

Good morning.

So my wife and I have been married for a number of years, but early in our marriage, she would say something that kind of rattled me, and she would. I mean, a lot of things might rattle me, but this was one thing in particular. She would say, I don't feel close to you. I was rattled. I was like.

I was hurt. I was a little bit confused. And I'm just like, we're married, right? I have my wedding license right here. I actually.

I don't carry it with me all the time. I do it for dramatic effect this morning. This is actually a copy of our wedding license. So we're married. What do you mean you don't feel close to me?

I buy you gifts on your birthday. I remember our anniversary most of the time. And I also get something for you on Valentine's Day. What do you mean you don't feel close to me? I could reel all that stuff off.

We've had kids together. We have a house. What do you mean? Well, I just don't feel close to you.

I kind of started understanding what that meant. Now, what if Jesus were to say to you, I don't feel close to you right now? You might respond like, I might respond, well, I'm baptized. I have my certificate of baptism. I don't have one.

The church I grew up in didn't have one. Seven years old God. I was baptized. I go to church. I give, I volunteer.

What do you mean you don't feel close to me? Same kind of thing. Jesus is a relational thing. It's not a matter of, I'm baptized, so I'm good. Jesus says, I want to be close to you.

So we're talking today about what it means to be close to Jesus, how to stay close to Jesus in practical ways. The series overall has been called Hope and Healing. So we've talked about all kinds of ways that Jesus sets us free. Whether it's confessing sin, forgiving others, making amends, or whatever, all those things. But ultimately, the way for the greatest health is to stay connected to Jesus.

Kind of like the vine, the branches, the fruit. So the passage today is Jesus talking about staying connected to him. So we're gonna read a little bit more from John 15. Maggie, read a little bit. Let me give you the context of this passage first.

All right, so I think we have a slide that says Jesus strongly encourages disciples to stay connected. Go to the next one. I think it's. Yeah, Jesus strongly encourages his disciples to say those next two words. Stay close.

One, two, three. Stay close. One more Time, stay close. That's what Jesus. He's encouraging to stay close to him no matter what happens, because stuff was gonna be happening, right?

So that's John 15. So this is all the night Jesus was betrayed. Last Supper. They were either sitting at the table or they had gotten up to walk to the garden of Gethsemane. So the night started with Passover meal.

Jesus washes their feet. That's unthinkable. So right away, the emotional temperature is different, and they feel something. And then Jesus tells them when he's gonna betray me. Judas gives up and leaves.

So there's a little more tension. And he tells Peter, you're gonna deny me. So already the emotional landscape of this scenario is a little bit heightened. Then in the next chapter, in chapter 14, when I say chapter, I also mean probably about a half hour later, maybe an hour later, Jesus tells them, I'm gonna give you the Holy Spirit and he's gonna be with you. He's gonna be in you.

And they were still trying to figure it out. But he's talking, something's going on. But he's saying, this is what's really important. And then we'll come back to 15 in a second. But in 16, maybe another 30 minutes later, he says, you there are hard things coming.

Some of you will abandon your faith. And I'm telling you this so you don't abandon your faith. And so now the emotion of the moment, that whole evening is kind of like, what is going on? He says, but my Holy Spirit will be with you. He's gonna be in you.

People will hate you because of me. And Jesus wasn't just saying this because of the hard things in the next three days with this crucifixion, and they're being totally traumatized. But he knew what was going to be happening. Even in the Book of Acts, most of them were going to be martyred. There was me, persecution.

But he's saying in 15, stay close to me. And the part that Maggie read was, I'm the vine, you're the branches. Stay connected to me. So I'm going to read the rest of the chapter, not the rest of the chapter, seven more verses. So put that up there.

The rest. Here's what we're going to do. I was going to. I was going to have you stand up and read this again. But somebody in the first service, an older person, said, we don't like standing up again.

Okay, we won't do that. All right, so I'm going to read this. But here's what I want you to do. Whenever you see the word if or remain, I want you to say it out loud with me. All right?

If Maggie already read three different remains, she had a couple ifs there. All right, so we'll do this, all right? I'm the vine, you are the branches. You in me and I in you. You will bear much fruit apart from me.

You can do nothing. You do not in me. You are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown to the fire, and burned. Next one.

If you in me and my words in. In you ask whatever you wish, it'll be done for you. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. Next one. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

Now in my love, you keep my commands. You will in my love, just as I have kept my Father. Oh, back, back, back. Just as I have kept my Father's commands and in his love. Now, this last one, you read all together.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. One more time with this. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. Again, this is in the middle of the emotionalism of washing feet, betrayal, denial. Now I'm going to tell you, you're going to be hated.

You're going to be. Something's coming down the pike. You're going to need to remain in me, and my joy is going to be the fuel that keeps you in. All right, so first thing is this. Jesus.

So we're talking about staying close, and we'll get practical at the end. But the word remain that we read, like, how many times there. In some of the older versions, the word is abide. Abide in me. We don't usually talk that way anymore, so remain in me.

But it also means stay close to me. Branches, stay close to the vine. So remain, abide or stay close to all this. It's a relational closeness. Right?

That's what he's talking about. So first point is this. You can stay close to Jesus or not.

So I did some research last week about the psychological realities of relational closeness. I'm kind of a geek with that kind of stuff. I like reading it. And so when you say you're close to somebody, it's usually characterized by you feel understood, you feel validated, you feel cared for. Their shared vulnerability, their shared experiences, physical touch and eye contact are significant part of feeling close.

To somebody. Maybe you've said the same even recently. I didn't feel

close to them anymore. I didn't feel close to my dad. I don't feel close to my old friends.

So we know what that means. But also what helps closeness or affects it is expressions of affection and appreciation. So there's things we do. So we know. I think we all know what it means if you're close to somebody.

Cause you feel safe, you feel comforted, you feel peaceful. Your soul's at rest in that relationship. So we know what that means in people. But Jesus is saying that with him, right? So he says, if you remain in me.

He says it 11 times. So he's talking about the closest possible relationship you can have. Because earlier he says, I'm remaining in my father as my father's in me. So he's saying the relationship he has with his father, the closest possible relationship you could have. He's saying, that's what I want with you.

And we kind of get thrown a little bit. Cause like, well, he's not here. But that's what he's saying. He wants that with us, right? He said, I want to be close to you.

But he also acknowledges, says, remain in me. But he also says, but you can't bear fruit unless you do. So there must be the possibility that we stop remaining in him. We stop being close to him, just like you might be stopped being close to a friend, a spouse, a parent. And then he says, apart from me, you can do nothing.

So if you're not close to Jesus, you can't accomplish anything of deep value in your life. He said, if you don't remain in me. We read this, you're like a branch that is thrown away, withers, thrown into the fire and burned. So there's obviously the option of if we so choose to get off on our own. But he says, if you do that, this is what's happening.

And Jesus does not say this with a spirit of should. You should do this. And he's saying, like, if you do this, freedom and joy are yours. So don't hear Jesus ever shaking his finger. This is what you should do.

You should all behave. That's not Jesus, not God. That's behavior modification. That's not. That's shame and, you know, whatever.

But he's saying, I want you to stay close to me. So he's telling them this again in the context of he knows what's coming down the pike for them. He knows, like, for you and me, life has potholes. Sometimes the bridges are out your relationships, your money, your health, whatever. And it's maybe not maybe it is hardest to stay close to Jesus.

When life is hardest. You're feeling tempted to sin, you're frustrated with this, you're frustrated that. And you. That's the time where Jesus says, stay close to me. Let me be a part of that with you.

So stay close to Jesus. That's what we want to do. Or you cannot do that. But he says, if you don't do that, then nothing good happens in your life in terms of fruit in your soul. But the why reason, I'm going to go to the why.

So we stay close to Jesus because he says, you begin to experience overflowing joy. So it's like, okay, joy. I mean, Jesus, you're saying, I'm telling you all this. This is verse 11. I'm telling you this so you can have my joy inside of you.

Somebody made this statement years ago, and I first kind of wasn't sure, but they said, Jesus is the most joyous being who's ever walked the earth.

Now think about that for a second. No one had more joy than Jesus. Makes us redefine joy or kind of fine tune it. God's the most joyous being in the universe. Jesus is the most joyous being that walked the earth.

So what's joy? So joy is not pleasure. I might have joy when I'm going to Brewster's to get ice cream. I might have joy when I get a good meal. I might have joy when I have a fun time outside.

Joy is not. It's not pleasure. It's not a sensation. It's a constant sense of well being that permeates my whole body, soul and mind, no matter what's happening around me. So joy can be.

Whoa. All right. But joy is not that pleasurable feeling there might be, but joy is this sense of, I am at peace, I am well. Cause I'm confident in God's goodness in my life, no matter what's happening around you. Jesus talks about joy in this, in chapter 15.

But in the next couple chapters, which again, would have been moments later, he says, your grief's gonna turn to joy. No one can rob you of your joy. It's abundant joy, and you're gonna be filled with it.

Don't you want that kind of joy? I do. I don't have it now. I'm on my journey just like you are. Cause the Bible says Jesus.

Cause he's something about joy. But in a few hours, he's gonna be like, tortured book of Hebrews says Jesus, for the joy set before him, endured the cross.

And then Paul writes a letter to the church in the city of Philippi. We call it Book of Philippians. He's writing about joy. He mentions that word like ten times in his letter. Do you know where Paul was

when he was writing about how much joy he was filled with?

You know where he was when he wrote that? He was in prison. He was in a Roman dungeon prison. And it's like, who can be joyful in that situation? And he wasn't faking it.

It's a sense of well being that permeates your whole being. And its foundation is the goodness of God, the sure goodness of God in your life. That's my foundation for joy. And Paul had that. It's not.

Joy is not fake. I mean, years ago, my wife and I, we were moving and we're. Our air conditioning went out in the house we were about to sell. And a guy who was helping us move said, well, praise the Lord. I'm just like, praise the Lord.

My air conditioner just went out. That's not joy. That's kind of a fake Christian praise the Lord. Joyism. That's not joy.

Joy is not like, oh, I'm so happy that I have, you know, bad health. That's not joy. It's a sense that I am well. Cause I am covered in the hands of God. And my whole body feels.

And I'm confident in the hope that God in my life. And I'm confident in his goodness toward me. I want that kind of. Every one of you here wants that kind of joy. We try to find it in other places, but we all want that.

Because can you imagine what it'd be to live life where those kind of potholes and bridges out? They still affect you, but they don't knock you off the horse. Or if they knock you off the horse, you get back on pretty quickly. Cause you're confident in the goodness of God. It's a sense of well being.

It is well with my soul, no matter what's going on. And Jesus knew what these guys were gonna be going through. Don't you want that kind of joy?

So, yeah, we wanna stay close to Jesus. He says if we do, we get filled with his joy. But here's the question then. Well, how do I. How do I stay close to Jesus?

I don't. I can't eat dinner with him. I can't. You know, it's not like a friend or a spouse or a parent or a neighbor. So here's My third point.

You can stay close. We stay close to Jesus by putting into practice the things he said to do. Read that passage on it. We already read it before. Read this at the bottom there.

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love. If. If. When we

read it earlier, I think there were like four or five ifs. This is conditional.

I thought God loved us unconditionally. Yes, but him having a close relationship with you is conditional. Not in a way that's tit for tat. Like, it's conditional. If.

If you keep my commands, you remain in my love. If my words are in you, ask whatever you want to and they'll be given to you. And earlier that Evening, from John 14, he says, the one who obeys me, if you obey me, that's how I know you love me. Then I will reveal myself to you. I will experience you, will experience my love for you.

That's conditional. The relationship, the staying close is conditional. And it's around us, obeying. Now, sometimes the word obey in a church setting feels like obey. He's saying, if you live life the way I said to live life, you will be free, you will have joy, and you will have peace.

So it's not a shouldism. It's an invitation to freedom. Well, we know this if then, right? We understand. You know, if.

Law of gravity. If I drop a ball, what happens? Falls to the ground. All right, if temperature falls below 32 degrees, then what happens to water freezes. If in a right triangle, A and B are the legs.

C is a hypotenuse. Sorry, if you don't like math. Right triangle. Then $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$. Thank you.

All right, so we understand this if then.

If you give a mouse a cookie, then he's going to ask for a glass of milk. Thank you. I didn't use that in the first service. They may never have read that book. Right?

It's a kid's book. If you don't have it, get it. All right, but we understand the if then in life. That's how life works. Gravity, laws of thermodynamics, all those.

There's ways that life work. And Jesus is saying, this is how life in the Kingdom works. This is how life in my relationship with you works. If you keep my commands, you're gonna experience my love in ways you've never imagined.

I'm gonna show myself to you. You will experience Jesus.

You will be close to him. Now you might say, well, what are the commands we're talking about? Because again, we tend to think of thou shalt this thou. Well, here's some of the things Jesus said to do when he's saying to the disciples, make sure my words are in you. If my

words are in you, here's some of the words that they would have heard him say.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Don't judge others, Forgive others. Tithe. Don't be afraid.

Don't worry. Go and be reconciled with those you're at odds with. Give to those in need. Invite the poor, crippled and blind. Let your yes be yes.

I wasn't planning in the second service, but I highlighted that because sometimes I think we're really good at kind of tweaking the truth. And maybe that's an area where God's maybe challenging you. I used to tell, I'm laughing now, but it wasn't funny then. I used to, you know, early on we had kids, younger kids. I'd tell my wife, I'll be home by 5:30.

I work 10 minutes from home. I'd leave at 5:25. But the car in front of me was driving really slow so I could tell my wife, I'm sorry I'm late, but the car in front of me was driving really slow. Right? That's factual.

It's not truthful. The truth was I didn't leave on time. So maybe the obeying the words of Jesus for you may be start being truthful with your words. Let your yes be yes. And not just relaying facts that make you look good.

But every single thing Jesus taught us to do was something he put into daily practice in circumstances just like ours. This is from an author of Dallas Willard. But he's. When he. When I read this, I thought it was really good.

Every single thing Jesus taught us to do, he had already put into practice in circumstances just like ours. And you might even know in the Great Commission, go into all the world, preach the gospel, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. That's good. That's good baptizing. Then sometimes we put a period there.

There's not a period there. Jesus Great Commission continues with and teach them to obey everything I've said to you. Teach them to obey. Getting baptized, it's a great start. It's like a wedding certificate.

It's a great start. But if you want to get close to Jesus, he says, learn to obey the things I've taught you to do because it will set you free and you'll experience my love. Because that's the kind of life. That's how God made you. That's the way things work.

And it's not about trying. It's not like I gotta try harder. It's like, I've never run a marathon. I never will. But if somebody said,

well, let's go train the very first day I try really hard to run 20 miles, of course I'm gonna fail.

Try harder is not the way you grow in following Jesus. It's training yourself. Might be a mile one day, then two miles. It might be looking at something in scripture you're going to do. And don't try to run the whole thing at once.

But we train ourselves. Scripture says we train ourselves to become like Jesus. It's not try harder that becomes all about should and try harder. So I'm going to give you three suggestions to be closer to Jesus. There's many things you can't do.

Like I said, there's all kinds of things Jesus said to do. He even said, obey the commandments, referring back to the ten Commandments, but again, take them out of the should zone. Cause he's saying it's a freedom thing. But I'm giving you three suggestions of things to do that can help you be closer to Jesus. So if I was a therapist and you were talking to me for marriage, and I'd be like, here's some things you might want to do.

May I want to, you know, with your spouse, do this. Do this. Here's some three things I'm going to suggest you do. One, which is maybe simple and obvious, but sometimes it's simple and obvious. Things we don't say, so we don't do.

First one is this. Read the Bible every day. Not like, oh, if it's midnight, oh, I forgot to read. Just read the Bible. Read the Bible.

And you might, you know, you might read print. Large print. Actually, for me, you might have. I have it on my phone. I have a couple apps on my phone.

And every morning I listen to the Bible being read to me. Sometimes it just. Sometimes you may need to switch things up. Sometimes it's like in relationships, sometimes you gotta try something different to kind of get closer and connect. So I have a couple apps that read the Bible to me.

One of them is with a British accent, so it always sounds really cool. But no, but sometimes having the Bible read to you from your phone, I hear it differently. I say, oh, I never. Well, I have one that reads in British and one that reads more of an urban accent. So.

But. And I do read the Bible Bible, but read the Bible. Even if. Don't. If you're not in the habit of reading the Bible, don't say, I'm gonna read through the Bible in a year.

I promise you, you will die in Leviticus. You will. All right, all right. Five minutes. Try five minutes, try three minutes.

Take a step in your relationship with Jesus and let his. If you don't know where to start, just start with Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, the Gospels. See what Jesus said. See what he did. See how much power he had.

See what he talks about. Freedom and life. So if that. And if you are in the habit of reading the Bible and you kind of feel like. Which is this is okay.

There's been times in my life where I feel like my relationship with Jesus was stale. It's like human relationships. I don't feel as close to this person. Or try something different. Read a different version of the Bible.

Find somebody that reads with an Irish accent. I don't know, just do something different. That might help you hear the words of Jesus in a fresh way. If you just do the same old, same old and you're feeling kind of stale, try something different. So that's the first thing.

Read the Bible. Read the Bible. Second thing is this. Again, obvious, but I'm gonna say it anyway. Obey Jesus.

Maybe there's an area of your life, whether it's money, conflict, forgiveness, sex, whatever. There's some area of your life that you know is not lined up with the kind of freedom life that Jesus talked about. So when Jesus, he talked a lot about forgiveness, talked a lot about loving your enemies. That's hard. He talked about a lot of things in terms of relationships.

Obey him. Again, maybe it's about money. And maybe you're like, start small. I'm like, God, I'm gonna give you this. I'm gonna.

Or if you need to take a step toward forgiving somebody, maybe it's all private for a while. You're trying to figure out. But obey Jesus. Because he said, if you obey me. If you obey me, you're gonna be immersed in my love, and you will experience me in ways you've never imagined.

My father will love you. I too, will love you. And I will show myself to you. That sounds close. That sounds joyful.

So read the Bible regularly, daily. Obey Jesus. And the third thing, Tell Jesus you love him. And you might say, wow, this sounds really sappy. I am not a sappy guy.

I'm not touchy feely. It was a while till my family grew up. We didn't hug each other. My Wife's family, they're hugging all the time. It was really awkward for me because that felt way too touchy feely for me.

But now I love it. And now when my wife goes to see my family, everybody goes to her because they know she's going to hug them, right? So I'm not touchy feely. I'm not saying. But there are.

Like yesterday I was riding my bike and I was kind of in a sour mood and I didn't even know why. I just kind of felt like. So I just started saying out loud on my bike, Jesus, I love you. It wasn't like an incantation, it wasn't a mantra or chant. Jesus, I love you.

In this place where my heart's confused and I don't even know why I love you. I didn't say it like 20 times, but I was inviting him. Relationship into a vulnerable place. Cause usually it's harder to. It's harder.

It's easy to feel close to Jesus when life is going well, Your money's going well, relationship's going well, get a great health report. That's easy. But when things are hard, then sometimes it's. We kind of feel like I need to get myself cleaned up before I talk to Jesus. Cause I'm in a bad place.

No, invite him there. Tell him you love him there. Cause that's what Jesus was telling his disciples. It's gonna get hard for you. There's gonna be potholes and bridges out.

But stay close to me in those situations.

So we're gonna do something here in a second. I'm gonna ask you to. We're gonna sing to Jesus. Nothing weird. I'm not gonna have baby.

But I'm going to encourage you because I want you to think about opportunities to tell Jesus you love him. Or maybe in your car by yourself, you just sing a song about your love for Jesus to Jesus, right? So to set this up, most of you probably know the musical Fiddler on the Roof, all right? The Russian Peasants. And Tevye was the dad, Golda was the mom.

They had a hard life. And there's. There's one song in there. Well, there's many songs. But one of the songs in the musical, he says to her, do you love me?

And her response is, she sings it. I'm not gonna sing it. Do I love you? You're upset, you're worn out. Go inside and lie down.

Maybe it's indigestion. Then he says, golda, I'm asking you, do you love me? She says, you're a fool. Tabby says, I know, but do you love me? And Golda says, do I love you?

For 25 years, I wash your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given your children, milked the cow. After 25 years, why talk about love now? But he says, but I'm asking you, do you love me? And

I'm suggesting that Jesus, he asked that of Peter just weeks later, do you love me? And Peter said, I do love you.

And maybe he's asking you, do you love me? And you might say, well, for 25 years, I've been a Christian. I go to church, I do all this thing, I volunteer. What do you mean, God? Why do we.

No. And he just says, no, but do you love me? I'm not asking if you're gonna do things for me. Those are all good. Do you love me?

Do you love me? So we're gonna sing a chorus. Most of you know the chorus. It's just called I love you, Lord. And I want us to sing it to Jesus.

Not trying to be weird. I'm trying to be real realistic, but also really helpful. Because sometimes in your car, when you're by yourself, whether you say to Jesus you love him or sing a song to him, one of the ways to get close to somebody is expressed affection. We know that in human relationship. So to tell Jesus you love him.

And I'm gonna ask you this. I want you to think about what's hard in your life right now. Money, people, health. Cause I want you to sing this song from that place. Jesus, in this hard place.

I love you. We tend to not do that. Cause we get mad in this hard place. Relational tension, financial tension, health, frustration, whatever. So imagine that place.

Put something in your head. Some hard place, some pothole, some bridge out. And then if you. We're going to sing this. If you want to close your eyes, you can close your eyes.

When I was younger, if people close their eyes during worship, my response was, oh, come on. Who do you think you are? I like closing my eyes now because I can kind of picture things differently. So I'm not saying you should or should. It's not a measure of spirituality if you know the song you want to close.

But I want you to sing it to Jesus. You're not singing to me. You're not singing to each other. You're not singing to the screen. I want you to sing it to Jesus.

And I want you to sing it from that place of hardship for you. Because that's what Jesus was saying. I'm telling you this because when things get hard, I don't want you to abandon your faith. All right? So picture that hard place for you, and then we'll sing this song.

Here we go. I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you. O my soul. Rejoice.

Take joy, my King, in what you hear.

Let it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear. Now just turn your body toward the cross. Sing it again. Let me hear your voices. I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship.

O my soul.

You hear.

A sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

So we have a time. Now, we call it a response time. That was already a response to Jesus. But the response time also includes communion. And Jesus would have.

The first communion service was the same night all this stuff happened. He says, do this in remembrance of me. So here's what I want you to remember. I'm going to suggest you remember this. That he said, I'm telling you these things so you will have my joy in you.

When you take this bread and this juice representing the life of Jesus you're taking into, you're telling Jesus, I want more of your joy. Joy in me. I will love you. I will obey you. But I want that in me.

So as you take that this. Remember Jesus promise for joy and his pathway to joy. All right. There are also people on the sides that have orange lanyards on if you want. Just ask somebody to pray for you.

I want to feel closer to Jesus. That may be all. You say. If you want to get baptized today, we can do that.

But let yourself love and be loved by Jesus. Let me pray. Jesus, we do love you.

Sometimes we're frustrated with you. Sometimes we wish things were different. Sometimes we don't understand why you're not clearing the path and filling the potholes. But we know without a shadow of a doubt your destination for us is joy. And we love you.

We love you that you love us enough. That that's what you want for us, and we're grateful. We love you, Jesus.