

**Last Words, Lasting Presence**  
**Jesus and the Disciples at the Last Supper**  
**Part Four: A Life of Abiding in Jesus**  
**John 15.1-15**

**March 20**

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Last weekend, my four sons Brandon, Sean, Dylan and John Matthew, and I, spent forty eight hours with Dick Towner, my adoptive dad. We went to a cabin in southern Indiana and invited Dick to tell us his story, and to share his life wisdom with us, and then to take us around to places that were important to him in Cincinnati where he grew up and lived a good part of his adult life as well.

It was a wonderful experience.

Well, Dick *loves* fishing. A thread that ran through his whole story was favorite fishing tales. He told us about the pond on a small nearby farm where he first learned to fish as a kid, and about the year he got a fly rod for Christmas and taught himself how to use it. He pointed out the pond at an apartment complex where he used to sneak in at night to fish during his high school years, and eventually got caught. He took us past the pond in the cemetery where, evidently having learned from his previous experience, he got permission to fish after hours. And he recounted highlights from the forty-plus trips he took up to Quetico in Canada summer after summer where he bagged near record catches of pike and small mouth bass.

Imagine you were the fishing rod in Dick's hand. We all know why a fishing rod exists. To catch fish. Given your purpose, given the reason you exist, think how easy it would be for you to focus on the business end of the rod: the line, the knot, the lure, the cast, and the presentation.

But if you were a fishing rod held in the hand of an expert fisherman like Dick Towner, wouldn't it make more sense to focus on the other end of the rod, on the grip and the hand that held you, and let him do the rest? Let him be concerned with the fish?

That's the basic idea we encounter when we come to John chapter 15, verses 1 through 17, one of the most familiar parts of the message that Jesus shared with his followers the night before he was put to death on the cross.

If someone were to ask you what the main theme of the first half of John 15 was, what would you say?

In fact, let's just do this. I'm going to read through the passage and I want you to decide what this passage is about. Where does the emphasis seem to lie? What's the main theme?

Ready?

**John 15.1-3**

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.

**John 15.4-5**

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.

**John 15.6-8**

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.

**John 15.9-12**

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept 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. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

**John 15.13-15**

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

**John 15.16-17**

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

What did you notice? What would you say this passage is about?

Some of you would say the passage is primarily about remaining or abiding in Jesus. And with good reason. Look how often that theme comes up.

**John 15.1-17**

remain in me (4)  
 remain in the vine (4)  
 remain in me (4)  
 remain in me (5)  
 remain in me (6)  
 remain in me (7)  
 remain in my love (9)  
 remain in my love (10)

Eight times in seventeen verses? That's certainly a main focus of the passage.

But some of you noticed there's another major theme that runs through this whole passage that is actually repeated just as often.

**John 15.1-17**

bears no fruit (2)  
 does bear fruit (2)  
 be even more fruitful (2)  
 bear fruit (4)  
 bear fruit (4)  
 bear much fruit (5)  
 bear much fruit (8)  
 bear fruit—fruit that will last (16)

You could easily argue that this is the most important theme of the whole passage. The theme of bearing fruit.

And then there's a third theme that, though it's not repeated quite as often as the first two, is still central to this passage. That's the theme of Jesus' command to live a life of love.

**John 15.1-17**

keep my commands (10)  
 my command is this: love each other (12)  
 do what I command (14)  
 this is my command: love each other (17)

The call to bear fruit. The command to love. And the invitation to abide. Each of them central to this passage.

Here's how I think these themes fit together.

The main focus of this passage is Jesus's *expectation* . . .

**John 15.1-17**

- bears no fruit (2)
- does bear fruit (2)
- be even more fruitful (2)
- bear fruit (4)
- bear fruit (4)
- bear much fruit (5)
- bear much fruit (8)
- bear fruit—fruit that will last (16)

. . . that his disciples will bear fruit.

The *kind* of fruit we are meant to bear . . .

**John 15.1-17**

- keep my commands (10)
- my command is this: love each other (12)
- do what I command (14)
- this is my command: love each other (17)

. . . is a life of love that Jesus commands us to live.

And the *way* we are able to bear that fruit . . .

**John 15.1-17**

- remain in me (4)
- remain in the vine (4)
- remain in me (4)
- remain in me (5)
- remain in me (6)
- remain in me (7)
- remain in my love (9)
- remain in my love (10)

. . . is by staying connected to Jesus – remaining in him, abiding in him.

Let me walk back through those.

Jesus is about to send the church out into the world as his agents, his representatives. We can think of this final message to the disciples as his charter for the church.

And in this part of his message, Jesus talks about the sort of life he expects his disciples to live in his absence.

Specifically, Jesus tells his followers that he expects them to live lives that *bear fruit*.

## **Bear Fruit**

### **John 15.1-17**

- bears no fruit (2)
- does bear fruit (2)
- be even more fruitful (2)
- bear fruit (4)
- bear fruit (4)
- bear much fruit (5)
- bear much fruit (8)
- bear fruit—fruit that will last (16)

Bearing fruit is one of the most common metaphors in the Bible. It is used almost two dozen times.

Think about what bearing fruit implies as a metaphor.

In an agricultural society like ancient Israel, fruit-bearing plants and trees are not planted to look pretty. They are planted to provide *food*.

When you hear the word “fruit,” don’t think clementine or honey crisp. In biblical language “fruit” means whatever part of a plant or tree or plant is edible: grain or kernels on a stalk, olives or dates or figs on a tree, grapes or squash or gourds on a vine.

When you hear fruit, think food. We human beings are in constant need of sustenance that will keep us alive and allow us to thrive as human beings. Fruit is food that sustains life.

A healthy, vibrant plant will bear lots of fruit, and an unhealthy plant, a plant that doesn’t fulfill its purpose, is one that doesn’t bear much fruit, or much healthy fruit, or any fruit at all.

That’s the idea behind the very first parable that Jesus tells when he talks about the kingdom of God being like seed sown in four different kinds of soil in Matthew 13 (3-8, 18-23).

This isn’t a story about four different kinds of followers of Christ. It is about *one* kind of follower of Christ. One plant, the last one in the story, produces a crop that yields thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was sown. That’s the metaphor for a disciple who fulfills his purpose by “hearing the word, understanding it, and being fruitful.”

The other three are examples of plants that don't fulfill their purpose. They never grow, or they grow for a while and then die off, or they continue to grow but never bear any fruit. Those are three different examples of people who don't fulfill their kingdom purpose. It is fair to ask if Jesus would even recognize them as disciples.

So just think about this metaphor in the simplest of terms. Jesus calls us to be people who bear fruit. By using this fruit-bearing image to describe his disciples, Jesus is saying:

If you belong to me, you have something on which the lives of others will depend. A healthy and spiritually mature version of you – you fulfilling your purpose – will mean you live in such a way that through your life you bring life to others.

Listen again to two key passages in John 15:

**John 15.6-8**

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.***

Jesus says when we bear fruit, we bring God glory, we reveal God in this world. And when we bear fruit, we reveal ourselves as his people, as ones who belong to him.

Our statement of identity and purpose as a church family captures this when it says that "we are his people who exist for his kingdom and his glory."

Turns out fruit bearing is central to our calling as followers of Christ. Here's the other key passage:

And **John 15.16-17**

***You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.***

The full reason why God chose us to belong to him is swallowed up in the mysteries of God's grace.

But at least part of why Jesus chose us and called us to himself is so that we would go out into the world as his representatives and bear fruit.

Paul echoes this expectation in Romans 7.4:

My brothers and sisters, we ... died ... through the body of Christ, that we might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, *in order that we might bear fruit for God.*

This is so challenging, isn't it?

As followers of Christ we don't often think about the *why* connected to our becoming Christians. We tend to focus on the benefits that come to *us*: our relationship with the Lord, his forgiveness, our joy and peace, our new life.

But when Jesus calls a person into the kingdom, he chooses and appoints that person to a fruitful life, a life of kingdom purpose. A life lived for the sake of others.

Just to pause for a moment: if you are honest with yourself, how much of your life is lived for the sake of others? To what extent do you see the way you live your life as your answer to Jesus choosing and appointing you to his kingdom work, bearing fruit for the kingdom? How much do you give your life away so that others may live?

As Jesus says in **Matthew 21.43**

The kingdom of God will be . . . given to a people who will produce its fruit.

## Love

So what are we talking about here? What exactly is the fruit of the kingdom?

This brings us to two earlier sayings of Jesus. Listen to how they tie in to each other:

First, in Matthew 7.16, Jesus says:

By their fruit you will know them.

A look at the fruit is all you need to identify the plant or tree.

And then in John 13.35, just a bit earlier in this last message, he says:

By *this* everyone will know that *you* are *my* disciples: if you love one another.

Jesus is saying:

Your fruit will identify what tree you're part of.

And if I am the tree you are joined to, because I came on a mission of love, and laid down my life in love, love is the fruit you are expected to produce, love is the fruit by which the world will recognize you as my disciples.

The fruit of the kingdom is love.

Which brings us to the second central theme we discovered in this passage.

**John 15.1-17**

keep my commands (10)  
 my command is this: love each other (12)  
 do what I command (14)  
 this is my command: love each other (17)

The kind of fruit we are meant to bear.

Those who study such things tell us that in the gospels there are forty-nine different commands that Jesus gives to his followers.

But when you look at them, you realize they boil down to just a handful of things that are all related.

Deny yourself.  
 Love God.  
 Follow Jesus.  
 Let your light shine.  
 Love, serve, and forgive others.

It is not an overstatement to say that all of that can be summed up in one command. To love.

Love God. Love one another. Love your neighbor.

Which, as it happens, lines up perfectly with our calling as a church family.  
 Know Jesus, grow with his people, and go to the world.

Or as I've been saying it more and more in the past two years:

Live a life of love. Love Jesus, Love his people, and pour out his love on the world.

If you are part of the Covenant family, this is what we are about together. This is God's call on us as his people.

Love is the fruit of the kingdom. We are called, we are chosen and appointed, we are *commanded*, to love.

Let me stop here and ask a hard question: when people inspect the branches of your life, when people inspect the branches of our life together, what will they find growing there?

Which brings us to the third theme of this passage.

Jesus talked about the *expectation* that we will bear fruit as his followers.

Jesus talked about the *kind* of fruit we are meant to bear, which is a life of love.



And now Jesus talks about the way we are able to bear that fruit, which is by staying connected to Jesus – remaining in him, abiding in him.

### **Remaining in Him**

At this point it would be easy to feel completely overwhelmed by his call on our lives.

But now Jesus does something utterly unexpected. At the very moment he calls us to a life of bearing fruit, a life of sacrificial love, He takes our focus off of the fruit-bearing end of the branch altogether, and calls us to focus on the place where we draw our own life-giving sustenance as a branch, which is from him.

#### **John 15.1-17**

remain in me (4)  
 remain in the vine (4)  
 remain in me (4)  
 remain in me (5)  
 remain in me (6)  
 remain in me (7)  
 remain in my love (9)  
 remain in my love (10)

In Jesus's mind, the two themes of bearing fruit and remaining in him are directly connected. He couldn't be clearer about the connection between them.

Jesus says in **John 15.4-5**

**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.**

So what does it mean to remain in Jesus?

It means staying connected to Jesus in a life-giving way. **Abiding in Jesus is staying connected to Jesus in a life-giving way.**

The word is in the present tense, so it means to keep doing it: continuous dependence, constant reliance.

I know that a number of you have found Oswald Chambers' book, *My Utmost for His Highest*, to be an important part of your life. In one of his entries he writes:

“Keep all your life perennially open to Jesus Christ. Don't pretend with him. Are you drawing your life from any other source than Jesus Christ? The golden rule for your life and mine is this concentrated keeping of the life open towards God. . . . Never be hurried out of a relationship of abiding in Him.” (January 20, 23)

Abiding in Jesus, remaining in Jesus, is staying connected to Jesus in a life giving way.

Putting ourselves in a place where his life flows into us, so his life flows through us and into the lives of others.

We have access to Jesus all the time, and we are called to live our lives so oriented to him, so joined to him, so anchored and attuned to him, that his life pours into us and his fruit is produced through us. Just like the imagery of Jeremiah 17.8.

So practically speaking, how do we abide in Jesus? How do we rest in him, make our home in him, find our life in him?

For twenty centuries the church has encouraged its members to foster an abiding life. Over the years it has developed a whole series of spiritual disciplines, like worship and breath prayer and resting prayer and solitude and silence, practices that Sharon likes to call “abiding life practices.”

Here are two examples from across the ages.

In the 1600s a French housewife named Jeanne Guyon wrote a little book on abiding that has become a spiritual classic. It is called *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*.

In it she introduces an approach to prayer that she calls “beholding the Lord.” Here’s how she describes it:

Turn your heart to the presence of God. By faith, believe that you have come into the presence of God.

If your mind begins to wander, just turn it back again.

Hold you mind quiet before him.

As you come to him, humbly acknowledge that he is everything. Confess to him that you are nothing.

Close your eyes to everything around you; begin to open the inward eyes of your soul. Believe that God dwells in you.

Once you are in his presence, be still and quiet before him.

Give yourself up to God. Acknowledge before him his right to rule over you.

Surrender your heart into his hands.

Surrender your freedom into his hands.

Yield to the Lord His right to do with you as he pleases.

Abandonment is the key to the inner court – the key to the fathomless depths.  
Abandonment is the key to the inward spiritual life.

Casting off all your cares. Dropping all your needs. Giving up all your concerns.  
All your concerns go into the hand of God. Devoting the present fully and  
completely to your Lord. Surrender yourself to be led by God

selected excerpts from a translation titled  
*Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*,  
pages 9-36

Abiding doesn't mean constant and unbroken awareness of God. None of us can  
sustain that. Every one of us as finite human beings have minds that will wander away  
from God again and again throughout the day.

As Guyon says,

If your mind begins to wander, just turn it back again.

In his spiritual classic, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, also written in the 1600s, Francis  
de Sales recommends a practice of returning again and again to God throughout the  
day that he calls "Spiritual Retreat." He writes:

During the course of the day recall as often as possible that you are in God's  
presence.

Let your heart retreat at various times each day to some place near [the Lord] to  
refresh and restore itself.

Remember to retire at various times into the solitude of your own heart even  
while outwardly engaged in discussions and transactions with others. Such was  
David's practice, as he testified countless times in the psalms:

O Lord, I am always with you.  
I have set the Lord always before me.  
I lift up my eyes to you, O my God.  
My eyes are ever toward the Lord.

Therefore withdraw your spirit from time to time into your heart and there, apart  
from the world of men, you can converse heart to heart with God. (96-97)

As I've thought about my own efforts to stay connected to Jesus in a life-giving way, I  
realize there are four different dimensions of what this has come to mean for me.

It involves:

being attentive to the presence of Jesus at any and every moment,

resting in Jesus instead of succumbing to the stress and pressure of whatever is before me,  
 trusting in Jesus with whatever challenges are in front of me, instead of relying on my own commotion and effort,  
 and surrendering to Jesus, opening my life all over again to whatever he wants to do in me and through me.

All of those things come together in a posture of abiding. So it is . . .

### What is Abiding?

	Trusting	
	Surrendered	
	Attentive	
Resting	<b>Resting in Jesus</b>	Attentive
Trusting		Resting
Surrendered		Trusting
<b>Attentiveness to Jesus</b>	Surrendered	<b>Surrender to Jesus</b>
	Attentive	
	Resting	
	<b>Trust in Jesus</b>	

Again and again, as often as God reminds me, as often as I forget and find myself caught back up in the press and stress of life and God graciously turns my heart back to him, I come again to Jesus, staying connected to Jesus in a life giving way all throughout the day.

Do you want to live a fruitful life for Jesus, the one to which he has chosen and appointed you, one that overflows with life-giving love for the people God places around you in this life?

Jesus says the way to do that is this:

#### John 15.4-5

**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.**

Come in attentive resting trusting surrender now. As the worship team comes up to lead us, I invite you to turn your heart to the presence of the Lord. Quiet your heart before him. Bring him the affection of your heart and pour out your devotion at his feet.

We love you, Jesus our King. We love and adore you and lay our lives before you.

**Closing Song**

We love You

Oh, how we love You

You are the one our hearts adore

Our affection, our devotion

Poured out on the feet of Jesus

**Notes**

Ephesians 5.8-9

Live as children of the light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Stay, abide, remain, dwell, stay present, linger, remain connected to

Carson: continuous dependence, constant reliance,

It's like the image of Jeremiah 17.8:

Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,  
whose confidence is in him.

He will be like a tree planted by the water  
that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes;  
its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought  
and never fails to bear fruit.

**John 15.1-17**

bears no fruit

does bear fruit

be even more fruitful.

*remain in me*

bear fruit

*remain in the vine*

bear fruit

*remain in me*

*remain in me*

bear much fruit

*remain in me*

*remain in me*

bear much fruit

*remain in my love*

*remain in my love*

bear fruit—fruit that will last

Jesus is leaving . . . but he is staying. We have access to Jesus all the time, and are called to live our lives so joined to him, so anchored and attuned to him, that his life pours into us and his fruit is produced through us.

The paradox of this passage

We are called to bear fruit – chosen and appointed that we might go and bear fruit, bringing God glory by bearing fruit, showing ourselves to be disciples by bearing fruit – and yet that isn't what should be our focus

Our focus is supposed to be on the other end of the branch

Worshipful mindful surrendered trust

Trusting worshipful mindful surrender

Mindful trusting surrendered worship

Trusting worshipful surrendered mindfulness

Resting – abide and abode are closely related

Trusting – the rest that comes from trust

Yielding -

Adoring

Attending

Bearing fruit

An orange; tasty, satisfying, nutritious, beneficial

Kingdom fruit

Kingdom = king and subject

Kingdom fruit is what puts on display the kingdom, advances it, furthers it, demonstrates it

Madame Jeanne Guyon

*Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*

*A Short and Easy Method of Prayer*