

Flourish
Week 2: Connected
John 15:4-5

One day, Jesus was traveling through Bethany, a town just a few miles outside of Jerusalem, and he stopped by to see his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. We don't know exactly how many people were with him, but there was at least the 12 disciples.

You can imagine, 13 people showing up at your home unexpectedly meant there was a lot to do. Not only do you have to clean up and make room for everyone, but the hospitality etiquette of the day was that the host would prepare a meal for their guests. And so Martha, who was probably the older of the two sisters, immediately felt the stress of all the things to do and got to work.

But, her sister, Mary, went and sat at the feet of Jesus so she could listen to him teach and share stories. And there are a couple of things that are odd about this. First, Mary, a woman, was sitting at the feet of a rabbi. This was a position reserved for men and would have been culturally unacceptable for her to do. And yet Jesus welcomes her.

The second odd part about Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus is that there's work to be done and preparations to be made for all these guests in their home. Instead of jumping up to pitch in, Mary left it all up to Martha and just sat around. And, having two daughters at home who have a keen sense of what feels right and what feels wrong, I imagine Martha started saying to herself, "That's not fair! She's sitting around and I'm doing all the work!"

Martha was running around, being hospitable, working to make sure Jesus and his disciples were being taken care of and Mary was just sitting there, listening to Jesus. I imagine as she went about doing everything, she was giving Mary that look that only siblings can give each other when they feel like something's not fair. Trying to silently send the message, "Are you going to get up and help or are you just going to sit there?"

Eventually, Martha's had enough. She's not just annoyed at Mary, she's starting to get a little frustrated that Jesus hasn't set her little sister straight. So she asks him, "Don't you care that Mary's left me to do all the work by myself. Tell her to get up and help me!" I mean, surely Jesus will see how unfair all of this is. She's running around doing all this stuff **FOR** Jesus and Mary is just sitting there **WITH** Jesus.

Luke 10:41-42 tells us how Jesus responded...(READ)

Now, I've got to be honest, I kind of feel for Martha here. Doing **something** has to be better than doing **nothing** and yet Jesus praises Mary for the nothing she was doing instead of the something Martha was doing. It had to feel a little confusing for Martha and, I have a feeling it's a little confusing to many of us, too.

I think it's because, from the time we were young, it was engrained in us that **results get rewarded**. I think that's true for us, but it was especially true in Martha's culture. Production gets us praise and promotions and pay raises.

Add to that, some of us grew up in homes where connection and love felt dependent on production. The not-so-subtle message you grew up hearing from your family was that affection and approval was based on accomplishments.

If you brought home straight A's or did everything just right, you'd get lots of affirmation, but if you brought home a C, or didn't do something exactly the way someone thought it should be done, then you could expect some criticism. If you played well in the game, your dad would be proud of you, but if you dropped the ball, he would be disappointed, which felt like disconnection.

As we grow up, we apply this results-get-rewarded mindset to our other relationships and feel like if we want to be loved, we have to earn it. Or, if someone wants our love, they have to earn it. And we make connection conditional on what we do or don't do. And when you live with that as your default setting for relationships all your life, it's hard not to apply that to your relationship with Jesus.

Production is a prerequisite for connection, so if you want to be loved by him, then it has to be earned. We have to strive for it, work hard for it, get it just right. And if we produce the right actions and behaviors and get the right results, then we will be loved by God.

We want to believe that if we can produce transformation in our lives, then God will love us and we will connect with Him. But that's not what the Gospel says. The Gospel teaches us that God already loves us, and it's our connection with Jesus that produces transformation inside of us.

Because of that, the flourishing life prioritizes connection over production because **only a deep connection with Jesus can bring about the flourishing life we desire**. Mary knew that, which is why, when Jesus was in her home, she chose to sit with him instead of running around doing stuff for him. Mary knew that the priority is on abiding over achieving, and that if you abide first, everything else will fall into its proper place.

I think that's the point Jesus is trying to make in the passage we're looking at over the next few weeks. In John, chapter 15, Jesus is coming to the end of his life and ministry on earth. In just a few hours, he's going to be arrested and crucified and he's leaving his disciples with the mission of taking the good news of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. So, you think he'd be giving them a strategy for how to maximize their impact and productivity.

And, in a way, that's what he does, but it's not how we'd think. Look at what he says in **John 15:4-5...(READ)**

You see, instead of focusing on production, Jesus prioritizes connection. He knew that if we would just focus on staying connected with him, then the production would come. Our lives would be transformed and the Gospel would spread. But he also knew that, if we just focused on production at the expense of connection, then it wouldn't matter what we did or how hard we worked, true transformation wasn't going to happen.

Jesus knows that a flourishing life flows out of a connection with Him. Which is why everything we do at Sherwood Oaks is about helping you connect more deeply with Jesus.

All of our ministries and programs and events, we want them to connect you more intimately with the true Vine so you can bear the fruit of a life that is deeply rooted and connected to Jesus. A life that flourishes, not because everything is sunshine and rainbows, but because it's deeply rooted and connected to an abundant source of life.

And, we want to know how you're doing finding this kind of life...and how we're doing helping you find it. Think about your life right now: **Are you flourishing?** Are you thriving in your relationship with God and others? Are you growing, or do you feel a little stagnant right now? Are you flourishing?

The second question is: **Are we helping you flourish?** As a church, are we helping you thrive in your relationship with God and others? Are we helping you grow in your faith and connection with Jesus?

As the Lead Minister of Sherwood Oaks, these are questions that sometimes keep me up at night. And I can point to anecdotal evidence in my life and our church, but that's not always the most helpful or reliable source of measurement. I'm really good at telling myself the stories I want to hear. But I want to know how we're really doing.

And so, today, we're inviting everyone to take the **ChurchPulse Assessment (show slide and leave it up)**. An organization called Barna developed this tool to help us know if we are flourishing and if the church is helping us connect with Jesus to find the flourishing life we desire. And we're asking **everyone** to take it today. We really want to know how you're doing and how we're doing when it comes to connected with Jesus.

So, everyone go ahead and pull out your device and either scan the QR code or type in the address. We're going to take some time in our worship gathering this morning to do this together because we value this so much. Not only will we get some great insight into how we're doing and ways we can improve as a church, but you'll get some insights into your own spiritual growth and development and some next steps you can take.

And this is completely anonymous. We're not able to go through and see how everyone responded. We'll just get the aggregated results.

Let's walk through these first steps together.

1. If you haven't already, click the Get Started button. That's basically saying that we'll get the results and that Barna is also using them in their State of the Church report that will combine results from the 1,000's of churches that are taking this same assessment.
2. Enter your phone number to save your progress and access your results. We actually don't have this tied into our church database or texting platform, so we won't even be able to spam you. If you want, you can also click "Continue without number..."
3. When you hit "Confirm Number" it'll send you a verification code. Put that in.
4. I'm going to walk you through the controls, so you can skip the tutorial if you'd like.
 - a. Basically, some questions that you'll just select a multiple choice answer.
 - b. Some you'll use a slider bar. Here's what I found...it works MUCH better if you put your finger on the slider bar and move it to where you want it instead of just clicking somewhere on the bar. As soon as you click or let go of the slider, it moves to the next question.
 - c. You can always hit the back button if you need to.
5. Click the "Take the Assessment" button
 - a. "Do you lead in any way?" Leader in a ministry, not just serve in a ministry. A few extra questions for you. If you're not sure, just click "no."
 - b. Click "Continue" and you're ready to go!
 - c. Progress bar up top.
6. When you're finished, you can go through your insights. Next steps. Studies linked to the Bible Project and YouVersion App.
7. Last thing before we begin...and this is VERY important. We did this with our elders on Tuesday night and Scott Todd said that if you complete the assessment, he will buy your lunch today. Just meet him at Chick-fil-A after church. He also wanted me to make sure to tell everyone that the offer is only good for today.
8. Everyone ready?! We're giving us 12 minutes starting....now!

Didn't have time to finish, just leave the page open and you'll be able to come back to it.

Like a branch that bears fruit when connected to the vine, our lives will flourish when we remain connected to Jesus, our source of life.

Communion: Jesus said, “Remain in me, as I also remain in you.” When we take communion, we are reminded that we are utterly dependent on Him – not just for strength and purpose, but for life itself. His body and blood nourish us spiritually, and as we stay connected to Him, we flourish.

If you’re tired of trying to get it just right, Jesus invites you to come to him and he will give rest to your weary soul. Connect with him, and you will experience the flourishing life, too.