January 7/8, 2023

Abiding

John 15:1-17

Pastor Matt Meyer

Good morning. It's a new year, spread out in front of us. Happy New Year! Last week, Lane did a wonderful job of helping us think about this new year that's in front of us that we get to live. And he encouraged us that, as we think about growing spiritually and becoming more like Jesus, that we need to think about it in terms of small steps of faith. Small steps. And, if you weren't here last week, I'd encourage you to go to the website or go to YouTube and check out that message.

But one of the things I loved most about his teaching was that it revolved around our everyday lives. It revolved around things that we're already doing, right? —the lives that we're already living. Because, as we think about becoming more like Jesus, we need to realize that it's in our everyday lives that Jesus wants to transform us; and it's for our everyday lives that Jesus wants to transform us. So, in addition to Bible study and worship and prayer and many other spiritual disciplines that we engage in that Jesus uses that help us connect to Jesus, He also uses the frustrating and the challenging things, and the really enjoyable things, to form us spiritually to become more like Him. It's in the situation where all I feel like I have is five loaves and two fishes, which is referring to Lane's message last week. What he means by that is it's in the situation where I don't feel like I have enough, or I don't feel like I am enough. It's in that situation that I have the opportunity to trust God, to follow the leading of the Spirit, to bring fresh faith to that situation, and allow Christ and the Holy Spirit to transform me as I walk through it with my Savior.

So, I'd like to continue from Lane's thoughts last week, and have us think together about something else that I think is vital to our transformation. It's vital to us becoming more like Jesus. It's vital to the Spirit using our everyday circumstances to transform us. We're going to talk today about abiding, as you can see on the slide behind me. We're going to think together about that. One of my professors at seminary says that the importance of abiding cannot be overstated. Here's how he said it. “There can be no real progress in becoming like Jesus apart from Christ and abiding in His Word.” Let me say that for you again: “There can be no real progress in becoming like Jesus apart from Christ and abiding in His love.” We're going to hear Jesus say something very similar in the next few moments.

But, before we get into the text, I want to give you a picture to keep in mind as we think about this idea of abiding, and it's related to the holiday season that we all just had. For many of us, the holidays meant visiting family, right? And I know that, for a lot of people, that can be full of tension. It can be full of challenges because of different relational dynamics. You've got divorced families, and you have to visit multiple places. My parents were divorced. My wife's parents were divorced. So, we're constantly having to schedule and move around and do these things. And, sometimes, the place where you go, there's just tension.

That's what it was like when we would visit my dad’s house every year. There was usually some kind of tension, and we didn't know what was going to cause it. But it was always just kind of like, “Oh, I wonder how it's going to be.” And if that's how the holidays are for you as you visit

family, you're going to have to think differently with me for the next few minutes, because you have to think about the opposite.

Because for me, visiting my mom's house was the opposite of that. When I visit my mom's house, I almost always feel welcomed. I immediately feel comfortable in her house and in her presence. I've noticed that, when I'm at my mom's house, I'm not in a hurry to leave. I just want to stay. Now, there are several things in this picture on the screen that represent that to me. There's a welcome mat that's indicating, "Hey, you're welcome here." The door is open, which indicates, "Hey, come on in." And whenever I was heading towards my mom's house, she knew I was coming, because when I would arrive, the door was almost always open. And many times she would meet me at the door. I also want you to notice the light is on, which indicates, most of the time, that someone is home and they're expecting my arrival. They're waiting for me to come in. And if you've ever come home to a dark house, it's just not the same. Right? And one of the first things you do, probably, is turn a light on. Now, partly that's out of necessity, so you don't stumble over something, but I think it also makes us feel more comfortable. It makes us feel more at home. That's what my mom's house was like. I almost always felt comfortable the moment I walked in. I felt so comfortable, I would take my shoes off. I felt like I could go anywhere in the house. I'd lounge around on the furniture, maybe put my leg up over the arm of the chair. Sometimes I'd fall asleep on the couch for a nap, and I wouldn't do that in a place where I didn't feel comfortable, where I didn't feel at home. But home is a comfortable place to be. I feel very loved by my mom. It's easy to be with her and in her home and in her presence.

That idea of comfortability of home, of love, of being able to take my shoes off and just relax, that's how Jesus and His Father want us to feel in terms of our relationship with them. They want us to not be in a hurry to leave. They want us to stay. They want us to abide. That's what the word abide means—to remain or to stay. They want us to learn to abide in their love, even as we go out and go about our days. They want us to learn how to sit down in their presence and stay there, even as we go to work or go to class or drive our car around the city or go to a store or engage with people—to sit down in their love and stay in a place of being loved. They want us to learn how-to live-in grace from one moment to the next. That's what it means to abide: to live intimately with Jesus from one moment to the next.

And that can be a really challenging and tricky thing at times, especially when you're talking about doing that with an invisible God. It requires a response from us, and not just one response, but a continuing response. So it's tricky, but it's also critical, because there can be no real transformation if we don't abide with Jesus and in His love.

So, we're going to look together at probably the passage where Jesus talks the most about this. If you haven't already guessed, we're going to be in John, chapter 15. You can turn there, and I'm going to give you just a little bit of background, because we're jumping right into the middle of a book. John 15 is what is called part of the Upper Room Discourse. It's one of the longest, continuous sections of teaching in the Gospels. It includes chapter 13, chapter 14, chapter 15, chapter 16, and chapter 17 of John. Five chapters! And in these chapters, Jesus is only teaching His disciples, not the crowds, not a whole bunch of other people. He's seeking to prepare His disciples for His departure. These are His last words to His closest followers, the things He would most want them to remember. And we get to listen in to part of it this morning.

John, chapter 15, verse 1:

> **"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser** (or the farmer). **Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned."** (*NASB, John 15:1-6)

So, Jesus speaks all the way through this text in a circular motion. He repeats Himself over and over again. But let me go back to the beginning with you. Actually, the end of chapter 14, the last thing we're told is that Jesus says: "**Get up, let us go from here."** They're leaving the Upper Room, where they were for chapters 13 and 14. They're on the move. And if there's anything that we know about Jesus, it's that He uses everyday things to talk about, to teach His disciples. And so, He starts to talk about vines and branches. Some scholars think that, maybe, they're passing through vineyards. Other scholars think that, maybe, they're at the temple. I tend to come down on the side that they're at the temple, and that's mostly because in chapter 18, at the very beginning, we're told that He leaves that place, crosses the Kidron Valley to a garden. So, I think that they left the Upper Room; they're in the city; they stop at the temple, and then they proceed forward after some more of His teaching.

But, if they're at the temple, you might be thinking, "Why is He talking about vines and branches? They probably don't have that there." Well, actually they do. At the temple, above the entrance, was a huge grapevine made of pure gold. It symbolized Israel. And, over the years, people would bring gifts, and the metalworkers would melt them down and add a branch to this vine. Josephus, a historian of the time, said that some of the grape clusters on this vine were six feet tall, almost as tall as me. This was a huge vine, and the vine and the vineyard were sacred images in Israel, in Judaism. The vine represents the covenant people of God. It represents Israel, and how God plants and tends so that Israel would bear fruit. There are passages all over the Old Testament that talk about Israel. I'm going to read one of them to you. Psalm 80, verses 7 through 9:

> **O God *of* hosts, restore us**
> **And cause Your face to shine *upon us*, and we will be saved.**
> **You removed a vine from Egypt;**
> **You drove out the nations and planted it.**
> **You cleared *the ground* before it,**
> **And it took deep root and** it **filled the land.**

He's talking about God rescuing His people from Egypt and planting them in the promised land. That's what it's referring to. And this concept, this idea of Israel as a vine, would have been very familiar to them, especially standing at the temple and looking at this huge golden vine. But Jesus is saying something remarkably different, something that went against everything they had

ever heard about the vine, about Israel, but it fits exactly what He's been doing in His teaching, all the way up to this point in the Gospel of John.

Jesus is saying He has taken the place of Israel as the true vine that the Father has planted. Jesus is replacing the vine of Israel, just like He replaced the sacrificial lamb of God in chapter 1, the temple in chapter 2, the way to be born again in chapter 3, the bread of life or the manna from heaven in chapter 6, the living water in chapter 7, the shepherds of Israel in chapter 10. (Oh, I skipped 8 and 9.) The light of the world in chapters 8 and 9, the shepherds of Israel in chapter 10, the resurrection and the life in chapter 11, and the way to the Father in chapter 14. And now, in chapter 15, He is the vine replacing Israel. This is what Jesus has done all the way through the Gospel with His "I am" statements. And no longer is Israel automatically seen as a vine growing in God's vineyard. Men and women are now branches connected to one vine: Jesus Himself.

This is such a great picture of what following Jesus is all about. Because being a follower of Jesus, amongst all the other things that we do, is about having Jesus intimately and spiritually connected to my inner life. It's about staying connected. That's what abiding is. And when I abide and when I stay connected to Jesus as I go about my life, I bear much fruit. Translation: I become more like Jesus. If I live according to the Spirit, then the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—all of those things begin to be seen in my life as I abide.

Now, there's also a couple of verses in here about some branches that don't remain in the vine; they don't abide—and they are tossed away. They begin to wither. They're picked up, they're thrown into the fire, and they're burned. And there are a lot of people that have a lot of concern about those verses; people have struggled with this text. I think a number of people have taught incorrect things with these verses. Some people think that this text is about salvation and, if we don't abide, we're like those branches, and if we don't bear enough fruit, then we're going to be kicked out of the vineyard. We're going to be tossed in the fire and burned. But I don't think this text is about salvation for several reasons.

First of all, remember who He's talking to? Remember who He's teaching? His closest followers! Not even the 12, but the 11, because in John, chapter 13, Judas has left. So, these are the guys He has chosen to lead His movement when He leaves. Now, several years ago, as a church, we were going through the Gospel of John. Bryan covered this passage, and he reminded us that we have to think about the context and the disciples' state of mind. So, here's these 11 guys. What do we know about them? Well, they've left everything for the last three years to follow this guy, Jesus. And now He's telling them He's going to go away, and they can't go with Him. So, these guys are scared. They're fearful.

So, why would we think that Jesus would teach something that's going to play on that? No, He would spend, like He did in chapter 14, most of the chapter reassuring them. "Hey, I'm going to go away, but I'm going to come back. I'm not going to leave you alone. I'm going to prepare a place for you, so that you can come and be with Me where I am. And, while you're waiting, I'm going to send the Holy Spirit." He spends most of chapter 14 reassuring them. He's going to return to that theme in chapter 16 and talk, again, about how it's better for them that He goes away so the Spirit can come.

So, in between these two chapters about reassurance, we have our passage in which Jesus is explaining to them what they're going to need to do when things get really hard. The second half of Chapter 15, that we're not going to cover today because of time, is about how the world is going to hate them. It's going to persecute them. It's going to be a place where the world needs Jesus, and He's explaining to them, "Here's what you need to do. You've got to stay connected to Me if you're going to make it through that." It was about how they were to live on earth.

Now, lastly also, Paul reminds us that, when Jesus is talking about a branch being "in Me" (He uses that language a lot.), it's not a reference to salvation. Paul uses that term a lot later in the New Testament. We saw it a lot in Colossians last fall where he talks about being "in Christ". But, at this point, Jesus has not died on the cross. That idea would not have made any sense to them. What would make sense to them was the idea of Israel being a vine, because you remember, they're standing, looking at this huge golden vine, and that they were branches in that vine because they were Israelites. Jesus is saying to them, "Being an Israelite, it's not enough. I am the true vine. You have to be connected to Me if you want to have life and bear fruit." That's how critical it is. That's how crucial it is. That's how vital it is.

So, if that's true, the question is: Tell me how to do it. How do I abide? What does it look like? Well, Jesus is going to tell us. Verse 7:

> **If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples** (or show that you are followers of Me). **Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.** (Vs. 7-9)

Okay, so Jesus was talking about abiding *in Him*. Now He's talking about abiding *in His love*. He's making a connection. Verse 10:

> **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 so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and *that* your fruit would remain (**or abide) **so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command to you, that you love one another.** (Vs. 10-17)

So, how do we abide? Well, verse 7: **If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you** (or remain in you…God's words remaining in us.) What does that mean? He refers to it again in verse 10. He says: **If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love**. So, twice in this text, Jesus is connecting *His words abiding in us,* with *us abiding in Him*. He's linking remembering and keeping His words and His commands, with abiding. So, you could say we're talking about

obedience. Obeying Jesus' commands, that's what His words "remaining in us" is. It means that we live it out.

Well, this is where it gets really tricky, I think, for us to talk or think about this. The reason is the moment that I said the word "obedience," some of us in the room went all the way to this extreme in our thinking and others of us went all the way to this other extreme in our thinking, and some of us are right in between. What do I mean by that? Well, this extreme over here is those of us that think, "Oh, obedience. I'm pretty good at that; I'm pretty good at obeying." We think we're so good at obeying that most of our relationship probably becomes legalistic, and most of our relationship with the Father is based on how well we obey.

But the other extreme are the people that hear "obedience" and go, "I'm not very good at that." We know how much we disobey at times, and so we start to feel guilty and bad about ourselves. Here's the thing: Jesus is not trying to make us feel guilty or bad about ourselves or the disciples. He's telling them this so that they may be full of joy, He says. So, sometimes we hear Verse 10 and we think it says, If **you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,** and we think, "Well, I don't keep the commandments very well. I do my best, but I know I still fail. So, I'm not abiding in Jesus' love. He must not love me."

Wrong way to hear the verse! This verse isn't saying Jesus doesn't love us anymore if we disobey. It's saying that we aren't abiding in the love that He offers. We aren't remaining in it. We aren't staying in that love as we go about our life. So, the question would be: "What does it look like to live loved, to remain in God's love, to sit down and be comfortable in it, to be at home in it?" Well, Jesus tells us, "Here's what you do; here's how you do that." He tells us in the passage. He says it means keeping His commands, and the specific command in this text is t**o love one another.** Jesus is concerned with one command here. Verse 12, verse 17; it's mentioned twice that **you love one another the way I have loved you.** He says, if you're going to abide in My love, you do that by loving one another as I have loved you.

And He goes on to say there's no greater love than the one that would lay down his life for his friend, which Jesus is about to do in a couple of chapters, in a couple of days. He goes on to say, *"I'm not calling you My slave; I'm calling you My friend."* We need to stop and think and recognize how remarkable a statement like this is. Only two people in the entire Old Testament are called a friend of God: Abraham and Moses. And now Jesus is saying to these guys, and He's saying to us, "You are My friends. I'm asking you to do this, to love one another, because you're My friend, because you'll experience My love by loving one another." A slave doesn't get big explanations He says, but Jesus is spending four to five chapters explaining to them over and over and over again because they are His friends.

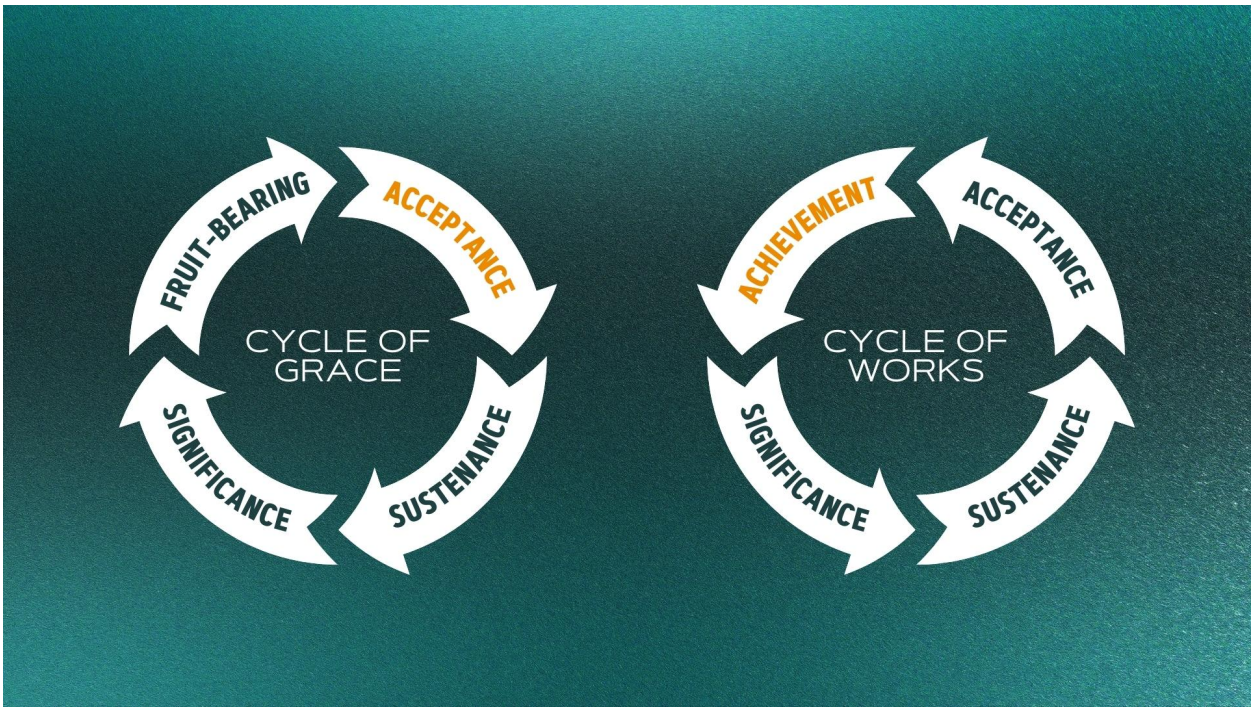
So, when things get hard in life, as they do for all of us from time to time, I think most of us begin to feel completely alone. Even sitting in an auditorium like this, even if I'm sitting at home with my family, I can feel completely alone. We can feel like God is not with us. Jesus and the Spirit seem distant. They don't seem much like a friend. And many times we don't feel like others can relate to us, so we don't talk about it with them; or we feel like they're going to judge us, so we don't talk about it with other people. We pull away from those that would be friends. And Jesus is saying, "You are not alone. You are My friend. Pulling away from Me or others isn't going to

help you. You need to remain connected to Me, and you need to do that by remaining connected to others."

This is why one of the things we're so committed to is Life Groups. A Life Group is a place where you can find friends. A Life Group is a place where you can find strength and help when life is hard. It's a group of people that will help you abide in Jesus' love. They can point you back to Jesus when you are wandering away or when you feel like He's distant. But a Life Group is also a place where the fruit of your abiding can be shared with others. It's an opportunity, week-in, and week-out, to love other people, even those who irritate you, and especially those who are struggling.

So, as we kind of step into another session of Life Groups, I want to challenge us (and I'm included in this) to not just approach Life Group thinking, "What am I going to get out of it?" But, maybe over the course of this session, every week, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you can love others in your Life Group. Maybe He'll answer that prayer by giving you the opportunity to be kind and encourage someone who's struggling in your group. Maybe He'll give you joy as you celebrate the good, wonderful things that are happening in another person's life. Even though there's not really any good thing happening in yours, you can celebrate authentically with joy, with this other person in your group. Maybe it will be that He gives you patience for that one person that you just don't get along with. Your personality clashes, or they just irritate you. But your patience allows you to remain committed, and you don't just drop out. Or maybe you're given the opportunity to exercise some self-control and not be the person who answers every single question the moment it's asked, but give other people some space to think, to answer, and to listen.

All of these things are ways of loving others. They're also fruit of the Spirit, which means they are the result of abiding. So, as I close, I want to give you a practical example of someone's life. Remember, to abide in Jesus is to abide in His love, to remain there, to live in grace with God each moment of the day, to live intimately with Jesus from one moment to the next. And Jesus Himself is the best example of this for us in His life on earth. What He says to us, what He commands us about abiding in chapter 15, He says about Himself in John, chapter 5, verse 19. Listen to what He says: **"Truly, truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can only do what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does."**



So, how did Jesus live? He abided in the love of His Father. He abided in the relationship with His Father, and it's the difference between living in the cycle of grace versus the cycle of works. You see this image on the screen. Jesus lived constantly in a cycle of grace. When Jesus was on earth, He faced enormous stresses, difficulties, and pain, yet He never got sarcastic or cynical. He was never unloving. He never burnt out. He never lost His joy because He lived in a divine rhythm where grace and love were constantly flowing into Him from the Father, so that they could flow out from Him to others.

The beginning movement of the cycle of grace is *acceptance*. At least, that's why it's a different color, to show you that's where it starts.

How do we see this in Jesus' life? Well, Jesus is brought into the world by a mother who loves Him; He's cared for by parents who give Him protection and nurture. Right as He starts His ministry, He hears the voice of acceptance from His Heavenly Father. Remember at His baptism, what happens? He comes up out of the water and a voice from heaven speaks and says, "You are My Son whom I love. With you, I am well-pleased." This is what Jesus' identity, and His acceptance is based on. This is joy no one can take away. You cannot earn this type of acceptance. Jesus knew that God loved Him apart from anything that He would accomplish in His life.

The second stage or phase is *sustenance*, or we might say *sustaining grace.* Sustenance is those things God provides us that nourish us and keep us healthy. The idea here is that Jesus engaged in certain practices that allowed God's grace and love to keep replenishing Him. How did He do this? What were these things? Well, some of them were very simple. He ate. He slept. He prayed. He had a circle of close friends, a community, around Him, the 12 who went through life with Him, who shared everything with Him. People underestimate the role of friendship in Jesus'

life. He engaged in regular corporate worship in the synagogue. He fed His mind with Scripture. He enjoyed God's creation. Think about how often in the Gospels we see Jesus on a mountain or in a garden or on a lake. He often goes off to the wilderness for silence and solitude. He welcomes little children. He hugs them; He blesses them. He enjoys spending time with non-religious types. These are just a few of the examples of the rhythms of life that nourished and sustained Jesus.

So, He moves from there into *significance*. But Jesus' life wasn't primarily significant because of what He did. It was because of who He was, who He is. His very presence carried the life and love of the Father to people. Go back to the time right before His ministry begins, and He's coming out of the water. What does God say to Him? He says, "This is my beloved son." And in the very next verse, Jesus goes off to the wilderness and is tempted. And the evil one says to Him, what does he say? He attacks the very thing God said. He said, "If you are the Son of God, then turn these stones into bread." "If you are the Son of God, then throw Yourself down from the temple, from this high place." Temptation depended on getting Jesus to question His identity and acceptance. The evil one wanted Him to feel as if He had to prove His significance, by doing spectacular things that would set Him apart from everybody else. But Jesus knew who He was and what He came to do. He didn't have to strive more and do more in order to be significant. In fact, sometimes He avoided doing things people wanted Him to do, simply because He wanted to obey His Father. Significance is about who we are before it is about what we do. And God says to us this morning, just like He said to His Son, "You are my beloved, because I created you. Because My Son redeemed you, you are a new creation." That's where your significance comes from. That's where your acceptance is based.

So, the final phase is *fruit-bearing*. So, rooted in the love and acceptance from His Father, nourished and filled up by the things that gave life to His soul, and knowing who He was and what He came to do, Jesus then stepped into a very active life. His life bore huge amounts of fruit. He taught; He healed; He befriended; He recruited; He trained; He traveled; He confronted; He defied; He launched the greatest movement in human history. But His acceptance, His significance, wasn't based on that fruit. The fruit coming out of His life, instead, flowed out of His acceptance and unity with the Father. He continuously lived out of the other three parts of the cycle, connecting with His Father, engaging in sustaining activities, and acknowledging the significance of who He was, not just what He did. It's important to recognize this is a cycle. And, as Jesus lived and bore fruit, He became depleted. He needed to be filled up again. That's why we see Him pulling away from the crowds from time to time, going off to the wilderness to pray, to be refilled. He keeps making His way around the cycle.

That's a picture of abiding. The fruit that Jesus talks about in John, chapter 15, is the result of grace acting in our lives as we make ourselves at home in the acceptance and love of the Father. See, our struggle, or at least my struggle is, I often find myself in the cycle of works, which is the opposite of the cycle of grace. You just go the opposite way around the circle, against the tide of grace. You begin by trying to achieve impressive accomplishments through your own strength, for your own ego. I work hard to make something of my life so that I will be a success, and I hope that, by doing this, I might feel significant. And so I attach my identity to what I do and how well I do it…or what other people think about me. And I hope, then, that this significance will sustain me through all the difficulties and stresses of this life. And, ultimately, I hope that the

end result will be that the life I live is somehow acceptable to someone, somewhere, whether that be God or my family, my friends, or my boss. And, ultimately, it doesn't last, so I begin achieving again, so that I can get significance. And then the cycle just starts over again.

So, as a point of application today, I just encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about your life in light of these two cycles. Where do you find yourself? In the next few weeks, think: "Are there specific ways or parts of your life in which you're tempted to live in the cycle of works?" And, as you come to grips with that, I encourage you, share that with somebody that you're close to…maybe somebody in your Life Group. I want you to know that I don't have this all figured out. I'm just the one who is communicating it. But, even as someone who has walked with and sought Jesus for 30-some years, and as a pastor, someone who's working for Jesus, who is seeking to do God's work with the Spirit, I can find myself often in the cycle of works, forgetting that my identity doesn't come from how well an event goes or what my kids think of me or how well I interact with them or how well I perform my work. So, if you find yourself in the cycle of works this morning, don't be discouraged. Jesus is right there with you, and He just says, "Turn around. Walk the other direction in the cycle of grace. Sit down in My love and acceptance."

Now in a moment, Carrie is going to lead us in a responsive reading based on the passage that we covered in John 15. So, we can respond together, maybe as a prayer about our desire to abide and live in the cycle of grace, because the cycle of works will destroy us. It's a hard yoke. It's a heavy burden. But Jesus offers us a much better life abiding in His love. He stands before an open door and says, "Come on in. Make yourself at home in My love. You are welcome. Nothing will ever separate you from My love. Not angels or demons or life or death, not the past or present circumstances, not the unknown future…nothing in the created realm will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. So He says, "Come in. Take your shoes off. Get comfortable. Sit down in My love. Make yourself at home. Abide!

Let's pray.

> *Jesus, we recognize that it's through Your birth, Your life, Your death, Your resurrection, Your ascension, Your sending of the Spirit, that enables us to abide. So, Lord, I pray that, as we think about our lives, as Your Holy Spirit examines us, as we invite You to do that, that You would reveal to us how we end up in the cycle of works sometimes. We pray that, as we go about our days and we go out into the places You have sent us, that You would show us the different steps we need to take, when we need to turn around, when we need to think differently about what we're doing and why we're doing it, and where our acceptance comes from, which is the love of our Heavenly Father. Remind us, Jesus, that we are God's beloved. We pray in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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