

1 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 6 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. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. 9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 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.*

- We are spending August in John 15:1-10.
- If you were with us the last three weeks, you will remember that these were words Jesus said to encourage his disciples because he knew that within hours he was going to die and they were going to lose their stability, their belief, everything they thought.
- Here is the process of thought that we have examined so far.
- 1. Jesus is the only source of life that will not disappoint. He is the true vine. Remain in him. Because no one or nothing else will produce the kind of fruit in you God desires.
- 2. We remain in him by remaining in a growing relationship with him. We depend on him increasingly and live as he lived.
- 3. We bear fruit when we let that kind of relationship change us and flow out to others.
- We had a takeaway from last week. I wanted you to consider the question: "Is what I am known for right now what I want to be known for when my life is over?" or "What do I want to be known for that, if I'm honest, currently does not characterize my life?"
- This all seems like a pretty straightforward process doesn't it? It's not like Jesus made it complicated. Some of Jesus' teachings he did over and over and over but this one was on the way to his death. It needed to be memorable, so it's pretty simple.
- So why does this not seem to happen? Why do we feel blocked? What is it that keeps this from being natural? Why is it sometimes such a struggle? It is so easy to simply drift along and end up where we don't want to be. We know this intuitively.
- What I want to look at this morning from these verses are three barriers, three things, that ultimately make it extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to remain in Jesus. I want to look at them and how to remove them.
- The first one here is one that many of us need to hear and pay attention to.
- One of the things that keeps us from Jesus, from remaining in him, from growing that relationship and becoming fruitful is simply this:

I. Busyness

- The pace of life in the USA, and even more in the NE, is crazy busy and crazy fast.
- Vacation – when it comes to taking vacation, Americans do a lousy job. Most countries mandate a larger amount of time off for workers. U.S. is one of just 13 countries in the world that does not guarantee paid time off on stat holidays. Yet we don't even use the vacation we get as 52 percent of Americans didn't even use all of their vacation days in 2017.
- Number of hours worked – Not only that, but when we work, we work longer and more hours than in many countries. It's sad that the only countries we lag behind are countries like China, Russian, Korea – not exactly ones to model ourselves after.

- Kids extracurricular activities – A recent study found the majority of children -- 88% -- took part in organized activities on four to five days per week, with 58% doing more than one in an evening.
- Amount of sleep – All this means that we sleep less. 80 years ago, almost 60% of Americans got at least 8 hours of sleep per night. Today that number is under 35%. In fact, 1 in 7 regularly get less than 5 hours.

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.

- Busyness will destroy your ability to remain in Jesus.
- Busyness is kind of like this.
- Now, for some of you, it is not simply the amount of stuff you are doing. It's not a schedule thing. For you it is never being able to be quiet.
- Amount of TV watched – Add to all that the average person watches 35.5 hour per week (which works out to 77 days per year). A recent study showed that people spend an average of 3.5 hours per day on their phones, which is another 25 hours a week.
- When you are at home, the TV or radio or Spotify is always on.
- When you are in the car, you are always listening to something.
- When you have a period between commitments, you are playing on your phone.
- There is simply no time for your brain to slow down enough, or for it to be quiet enough, to listen or hear the voice of Jesus.
- Even when we take time with Jesus, it is hurried, quick with an agenda to read, write or pray.
- This all means that if you are an average person, you work long hours, take not enough vacation, are shepherding multiple children all over the place, watching TV, spending time on our phones and devices, and falling exhausted each day into bed and not getting enough sleep. And we wear this as a badge of honor!
- How do we remove this barrier? Before you even look at this issue, we have to ask ourselves the question: "**Why** am I so busy?"
- The quick answer is "I have so much that *has* to get done. If I don't do it, it won't get done. I'm the only one who knows how. Things will fall apart if I don't. I will get fired. I'm just trying to be productive.
- Really? C'mon – you're all smart. You know there is more to it than that. Our busyness (I don't mean the occasional busy week, I mean the regular, ongoing, an off week is the exception busyness) is most often the result of one or more of three things.
- What will it look like to others? How much of what you do is so that you look good to others? Clean the house, mow the yard, wash the windows – so others see you better? Work longer hours because you don't want to be that person who leaves before everyone else?
- For some of you your busyness is a way to feel good about yourself. So you can be productive? So you can accomplish more stuff? To do more than the next person? So you can get that next promotion to have more money so you can be busier so that you can get that next promotion to have more money so that you can be busier . . . Hides itself in statements like, "I just don't want to be lazy."
- How much of busyness is because you simply are freaked out by silence. You don't like doing nothing. You tried it once for 15 minutes and you found your mind was fragmented and all over the place or you fell asleep. You became convinced it just wasn't you. You found that when you let your mind rest, it would go to dark places that you prefer to avoid.
- This is one of my single biggest struggles. There are always more people to meet, more study to do, more vision to plan, more projects to accomplish, more problems to solve. And it is almost always good stuff. But, remember from last week, busyness/productivity does not = fruitfulness.
- Ask, "Why am I doing all these things . . . really? What adjustments do I need to make?"

- There is a second barrier, and this one is a little harder to pin down for most of us.

II. Viewing God as an adversary

2 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.

- We briefly talked about this last week.
- We saw that God loves us too much not to prune us. He wants to cut away and get rid of those things that hinder us from remaining in him.
- Sometimes it is small, and sometimes it is large. Sometimes it is good things sometimes it is destructive habits.
- For those of you that say that you never see God this way, let me ask you, have you ever said?
- “What is the lesson I need to learn here so I can move on?”
- “Again? What does God have against me?”
- “Why do these kinds of things always happen to me?”
- “C’mon God. Cut me a break once already.”
- “Really?”
- Or you find yourself looking at the easy life of others and ask God why those people, who aren’t nearly as good or nice as you, have it easy while your life is a constant struggle.
- It is easy to view God as an adversary. As one who is trying to make my life difficult. As a drill sergeant who is trying to build my character.
- As best, he is a neutral third party.
- You cannot draw close to someone who you feel is not fully in this with you and for your best.
- Let’s be clear, bad stuff does happen in this life. A miscarriage. Loss of a job. A wayward child. Money problems. The car in the shop again. Infertility. Death.
- We have an enemy in Satan who desires to separate us from God, and if he can’t get us to abandon God completely, he will do everything he can to put distance between us and God so that life becomes frustrating, stale and dry.
- The way we remove this barrier is with truth. All of the above is a lie from the enemy and we counter lies with truth. If we want to have the kind of relationship where we are remaining in his love and his love in us, we must remember this truth: God is never, ever against you. Pruning is a symbol of his love and attention. (Some of you are thinking, “Then he must love me a lot 😊”)
- Even the stuff of life that is terrible he is using toward our good because he loves us. That’s why we need to embrace pruning and why adversity should drive us toward God, no matter how painful it is, and never away. That last barrier is one we really don’t like. The barrier of:

III. Disobedience and Sin

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. 9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 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.

- Jesus is very clear to his disciples.
- If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.
- One of the quickest ways to lose intimacy with Jesus and to derail remaining in him is through disobedience or sin.

- When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, the biggest consequence was separation from God. They were forced to leave the garden. They lost their daily communion with him.
 - This was the whole reason that Jesus came and died on the cross in our place. He knows we will sin and disobey, but he wanted to make a way for us to be restored into that relationship with God.
 - There is only one thing to do to remove this barrier. Confess and repent.
 - Confession is admitting the wrongness of what we have done.
 - Repenting is changing direction and doing what you have to to make it right.
 - It might be those things that just happen. We react and we react poorly. Bring it immediately to Jesus and then make it right. Jesus never gives us the leeway to say that we went to God and confessed and now everything is good. If it involves others, part of that process is making it right with the other person.
 - Then there are those areas where you are actively living in disobedience. You have heard God put his finger on something and you are ignoring him.
 - This will hinder your ability to remain in Jesus.
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- We stand on the edge of another school year.
 - Fall and all the activities of Sept-Dec are staring us in the face.
 - Thanksgiving, Christmas, Kids, Sports, Coaching, Church meetings, and so on.
 - In the midst of all this, there are the ongoing battles with life, with our own sins.
 - This fall can be different.
 - You can remain in him. You can get to Christmas this year and not be frazzled.
 - You can be fruitful in the weeks and months ahead.
 - You can gain victory over those sins and habits that have plagued you.
 - You can be rested and leave worry behind you.
 - You can have an intimacy with God that you have never had before.