

Like many of us, there's a lady in California named Kylie Wilkes who has a hard time keeping plants alive. Anybody else? This is a safe place. Anybody else have a hard time keeping plants, house plants alive? True story.

When we moved into our first real home, Amber's parents gave us a plant that they had cared for and nourished for 15 years. We killed it in one day. Ask me how later we are not good with houseplants. And so we've kind of given up. And Kylie was in that same boat.

She was about to give up. Every time she would get a house plant, she would care for it, she would nurture it, she would water it, and then something would happen and it would die. She just did not have that green thumb to keep them alive. And after a string of attempts with larger house plants, she realized, okay, this isn't working. I'm going to try my hand at something just a little bit smaller.

And so she went out and she got this really cute little succulent. And she thought, maybe, maybe at the very least, I can keep this thing alive. And so she was meticulous about. About watering it, about making sure that it got some sun. If.

If she had to travel, she would give very detailed instructions to a friend to come and take care of it and to. To give it just enough water, not too much, not too little, so that it will continue to. To grow. And after two years of carefully nurturing this succulent, it was flourishing. It looked as healthy and as vibrant as the day that she got it.

And so one day she decided that she. She transplant it from the pot that it came in into this new pot that kind of matched some of the decor in her house. And so she gently lifted it out of its current home, and that's when she realized it was fake.

For two years, Kylie had watered and obsessively cared for a fake plant. In an article I read this week, she said. She said this. I love this. I can relate to this so much.

I put so much love into that plant. I washed its leaves, tried my hardest to keep it looking its best, and it's completely plastic. How did I not know this? I have another question. Why does anyone else know this?

Like, if this would have happened to me, I think I would have been like, I'm not telling anyone. Like, no one is going to find out about this. But I bet that we can relate to her in some way. Not that we've spent two years nurturing a fake plant, but I have spent a lot of my life giving time and energy to things that will never produce anything real. I'm giving a lot of my time and energy poured in to things that will never produce anything real in my life, anything of substance

that will truly satisfy me.

In my pursuit of a flourishing life, I've given a lot of time and energy. The things that promise to provide, the promise that if I just attach to it or pursue it, then it is going to bring me joy and happiness and pleasure and fulfillment. And oftentimes it leaves me feeling malnourished. It leaves me wanting more, worse off than when I began. It leaves me with as much nourishment as a fake plant buried in Styrofoam.

There's no roots. There's no substance. Fake plants can't sustain you. This is like, the most obvious thing that you're going to hear today, right? Like, why would I even feel the need to say that?

Let alone, this is such a great point. I'm going to put it up on the screen. Fake plants can't sustain you. We know this. And yet chances are you probably, like, I do run to the fake stuff to satisfy and sustain you as much as I do in my life.

If you have a Bible, open up to John, chapter 15. We're going to be spending the next few weeks in this chapter. We're in this series called Flourish, and we're talking about what does the flourishing life look like? But not just like, what does it look like? How do we.

How do we experience it? How do we experience a flourishing life that is able to thrive and grow and bear fruit, fruit in us and for others in the good times and in the bad? And so Matt kicked us off in week one by talking about the flourishing life is rooted deeply in God's Word. So we spend time in God's Word, not out of legal obligation or some kind of religious duty. We spend time in God's Word because it nourishes our souls.

It gives us deep roots. Psalm 1 tells us that we are like that tree that is planted by streams of living water. Who. Who it is, it bears fruit in season and out its leaves never wither. That's the type of life that we can experience when we are deeply rooted in God's Word.

And then Jesus takes on that and he builds on it. And he says, if my words are in you. And so these words, the living Word in us, we are connected to him in the same way that a branch is connected to a vine. He is our source of nourishment. He is our source of life.

And we flourish when we are connected to Him. And Jesus continues this this morning as we're looking at the first part of chapter 15. And I think that he gives us a word in this verse that we're looking at that brings this to light and kind of shines a spotlight on our temptation to run to the fake stuff, to look for what we can only find in Him. He uses an adjective in our text today that's an important adjective, and oftentimes we just skip right through it. So John, chapter 15, verse one.

I'm just going to read five verses, see if you can spot it. Five words, see if you can spot it. Jesus says, I am the true vine. I am the true vine. Now, you've got a one in five chance here.

All right, which word is the adjective? Let me hear it. True. That's right. Good job.

Hey, give yourselves a hand this morning, you guys. Yes, Jesus says I am the true vine. That word, it means real. It means authentic. Genuine.

Jesus is saying, I am the real vine. And if Jesus felt the need to point out that he was the real thing, if he felt the need to add the adjective, it must mean that he believes that there are other vines out there that aren't real, that there are other vines out there that are fake. And Jesus knows that there are other vines that will promise to satisfy and sustain you, but they have as much ability to do that as a fake plant has to grow. No matter how much time, no matter how much energy you pour into these fake vines, they are not going to satisfy and sustain you. Jesus says, I am the true vine, and we are the branch.

And so the question for us this morning is, which vine will you attach your life to? Which vine will you attach your life to? The true real vine or a fake cheap imitation of the real thing? And all of us have been and have the ability to be fooled by these fake vines. We may be able to spot a fake succulent, but there are a lot of fake vines out there that look so much like the real thing.

Fake vines that look like they will satisfy and sustain us, that even give us the promise and the allure that they are going to give us what they are looking for. In his book, when your way isn't working, Kyle Idleman, who's a preacher down in Louisville, Kentucky, he identifies a few of these fake vines. I just want to share them with us this morning. There's the me vine. When you attach yourself to the me vine, then you look to yourself for everything that you need in life.

And when you look to yourself for everything that you need in your life. Then, then your life becomes all about you. You only think of yourself when you are attached to the me vine. And you, and you process everything that happens to you in your life based on how it affects you. You are nourished by, by your own personal gain, by your own comfort, by your own validation.

And so if someone comes into your life that is either not giving those, those things to you, not nourishing you and giving you what you need, you're gonna cut em out of your life, you're gonna devalue them, or they come into your life and maybe they are in a place of their own vulnerability and they need a friend, they need somebody who's willing

to walk through a difficult season with them. And you're like, no, no, no, you give to me, I don't give to you. And you just hold them off at arm's length. We're quick to push people aside when we have attached ourselves to the me vine unless they can give us something that we need. I think another name for this vine could be the pride vine.

And you don't have to look real hard to see that this is the vine that many people in our culture have attached themselves to.

Another fake vine is the politics vine. When we look around and we feel frustrated by the state of our, of our country, of our community, we're tempted to think that if we just get the right people in the right positions, then it's going to fix everything. That the politics vine promises to produce change through power. It promises to produce change through legislation. And so we attach ourselves to the politics vine, hoping that it will be the vine that satisfies and sustains us.

And when we realize it's not, we're like, oh, but in four more years maybe it will then. Four more years, maybe it will then we only find it doesn't work. Politics is important, but it is not the true vine. Another imposter is the relationship vine. We believe that if we can just connect ourselves to the right person, then they will be our true source of strength.

They will fill the missing pieces in our life. They will complete, complete us, give us all that we need. I think the relationship vine is especially insidious because no person was ever created to give you what you can only find in God. They were never meant to be those things in our life, but we think that we can get them from someone if we attach ourselves to them. And so if we believe that, then we elevate being in a relationship above everything else.

Which, listen, is why some of the most spiritual, spiritually mature people I know are very comfortable in their singleness. Honor that in them. Because they've learned that they cannot find in another what they can only find in the Lord. When we think that we can find that in someone else, we elevate being in a relationship above all else in our life. It becomes the most important priority.

And we are looking for someone to be that source for us. And if the person that we're currently with isn't satisfying and sustaining us the way that we think that they should, then we look for another relationship to attach ourselves to. And some of you have been hurt by someone in your life that had attached themselves to the relationship vine. And we keep looking to others for what they were never meant to provide. And here's the thing about these imitation vines.

Fake vines can only produce fake fruit. They cannot produce anything real or satisfying or sustaining in your life. Fake vines promise to grow authentic joy in your life, but they can only produce momentary

pleasure. At best, they can produce momentary pleasure, which is not the real thing. Fake vines promise to give you true purpose, but oftentimes they only leave you with selfish and ambition because you attach yourself to that vine at the cost of anyone and anything else.

The fake vines promise to produce real peace. But. But they maybe, maybe will just give you temporary distraction from what you're actually feeling, which is usually then followed by a sense of deeper despair. Because maybe at some point, you said, I promised myself I was never going to attach myself to that vine again. I promised myself I wasn't going to go to that place again.

We land in a spot where we feel more empty and malnourished than before. When we connect ourselves with Jesus, who is the true vine, he promises to grow true fruit, real fruit in our life. Real joy, real peace, real purpose. It is all when we connect ourself to Jesus, the true vine, that we find the satisfaction and sustainment that we desire and that we need for a flourishing life. As we kind of continue talking through this, I want to invite my friend Ron Blue up to join me on stage.

Can we give Ron a hand? I just have really grown to love and appreciate this man. Hey, go, Ron. Ron has so many ways in his life. He has seen how fake vines produce fake fruit and do not satisfy us the way that we think that they will.

And, Ron, you've kind of committed most of your life to helping people detach themselves from the vine of money, the fake vine of money, so that they can attach themselves more deeply to the true vine of Jesus. So thanks for joining us today. And before we get to that, you have a pretty unique experience when it comes to that political vine. And so I just briefly want to explore that with you. You were part of a group in the 70s that was looking to see how can we bring morality into our politics and how can we legislate things that would kind of make America moral again.

And you had a little bit of a revelation during that time. Can you, can you just share some of that with us? Yeah, it was interesting because we were connected politically at the highest levels through this group. And I attended board meetings for years and I finally realized that we were trying to solve the wrong problem and we were trying to solve a moral problem. We were attaching ourselves to political influence to solve our problems, and that'll never work.

And I came to the conclusion that what has happened in America, and I've lived a long time, so I've seen a lot, is that we have created a political class and it takes the place of what we're looking at. Sure, yeah. And that's not ever going to work. Yeah, yeah. So trying to attach ourselves to that.

Right. It's just. And put g Jesus, who came and gave up power. Right. He's probably not going to grow in us a flourishing life through power.

You know, I testified before Congress in the early 90s, and I was asked by Senator Dodd from Connecticut, he said, what would you tell the American family about money? And I thought quickly, what I'm going to share with him. He's going to laugh. So I said to him, I said, senator, I would say this. Live within your income, avoid the use of debt, build liquidity or margin or flexibility into your finances and set long term goals so that you prioritize your spending between the long term and the short term.

Well, he picked up his pencil, he wrote them down and he repeated them back to me. And then he said, you know, it seems to me that that'd work at any income level now he's a senator, he's pretty smart. Yeah, clearly. And I said, you're right, Senator. Including United States government.

That's right.

Now, the point of that, though, Sean, is, I think, really important for us is that those were four principles and I would add a fifth, and that is to give generously. Those five things are biblical and they're not hard. They're principles that if followed, will result in an abundant life financially. That's right. So how have you seen people in your, over the course of your career attach themselves to that vine of money.

And then I think maybe, maybe, first of all, why is that so alluring? Why is the vine of money so alluring to attach ourselves to? Well, I think there are three things that are possible in terms of my deepest desire. One, I may want to be significant, and money can make me significant. I may want to be successful, and money can picture the fact that I'm successful.

And the third is I want to be secure. So if you look at significance, success, and security, it sure seems possible. If I had enough money, I could meet one or more of those goals. Right, right. And the reality is you can't, because you can only find, if I'm a child of God, I'm pretty significant.

That's right. I don't need money to prove my significance. He's promised me eternal life. I don't need money for security. And I'm already successful because I'm a beloved child of the king of kings.

That's right. Yeah. Amen. Yeah. That is right.

And so why would we look to anyone or anything else. Yeah. For what we can only find in Him? And so we. We need to test ourselves and say,

what do I think money will do for me?

And money is nothing more than a tool to be used for God's glory. Or it's a test of my spirituality. And it's also a testimony to the world. The world should look to the church and say, they're different. And why are they different?

They're different because they're not driven by money. Money might. They might have money, but that's not their driver. Yeah. So if we find ourselves in a place where we have attached ourselves to that fake vine of money, looking for security, significance, how can we detach ourselves from that?

And why does that help us actually attach to the true vine of Jesus? I'm glad I told you. You need to ask me that question. You told me I needed to ask you that question. I just want to let you know this is not the preacher coming out here, all right?

This is Ron. Well, the answer, though, is really simple. And the answer is I need to hold everything I have just like this. And if I hold it like this, God's free to put in what he wants to put in, and he's free to take out what he wants to take out. And when I go like that, money now controls me.

That's right. And, man, even that image of like now, we've attached to it. Right? We've attached to it. That's right.

Yeah. So the only way you can break the power of money is to give. And I've seen this in thousands of people, that giving is the only way to break the power of money. And we need to give and we need to give spontaneously, regularly. The needs are mammoth and God has given us the means to help meet those needs.

Judy and I have started giving a lot more. That's not deductible. We give because there's a need when we support people with money without running it through tax exempt organization. Because I need to hold it like this. Yeah.

God's still working in your own heart. You've been talking about this and living this for decades, and he's still drawing you in to a deeper connection with Him. We've even changed. This is really off script, but I'll allow it. Okay.

Okay. Or should I, Judy? Should I allow it or rein him back in? Okay.

We've started giving, writing our check every Sunday. And the reason that we do that is because we recognize that last week God provided for us and then we give this week. And so I think somehow, even if you give online, recognizing on a regular basis where it all came from. Yeah. And it still comes down to this, having that mechanism of

saying, I am not just automating it, but I am really, this is a sacrifice because I want it to be.

So we have just a couple of minutes left here. I know. Time goes fast, doesn't it, when you're having fun. Oh, you're having fun. Good.

I'm glad to hear that. So we have been. You have really helped us develop a financial counseling ministry here that you're replicating in churches across the country. And so we get to kind of be the pilot that you're testing some things here. But we've raised up some different financial counselors and trying to grow and develop this robust financial ministry to be able to come alongside and help people wherever they are, whether they have a little or they have a lot.

Can you share with us just just briefly what that ministry looks like? I can do that. And by way of introduction, I said to a pastor one time, I know after 50 years of working with money that God's word speaks to every financial decision anybody would make at any time, under any set of circumstances. Circumstances. And he said, well, then why isn't the church the center of financial wisdom?

It's a great question. And it's not because most churches treat money for our needs rather than looking at money as being transformational rather than transactional. Money should get to my heart because it came from God. And so what we're trying to do is to bring to the church a holistic approach that's built on transformational thinking when it comes to money and meet everybody's needs. That comes all the way from those that are not making it to those that are very, very blessed with an abundance.

So we've got curriculum, we've got training, we've got coaching that we're bringing, and we're asking that money be a part. Be a ministry of the church on an ongoing basis. Yeah. And really living like God Owns it all, whether, again, you are kind of struggling or you have that abundance. And so how are we able to come alongside of people who maybe find themselves in those different categories?

Well, there are maybe five levels of affluence. One is the ones that are struggling, they can't even make it. They need coaching. They need accountability. You've got some that are struggling that are living paycheck to paycheck.

Statistics say that about half the church is in one of those two categories. And then you move into having a positive cash flow and you become stable when you have a positive cash flow. And then you move to security as you go through life because you've met all your goals. And then the last level is the surplus level. So we've lived through every stage of life.

Yeah. And we are developing some counselors that can come alongside



wherever you are and help if give you some guidance that maybe you need. And no strings attached. They're not trying to sell anything. They just want to help you gain a little bit of footing or know how to live like God Owns It All.

The God Owns it all curriculum that we've taught in several places here is having a real impact. We're working with a church in Indianapolis right now. They're putting everybody through God Owns it all. And their giving has gone up 35% the first year they did that. So we want everybody to go through God Owns It All.

But we have help at every level. Coaching all the way to what are you going to do with the wealth that God has given you? So we're going to start teaching splitting errors in February. Okay. To a Sunday school twin heirs.

All right. Not hairs. Heirs. All right. Well, Ron, thank you so much for joining us and just for sharing all of your wisdom.

We love you and Judy and just grateful that you're a part of Sherwood Oaks and helping us really attach ourselves to the true vine and detach from that fake one. Thank you, Sean. Yep. Yeah. Thanks, Ron.

Appreciate you, buddy.

So as we wrap up this morning, how do we know? How do we know if we have attached ourself to the true vine, or if we have kind of settled for one of these imitation vines. I want to share an acronym, just real quickly that I've shared before. Maybe you've heard it, but I don't think that we can come back to it enough. It's an acronym that I've used in my own life to evaluate these things, and it's Halt.

And there's a question behind this acronym, and the question is this. Where do I run when I am hurting? Where do I run when I am hurting? When. Think about this in terms of your own life.

When you are in pain, either emotionally or spiritually, where do you run for comfort and healing? Do you try to escape by mindlessly scrolling through social media? Do you try to numb it with a substance that will take away the pain just long enough for you to go to sleep? Where do you run when you are angry? Where do you turn for relief when you are frustrated or upset?

Do you find yourself lashing out, which might feel good in the moment, but it leaves some damage in its wake? Do you try to control everything or everyone else around you? Is there. Is there a fake vine that you find yourself trying to attach yourself to when you are angry? What do you do when you're lonely, when no one is around, or when you feel isolated and disconnected?

Do you resort to habits that you can't break or unhealthy relationships that you can't escape, trying to make the pain of loneliness go away, trying to nourish you and give you life?

Where do you go when you're tired, when you're physically. When you're emotionally drained? Do you try to numb yourself with entertainment or busyness? Do you. Do you isolate from others and run away from other people?

Where do you run when you are hurting, angry, lonely or tired? And if the answer is anything or anyone other than Jesus, then you may have just identified a fake vine in your life, an imitation vine that promises to nourish and strengthen you, but will only leave your soul malnourished and dry. And many of us have been in that place. We have attached ourselves to that fake vine. And when we do, we feel.

Feel restless, we feel empty. We. We wonder why we feel this, and it's because we are trying to find something from someone or a vine that could never deliver it. And if you find yourself in that place today, these are Jesus words to you. He says in John 15:5 I am the vine, and I am the true vine.

You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. And then he says, apart from me, you can do nothing. Attaching yourself to the imposter, to the fake, you can do nothing. And so Jesus invites you to let go of the fake vine and to attach yourself fully to him, the one true vine.

And when you do, he promises to produce fruit in your life. That is the real thing. Fruit in your life that will last. Fruit of love and joy and peace, things that will satisfy and sustain you and allow you to flourish in every season of life. And he did it.

Through his death, burial, and resurrection. He made a way for us to be connected to him and to experience peace and fulfillment that only he can give us. And communion that we're going to be moving into. Now is a time for us to remember that. It reminds us that Jesus made that way to connect us to him and to the Father, and that through a relationship with him, his life, death, resurrection, his blood that was shed, his body that was broken, that was all given to connect you to the Father so that you.

You can find true life. So as you take communion this morning and remember Jesus who gave Himself for you, Christ who died for you, so that you could connect with him today. If you've never made a decision to give your life to Christ, to connect with him, or maybe you have been looking to so many other things that you can only find in him. We want to come alongside of you. Maybe you need to confess something this morning.

This is a safe place. This is a place where we are all broken. We've all looked to the false vines. We've all attached ourselves to things that were fake. We've all been in that place of hurt and despair.

And so you are not alone. If you just need someone to talk to, to pray with, you know that you're going to find a friend here that's not going to judge you. It's going to walk alongside of you and help connect you to the real source of life. So we'll have some people with lanyards around the room. I'd love to pray with you, help you find that real source of life.

And maybe your first step towards that is baptism. We'd love to help you make that decision today.

Let me pray. Father, thank you for how patient and loving and kind you are to us. And thank you for the ways that in your kindness, you convict us. You. You show us those.

Those things in our life that we run to, that will never provide what only you can. And you don't condemn us for that. You know you know the temptation. And so in your kindness, you convict, but in your love, you draw us to yourself, and you invite us to find what we are truly looking for in you. And so, in this moment, as we take communion, may we once again just be grateful that because of Christ and our faith in him, we have been forgiven for all those ways that we have wandered, all those ways we have looked for life elsewhere.

And Lord, maybe if we need to just confess something to you, may we do it. If we need to confess something to someone else, give us the courage to do it. And in it, Lord, may we find healing in the flourishing life that you desire for us. Thank you, Jesus, for being the true vine and for giving us everything that we truly need.

May we rest in you right now. In Jesus name, Amen.