Christ, receiving my dependence, living my dependence upon him.

[35 : 27] I can't deal with gossip because I love to run my mouth. I got the tea, baby. I got to tell it. I can't deal with that unless I'm abiding in Christ, remaining in him, realizing my dependence and my tongue's dependence on the spirit's control.

I can't be a good friend because I'm really selfish unless I'm abiding in Christ, the true friend, and allowing him to work in me, teaching me how to love people.

Fill in the blank, please. That's steeping, and as you steep, Jesus fills your cup with power and love and glory, his glory, and you're being transformed.

So let me ask you, are you a dipper or are you steeping? Father, as we come to the end of this message, we pray, Lord, that it would minister your grace to your people. May the illustrations use support the text and drive the text home into our hearts, drive Christ home into our hearts and lives.

[36 : 59] Make us more dependent upon Jesus. Please, don't leave us like this. Make us more dependent upon him who is life.

We ask in his name, Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.