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Traders Point, how are we doing? So good to be with you. Everyone at the campuses, everyone watching online, welcome.

We are in our series Jesus Is \_\_\_\_\_. Jesus is. And the big concept of this series is who is Jesus? That's what we're all about week in and week out. And we're letting Jesus define Himself. Who does He say that He is?

Here's the problem. From the beginning, since the time when Jesus finished His ministry on earth and His message went out, it began to change, and it was modified.

A lot of us, we've either accepted or rejected a version of Jesus that Jesus, Himself, never portrayed. And I don't know which is worse.

We see that this picked up just years after Jesus' ministry. Look at this. It says:

"You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed." 2 Corinthians 11:4 (NLT)

I mean, they are living in the same lifetime. There were people there, "I saw Jesus heal these people, they were blind now they see."

"I saw Jesus go to a cross and die and then rise three days later."

There were people there who had the nerve to say, "You know what? I'm going to come up with a different version of Jesus. There's a better version of Jesus."

That's why we create something that is different, right? We think that it will be better. But have you ever had something that you thought was so good and then someone tried to make it better and they failed? Restaurants do this all of the time.

You ever been to one of these restaurants and you order your food and at the end of it you say, "Can I also have a side of ranch?" And some of these people have the nerve, the pride, to say, "Yeah, we actually have our own house ranch."

What happened? Did Hidden Valley stop making ranch? "Why are you taking something that is so good—"

"No, no. You'll love it. It's like a southwest mix—"

“No. I’m so excited that you’re making ranch back there in the bathtub and now you want me to get on with this?” Listen. If you’re making your own sauce, don’t call it ranch, okay? Call it Blanche, call it another one of the Golden Girls, but it’s not ranch.

It's the same thing with Jesus. Here's the truth:

There is nothing we can add to Jesus that will make Him better than He already is.

Whatever you add to Jesus, it will only take away. Hear this. God’s Jesus is better than your Jesus. God’s Jesus is better than any Jesus you could imagine or think through.

And that is what this series is about. Jesus has not changed, will not change, but we can know more of who He is and how we relate to Him. That’s what we’re going to be doing today.

If you have your Bibles, we’re going to be in John, chapter 15 starting in verse 1. And if you have your notebook, you’re taking notes, here’s the title for today’s Scripture, for the message:

## JESUS IS THE VINE

We’re going to be unpacking this today. So, go ahead. John 15, verse 1—Jesus starts by saying:

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

And I just want us to look at this really quick. We talked about this last week. These first two words here, the I Am statement is more than Him just describing the fact that He’s the true grapevine, He says, “I Am God.” This is how God described Himself. He said, “I Am. I Am the great I Am.”

So Jesus said, “I am God,” and “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener.”

So before we can unpack this a little more we need to come to this place of, “What is Jesus talking about when He says that He is the true grapevine?” Well, for Jesus to step up and say that He’s the true version of something, that means that there has to be an old version, a false version, a fake version of what Jesus is proclaiming to be.

And we see this. This word vine is what God uses for His people, the people of Israel. Look at this in Psalm 80. This is the way that God talks about Israel. He says:

“You brought us from Egypt like a grapevine; you drove away the pagan nations and transplanted us into your land.”

So, the grapevine in all of Jewish literature, for the most part, was pretty much the people of Israel. They were God's select people and this is referencing that He rescued them out of Egypt, out of slavery, brought them into this new land and then He uses this word vine.

He says that He went into the land before them, and He removed everything. He tilled the soil. He removed the rocks, and He placed them, choice vines, and they were supposed to grow up and multiply and be fruitful.

But the story of humanity and God is that God plants, but it never results in what He wants. He said, "I planted this vineyard and I expected, I hoped, for sweet grapes, for good grapes, but I came back, and they are bitter.

And then there is this line in Isaiah where God said this. He says:

"What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not already done?"

If you want to know the heart of God, read the Scriptures and you will see this over and over again. It's a cycle. God rescues His people, He plants them, their walls get taken down, they become exiles, God brings them back and He plants them over and over again.

So God is like, "I don't know what more I can do." The more that God can do, is Jesus. God is answering His own question there in the life of Jesus. When Jesus says, "I am the true vine," this is what He is saying:

Everything God expected from His people is finally found perfectly in Jesus.

The life that Israel was supposed to live, the life we were supposed to live but kept falling short of, God said, "I'm going to send My Son. I'm going to plant Myself." And then, out of that I'm going to produce the true vine and the good vine.

And the amazing thing, the really good news about this, when Jesus was stepping up and saying that no longer are the people the vine, but He is the vine, it completely shifts and shapes who we are and how our relationship connects to God, okay?

That's what we're going to be unpacking now. Jesus is the vine, the true vine, then who are me and you? Take a look at this. He says:

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

"You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you

cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.” John 15:1-5 (NLT)

Alright?

So let’s break this down. I know some of you—I’m losing you. I was better when I was talking about ranch. No ranch. Now you’re talking about vines and branches. Okay, let’s just break this down really quick:

Jesus is the vine.

We are the branches.

What is He saying here? Well, if you could picture this, picture a vine, picture a tree—it grows out from the ground, right? And from the base of this vine it branches, it branches out. These branches come from the vine and then fruit is sitting there on the branches.

But now, where does the fruit come from? It’s exposed out on the branches but everything that that branch needed came from the vine. The vine supplies, the vine provides the power, the vine provides the nutrients—everything that branch needed, none of it was earned. All of it was given.

Jesus says, “Just like that. Now this is what it is going to be like. This is what our relationship is going to be. I’m the vine, I supply you with everything that you could possibly need.”

Just to break it down a little bit more:

Branches produce physical fruit because they are connected to the vine.

We know that to be true.

People produce spiritual fruit because they are connected to Jesus.

There is no other way to produce everlasting, eternal, divine fruit outside of remaining connected and abiding in the love of Jesus. It’s the only way.

And the amazing thing of what Jesus is doing here with this language is He is shifting the relational dynamic. Both back then and for how we live today. He completely shifts it on its head. Take a look at this. This is what I mean. Most of the world follows this:

PRODUCTION FIRST

CONNECTION SECOND

Here's what I mean. Production first: you show me why I should want you. You show me your proof. You show me something that is desirable, then I will make the decision if we can have a connection or not. This is how your work environments go, this is how school goes.

And a lot of times this is how we take our mindsets to God as well, thinking, "If I produce then I can find connection." Every other world religion follows this. Not because they want to but because this is the way that their god has set it up, "If you do these things, then you will be loved."

It even goes all the way down to some faiths you don't know all the way up until the end, and then at the end, you're let in on: here it is. Here are the good deeds. Here are the bad deeds. And unless the good outweighs the bad, you're going to the bad place. What a horribly unstable life to live.

Jesus flips this completely. Look at what He says. He says:

CONNECTION FIRST

PRODUCTION SECOND

Connection first. He said, "I'm the vine you are the branches. All you have to do is come to Me. And you are going to be welcomed in. You are loved. You are accepted. You are wanted. I'm going to make a place for you in My vine. And you are going to be one of the branches. And all I need you to do is to receive and give love. All I need you to do is to receive this love, and if you do that, you will bear fruit."

It's this idea that God's Spirit goes into followers of Jesus and then from His Spirit through all of our extremities, from our head down to our toes, God is filling us with a fruitful life. What do we have to do? How do we have to keep it?

He said, "Just remain in Me. A branch realizes how dependent it is upon the vine. That is what I need you to do. That's all that I need you to do. Stay with Me. Remain in Me. And I will produce the fruit."

And what is the fruit that Jesus is talking about producing? If we connect to this true vine, what is the fruit we will bear in our lives? Well He says it. It's:

Love

Over and over again you're going to see in John, chapter 15 that He says, "Remain in My love. Stay in My love." This is what you can expect, to live a life that is filled with love. And not a fake love. Not a cheap love. But a real, sacrificial, powerful, life-giving love. He's going to fill you with everything that you need.

That is the true vine. That is what He produces. But once again, if there is a true vine, then there has to be a false vine. And those vines are still existing today. And for some of us, you have connected yourself to one of these vines. What is it?

Maybe an easier way to look at this is to ask this question:

What's the fruit that you want most?

What do you want your life to produce? What is it that, at the end of the season, if you have this then you will know that this was a good season, or this was a bad season? Is it the love of God? Or is it one of these?

Money

Power

Status

Comfort

I'm telling you, there are real vines that produce this worldly fruit. I'm not saying that that doesn't happen. You can connect yourself to a vine to get money. You can get power. You can get status. You can get comfort. You can get all of these things.

But I love the way Jesus talks about it in Mark, chapter 8. Do you know what He says? He says:

“And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?” Mark 8:36-37 (NLT)

Is anything worth more than your soul? God is saying, “Be watchful. Be mindful. You'll know if you're connected to Me, you'll know if you're abiding in Me because your life will produce fruit. It will produce love, spiritual fruit.”

But if you look at your life and you're wondering, and you're planning, and all of your goals are wrapped in other fruit, whether that's money or power or status or comfort, you need to take a step back, because those are not the things that God is trying to produce in your life.

Sometimes they can be a byproduct for sure. But if you're looking for Jesus to provide what He never promised to provide, you are going to get angry, angry at the vine.

Jesus is telling us right now, “This is what I want to produce.” And God wants more of it for you. More and more. But it's not the more of the vine that we connect to, it's more of the vine He wants for you.

And it shows, even in this text, that He is willing to do whatever it takes so that we can produce and bear more fruit. Look at this. It says:

“He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.” John 15:2 (NLT)

I want you to think about that. This is who God is. Jesus is the vine; God is the good gardener. And He wields a knife. Why is He holding on to this knife? It says it’s because He is there to prune.

And the process of pruning, if you just look at it from a distance, you have no idea what is going on. If you just saw a gardener at work, you would think they were murdering a plant.

You would be like, “I don’t know if that’s the way it should go.” Because when you’re pruning, you’re taking these long branches and you’re cutting them back. So now, at our glance we’re like, “Well, that was long and that would be better, right? It’s shorter. It can’t be good.”

If you look at the ground and you see all of these dead branches there, you’re like, “What is going on?” But a good gardener knows that you cut back. And, yeah, for a season it’s smaller. But you cut back so that this tree can bear more fruit. So that this vine can bear more fruit.

This is what God is saying here. It’s an idea that He prunes, that He cuts back, that He wants more of you and for you to have more of Him. Do you believe that?

He has a knife and maybe that’s scary. He prunes back. And maybe that takes a lot of trust. I want you to think about this. There are a lot of people who wield knives who we don’t fear. There are some that we do.

There is a chef. A chef wields that knife, and he makes that perfect meal. And then he puts that house ranch on it. Do you know what I’m talking about? But he has a knife. You trust him.

There is a surgeon with a scalpel who you trust to remove cancer. Why do you trust him? Because you believe that he has your best interest at heart. You believe that he knows something that you don’t. You believe that there is going to be pain in the immediate, but in the next season to come there is going to be health.

It is the same thing with God. And when God prunes, He’s actually doing it for a purpose. Look at this in James. He says:

“Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.

“So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” James 1:1-3 (NLT)

Why is God making these cuts? Why do we go in these seasons where we seem to lose the things that were most important to us sometimes?

You know, I heard this line this past week: at your top, at your pinnacle, as high as you have ever been then you should be on the lookout, because that’s when the devil attacks. That’s when the devil comes knocking. And I believe that that is 100 percent true.

But I also believe that some of the things that we’ve held on to so tightly, the things that we are abiding in, and remaining in, our mountaintops, that we think our so stable, are actually hollow branches. And God is pruning them, and they are falling. Not to take away from us but to give us more, because He has a plan in the pruning to produce fruit in us.

He is creating something. God wields that knife, but God is the One who has the perspective. God not only sees the vine, He sees not only your branch, but all of the branches. And He knows that with this cut it’s going to produce this fruit, not only for you individually but collectively for the church, for all of His people. So He cuts very carefully, shaping all of us into the image of Jesus.

I love the way Michelangelo—the artist, not the Ninja Turtle, I have to clarify so that you know which one I am talking about—when he was interviewed, and they asked him, “How did you do it?” (They were talking about his sculpture of David.) “How did you take this giant chunk of nothing and carve it down to this beautiful masterpiece of David?”

Do you know what he said? He said, “It is easy. You just chip away the stone that doesn’t look like David.”

I want you to think about that. The things that cut, the losses that you have, the grief, what you’ve experienced, what if it was not all for naught? What if there is a gardener behind the scenes cutting and pruning, cutting away what does not look like Jesus?

And in the moment, it just looks like dead branches on the ground. But God is producing something there. Creating something. A true and accurate version of you. The most pure and perfect version of you that looks like Jesus. That’s what He is doing.

Do you believe that He is the good gardener? Do you believe that He cuts with a purpose? You know, that’s the point of faith. You not only believe that God is good when He gives blessings, but that God is also good when you feel the pain of the pruning and you trust what He has in the next season.

That’s what God is saying here. I cut back for a second, but the truth, the promise of Jesus is that whatever I take, I will give you more. It may be in this next season, a year from now, or five



years from now but whether it is or not, eventually on the other side of eternity you will have way more than you ever lost here on this earth.

This is the promise of God in the vine. Why? Why does He do this? Why can we trust Him with the knife? Why can we trust Him with the scissors? Look at what He says in verse 9:

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me.”

Pause.

I think this is one of the lines that we just read through like it's just a normal sentence, just normal words strung together. Think about this for a second. This is mind blowing. “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me.” What Jesus is saying is this, “Exactly with the same velocity, with the same strength, with the same power, with the same actions that God loves Me, I've turned around and I've given you that kind of love.”

It will blow your mind. Just take a day and think about what this kind of love looks like. Think about the moments in your life when you've experienced real love, deep love, life-changing love and to know that it's nothing in comparison to what God is talking about here.

You know, I get asked to be in groups sometimes or I have a conversation with people, and they want to talk about the deep theological things, whether it's like Calvinism or the end times or predestination all of these things.

And I'll be honest with you, I don't care for it. I understand and I have this part and I understand it can be fun, but you're really just kind of taking things—a lot of this is thin. It could either be this way or that way. It's not my favorite thing to do.

But, if you want to get coffee sometime, you want to go for a walk and you want to talk about how God loves us, you want to spend some time just racking your brain in all of the ways that God loves us—I'm all in on that conversation, 10 out of 10 times I will take that one because that is the kind of love that will push us and shape us and grow us into the image of Jesus.

I know I've offended some people. They are like, “That is my favorite thing to do.” I'm kidding. I love talking about those things too. Seriously, hit me up. Email me this week at [abrockett@tpcc.org](mailto:abrockett@tpcc.org). We'll grab a coffee.

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me.” So what? So:

“Remain in my love.”

That's what it says. “I've lavished My love on you, I've done everything. I went from just planting and removing everything to actually being placed Myself and becoming the vine. I've loved you.

I've shown you that I would give My only Son for you. I died for you. I've done it all. What I need you to do... remain in My love."

How? How do we remain in His love? Look at what He says:

"When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love." John 15:10 (NLT)

What are the commandments that He is talking about? Fascinating. Once Jesus was kind of pushed and asked, "What's the most important commandment? How do you boil this thing all down to one?"

And He said, "This is as close as I can get. Love God with everything you've got and love people with everything you've got." That is what everything hangs on. The balance of everything is found in those two things.

So what fruit is God trying to manufacture and produce in your life? Not a trick question. Love. Why? So that you can love Him and so that you can love others. It all goes together.

What does that kind of love look like lived out and expressed? Look at this:

"We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love."

If you want a definition for what faith is, maybe you live with a pretty thin faith, it's just blind. No, no. Here's what faith is:

"We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love." That's faith. When I say that I have faith, it's that I've put my trust in His love, and "God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

"And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence," hear this, "because we live like Jesus here in this world." 1 John 4:16-17 (NLT)

If you need a statement to live by, if you need a purpose, if you need something to line up with, to wonder, am I connected to the vine? Go back to that. Am I living like Jesus here on this planet? That's what it all boils down to.

And the only way you can do that, it is not through more activity, it is not proving yourself, it is remaining and abiding in the love of Jesus.

And this sounds crazy. It sounds so counter to everything we've been taught our whole life. It is better to remain in Him than to run in circles and to pretend like we're really doing something.

What if the best thing that you could do with your life is abide in Him?

I was about to go on sabbatical about a year ago and I was meeting with a guy, he's been on staff here for years. He's been on a few sabbaticals. And I'm all amped up about it before. So I'm trying to get it right. And I had my weeks all broken down: I'm going to do this. I'm going to do that. I'm going to travel. I'm going to see these people. I'm going to interview them.

And I'm going through my plan with him, thinking he's going to be like, "This is a really good plan." But he looked at me, he took a sip of his coffee, and he said, "What if the best thing that you could do on sabbatical was rest?"

Alright. That is a hot ticket. Bold strategy. But he was right. It produced more fruit in my life to just be with God and sit with Him and hear from Him than anything else—to remain in a relationship, to abide in a relationship.

You know, there is some space in our lives that allows that to happen easier and some that just makes it downright impossible. It's not just true with our relationship with God, it's true with our relationship with people, right? There are certain settings that your relationships thrive in and there are certain settings that your relationships don't do so well in.

We are in a season right now where most of you are experiencing a tough relationship and we have one thing to blame: March Madness.

You ever had a conversation, a fruitful conversation with a guy during the Final Four? Or a woman. I know my mom. I'm not even talking to her right now, she's so invested... I'm kidding. I do talk to my mom.

You get so blocked in to what's going on. It's like trying to have a conversation with someone when he is scrolling on his phone. It's not the right setting. It's not going to produce something. You're going to get frustrated and end up walking away.

It's the same with God. When we live our lives, if that's what God wants for us, to abide in Him, to remain in Him, to be a part of His vine, then our lives should be sculpted and protected in a way to make sure that that happens. We should create a greenhouse of sorts to protect the fruit that God is trying to make.

I'm getting too amped up. I'm going to slow down for a second. Next part is really good.

I just want to create just a prompt that can begin the conversation if you want that kind of space, if you want to truly abide in Jesus and to sit with Him and to behold Him and to worship Him and to trust that He is the vine. How do you do that? Here's the first thing:

I feel close to God when I

There are things in your life right now that when you do them you feel close to God. What we want to do is just identify those and make sure that they are part of your daily and weekly rhythms.

I'll get the list started for us and then you guys can finish this week. The first one is:

Come to church

There's a reason when you come to church that you feel close to God. It's God's design. You're flowing in on what He's doing. You're shoulder to shoulder with a bunch of people who are stirring you up.

We have people coming up here who are leading in worship, they are opening God's Word, there are so many reasons why you feel close to God.

You get an opportunity to serve other people. All of that comes together and you walk out of here and you go, "Man, I feel close to God." But for a lot of us, that closeness ends Monday morning when your alarm clock goes.

Everything else I want to give you are things that we can all do this week to abide and to remain in Jesus. Not one day a week, one hour on that day, but every day, continuously, to make sure that we remain in Him. The second one is this:

Go to group

You notice how I didn't say join a group. I'm on to you guys. Don't just join a group, you've got to actually go to the group every week. Because what happens when you put yourself in that setting? You get surrounded by other people who stir you up, who move you closer and closer to Jesus.

You get to share your struggles, your pain with what's going on. You get to celebrate the big things and share the not-so-great things and there are people who come alongside of you, they pray over you, they encourage you and they point you back to God and who He says that you are. Over and over again you get stirred up to live like Jesus here on earth.

Look at the next one:

Serve

Serving other people. This is the idea that you want to make a difference with your life. That is true of you if you are a follower of Jesus or not. I believe that to be true. There is something in you that wants to make a difference, to serve other people. When you do that, you will feel close to God, You will be abiding in Him.

A lot of us, we're serving in situations where we know that if God doesn't show up it isn't going to go well. Every Sunday I'm reminded, standing on this stage, when I serve in this way that if He doesn't show up, it's not going to go well.

And once again, by serving I'm modeling what Jesus modeled for all of us. I want to leverage my time, my talent, my treasure, all of it to make a difference. I'm abiding in Jesus.

Read Scripture

Psalm 119 says:

"I have hidden your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you."

It's this idea that I'm going to open God's Word. I want to hear from Him. I want to be so close to Him, seeing who He is and who He says that I am. And I'm tucking all of this away. And it's going to flow out from me afterward.

Pray

I'm going to talk to God. I'm going to share exactly what's going on. I'm going to build this relationship. I'm going to find solitude and silence so the only voice that I hear is God's. And after I pray, I'm going to wait to hear what He has for me.

Next one:

Listen to worship music

Now, I know most of our lives, if you're anything like me, there is always music going on in the background. When you drive to work, when you work out, after work, there's a different playlist for a different thing. And I'm not saying that you should only ever listen to worship music. But I am saying be strategic about when you listen to worship music.

There is something that happens... I just want to give you this. If you started your day with these three here, if you woke up in the morning 30 minutes early and you read some Scripture and you prayed and you sat and you thought about who God is, and then on your way into work you listened to worship music, that is a very different person who is going to be walking into work.

That is very different then waking up late, rushing to get out, listening to some music that amps you up so that you walk into the office....

What if you spent your mornings abiding in Him? This is the idea that when you do these things, you can't help but bear the fruit of love.

And the final one—oh, I'm sorry, we've got two more:

### Share my faith

If we want to live like Jesus here on earth then we have to do the things that Jesus did. He shared His faith everywhere that He went. "That's what I'm here for. I came to proclaim the Good News of the gospel. That there is a good God who loves you, who sent Me, the vine, to live here. All of this is now possible. This is who God is."

If we want to be like Jesus, then we have to share our faith with those around us. I'm telling you, when you share your faith, you will never feel closer to God. You will be abiding in Him. He will be pushing down your insecurities, He will be giving you the words to say, and you will walk away going, "I don't know how I could have done that, but thank You, God."

And then the last one:

### Personal preferences

Personal preferences. Here's what I mean. All of these above are for all of us. It's not like, "You go to church, I'll go to group. You serve, that's your thing. I'll read Scripture." No, no. All of these will help us abide in Jesus and in His love.

And then the bottom one is personal preferences. These are the things that are unique to you. There are some little things that will help you connect to God that might not help the person next to you.

For some of you, you're more of an indoor cat, you know what I mean? You love being indoors. Your idea of abiding in Jesus and feeling connected to Him is being at home on your couch. You have a nice fire going, but it's not one you built, it's one you pushed a button for. And you have a nice cup of coffee and it's beautiful and slow.

For others of you, that's not you. That's not your speed. You would rather be at Eagle Creek or Turkey Run out in the wilderness fighting off bears and lions and tigers. You're reminded of God's creation and you're like, "This is when I feel close to God."

What are those moments for you? Make this list as long as you possibly can. Protect it. Do everything you can to feel close to God.

There's also a shadow side to this. We have those things that make us feel close to God, but we also have this:

I feel far from God when I

There are things in your life that you do, even though after you do them you feel far from God. There is a fruit that you are getting from that, that you're saying is worth it. And I think Jesus would say that it's not.

What are some of those things? If you're abiding in a different vine, what could that look like. Here are some of the things, some of the fruit that is produced from that. Galatians says:

"When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these." Galatians 5:19-21 (NLT)

These are on the other side. That left unchecked this is the fruit that will come from those. This is what is going to pop if we do not abide in God's love, then this is what we can expect.

I want you guys to think about this. Whenever you are in these situations, why this is so incredibly important? God says, "I don't want you to focus on these things, I want you to abide in this instead."

Because when you abide in Him, when you are close to Him, you will not be able to do those other things. If you are abiding in Jesus, it makes it really, really hard to do those other things. So I want to fill my life with the good things, the things that God has called me to, living on mission and living to look like Him.

Think about this, just practically think about this. Have you ever gotten into a fight with someone who you were trying to serve? You ever do that? Like you're trying to serve him, wash his feet, and you're washing his feet and you are angry at him at the same time, it can't happen.

Have you ever tried to share your faith with someone as you are gossiping? Think about that. Like if you're at work this week and you're like, "Man, did you hear about Kristie? Oh, I heard about Kristie. Did you hear that she was drunk?"

"No, I didn't."

"I heard some other things too. You won't believe who she is when she is not here. You know what else you won't believe? Who Jesus is. Can I tell you about Him?"

Listen. You can't do both at the same time. It's like sneezing and peeing. One has to stop so that the other can go. I promise you, our lead pastor will be back.

But this is the life that God has called us to.

If you heard a kid laughing you understand who my humor is for.

But we have to stop one to do the other. Why? Why did God want this for us? Why is God leading us in this way? Why does He want us to produce this fruit? Why does He want us to abide in Him? What does He get out of this? Look at this. He said:

“I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than 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 slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other.” John 15:11-17 (NLT)

Why does God want this for us? What does He want us to be able to experience to abide in Him? What are we going to get out of it? It’s this. He says it there at the beginning. He said, “Do this so that you can be filled with joy.” He said, “I want you to overflow with joy.” That’s what God wants for you.

But what is joy? I feel like a lot of times joy and happiness get talked about like they are interchangeable, that they are synonymous, but they are not. I love the way that Dr. Tony Evans describes what joy is. He says:

“Joy is internal stability in spite of external circumstances because of the knowledge that God is in control.”

This is what joy is. This is why Jesus says, “I am the vine,” and why it’s such good news, because you can now have internal stability in spite of external circumstances.

Why? Because of what you are connected to. You are not connected to one of these shallow vines. You are not connected to one of these vines that is just going to get blown over. You’re not connected to one of these seasonal vines.

No, no, no. He says that you can connect to an everlasting vine, a vine that cannot be shaken no matter what storms come, this vine is not moving.

You can have joy in spite of the storm, in spite of whatever comes. This is why you have confidence. This why you have joy.

And because you know who holds the knife. You are stable, you are locked in. You are secure. And you know that the One who is overseeing the whole project, the One who is making the



cuts—it's always for your good. God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him.

It may be a loss right now in this season, but there's going to come a day when the fruit that He gives us won't even compare to what we're thinking. So He says, "Yeah, so I have joy."

But I don't think that's the way most people think about God, that He's a God of joy, that He's a God who wants you to overflow with joy.

A lot of times when I talk to people I get this idea that they think God is a killjoy, right? God is set up to take away the little bit of joy that we have in our lives.

And a lot of that is wrapped around this question. I meet people and they want to know how to follow Jesus and a lot of times it's wrapped around this:

"What can I do?"

"I'm in. I'm going to do it. I'm going to follow Jesus. But what can I do?"

"What do you mean, 'What can I do?'"

"Can I drink?" It's almost like, "Well, how many drinks can I have?" Like there is a chart or something, like God and Benadryl are the same thing. Don't mix these two whenever you're going after it. "How much can I drink?"

"How much can I smoke? What can I smoke?"

"Can I have sex before marriage? Who can I have sex with?"

"Can I be rich? How rich can I be?"

"Do I have to give? How much do I have to give?"

"Do I have to go to church? Do I have to join a group? Do I have to serve?"

There is this idea that prompts those questions. The idea is that we've created a better world than the one that God wants for us.

What people are saying when they say, "What can I do?" is they're saying, "How can I hold on to this vine that has given me so much fruit that I really like, and how can I hold on to this one over here as well?"

What God is saying... I'm telling you the gospel in so many ways is so much simpler and cleaner than we make it out to be. It's clean but it is not easy. There is no best of both worlds.

You can't hold on to this one and swing over to this one. There are not two worlds. There is only one.

There is one God, one gospel, one life, one love that He wants for you. You can't hold on to this other part and receive all of the other things. It's complete surrender. It's letting go of everything.

I love the way that C. S. Lewis talks about it. He says:

"Christ says, 'Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it.'"

God doesn't want just a little bit of your money. The idea of the vine is not, "God, we're about to go into business together, alright? I'm going to bring You 80 percent, You show up, I don't need a lot, I just need 20. Give me 20 percent of Your supernatural power, and I'm telling You, we can take this thing from the ground floor to the penthouse."

God is saying, "I have a better idea. How about you come to Me, like who you are, and I'll come to you like who I am. How about you acknowledge that that fruit that you're trying to produce in your life, that you're so worried of losing, that it's an earthly fruit."

And I don't know a lot about fruit, but here's what I know. Apples, bananas are amazing, but they spoil quickly, bananas especially, those things are nuts.

And God is saying, "You can live your life for those things, but every single season you're going to go to that basket and you're going to realize that it's already spoiled before you ever got a chance to enjoy it."

God says, "What I want to offer you, through the true vine is everlasting life. It is true fruit. It is spiritual fruit that I want to give to you." But you have to realize who you are coming to and who you are. Here's the truth. It's found in John 15:5:

"For apart from me you can do nothing."

That's a hard pill to swallow. We would rather spend our lives building vines that will fall down before we die than to humbly submit to a God who holds the scissors, a God who holds the knife, a God who says, "I want to provide you everything. Just stay in here and embrace it. Just stay in here and receive it, don't look away. Abide in Me."

This is the gospel. "Come to Me and I will fill you." There is nothing you can do, you can't prove yourself. It's only what you can receive.

When we come to this idea and we realize that when Jesus is the vine and we are dead wood, we are branches just laying there on the ground, with no way of being able to produce fruit, no

way of connecting ourselves to the vine, we see that it is by God's grace that we can be connected. And what we do is we come to Him, and God takes that dead wood, me and you, and He breathes life into it.

The picture that the Bible uses is of grafting. It says that God grafted us onto His tree. And this is that idea that you can cut, and splice and you make room in the vine. And you take that dormant, that dead branch and you shave the edges of it and then you stick into the base, into that vine, and you push it skin on skin into it. And then you wrap it so tightly that it can't move. And then that dead branch comes to life.

And because it's connected to the vine the nutrients flow into it again. It's filled. And over time that dead and dormant branch will begin to produce fruit.

This is what Jesus has offered to all of us. This is a relationship that you can begin today. And if you're here today and you want that, you're tired of these false vines, you're tired of the spoiled fruit, you're tired of the hunger pains that you have experienced, and you want to know what it's like to be connected to the true vine, that relationship can start today.

At every campus we'll have people at the front of the stage, and we would love to pray with you and talk about what it looks like to rest and abide in Jesus.

For those of you who are here and you're saying, "I want a relationship with God, I want to abide in His love, I want to just be with Him, but it feels like every season is March Madness, it feels like there is always a reason not to put Him first. There's just always something that takes my attention, I want to carve out space, I want to create the space, to come forward," that is a prayer that I believe God will answer.

He will help you identify those false vines. He will help you grow up true and everlasting fruit in your life.

That's what I want to pray for right now, pray that we would have a moment of response. That the branches would cry out to the vine and just thank Him for all that He has done and all that He continues to do. And then we're going to worship, thanking God for being God and for all that He's done.

Would you pray with me?

God, we thank You for today. God, we thank You for this life that You have given us. God, we thank You for how You shifted everything. God, You are the true vine, and we are the branches.

And the best thing that we can do with our lives is to remain in You. There are things in our lives that try to pull us from You. There are things in our lives that try to silence Your voice, deafen us to it.

God, I pray that just being next to You would be the greatest thing that we could ever want to do. That our lives would be building around that time and that space where we would just get to know You better, we would experience Your love. That You would lavish it upon us. That we wouldn't have to strain or strive, but we would just receive.

And all of the things that we do in our lives, it's not to be loved. We do them because You commanded us to do them and because they are the best things that we could possibly do with our lives.

Let us see You as a good God who wants more for us, not less. A God who has defeated sin and death. A God who has authority over both and now has given us the invitation to just rest in Your finished work on the cross.

Jesus, we love You so much. Help us to abide, help us to remain, help us to bear fruit.

We love you. It's in Jesus' name: Amen.