

John 15:1-8

Rest, Renewal & Grace: Life with God

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The actual sermon on Sunday, September 26th, came out much differently than the one written below. Please watch the video of the service to see how the Spirit moved.

This summer I started reading (and am still reading) a book by Skye Jethani called *With*. In *With* Skye talks about the four different ways people generally relate to God (pp. 6-7, 169-170):

1. **Life Under God** — You may relate to God this way if you feel like you never measure up. You feel like if you can get yourself or your family to obey God, God will bless you. You try hard not to disobey. You're afraid of what might happen if you do. God will be angry with you and judge you, so better not make him mad. Do you relate to God this way? Are you living life under God?
2. **Life Over God** - Or maybe you relate to God on the other end of the spectrum. You don't believe there is a God, so you ignore the very thought of him. Or you believe that God has created the world in such a way that if you live a good life, do what's right, and don't hurt others, God will bless you and you will be happy. God created the world in such a way that if I operate according to his rules or values or principles, I will be blessed. Do you relate to God this way? Are you living life over God?
3. **Life From God** - What if you take a different approach? You continually ask God to bless your life and to give you the things you want. You pray all the time and expect him to move. When things get hard, you pray, but as soon as things return to normal you forget about God. Or, you get upset with God when he doesn't give you what you want. You want God to do things for you, but don't actually want God himself. Do you relate to God this way? Are you living life from God?
4. **Life For God** - This, perhaps, is the approach many good Christians take. You want your life to matter, to not waste your life, to be radical for God, and so you fill your schedule or life-goals with things you can do to make a difference for God. God has given you a mission, and you will fulfill it if it's the last thing you do. You are a servant of God and you know that's what will make you a success. Do you relate to God this way? Are you living life for God?

Two weeks ago Bernie preached about Jesus' story of the Prodigal Sons. The first son, the younger one, asked for the father to give him his inheritance and then he went and spent it on a lavish lifestyle in a foreign country. The younger son didn't want a relationship with the father, but his inheritance from the father. When we don't really want God, but worship him so he'll give us a successful career, or marriage, or make us better parents, or just to get our fire-insurance—that's living life from God (See *With* pp. 73-74).

But if you're a good Christian who always obeys, you might be living more like the older brother. There's the son that ran away and lived a lavish lifestyle, but there's also the older son who stayed home. That son got mad when he heard his brother had returned home and his father had welcomed him by killing the fatted calf. He refused to go inside to the party and the father had to beg him to come inside and join the party. Jesus was talking to the pharisees and religious lawyers of his day, the most religious people of all. They were living life for God. They thought if they did what God wanted God would be pleased. You might be an older brother if you think what God wants most is your service, and not your heart. (*With* pp. 93-94)

We can live life under God, over God, from God, and for God. But what if none of these ways are what God intends? What if we're supposed to relate to God a different way, not for what he can do for us or what we can do for him, but for who he is? Skye Jethani calls this other posture:

Life with God

Life with God is what God intended all the way back in the Garden of Eden. Eden was supposed to be a place where people knew God and lived and worked and played with him. I watched the [BibleProject's video on the Tree of Life](#) this week. They reminded me that the garden of Eden was a kind of temple where God's presence dwelled. And the Holy of Holies, the place where God's presence was most manifest, was in the center of the garden at the tree of life. God gave Adam and Eve and all humanity access to this tree so they could experience his life. To eat from this tree, from God himself, granted eternal life.

But instead of choosing eternal life with God, Adam and Eve and all humanity chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9, 3:6). They had access to God's eternal life through the tree of life, or they could do life their own way through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They chose life apart from God and ever since then humanity has been wandering in the wilderness trying to recapture what we lost in the garden, access to eternal life with God. We try life over God, life under God, life from God, and life for God, but none of them are the same as life with God. No matter how hard we try, we cannot recapture Eden, we cannot rebuild the temple we lost. But God has a plan for a new and better temple that will house his presence and we can have access to God. This is what the gospel of John says:

John 1:14 (ESV)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This verse tells us God became flesh and dwelt among us. That word for "dwell" is the Greek word for tabernacle, a tent where God dwells, a temple. So the garden temple has returned to the world but this time in the form of flesh and bones, a man. This man Jesus is full of the Father's glory and is both God and man. He is the holy of holies made manifest. And as we look at our passage today, Jesus identifies himself as [the tree of life walking among us](#).

Jesus is the tree of life.

John 14-17 is a summary of Jesus' final words the night he was betrayed. We call it the "[farewell discourse](#)." At the start of his discourse he said this:

John 14:6 (ESV)

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus wants us to have access to the one and only true God, and so receive eternal life. But it's only through him that you and I can experience eternal life. Later Jesus prays this for his followers:

John 17:3 (ESV)

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Jesus is the way we access eternal life through God. And it's only through knowing him that we can know God, that we can know eternal life. Jesus is the tree of life.

Jesus is the tree of life who makes life with God possible.

And in John 15 Jesus actually describes himself as a tree.

John 15:1 (ESV)

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

John 15:4-5 (ESV)

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

If you want eternal life, if you want access to God, if you want access to the tree of life, abide in Christ. Jesus is the new tree of life, and he invites us to come and connect to him. He wants us to come and find our complete growth and nurturing in him. You want to do life with God? Come do life with Christ. Jesus is the tree of life who makes life with God possible. Jesus allows us to connect with God through worshipping him and enjoying God’s presence through the Holy Spirit. This helps us bear fruit.

Jesus is the tree of life who makes a fruitful life with God possible.

Maybe you’re wondering how we know if we are connecting to life with God. Jesus talks about fruit.

John 15:4-5 (ESV)

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

When we connect to Christ, we’ll bear fruit, and it might come in the most surprising of places. Next to our house is an empty office complex and next to the parking-lot there are bushes with vines full of concord grapes. We didn’t even realize there were vines there for multiple years until Monica smelled the grapes. For some reason I’m okay with getting grapes from the store, when they’re packaged in plastic. But I feel more awkward picking grapes off the side of a parking lot and eating them that way. My wife and kids just went down to her grandmother’s house where she also has a vine with concord grapes. They picked the grapes and brought a whole tuber-ware full of them home. We are overflowing with grapes from unexpected places. That’s what God does.

When we connect to Christ, he bears fruit in our lives.

There are lots of different types of grapes. There are moon drop grapes, concord grapes, pinot noir grapes, lemlberger grapes, sweet jubilee grapes, champaign grapes, crimson seedless grapes, and the list goes on and on. As we look at scripture, there seems to be a lot of different types of fruit too.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

I don’t think this list is exhaustive, but representative of lots of kinds of fruit. I think there could also be the fruit of repentance, the fruit of obedience, the fruit of a life lived in faith, the fruit of serving your neighbor, the fruit of loving God, loving others, and loving your enemy (it does talk about love). But here’s the commonality all of these fruits share. They all come from knowing and being known by God. They all come from spending time with Christ, abiding in him, knowing him, communing with him. So how do we do that?

How can we abide in Christ?

How can we abide in the vine? How can we do life with God. We find in our John 15 passage several ways:

1) Be open to the pruning of Father.

Verse one calls the Father the “vinedresser.” I watched a [YouTube video about a vinedresser](#) this week. The vinedresser takes care of the vine. The vinedresser plants the vine, grafts it to a root that is resistant to the critters in the soil. The vinedresser is the only one who carries the sharp clippers. The vinedresser trims back leaves so they have access to the sun and cuts off limbs if they get sick.

John 15:2-3 (ESV)

2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

The pruning of the vinedresser makes fruit possible. Who does all the work? The vinedresser. The branch’s job is to just stay connected to the vine. Our job is to seek to know Christ and trust the pruning up to the Father. Pruning is painful. When he addresses sin in our lives, it hurts. But “the Lord disciplines the one He loves.” (Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6) So we need to be open to what the Father wants to do in our lives. If we’re not, he’ll cut us off and we’ll wither.

John 15:6 (ESV)

If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

The vinedresser said that they have to gather up all the branches that have been cut off and burn them, because if they don’t they will attract vermin and critters and bugs. To not be pruned leads to sickness and death. 1) Be open to the pruning of Father.

2) Abide in the word.

Christ is the word of God made manifest. And we have access to Christ through the Holy Spirit and to his words through the scriptures.

John 15:7 (ESV)

7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Do God’s words abide in us? One of the ways we abide in Christ is by reading scripture, meditating on what it means, memorizing it, and applying it to our lives. And as a church body, we don’t do it alone. We do it with other branches. We bear fruit together as we receive God’s word together. I think this includes spending time in prayer and listening.

3) Abide in prayer.

At the end of this passage, Jesus talks about sending the Holy Spirit.

John 15:26 (ESV)

26 “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

The vinedresser has given us Christ to cling to and the Holy Spirit to help us grow. We’re called to spend time in solitude in prayer, to pray together as a church community, and to “pray without ceasing”(1 Thess 5:17). We’re to abide in God through abiding in prayer. What does that look like? Skye Jethani illustrates:

In 1982, the Today show in New York City scheduled an interview with Reverend Billy Graham. When he arrived at the studio, one of the program's producers informed Graham's assistant that a private room had been set aside for the reverend for prayer before the broadcast. The assistant thanked the producer for the thoughtful gesture, but told him that Mr. Graham would not need the room. The producer was a bit shocked that a world-famous Christian leader would not wish to pray before being interviewed on live national television. Graham's assistant responded, "Mr. Graham started praying when he got up this morning, he prayed while eating breakfast, he prayed on the way over in the car, and he'll probably be praying all the way through the interview." (*With* by Skye, pp. 116)

What would it look like for you to abide in prayer? It would look like times of solitude and retreat, just like Jesus retreated into the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:16). But it would also look like joining us for the Sunday morning pray gathering, and then praying for each other throughout the week. Our job as believers is to 1) be open to the father's pruning, 2) abide in the word, 3) abide in prayer; and...

4) Abide in community.

We don't realize it in our English translations, but this entire passage is written in the second-person plural. Here's a more accurate translation.

John 15:4 (ESV&ME)

Abide in me, and I in ya'll. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can ya'll, unless ya'll abide in me.

We abide in Christ together. You notice how grapes never come by themselves? You can't go to the store and buy one grape. Grapes come in clumps. Fruit comes in clumps. We need each other. It's been hard due to Covid, but I want to encourage us that if it's nice out, come to worship. Make the extra effort to abide in community. We can't worship alone forever. I know it's almost October and winter is coming. So let's take advantage of the women's ministry, men's ministry, youth group, and other ways to gather outside. Abide in Christ by abiding in community.

Jesus is the tree of life who makes a fruitful life with God possible. How can we abide in Christ? 1) Be open to the pruning of the Spirit. 2) Abide in the word. 3) Abide in prayer. 4) Abide in community.

If I want to be successful as a pastor, or we want to be successful as a church and see fruit happen, then take time to abide in Christ. And let's not abide in Christ for the things we want, success. That's like being the older or younger brother. Instead, let's abide in Christ for the sake of knowing Christ and through Christ knowing God. We want to know him and be known by him. Come and abide in Christ.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above. You can also listen via [Apple Podcasts](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. Of which of Skye's ways do you feel like you relate to God? Under God? Over God? From God? For God? Or maybe With God?
2. What does it mean to live life with God? What are some ways we can seek that?
3. What is hindering you from pursuing a life with God?
4. Why is the father's pruning important?

5. What does it mean to abide in the word?
6. How might you abide in prayer?
7. How might you abide in community?
8. How does Christ make life with God possible?

Sources

With: Reimagining the Way You Relate to God by Skye Jethani (2011)

The Vinedresser (John 15) 2019 YouTube Video

Tree of Life YouTube BibleProject Video

**Fact check of the video sermon: my family discovered the Concord grapes several years prior to Covid.*