

**Exploring Grace: Sanctifying Grace**  
**John 15:1-8**  
**Sunday, June 14, 2026**

. This is the third and final Sunday in our series about exploring God's grace. And throughout this series, we've been using the image of a house to understand how that grace works. The house represents a life lived in God's love. So, a couple of weeks ago we talked about prevenient grace, the grace though which God draws us closer to Himself, getting us up on the porch and ready to go into the house. Then, last week, we talked about justifying grace, the grace by which God gets us through the door and into the house. And today, we're going to talk about what happens once we're in the house. We're going to talk about Sanctifying grace.

So, let's just imagine. God got you up on the porch and now you've taken the leap of faith. You've stepped through the door of the house. You find yourself standing in an entry hallway. It's the most peaceful, joyful, beautiful entry hallway you can possibly imagine.

And, as you look more closely, you notice that as far as your eyes can see, to the left and to the right, there are doors. You see stairways going up and down and hallways at the end of the stairways going every which direction, also with door after door after door. And you know, without knowing how, that on the other side of each door is more peace, joy, and beauty for you to see and experience. So, what are you gonna do?

Well, surprisingly, a whole lot of us just decide to strike camp right there in the entryway. Now, isn't that strange? With that whole, amazing house to explore, why would anyone limit themselves to just the entryway?

Well, it could be that they just don't know any better. Because the dominant strain of Christianity here in the US says once you're through the door and into the house, you're done; that salvation consists entirely in accepting Jesus as your savior so you can get to heaven when you die. That's it. After that, it really doesn't matter how you live your life. All you gotta do is say the words, get yourself saved, and you're good to go. Just pitch a tent right there in the hallway and get on with your life.

And so, in this understanding of Christian faith, the *only* difference between Christians and everyone else is that, because they believe the right things about Jesus, Christians get to go to heaven when they die. Faith has no impact on how they live their lives.

So, it shouldn't come as a surprise that, in fact, Christians in the United States don't, as a whole, live any differently than the surrounding culture. We talked a few weeks ago about how Christians are indistinguishable from the general population in terms of adultery, divorce rate, gambling, visiting bad internet sites, theft, gossip, fighting, abusing people, using illegal drugs, getting drunk, lying, and vengeance.

Which is a big part of why the church in the United States is shrinking. Why join—or for that matter remain a part of—a movement that has no impact on your life here and now.

So, the question is, is that really all our faith is about: going to heaven when we die? Is our faith really irrelevant to how we live our lives?

And in today's scripture, Jesus gives us the answer. The setting is right after the last supper, as Jesus and his disciples are sitting around the table. Jesus is taking this opportunity to

inform his disciples that he will soon—very soon—be leaving them, and to give them some final instructions before his departure.

Now remember, at this point, there was no church. There was just Jesus and a bunch of more or less clueless followers who seemed to always misunderstand his lessons and later, when it mattered most and the soldiers showed up to take him away, abandoned him. They knew Jesus. They believed in Jesus. But it was far from clear that that would be enough to keep Jesus' mission of bringing new life to the world alive after he left them.

And so, a big part of Jesus' message to them that night was to let them know that even though it may have seemed like this was the end, it wasn't. Even with him gone, they could still experience a new kind of life; a life he had described for them earlier as abundant, bountiful, new, and eternal. Here, he refers to it using the image of bearing fruit.

He explains to them that to enjoy this new life—to live a fruitful life—it's not enough to just know him, as they did. It's not even enough to believe in him, as they surely did. He told them it's also necessary to **abide** in him.

And so, he gives them this beautiful image of the vine and the branches. Like a branch can't live unless it's connected to the vine, they can't really live unless they're connected with Jesus. They've got to abide in him, make themselves at home in and remain connected to him. It's not just knowing or believing, it's also being connected and abiding.

Which is great, but let's remember. Jesus has just told them he's leaving. So, how's that abiding going to work? Well, a little earlier in the conversation, Jesus has told them that he's *got* to leave. And the reason he's got to leave is so he can give them his Spirit—so he can **literally**

abide in them, and they can abide in him. This new life that Jesus came to bring isn't just for when he's physically with them. It's for today, tomorrow, and forevermore.

And then, Jesus gives them the "why" of it all. He explains why he's leaving, why he's giving them the Holy Spirit, why he's enabling them to live new, full, fruit-filled lives. It's in verse 8: "This is to my Father's glory, that you *bear much fruit*, showing yourselves to be my disciples." I really like how the Message translation says it: "This is how my father shows who he is ... when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples." It's about growth. It's about maturing. It's about bearing fruit. As the apostle Paul says later, it's about transformation. And that growth and maturing has a purpose: to reveal God to the world through how we live our lives; to show the world how we were *all* created to live.

The world around us, and a big chunk of the Christian church, wants us to think that each one of us is an individual, isolated grape vine. What we do with our lives once we accept Jesus is our own business.

But they're wrong. **Jesus** is the vine. He's the source of true life. We are just branches. Without him, we shrivel up and die. Without him, we're not producing fruit, but just taking up space. To live the way we were created to live, we've got to abide in him and allow him to abide in us; allow him to work in us.

True faith is about a lot more than just getting through the door and into the house. Of course, that's important, it's necessary. But it's just the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the gospel. Once we're in, we've got to make ourselves at home there. We've got to explore.

And that exploration, that going from room to room and discovering the awesome and amazing riches that are waiting for us in the house, that's the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Gospel, it's the full gospel. Its sanctification. It's the process of becoming transformed, little by little, through the action of Christ's Spirit within us, into the image of Jesus himself.

But, as we've discussed many times, this growth and maturing isn't a passive process. Abiding in Jesus, exploring the house, it's not going to just happen. For the Holy Spirit to work in us and change us, we've got to do our part. And, as we talked about in our last sermon series, we do our part by participating in what we call spiritual practices. Things like prayer, generosity, service, study. Through these practices, God changes us. These are the *ways* we explore the house; the means through which we walk down the hallways, up the stairs, open the doors. They're absolutely *essential* to our growth.

And, as Jesus says in today's scripture, that growth is an absolutely essential part of our faith. When we abide and grow in God's Spirit, we produce beautiful, delicious fruit. And the people around us see that fruit, and can't help wanting to get some of that for themselves.

In other words, going back to what we talked about a couple of weeks ago, as we abide in Jesus, as we grow in our faith and bear fruit, we become agents of God's grace for others. We enable God's grace to work through us in the lives of those around us, getting *them* up onto the porch, and ready to enter into the house of God's love for themselves.