

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Jonathan Pokluda
Series: Abide
January 14, 2024

The Fruit of Abiding

John 15:1-8

“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, as I also 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are 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 done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Harris Creek, how we doing? *[Audience cheers.]* Let's go! All right, new series. We're gonna start with a game, a game show. Let's play Family Feud. *[Audience cheers.]* You guys familiar with it? Anybody watch or play Family Feud? If you don't have any context, you're about to learn—just call me Steve Harvey. But we're gonna do this, so I did a survey on Instagram. I sent out a survey and a few thousand people chimed in. I asked, “What do Christians do?” If you're not familiar with Family Feud, you're trying to answer according to what the people said. It'll be this section right here *[motions to his left]* versus this section right here *[motions to his right]*. Anybody else is welcome to help them. There will be winners, there'll be losers, all the things.

So, we'll start with you guys. What do Christians do? “Go to church.” I heard, “go to church.” Show me. *[Board with ‘Family Feud’ formatting dings.]* “Go to church.” It's on the board. I'm going to tell you up front. “Abide” is not up there so don't even guess that. It's the series title. All right, here we go. “Pray.” *[Board dings.]* That was the number one answer by a landslide. The biggest thing they said was “pray”—over and over. All right, give me another one. “Read the Bible.” Show me “Read the Bible.” *[Board dings.]* Let's go. It's up there. Christians do indeed read the Bible. “Serve.” I heard serve. *[Board dings.]* Serve/love—love God, love people, all the things. You don't even have to raise your hand. We're just wheels off. “Forgive.” I heard “forgive.” *[Board dings.]* “Forgive” is up there. We're doing it. “Share the gospel.” *[Board dings.]* They're gonna sweep this place. You probably watched the first service. Okay, I heard, “Worship.” Show me “worship.” *[Board gives an ‘incorrect’ sound; crowd boos.]* All right. What else? “Give.” Show me “give.” *[Board dings.]* “Give generously” is up there. “Make disciples.” Show me “make disciples.” *[Board dings.]* And they swept it. *[Applause.]* They swept it. You *[to the right side of the crowd]* never even got a shot. I'm so sorry. That's not how the first service went. But you guys are good. You know what Christians do.

Let me ask you a question. Can you do all of those things and not be a Christian? *[Crowd murmurs “yes.”]* You absolutely *can* do all of those things and not be a Christian, which is

ironic--something to give thought to. There are people who are Christians, or at least they embrace the title "Christians." They go to church, and they do all of those things [*on the board*]. But they're not saved. And then you have people who are Christians, or call themselves "Christians," and they don't do any of those things. And so, there's this weird contrast. So, what is the difference? I want to make it a case for you, in the coming weeks, as we kick off this series; it is indeed the word "abide." That's the missing puzzle piece. That's the thing that has to go in there. You cannot abide and not be a Christian. This is the game changer. This is the word that you put it in place, it changes all of the other outputs. If I abide, the way I pray is different. If I abide, the way I read the Bible is different. If I abide, the way I make disciples is different.

I went to church most of my life. I would share the gospel with you without having even trusted in the gospel myself. That's why I'm so passionate about it; because, when I became a follower of Jesus, I felt like I was duped. I was in church my whole life. I was doing all the church things. I owned multiple Bibles, but I wasn't abiding with Jesus. In fact, when I heard "relationship with Jesus," I thought, "That's just this thing that we all say, but who can really have a relationship with someone that you can't see?" And I just continued saying that, like I had one, you have one, we have one, but I didn't have one.

We're starting a new series titled "Abide." This is born out of, if you remember the "I Am" series we covered, Jesus says, "I am the vine," in John 15. That is the chapter where you see this word repeated: 'abide.' As I taught that, I thought, "I think God has more for us here. This is a deeper well than we're able to cover in one short week." We're going to dive back into that chapter. You can turn to John 15; that's where we're going to be today, in Verses 1 through 8.

I read an article this week that the title was, "The Prove It Generation." It said that Gen Z is the Prove It Generation. And it went on to say how they can buy dupes on Amazon. You can get fake sneakers, fake watches, fake Versace, fake Louis Vuitton, fake brands. They are the generation where this monster of AI was born; that stands for 'Artificial Intelligence.' They're looking at fake images, at these pictures of people that were never taken; they were just made by robots. It's crazy. Deep fake. It's like, "Hey, you can watch a video of somebody doing something that that person never did." Fake news, fake articles, fake ideas, people, the media, other things. They are propagating ideas because they get clicks and likes, but they are stories that are told that are untrue. Here's an interesting aside. I answer questions on Fridays, and I get an overwhelming number of questions about flat earth. Okay, "Do you believe the earth is flat?" I thought I was being trolled, but it turns out that there are a group of reasonable people who passionately believe the earth is flat. And a whole other group believe we never landed on the moon. In fact, they would say, "I don't trust that source. I'm out. I don't trust the source, so I don't trust the information that I'm getting from the source." They are the Prove It Generation. When it comes to Christianity, I'm a Christian. Their mindset is, "Prove it."

This is why I believe this is so important for us here. I want a distinctive of this church, moving into 2024 and forward, to be that we train and equip you to be and make disciples, especially in the home. I hope that we give you all the handholds, the resources, the programs, and the processes so that you can leave this place and you know you are well-equipped. We are world-class at teaching you how to make disciples in the home. What I think we are good at here in the Bible Belt in Texas, in churches in Texas, is teaching our

children how to be really good, upstanding citizens and contributors to society who go to church. That is very different than the call of a disciple. It's so important that we understand this. I think, for so many of us, and in fact, sometimes the people that are elevated like, "Oh, they're a good Christian." And what they're really trying to say is, "They're a person who makes good choices and goes to church."

Jesus didn't say, "Hey, do good and go to church." He said, "Come and die. Die to the things that the world is calling you to." The enemy of having this is thinking you have it when you're this. I'm telling you, as I've said many times: the chasm between a churchgoer and a Christ-follower is really large. Those are two very different things. And that scripture, where Jesus says, "**Depart from me, I never knew you,**" it's like, "What?" I don't know if you've ever studied it, but the follow-up on that is, "But I led a ministry. But I did ministry in your name. I told people about Jesus." And He's like, "I know—but I didn't know you." So, there's people that are like, "I know Him," and they don't tell people about Jesus. There are people who tell people about Jesus. And He's saying, "They don't really know Me." You can't just turn the page and go on with your life as though that's no big deal. We've got to say, "What do we do with that? What does it mean?" And I'm telling you, I think the solution or the answer to the question is "abide."

Here is the challenge that I'm up against up front: the application of this message is really like an intellectual ascent, if you will. It's not to leave here and go do something—because we've already established you can do all the things with the wrong heart or a wrong understanding, a wrong "why," a wrong motive. There's something that we have to learn that really is the application which can feel like, "Wait, hold on. But what do I *do*?" No—you learn abiding really is about being, not doing. Before we do anything, we've got to get the being right. A right understanding of who Christ is. That's what's going to produce the fruit.

I'll just say up front two things: you're going to hear things that are going to challenge your thinking and maybe even contradict some of the things that you've heard before in your journey of faith, and that's okay. You can ask questions. I'm never afraid of questions. I welcome the conversations afterwards always. Somebody's like, "Wait, what did you mean by this?" or "Hey, I didn't quite understand this," Or "I didn't miss this point." Those are great questions because they tell me that people come here with the heart to learn, so that's a good thing. I also want to say to you: it's a series. So today will not be a comprehensive lesson on abiding. It's just the introduction. In fact, I would call this, "The fruit of abiding with the help of the Trinity" because we're going to see the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—at work to produce fruit in those of us who abide. That's really this idea, the concept that Jesus is giving us here. I want to set you up; you may leave with some questions. Let's wrestle them, come back, let's keep the conversation going, and hopefully at the end of the series you're like, "Alright, I got it; I understand what it means to abide."

Today we're going to look at the work of the Father, the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit in producing the fruit of abiding. That's the outline of the message. This is very simple in theory but takes a lifetime to perfect. It's easy to read the words on the page, but it really is something that you will do for the rest of your life as you're trying to understand, "What does it mean to press deeper into Jesus?" Let's dive in. I'll just read the whole scripture. I'll be in Verses 1 through 8. These are the words of Jesus. Jesus chose His words. The Holy Spirit preserved the words in the Scripture for thousands of years so that we would

read them today in an effort to apply them to our lives, to understand why. What does He want us to do with this?

This is what Jesus said: **“I am the true vine.”** He says, *“The true vine,”* because Israel was also called “the vine,” but it says that they did not produce fruit. So, Jesus shows up on the scene and says, **“I am the true vine, and I produce the fruit for the branches that remain in me. 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 as I also 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.”** That word “remain in me,” it’s the Greek word *“menō.”* It’s the word that we, in some versions of the Bible, translate “abide” or interpret “abide.” Abide—remain in me: same word, same meaning. This word is also shows up in the scripture to mean “continue in,” “endure through,” and “remain.” The NIV here has it as “remain”; yours might have “abide.” “Dwell” is another translation. Verse 5: **“I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.”** That’s worth underlining. **“If you do not remain in me, you are 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 done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”**

I want you to know, as someone who uses illustrations and has to come up with them every week: there are no perfect illustrations. There is something that the illustrations illustrate or teach, and then you can over-index on the illustrations to kind of go outside. “Thrown into the fire? What is that?” We need to stay in the fairway of the illustration to say, “Alright, what is He trying to tell us with this illustration?” He presents to us different parts: the Father, who is the gardener; the Son, who is the vine; the branches. Who are the branches? Us. We’re the branches. Fruit is produced on the branches if they remain on the vine. The first interpretive challenge that we’re faced with is this reality that the Father prunes the branches. What does that mean? That’s my first point:

1. *The Father prunes fruitful branches.*

Before we get into the pruning, we have to deal with the real interpretive challenge, that some of the branches are removed altogether. Which branches are removed? There are two verses that address this: Verse 2 and Verse 6. Two says, **“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.”** A branch that doesn’t bear fruit is cut off—not pruned, but cut off altogether. He says in Verse 6, **“If you do not remain in me, you are like the branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up and thrown into fire and burned.”** What does He cut off? It’s two things. You can write this in the margin of your Bible because, when you study this, there’s really two branches that are removed. The first one is the one that bears no fruit. They appear to be in Christ, or in church, or fellowshiping, but there’s no fruit that comes from their lives. They’re not sharing the gospel. They’re not making disciples. They’re not studying the Word. They’re not praying. There’s no fruit coming from them. The other one is branches that don’t remain in Christ. “You’re like a branch that is thrown away and withers if you do not remain in me.” This one is tricky because it may produce fruit by their own effort. Maybe they do read the Bible. Maybe they do share the gospel. Maybe they

do go to church. Maybe they do pray. They're doing so for the purpose of showing up to Life Group and having something to say, not out of their remaining in Jesus.

Now, here's a question I want to present to you that I think is worth asking: do they know they're pretending? I believe the answer to that question, without a doubt, is "no." They are not aware. That's why you have this argument with Jesus. They're like, "Wait, hold on, I did this in your name." And he says, "Depart from me. I never knew you." I grew up thinking that that there were people that would come to church, and they just did it because they thought it was good for business, but they get in the car on the way home and they're like, "What a load of garbage, you know?" Or there's pastors that preach, and they're like, "Yeah, if you just give me money, then I will." And they get in the back of their office and they're counting their money. They're like, "I've got them right where I want them. I'm running this shell game." I don't think that is reality. I think, if it is, it's the extreme exception. In most cases, these people are doing all those things, thinking, believing, having convinced themselves, "I know Jesus," but they don't. And it's okay to wrestle. "Wait, why would anyone think they know Jesus, but not actually know Jesus?" We'll talk about it.

Verse 3—if you're questioning your own salvation right about now—Verse 3 is a comfortable blanket. It's a parenthetical statement that Jesus says, almost in anticipation of our, "But wait, wait, Jesus, hold on!" He says, "**You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you, which is the gospel.**" Have you believed upon the gospel? Now, don't get too comfortable because I think you have to answer, "Do I really literally believe this guy showed up, lived a perfect life, died, went in the tomb, and three days later showed back up, and He died as a payment for my sins? Do I believe that is history—not legend, not a story we're told, not something we celebrate like Santa Claus—but something rooted in history that it actually happened? My whole eternity hinges on that reality."

Then He says, "**And some branches are pruned.**" What are the qualifications of the branches that are pruned? What kind of branches are pruned? Is it the bad ones? Is it the ones that don't do what they need to be doing? The ones that sin? What branches are pruned? The fruitful branches. The only qualifications that are necessary to be pruned is that you are fruitful—you did everything you need to do, and that's something we've got to wrestle with. That when we do all that we're supposed to do, what is promised to us is pruning. And the pruning doesn't mean that we did something wrong; it actually means we did something very right. What's the purpose of the pruning? "**That they would bear more fruit.**" This is a literal thing. Everybody there understands vines. Jesus' original audience are like, "Oh yeah, yeah, we see vines everywhere." Like Nate showed us last week, this area is bursting forth with vines and pruning. In fact, I talked to a vineyard expert this week and they were talking about how the timing of the pruning is even more important than the harvest. When you prune at the right time, it brings forth more grapes, it brings forth more fruit, and so it's rooted in there. Jesus is using this, and He's saying, "Hey, God's timing is perfect. He knows what He's doing, and the purpose in everything that He does is to produce more fruit."

What is pruning? Pruning can be circumstantial hardship. It can be a situation you're going through, it can be a layoff, it can be loss, it can be grief, it can be a diagnosis. It's something that happened to you that you didn't do anything to bring onto your life. That's easy because of the way this is written, and this is where I think we can over-index on the illustration. It's easy to think about and read this and think, "Okay, God is sitting there, and He's actively taking something away from me that causes me much pain." How am I not to turn my back

on a maniacal God that would do that? You have to keep in mind that it is God's first desire that there would be no loss or grief here, that there would be no suffering here. His first desire is that that wouldn't be. And yet, He created us with an ability to pursue a relationship with Him or to pursue ourselves and the world. As we pursued ourselves and the world, sin rushed in like a tsunami. Brokenness, hurt, and pain rushed in like a tsunami. So, the pruning, I think, is when you go through those things, what you do with it determines the pruning that's happening in your life. For example, when someone is pruned, one of two things happens. They fall 'in' or they fall 'out'. They're going through a pruning and they say, "God, I really need you in this time. Here's what's going on. I'm moving closer to you. Can you help? How can you use this? What do you want to do with this? What are you trying to teach me in this?" Or they say, "God, if you're going to allow this to happen to me, then I don't want anything to do with You. I'm out." They fall 'in' or they fall 'out'. If they fall in, what typically happens is a more fruitful ministry.

I can think in my own life, just to give you some practical or historical examples of this. In my own life, there was a season where I went through intense anxiety and panic attacks. It was a humbling season that softened me, and it grew in my heart empathy. It gave me more tools to pastor people, to sit in situations. Now, an entire part of my ministry is to meet with people and counsel people going through anxiety and panic. In that time, I learned therapy practices that overlapped with what the Scripture teaches, and my faith grew. It was a pruning that has produced a greater harvest. You can imagine how insufferable I'd be had I not learned empathy and care in that time, right? Just hard-charging: "Suck it up, let's go!" And God humbled me.

This week on the 'Becoming Something' podcast, we interviewed Granger Smith. Granger and his wife Amber—their three-year-old River fell into a pool when he couldn't swim and drowned. It's a horrific story, and he told it on the podcast and talked about all that God taught them in and through this. Then, he had the wherewithal and the wisdom to pause and say, "Wait a minute, I need to say something to you. I am speaking about this today very differently than I did in the event. In hindsight, I can see the goodness of God. In the event, it was just sad and hard and terrible and awful." He said, in fact, some well-meaning relative texted them some plight cliché: "Hey, God is good," and it didn't land well because there's a time for mourning and that was only a time for mourning. But now, they're able to take this story, this pruning, and use it. Not only are they doing podcasts like ours, but it's turned into a book, and the story has ministered to tens and thousands of people who are going through grief themselves. What is that? It's a fruitful harvest. They're taking this thing that happened to them, they bring it to the Father, and they say, "How do you want to use this? I'm clinging to you in the midst of this." And He says, "Okay, let's go. We'll use it."

It's been a hard week. It's been a challenging week. I had some friends whose son fell off the back of an ATV. Dead. About the same age as our son. Then, some of my best friends gave birth to a sweet baby girl who lived for just under two hours. You think, "Why would God intend for babies to be born and live for two hours?" I would tell you: He didn't. He purposed that little girl to live forever. We lose sight of eternity so fast. God created us to live forever with Him. As we live in this broken world where there's all kinds of broken people who do very, very broken things, we have to ask constantly, "Lord, what do you want to do with this? What ministry do you have for me in the midst of my suffering?" Here's what I want you to know: He's not in a hurry for you to get there. He's a slow and patient God. The only reason

that He would be rushing to get to that part is just because He's eager to flood your heart with the peace that He has for you when you bring Him the broken branches.

I see all the time, in pastoral ministry, someone's like, "No one understands. No one understands. No one understands my miscarriage. No one understands my stillborn. No one understands my cancer. No one understands my eating disorder. No one understands my abortion. No one understands my same sex attraction. No one understands. No one understands!" As a pastor, I'm like, "They understand, and they understand, and they understand, because I just talked to them and heard them say the same thing." "No one understands! No one understands!" The church has been awful—miserable—at creating avenues of discussion so that people can show up and say, "Now, I was abused like that. I went through the same kind of trauma they did. You know what? That same thing happened to me." And then they talk, and they're like, "You did? Oh, my goodness. And how did you?" And it's like, "Well, here's what was helpful to me. Well, here's what was helpful to me." And it's like, "Okay. Let's lock arms and begin to walk forward into freedom." The devil hates it. He'll show up: "But you can't tell anybody." And there's areas of our church where he's winning. What I have is the benefit of seeing the people who say, for the first time, things out loud that they thought they would never say again. And they say it the second time with a little bit more confidence. And then the third time with their chest out and chin up. And then the fourth time they're leading the small group discussion. And the fifth time they're speaking on a stage with a microphone. And the sixth time they're yelling, "Freedom! It's available to us!"

Pruning. Verse 4: "**Remain in me. As I also 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.**" Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. Fruit is produced by remaining connected to Him. My second point is this:

2. *The Son produces fruit.*

The Son, Jesus Christ, produces fruit. This is so important. This is abiding: this ethereal, intellectual concept that we are to remain in Christ. Let me tell you how this series came to be. I'm up here; I'm on stage, and I read a verse, Philippians 4: 6,7: "**Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, pursue your request of God, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**" And then the next verse that I read, up here on stage, talking to you, was 1 Thessalonians 5, and it says, "**Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances. For this is God's will for you, in Christ Jesus.**" I have this moment where I'm talking to you, but I'm thinking up here, and I'm like, "Wait a minute—those two verses end the same way: 'in Christ Jesus.'" I leave here and I do this phrase study, asking, "Where else does it say, 'in Christ Jesus?'" How often is this repeated throughout the scriptures, "in Christ Jesus?" So, I'll show you; watch this--look. We could just come over here [*on screen, Bible verses begin to scroll, all containing the phrase 'in Christ Jesus'*].

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith **in Christ Jesus. Acts 24:24**

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God **in Christ Jesus**. **Romans 6:11**

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life **in Christ Jesus** our Lord. **Romans 6:23**

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are **in Christ Jesus**. **Romans 8:1**

nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God **in Christ Jesus** our Lord. **Romans 8:39**

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. **Romans 15:17**

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers **in Christ Jesus**, **Romans 16:3**

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified **in Christ Jesus**, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: **1 Corinthians 1:2**

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you **in Christ Jesus**, **1 Corinthians 1:4**

And because of him you are **in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, **1 Corinthians 1:30**

For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father **in Christ Jesus** through the gospel. **1 Corinthians 4:15**

That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways **in Christ Jesus**, as I teach them everywhere in every church. **1 Corinthians 4:17**

I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you **in Christ Jesus** our Lord. **1 Corinthians 15:31**

My love to all of you **in Christ Jesus**. Amen. **1 Corinthians 16:24**

This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have **in Christ Jesus** and to make us slaves. **Galatians 2:4**

know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith **in Jesus Christ**. So we, too, have put our faith **in Christ Jesus** that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. **Galatians 2:16**

So **in Christ Jesus** you are all children of God through faith, **Galatians 3:26**

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one **in Christ Jesus**. **Galatians 3:28**

For **in Christ Jesus** neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. **Galatians 5:6**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful **in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 1:1**

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms **in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 2:6**

in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us **in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:7**

For we are God's handiwork, created **in Christ Jesus** to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. **Ephesians 2:10**

But now **in Christ Jesus** you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **Ephesians 2:13**

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise **in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 3:6**

according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished **in Christ Jesus** our Lord. **Ephesians 3:11**

to him be glory in the church and **in Christ Jesus** throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. **Ephesians 3:21**

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people **in Christ Jesus** at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: **Philippians 1:1**

so that through my being with you again your boasting **in Christ Jesus** will abound on account of me. **Philippians 1:26**

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast **in Christ Jesus**, and who put no confidence in the flesh— **Philippians 3:3**

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward **in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:14**

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds **in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7**

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory **in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19**

Greet all God's people **in Christ Jesus**. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. **Philippians 4:21**

because we have heard of your faith **in Christ Jesus** and of the love you have for all God's people— **Colossians 1:4**

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are **in Christ Jesus**: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews **1 Thessalonians 2:14**

give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you **in Christ Jesus**.
1 Thessalonians 5:18

The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are **in Christ Jesus**. **1 Timothy 1:14**

Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith **in Christ Jesus**. **1 Timothy 3:13**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is **in Christ Jesus**, **2 Timothy 1:1**

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us **in Christ Jesus** before the beginning of time, **2 Timothy 1:9**

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love **in Christ Jesus**. **2 Timothy 1:13**

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is **in Christ Jesus**. **2 Timothy 2:1**

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is **in Christ Jesus**, with eternal glory. **2 Timothy 2:10**

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life **in Christ Jesus** will be persecuted, **2 Timothy 3:12**

and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith **in Christ Jesus**. **2 Timothy 3:15**

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner **in Christ Jesus**, sends you greetings. **Philemon 1:23**

It's overwhelming. It's like the Holy Spirit is trying to say something to you: "You can't do this thing if you're not in Christ Jesus." We'd better understand what it means to be in Christ Jesus. It is foundational to living as a follower of the One that we are to remain in. We can do all those things; show me again the list from Family Feud. We can pray, read the Bible, make disciples, give to another, forgive, love, serve, go to church, and share the gospel—do all of those things. That's not connected. Look. We're this [*holds up a branch removed from the tree onstage next to him*]. It's just like the other branches. It looks just like the other branches, but no lime is going to grow on this. No lime—but it looks just like those. But nothing's going to grow on it because it's not connected. Apart from the Son, no lasting fruit is produced.

So, what does it mean to abide? My best effort to explain this--this is the important part. Okay, in a conversation with John Mark Comer--which, on your 3E [*the Harris Creek membership renewal form*], evidently, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* is the number-one recommended book by Harris Creek. It's a John Mark Comer book, if you're not aware. In a conversation with him, I said, "John, what do you think it means to abide?" I love what he said. He said, "It's like being in two places at once." I said, "Well, what do you mean, 'being in two places at once?'" And he's like, "Like when you're a new mom, you hardly have time to do a Bible study or a quiet time and there really is not a lot of quiet time when you're a new mom, you know? But what you can be doing is you can be changing diapers, and as you're changing diapers, it's as though Jesus is in the room with you. You can be reflecting on things that He said and letting His Word wash over you and purify you from within. You can be praying over a child as you change those diapers, and so you're doing it as though Jesus is present. And as you work, you can go to work without Jesus, which is very different than one who remains in Him and goes to work, sits in a cubicle or in an office or at a desk or whatever it is that you do, behind a counter. And Jesus is with you." And you have this mindset, constantly, that Jesus is with you. That changes the way you're going to surf the internet. It changes the hashtags you're going to click on Instagram, or where you're going to navigate to on TikTok. When you believe Jesus is with you, it changes everything you do. You think, 'Okay, Jesus is with me, and I'm in constant communication with Him. I'm talking with Him and He's present with me.' For some of us, that's a new idea. What I'm telling you, according to the words of Jesus, it's foundational to everything that we believe about Him and what we do flowing out of our relationship with Him.

You meet someone like John Mark, or Dallas Willard, or Eugene Peterson—or just that person, if you don't know who they are—that person that just gets it. They're all the time following Jesus. All the time. There's just something. And you're like, "What's different about you?" It's abiding. It's not for the professional Christians. It's not for people who've been called to vocational ministry. It's not for the college student that's the weirdo; they're in the Christian sorority or Christian fraternity. No, no, no. It is for everyone. It's baseline. It's foundational.

I'll give one more to try to hit home what this means. In sitcoms, there's this plot that's been played out over and over. In the plot, someone saves someone's life. Then, what they do is they spend the rest of the episode trying to repay them. Think "Family Matters"; think Urkel, if anybody knows that; I think that happened there. If you're a kid of the 90s like me, "Saved by the Bell"; I think Jesse or Screech was pushed out of the lockers. Maybe it was an earthquake. It's a little fuzzy—but somebody saved somebody's life. The rest of the episode, they're trying to repay them. Like, "You saved my life." You guys tracking with that? Anybody know what I'm talking about? You've seen something like that in TV? Okay. "You saved my life." They get really clingy. They're like, "No, I can't, but what can I—here, I just want to—" There's gratitude overwhelming in them. It's overflowing in them. They're like, "I don't know what to do with all this gratitude that I feel." That's abiding.

I don't think we—Harris Creek, the church in America, the vast majority of us, dare I say—live with an understanding that Jesus Christ has done exponentially more for you than any human being ever has or ever will. Any gratitude you would feel, it's like, "What do I have in Christ Jesus? Is it a new car or a new phone or a billion dollars?" It's so much more than anything you can imagine. Here's what I'm going to have the audacity to say: we ask, "How can I worship a God who allowed pruning?" If the good that He offers you, in light of the

pruning, is so good that you would say it was worth it, and only God can do that. You might be like, “It’s not worth it! It’s not worth it!” No, no. Slow down. Slow down. What would make it worth it? Answer the question. “You took away _____ !” Well, if He’d give them back to you forever, would that make it worth it? What would make it worth it? If you answer that question, the other side is just “take away.” It’s just loss. It’s just grief—but God can give you a good that’s *so* good that you would say it was worth it. I’m not just talking hypotheticals up here. You answer the question.

I’m going to skip Verse 7; I’m going to come back to it in the coming weeks. It’s intentional. Verse 8: **“This is to my Father’s glory”** — got 11 seconds, alright. **“This is to my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”** “To my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit.” My third point is:

3. *The fruit of the Spirit proves a disciple.*

The fruit of the Spirit is evident of the disciple. If this feels redundant, it’s because the chapter is so redundant. It’s like, “You remain in me, and I remain in you, and you will bear fruit, but you won’t bear fruit unless you remain in me, and I remain in you, and you’ve gotta remain in me in order to do this, and remain in me, remain in me.” It’s cyclical. It’s as though God is saying, there in your Bible— “Hey, this right here? It’s super important. Yeah, we’ve gotta get this. You have to figure this part out.” In Matthew 7, He says it like this; these are also the words of Jesus: **“By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick up grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit, you will recognize them.”** The fruit—let’s see it again. What’s the fruit that we talked about up front during Family Feud? The fruit: you pray, you read the Bible, you make disciples, you give generously. This is the fruit the world is seeing. It’s not just that, but this mindset of, “All right, I’m going to die with Jesus and I’m going to make disciples.” There’s more going to be birthed forth, but not just that. Then the character qualities, the fruit of the Spirit—God’s Spirit, Jesus’s Spirit living inside of you—produces, Galatians 5: **love, joy, peace, forbearance**, or patience, **kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control**. These things are worthy.

Now, if I say, “Come up here and grow fruit. Hey, come here and sprout an apple.” You’re not going to be able to. You’re going to be like, “I’m not a tree.” “Okay, great, here’s a tree [*onstage*]. Make it grow. Make it grow a lot. Have this grow here. Go, go.” “I can’t. All I can do is put it in the environment—put it in a situation—where fruit is able to grow, right?” If I live in that environment, then fruit is going to grow. If I stay in that in environment—it’s the same with us yielding to the Holy Spirit.

To say it plainly, a disciple is not someone who simply produces fruit. A disciple is someone who abides in Jesus and fruit is produced. The difference between those two things is so important. It’s so important that we get this conceptually. I can put out a fire, right? It doesn’t make me a fireman. I can diagnose something. I can look at you and say, “This is medically what I think is wrong with you and, man, you should take two Advil.” I would be out of my mind to then say, “I’m a doctor.” “I did what doctors do. I’m a doctor.” No, that’s not what makes you a doctor. I can translate the law for you. I say, “This is the law and this is what needs to happen and these are consequences to the law. I’m an attorney.” I can say, “Hey, the

speed limit is 60 miles an hour. If you go over the speed limit, this is what's going to happen. This is what it looks like. These are the consequences.” And I walk away and I say, “Look, I’m a lawyer.” You’ll be like, “You’re not a lawyer.” I’m like, “Yeah, I am a lawyer. I just did what lawyers do.” That’s not what makes you a lawyer. There’s something that has to be in place prior to you doing that. That’s abiding for followers of Jesus. You have to have the abiding piece right or else you’re just doing stuff.

In summary, the Father prunes fruitful branches. The Son produces fruit. And the fruit of the Spirit proves the disciple.

What’s the difference between this lime and this lime [*JP holds one in his hand and points to one on the tree*]? It’s attached. It’s true. That’s attached. This one’s pretty; as pretty as they come [*the unattached lime*]. It’s fake. It’s fake. [*taps on the plastic lime in his hand*] It’s not real. Can you guys verify that it’s not real? [*tosses the plastic lime into the audience*] It’s prettier than these. These have some yellow brown spots. This one’s almost perfect. It looks the part. It’s not going to have any taste. But here’s the deal—when it dies, it will not produce a harvest. Okay? Why? Because it was never alive. Because it was never alive. It just tried to make itself look like that. This is why this is so important to me: because fake fruit replicates real fruit, but it duplicates fake fruit. Okay? It replicates real fruit, but it duplicates fake fruit. Fake fruit: it makes more fake fruit. You can tell your children, “Listen, we believe there’s this place called heaven and this place called hell. We believe that hell is an awful place where there’s no goodness of God there and that, if people don’t trust in Jesus, they’re going to be there forever and ever and ever and ever and ever.” We really believe that. You go out and you come up against people every day who are going to hell and you don’t tell them how to get to heaven. Your kids are going to be like, “Oh, this is this thing that we pretend like we believe, but we don’t really believe because our actions don’t follow through with what we say we really believe.” We can say, “Hey, this world, it’s not like it’s all going to fade away. And what really matters is the treasures we store in eternity.” But then we try to store up all of our treasures here on earth, and then, “Oh, okay, I get it. I get the game. So, we say this one thing, and we say we believe it, and we say it passionately, but we live as though we don’t.” And you’ll make fake fruit. And the fake fruit will sit in church and get in small groups with fake fruit. Do you see how much this matters?

That’s how you get to—**“Depart from me. I never knew you.”** You’re like, “Yeah, but hold on. I was doing all kinds of stuff in your name.” And that’s why it’s like, “What are we doing? What are we doing?” You say, “Hey, I’m going to teach someone to read the Bible.” And what do we do? “Hey, I’m reading the Bible and it doesn’t make sense.” We say, “Okay, let me go ‘Interpretation-Observation-Application.’ Here’s some methodology.” Hold on. That other thing has to be there first. You’ve got to have the abiding thing first or else you’re going to read the Bible, but you may as well be reading the Wall Street Journal. You’re going to read it so you show up to Life Group saying that you read it. That’s different than reading a love letter from a spouse who’s at war who you haven’t talked to in six months. You’re going to hang on to every word. You see the difference? It’s different. So, if you’re here and you’re like, “I’ve been reading the Bible but I don’t really enjoy it. It doesn’t really make sense to me.” I’m not going to come at you with tips, tricks, and techniques. I’m going to say, “Hold on. Are you sure you’ve got the abiding thing? You sure that’s there? You sure you understand who Jesus is, what He’s done for you? Are you living with gratitude for that? You sure?” The enemy of understanding that is thinking you understand that—just going through life pretending like you understand it and assuming everyone else is doing the same

pretending. I'm just crazy enough to say there's some people here that literally believe this man lived a perfect life, died, and showed back up. He's got an inheritance reserved for us forever and ever and ever and ever and ever. We're going to be with Him forever and ever and ever and ever. It's crazy. Crazy. But it's true. It's true. I'll pray we'll believe it.

Help us believe it, God. We can't even believe it on our own. We need your help.

I'm just going to give you some space. You talk to him. You need to talk to him. Just say, "Hey, this is where I've missed it. This is where I haven't been abiding." This is the time though; right now, you can practice. "God, I'm going to abide right now, in this room full of people, for the first time, I'm going to talk to you as though you're real."