

John – I Am
Part 7
John 15: 1-9
Pastor Charles Price

Now let me ask you to turn in your Bible to John's Gospel and Chapter 15 - John's Gospel, Chapter 15.

And we have ahead of us such a rich passage of Scripture that it would be impossible to do it justice, and particularly in the 40 minutes that I have available to be me this morning.

But I want to pick out some key, some practical, and some life-changing issues that Jesus talked about here.

This is part of His talking with His disciples the night He was arrested. The following morning He was crucified. He has already been with them in Chapter 13 and Chapter 14. And we have got Chapter 15, Chapter 16, Chapter 17 still to go of what Jesus was talking with His disciples about that evening.

And in Chapter 15 and Verse 1 He says,

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

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

“If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.

“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Well, I am not going to read beyond that. There is enough there to keep us thinking for a long time. We have been looking for a number of weeks at the “I am” statements that Jesus made about Himself.

“I am the bread of life.”

“I am the light of the world.”

“I am the good shepherd.”

“I am the way, the truth and the life,” and so on.

And we come this morning to this one, “I am the true vine.”

These verses we have read have three aspects to them, three functions to them.

There is the function of Jesus, first of all. “I am the true vine.”

Then there is the function of the Father. “My Father is the gardener.”

And then there is the function of you and me, the disciples of Jesus Christ. “You are the branches.”

So the vine is Christ, the branches are us, and pruning the branches to make them more fruitful is the Father, whose business is to bring about that fruit in our lives.

Let’s talk first then about Jesus’ role in this.

“I am the true vine.”

If you visit Israel today you will see the symbol of the Israeli tourist board almost everywhere you go. You will see it on buses, you will see it in hotels, you will see it in other buildings, you will see it on the badges that tour guides wear.

And the symbol is two people with a pole on their shoulders, reaching from one to the other, and a huge bunch of grapes hanging below it.

It’s about the spies who brought back to Moses the riches of the land of Israel, carrying grapes and pomegranates on poles on their shoulders.

And the vine becomes a key image that runs through the Old Testament. It is, in fact, the symbol of the nation itself.

Now you find this especially in the book of Psalms, you find it in the prophecies of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, of Ezekiel, of Hosea. It is alluded to in other places. And you also find it in one or two of the parables of Jesus.

But the general message about the vine throughout the Old Testament is that though it is symbolic of the nation of Israel, that God set apart, called to Himself, created from Abraham whom He called to Himself; the general message is about the failure of the vine, that it has not produced fruit. It has not developed deep roots. And so the vine was shallow. It had not been pruned and so it had grown wild and the fruit was bad.

I will give you just a couple of examples.

Isaiah 5:4 has the whole story of a vineyard that has failed. And it says,

“What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad grapes?”

Then he talks about how they took away the hedge around the vineyard, they broke down the wall and the whole thing just became a barren wasteland.

That’s Isaiah’s picture of the vine.

In Jeremiah 2:21 God says to Jeremiah,

“I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me and become a corrupt wild vine?” (“A degenerate vine,” as the King James puts it.)

The book of Hosea; he says Israel was a spreading vine and became corrupted. And he goes on to write about how they built false and foreign altars and they became full of thorns and of thistles.

They were all giving the same picture. Something has gone wrong with this vine.

Psalm 80 is the last reference I will make here but it is the most interesting because David is writing there and he says to God,

“You brought a vine out of Egypt” [Verse 8]

(That of course was the Israelites under Moses’ leadership.)

“You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.”

So far, so good. And then there are eight verses I am not going to read to you, which talk about how that it took root and filled the land at first, but now it was broken, now boars ravaged it. Now it gets burned with fire – he describes all of that in about ten verses.

And then in Verse 16, then he says this of the vine:

“Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish.”

And then he says,

“Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.”

Raised up to replace this degenerate vine that only gives bad fruit.

Well here’s the question – and you will get the answer: who do you think he is talking about when he speaks to God of “the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself?”

And Israel wondered that for centuries until in John Chapter 15 and Verse 1, Jesus said,

“I am the true vine.”

Not just, “I am the vine” – “I am the true vine.”

That is that Israel, being set apart by God was only a foreshadowing, only an anticipation, only a preparation for what God really was sending to be the true vine, which is Christ Himself. He is going to be the source of life and therefore the source of fruitfulness.

The sole function of a vine is to produce grapes, to bear fruit. A vine has no secondary function. You can’t carve a vine as wood. You can’t build with it. You can’t make a vine into a walking stick. You can’t even burn it unless the fire is already blazing and you throw it in and it smolders away in the flames.

That’s why, when in the Old Testament, the vine produced no fruit. It was worth nothing except to be thrown out and destroyed.

Now Jesus is the true vine, He tells us, and His purpose is to produce fruit in the branches that are united to this vine.

His purpose is to produce fruit so much so, in Verse 2,

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

Verse 4:

“No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

Verse 5:

“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Verse 8:

“This is my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Now what’s the evidence of being connected with the vine, being connected with the Lord Jesus? It is fruit, He says; it is producing fruit.

Nine times in those verses I just read to you, He talks about fruit and being fruitful. All the life comes from the vine but is expressed in the branches and the quality of fruit that comes from it.

So this allegory, this picture of the vine is Jesus saying, “I am, Myself, the source of your life, and the source of your fruitfulness.”

However, a vine and its branches need gardening. So the second thing He says there in the second part of Verse 1,

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.”

And the gardener has two roles here. And they are two roles played out with two different kinds of branches.

First of all, in the beginning of Verse 2,

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.”

The first thing He does.

The second thing He does is the second part of that verse:

“Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

So branches that bear fruit, He prunes them. Branches that do not bear fruit, He cuts them off.

Now let’s look at these two and see what is meant here.

First of all,

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit” (first part of Verse 2 tells us).

There are branches that are attached to the vine, they appear attached to the vine, they are physically attached to the vine. But there is no fruit, and if there is no fruit it is because there is no life. So the branches are described as being dead.

If there is no fruit it will be because there is no life, and if there is life, there will to some measure be fruit. Unpruned branches; the fruit may lose its quality, but there is to some measure fruit if there is life.

Now who are these lifeless branches He is talking about?

Well let me read again Verse 2 and 3:

“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

And then He says in Verse 3:

“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

Now He is speaking to His disciples and He says,

“You are already clean.”

And the significance of that is that a little bit earlier, in the same evening in John 13:10 He said to them there,

“And you are clean, though not every one of you.”

So Chapter 15 He says,

“You are already clean” – all of you.

Chapter 13:

“You are clean, though not every one of you.”

Really? Well look at the next phrase in John 13:10:

“For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.”

He was talking about Judas Iscariot. And it was after Jesus had said that that Judas went out into the night, as I think Luke’s Gospel describes it, went out into the night to betray Him and sell

Him for information about Him for 30 pieces of silver, and within 24 hours had, himself, committed suicide over that whole event.

There are branches who have all the appearance of being Christian, but they bear no fruit that originates in the vine, in the Lord Jesus Christ. And they are not genuine.

There are a number of references – I looked at a lot of them this week, and I am only going to be selective – I am going to quote one primarily – where there is talk about separating wheat from weeds that all grow together in the same field and all look alike, sheep from goats that look alike in the Middle East (they look alike much more than they do here), bad fish and good fish all caught up in the same net – there are parables about that.

But in Matthew 7:21 Jesus says there,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’

“Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

These are people involved in prophecy, they are involved in performing miracles, they are involved in exorcisms, driving out demons, all of which appear to be spiritual gifts.

They have learned the language. Several times it says that “they say to Me, they say to Me, they say, ‘Lord, Lord.’” But they have only learned the language. They don’t know the life. They appear as genuine but it is not real fruit they produce.

So what appears to be the fruit that comes out of those branches is something akin to the plastic fruit that some people have on their kitchen tables, just a plastic banana, a plastic orange, a plastic apple, a plastic whatever you put there, designed to look similar but lifeless, artificial, dead.

Paul said to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 13:5 (and I am going to read the Amplified Version of this) - I have read it here before - it’s a very important verse:

2 Corinthians 13:5:

“Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to the faith and showing the proper fruits of it.”

Don’t separate those two things. You are holding to the faith. Don’t say, “Yeah, my creed is in order.”

“...holding to the faith and showing the proper fruits of it.”

That is, there is fruit that is flowing out from that.

It goes on to say,

“Test and prove yourselves. Do you not yourselves realize and know thoroughly by an ever-increasing experience that Jesus Christ is in you...”

Not a static thing, not something I did twenty years ago, but,

“...by an ever-increasing experience that Jesus Christ is in you - unless you are a counterfeit, disapproved on trial and rejected.”

Now what Paul is saying to them there is if there is no evidence of an ever-increasing experience that Jesus Christ is in you, an ever-deepening relationship with Him, an ever greater manifestation of His presence and His fruit in your life, then you are counterfeit, you are disapproved on trial, you have failed the test and you are rejected.

That’s what Paul says.

You know we can deceive ourselves that if we have the language of godliness, the language of spirituality, the language of Christianity that we therefore have the life. But we can teach parrots to talk, we can teach monkeys to act and you will see them in the circus.

Those of us who grew up in Christian homes are probably especially vulnerable here. It has been part of the culture of our homes. It is what we continue to do. It is the area in which we find a measure of security because of the familiarity of it all. And yet we have no direct dealings with God ourselves, there has been no wrestling with Him, there has been no pleading with Him, there has been no battling through to Him, there is no experiential relationship with God. It is an intellectual exercise but no more.

And our interest in Christianity is expressed primarily in things like going to church – that’s really the evidence we are a Christian, if there is any that the neighbors are looking for. We go to church on Sundays. They happen to play golf on Sundays – in the summer anyway. That’s your hobby; that’s their hobby.

There is nothing significantly different in the relationship that we have with God that flows out in life. There is no fruit, nothing that cannot be explained merely by our own personalities, our own temperament, our own abilities, our own gifts – nothing that requires the life of God in us to explain it.

And Jesus said the reliable evidence is not found in our testimony but in our fruit. That’s why He says (lost the verse here I was going to quote to you, but it is here and if you just have a cup of tea I’ll find it – the verse that says, - where is it? Anyway it’s here somewhere that you show yourself...)

Here we are: [John 15:8]

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciple.”

“Not showing yourself to be a member of the local church, but showing yourself to be connected with Me. You show yourself to be My disciple, intimately related to Me.”

And so the gardener, in Verse 2, cuts off every branch that bears no fruit because it is phony, it’s not real.

And it is a good thing to examine our own hearts as to whether our relationship with Jesus Christ is genuine and living and real, and we will see in a moment just a few instances to how we might know that or whether it is simply a cultural thing, a convenient thing, but it’s not real.

The second thing the gardener does is in the second part of Verse 2:

“Every branch that does not bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

So the branches that do not bear fruit he cuts off. The branches that bear fruit he prunes. That means he cuts them back so they become even more fruitful.

My wife is the gardener in our house. And in our small area of plants and things, some of those plants look as though they have been murdered at the end of the summer when they are just cut right back to nothing so that next year there is even better fruit, better flowers, more beautiful.

This is talking about the discipline of God in our lives to produce better fruit. Now the discipline of God is both preventative and restorative.

What I mean by that: if you go to a doctor and he puts a needle in your arm, it may be for one of two reasons. You will feel the same needle – feel the same way should I say (hopefully not the same needle) – one will be a flu shot, and that’s preventative, that’s designed to protect you. There is not anything wrong with you yet; there is no flu – it is designed to protect you from the flu virus when it comes your way.

If, with his needle, he injects an antibiotic into you, that is restorative. Something is wrong with you and this is designed to fight the bacterial infection.

Now God’s pruning both corrects when there are things that need correcting, and prevents things that haven’t yet taken place but might and is preventative.

And a vine is not fruitful without its branches being pruned. Unpruned branches produce mediocre fruit - and increasingly mediocre. But a pruned branch has been refined.

Let me read to you what the book of Hebrews says, the writer encouraging people not to take discipline casually.

“My son...”

(Hebrews 12:5)

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?”

And he goes on for several verses there to say that it is the love of a father that lies behind the discipline of a child.

Now this should help us understand the positive role that suffering and difficulties and disappointments, sadnesses can play in our lives.

Paul also wrote in Romans 5:3 that

“We rejoice in our sufferings...”

(Which sounds rather masochistic till you read the rest of the sentence.)

“...because we know that suffering produces...”

Now I have those two words heavily underlined in my Bible: suffering produces. And he gives a list of qualities:

“...suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Now he says this is why you rejoice in your sufferings. Not, “God, take away my sufferings, take away this difficulty, take away...” No, of course God does intervene – there are things in our lives that He takes away because their source is satanic rather than from the Father.

But the Father, who is the gardener, will bring into our lives that involve difficulty and suffering and we rejoice in those sufferings because of what they produce.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:6:

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

Similar theme – rejoice in the grief that you are suffering in all kinds of trials.

“These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

I remember this verse becoming very meaningful to me many, many years ago when I was a student. And I spent a couple of summers smuggling Bibles into eastern European countries during the Soviet era when Bibles were not available, often illegal literature.

And I spent two summers with a friend carrying Bibles into Romania and Bulgaria, Hungary and a few other places. And we went thinking we were doing a wonderful favor to these people – bringing them Bibles! And we met Christians in all kinds of remote situations. We had secret addresses and things to go to. And it was all very exciting.

But you know we met some of the most godly people I had ever met up until that stage. We stayed in the homes of the most generous, the most kind, the most godly. I remember while I was there reading this verse and it becoming so meaningful to me. “This is exactly what I am seeing in front of my eyes.”

“You greatly rejoice, but for a little while you have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come for this reason: your faith – of greater worth than gold.”

Do you know the problem we have is that gold is the greatest value to many of us. We talk about success in life in terms of material things. Somebody is successful because they made good money.

That is not success. Success is when your faith has become refined so it is proved genuine and results in praise, glory and honor.

Suffering brings the best out of some; it brings the worst out of others, depending on the disposition of heart that we have towards it.

The same thing in one person makes him bitter; the same thing in another person leads him to greater rejoicing. It is the disposition that says, “God, this is tough, this is difficult, but thank You so much that I am tied into the vine, You are my life, You are my strength and I am looking to You.”

And God will bring out of the most difficult situation fruit. And fruit is what Paul calls the fruit of righteousness in Philippians He calls it the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control.

Fruit is things from our lives that feed other people, fruit not just to be on display. A tree full of fruit is not much use to you; the fruit is to be eaten so that people may eat your love, that they may be fed by your joy and peace and patience.

And you bring things into people’s lives rather than sucking life out of them because this fruit is designed to feed.

So, “I am the vine,” said Jesus “and My Father is the gardener who both cuts off and prunes.”

Thirdly, and briefly, “You are the branches.”

The key word for the branch is the word “abide” is how most translations put it. It occurs eleven times: abide in the vine.

King James says,

“Abide in me and I will abide in you” (in Verse 5).

The NIV, which I read earlier, has the word “remain.”

The Amplified Bible has the word “live” as does one or two others – few, but one or two others have the word “live.”

Now I want to read this and combine those three words: abide, live, remain in Me.

In Verse 4:

“If you live and abide and remain in me, I will live and abide and remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must live, abide, remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you live and abide and remain in me.”

Verse 5:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man lives in me, lives and abides and remains in me and I live and abide and remain in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

“If anyone does not live and abide and remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned.

“But if you live and abide and remain in me and my words live and abide and remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.

“This is my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now live and abide and remain in my love.

“If you obey my commands, you will live and abide and remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and I live and abide and remain in his love.”

Now this is a conscious deliberate abiding, remaining and living in Christ. And why is this so crucial to get hold of?

Because, Verse 5,

“Apart from me you can do nothing.”

“You can be very busy apart from Me, but you won’t accomplish anything.”

You can be a pastor, you can keep busy, you can keep a crowd happy, but you won’t accomplish anything of lasting fruit and value in people’s lives.

You can be a leader, you can be an elder, you can be a board member, you can be a Sunday school teacher, you can be a choir member, you can be a staff member of a church, you can be a missionary out on the field, but unless you know what it is to “live in Me, abide in Me, remain in Me” you will never produce fruit. There will be nothing to show for it once you have left.

That’s why if a work becomes dependent on a man because of his strength of personality and gifts and abilities and you take that man out the work will collapse because it is not dependent upon Jesus Christ; it is dependent on the man. And it is as we live and depend on Him.

Now we usually have to learn this the hard way.

Just very quickly, Peter, you know the disciple Peter, was one who had to learn this the hard way. He was very self-assured it seems, certainly very confident about his opinions and had lots to say in the gospels. You have more of Peter than every other disciple put together.

“Then spake Peter, up spake Peter, then answered Peter.” You even have “then answered Peter” when Peter hadn’t been asked anything. He was just always offering an opinion, always talking.

And the night that Jesus was arrested, after this discourse that we are looking at, went out to the Garden of Gethsemane.

And before they went out there, Jesus said to His disciples, “Before the rooster crows in the morning, Peter, you will deny Me and everybody else will desert Me.”

And Peter was indignant. “I will never deny You,” he said.

“Peter, before the rooster crows you will have denied Me three times.”

And it says - I can't tell you what Peter said because the Bible censors it – he was emphatic, “I will never do it. Even if all these desert You,” he said. “I can understand James, Matthew, John, they'll go, yeah okay, but I never will. If I have to die with You, I will never desert You. If they need to put four crosses up there and put me on the fourth, I'll be there.”

Now you remember how Jesus was arrested and Peter followed at a distance. A girl came by, “Aren't you one of His disciples?”

“No.”

“I thought I saw you with Him.”

“No, it must be someone who looks like me.” (Phew! Got away with that one.)

Somebody else came along. “You have got a Galilean accent. Are you one of His disciples?”

“Funny you should say that – somebody else just asked me that. No, I don't know Him.”

Then a third person came by and said, “I know you; you are one of His disciples.”

“No, I am not.”

And this is when Peter cursed and swore and denied any knowledge of Christ. Then suddenly, cock-a-doodle-doo. And Peter broke down and wept bitterly. And when he next talked with Jesus, or maybe not immediately the first time, but after the resurrection, He said, “Do you love Me, Peter?”

He used “agape”, the strong word.

And Peter responded, “I phileo” – it's a lower word. In English the only close form would be, “Do you love Me?”

“Well I like You.”

Second time: “Do you love Me Peter?”

“I like You.”

So Jesus came down to his level. “Do you like Me Peter?”

“Yes, I like You. You know everything. You know I like You.”

“Feed My sheep.”

But Peter is now humbled and he is fully aware of the inability and brokenness of his own life.

And then in Acts Chapter 2 the Holy Spirit is poured out and the disciples and others with them are filled with the Holy Spirit.

And Peter gets up to speak. And if I was one of the disciples, I would say, “Peter, you have messed up enough. Sit down. Give somebody else a go.”

But he got up, he preached with authority, with power. 3,000 people came to Christ.

In Chapter 3 they go into the temple in Jerusalem. There is a crippled man asking for money and Peter says, “I don’t have any money but what I have I will give you.”

That’s interesting. What have you got?

“In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk!”

What have you got Peter?

“I have got Jesus Christ.”

And the man jumped to his feet, began to bounce around. A whole crowd gathered and I love the fact that when the crowd gathered and they came around Peter, Peter saw this. He said to them, [Acts 3:12]

“Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we made this man walk?”

“Why do you look at me? Don’t call me a miracle worker. Don’t say, ‘well Peter, did you see Peter heal that man?’ No, no, I didn’t do it. I can’t do it. Without the vine, the life of Jesus Christ, I can do nothing.”

He goes on to say, “It is the God of our fathers who raised Jesus from the dead, whom you crucified; it is He who has done this work amongst you.”

And Peter’s life was transformed. And that discovery, that realization that all God expects of me is failure because I don’t have the ability within myself, so He invites me to live in union with Him, to abide in Him, to live in Him, so that the effect of my life is not explained by my own personality, disposition, gifts and the rest of it. It is explained by the fact that Jesus Christ is at work in me.”

Of course we have personalities and gifts and dispositions, but the source of what is going on is Christ being at work.

What does it mean to abide in Him?

We have a plaque in our house that is illuminated, and it is one word- a white board with one word in black letters. It says, “Abide.”

And it is the first thing Hilary puts on every morning in one of our rooms. I am usually sitting there reading and I have forgotten to put it on, but she will put it on. So the last light we put off at night when we go to bed to remind ourselves, “Abide, abide, abide.” That’s our job. Not do, do, do; abide.

And out of that will flow.

But what does it mean to abide?

Three things very quickly: to abide in Christ is to put no confidence in yourself.

You know Paul said to the Philippians, [Phil. 3:3]

“We glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

We accept the verdict of our own bankruptcy in ourselves, of our own poverty and we become utterly dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ as our source of strength.

This week on the radio I listened to an interview with the father of Josh Morrissey who was one of the world junior hockey championship Canadian team.

And when his father was interviewed he was asked him – amongst other things he asked him – “how did you teach your son to be successful and at the same time to be humble?”

And he said, “You know, we keep all the hockey gear in the garage at home and every time” (he has two sons and they both play hockey, both at a good level, but Josh is playing for the world junior team). He said “when they go into the garage to get their hockey stuff and put it together, I have a sign I wrote up across the wall of the garage and it says, ‘When you think you are good, you are done.’”

When you think you are good, you are done.

And the woman said (the interviewer) “Really?”

He says, “Yeah, the moment you think you are good, it is over.”

And you know there is a spiritual principle there.

“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Because when you think you can, you can’t. When you know you can’t, you can because your dependence is placed in Him.

You relate everything to the Lord Jesus Christ, not to our own abilities. Of course we have got abilities, of course we have got skills, of course we have got the different personalities that enable us to function differently. But that simply is the mechanism; the life is the life of Jesus Christ, unless we are utterly dependent on Him – “I can’t but You can and I trust You.”

Second thing: to abide in Him is to abide in His Word because Verse 7 says,

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

It’s not just some mystical “well, I abide in Christ” and some kind of mystical thing. It includes abiding in His Word.

That’s why I encourage you to bring your Bibles here on a Sunday so you know the Word of God yourselves, not just take me for it, or what you hear from this platform. But that is why it is so important that, as Paul says in Colossians 3:16, you,

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

Let me say this to you. If you do not have a time alone in the Word of God, if that is not a regular part of your life, you are not going to be fruitful – you’re not - because it is the Word of God that reveals the life of God to us and the agenda of God.

You see there are no fast tracks to growth. There is active discipline in spiritual growth that this is the discipline, not doing, doing, but abiding. And you abide in His Word and you let the Word of God speak to you and the Word of God reveals the life of God.

And here’s the result of that:

“My words remain in you, and you can ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.”

And so here’s your answered prayer verse. Why? Because if you abide in His Word you know the mind of God, you know the heart of God and you pray according to the mind and the heart of God. So there is no more, “Give me this, give me that, give me the next, I want this, I want the other.”

It is “what is the agenda of Jesus Christ?” That becomes your concern. And God answers.

And the third thing: to abide in Him is to abide in His love.

Verse 9:

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”

Do you know why we need to remain in His love? Because our security, our sense of value comes from knowing that we are loved by God, we are loved by the Lord Jesus. So when the Father prunes us, whether it is to protect us or to correct us – doesn’t matter which it is – when the Father prunes us, we abide in His love and say, “Lord this is not something that has gone wrong. You have not been nasty to me; this is the expression of Your love and what You are bringing out.

And He says, “Remain in his love, just as I remain in my Father’s love.” And in His Father’s love, He had to learn obedience by the things He suffered (book of Hebrews tells us that).

And so when we abide in Christ, we abide in His Word, we abide in His love and if abiding in His Word leads us to praying effectively, abiding in His love leads us to obey fully.

“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”(That’s in Verse 10.)

So the effectiveness of our lives, our Christian lives, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ is we abide in Him as a source of fruit, we abide in His Word as a source of effective praying, we abide in His love as a reason for active obedience.

Now let me finish then with this.

What kind of branch do you think you are? If there is no fruit, it is because there is no life. There is no other explanation for a branch that bears no fruit.

It does therefore suck the life out of the tree. That’s why it is cut off. But the invitation always is to reconnect with that vine and say, “Lord Jesus, forgive me that I don’t have this reality in my life and I want it and I am going to find it and I am going to seek for You in a whole new way, in His Word and in your heart.

If you are abiding in the vine, then the Father will prune. Don’t be bitter with things that go in our lives we didn’t want. They may be in themselves bad things, of course. We live in a broken world. Say, “Lord, thank You, this is a pruning tool in my life,” whether it is to protect you or to correct you.

And then do you abide in His love? Do you know that you are loved, really loved? And out of that security the fruit reaches other people’s lives and hearts.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, we are grateful to You this morning that You don’t tease us with Your Word, You don’t suggest some wonderful things that are always out of reach, always just that little bit unobtainable. We know we will never arrive at the fullness that we will enjoy one day in

heaven, but thank You that we can grow in such a way that the fruit comes from our lives in benefit, blessing and enrichment to other people.

We know Your Word measures our fruit not by how we are feeling, but how other people are being brought into a deeper knowledge of Yourself through the lives we live and the generosity of our hearts and our spirits and our love and our kindness.

We pray Lord that we will be a fruitful vine individually and You will make us a fruitful vineyard.