

It's.

Well, if you're looking, that's. I'm not Tim, I'm not Allen. I'm just little old me. It's good to be able to share with you. Tim is enjoying some spring break activities with the boys while they have a chance to get away.

And Alan is, I think, still recovering a little bit from his kidney stone surgery and kind of a little bit ginger. He's labored with that for a couple weeks. So it's good to hear he's progressing.

Today we look at the 11th step of the 12 steps of the 12 spiritual disciplines that we've been going through in a series.

We have an outline that is a little bit different outline than what you're familiar to, seeing that on the right side you have the disciplines and the various steps are listed in the middle. And today we're on step 11, but I thought that maybe to give you a little bit of a handle on condensing or categorizing the various steps, you look at steps 1, 2, and 3, and it's where we find peace with God. Steps 4, 5, 6 and 7 is where we, we start making peace with others or with ourselves. And then steps 8, 9 and 10, we are making peace with others. And then the culminating part is in steps 11 and 12.

It's keeping the peace that we find through our interactions with Christ, our interactions with others, what we have learned about ourself, what we've learned about others.

The step 11, it invites us to deepen our relationship with God through daily prayer, dependence on Him. The passage we're going to look at this morning is John, chapter 15. And in that, Jesus uses the image of a vine and the branches, and he reminds us that real spiritual growth, personal growth and development, it comes not from striving harder, but by remaining connected to him. And he does that by talking about Christ, the divine and that we are the branches. And then the encouragement that we are to buy in Christ through practices like prayer, scripture, reflection, his life begins to shape our life and we begin to look more and more like Christ.

We have the mind of Christ. We start developing the heart of Christ, the vision of Christ to see things as God sees them, as his life begins to shape us, his strength replaces our weakness. Paul made the statement for God's power perfects our weakness.

It teaches us that lasting freedom and transformation grows naturally from a life that is rooted in intimacy with Jesus, where joy and fruitfulness flow from staying close to one another, to Christ, who gives us life, and in that word, intimacy. If you're looking at the various steps, you'll find it referenced quite often is the word intimacy. And it's the idea of a close, familiar, affectionate,

personal relationship involving vulnerability, trust, connection. A connection that is not infrequent. It is a regular connection.

It encompasses the emotional, the physical, the mental, cognitive thinking, the spiritual, closeness. It's so much more than what most people when they hear intimacy, thinking of just sexual activity. Intimacy is found in the idea of where Christ states in our text that we remain in him and he remains in us. That the idea in intimacy is those four words into me, see. So if you're thinking of intimacy, just think of those words into me, see that someone else can look and see into me.

The Genesis chapter 12 or chapter 2 talks about that for this reason shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh, that one counselor. He summarized it by saying that what the encouragement is is that we leave and we cleave and we weave our lives together, and we can spend a lifetime, an intimate lifetime, learning more and more of each other, just as we can learn more of Christ, and God is able to learn and see more of us.

The passage of scripture John chapter 15 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While each branch does its fruit, he prunes. Each that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

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. 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 if you do not remain in me. You are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branch are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned. But if you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish. What a statement.

Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, sowing yourselves to be my disciples. And the main verses that we want to focus on as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. 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.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. The whole purpose of our time together in God's word this morning is we seek to deepen our relationship with Christ, with God daily depending on his power to do his will.

I think last words are somewhat important, that perhaps you can think

of some last words that have stuck with you. When I think of last words and last moments that become more precious and more cherished with each passing day. It's when I was being held by my father, looking at three years, three and a half years old, looking into the casket of my mother that had passed away with cancer and asking dad, why did she have to die? And it was just a simple statement, not a big theological statement, but he simply said that, well, God wanted her to be at home with him.

That simple statement gave me a whole different concept of life and living. And as it unfolds and spending time with Christ and His Word and his Spirit being at work, I come to grasp fully understanding that home, it's not here, it's there and it's not now, but it's then. So we live in a transitional time between where we are and the heavenly home that Christ goes to prepare for us. The setting of our text. It is taken out of John and the John, the apostle of love.

He writes some of the last moments and last words of Christ that he gave to those apostles, to his disciples, as he's getting ready to be arrested, crucified, buried. And in John, chapter 13, Christ had given them the lessons in the upper room that he had told them that he was going to be leaving them. He had warned his Peter that Peter, there's a time where, where you're going to deny me. And he told the disciples that one from among them was going to betray him. And so those three factors, it seems as though the disciples, their, their heart was troubled.

And in John, chapter 14 is where Christ gives the teaching about the home of the soul, that he speaks of heaven not as some mental place, but as a real place. He pictures heaven as a loving home where his Father dwells. He said, do not be troubled, don't have your heart burdened down. And then he goes on and shares that in my Father's house are many dwelling places. Or some versions say there are many mansions.

But the, the literal idea is in my Father's house there are abiding places. Abiding is a, a long term presence, a dwelling place. And so he said, in my Father's house are many mansions, many dwelling places. And I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

So Christ is meeting his disciples at the point of their despair to say that, that you're not going to be orphans in the world, that I'm going to be leaving, but then you will see Me again. He said that you I will come and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. So when Christ makes that statement that, that they will see him again, I think there's at least three elements in that, that it's true they're going to see him again after the resurrection. They're going to see him again in the coming of His Spirit that indwells us. And then ultimately when he comes to claim his own, we

will see him again.

So in this time of despair, Christ keeps trying to encourage them that he's going to prepare a place for you. And, and we look at through all the Scriptures and we know that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. And John chapter 15 gives us some of that, the foundation of how we prepare ourselves, that we are interacting regularly with His Spirit and with His Word. And those two help to develop us, as Paul says, to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The more time we spend in His Word and with His Spirit, the more we look like Christ.

The man stood up at the men's convention, a conference and gathering, and they were, they had asked the men, what are some of the things that you want to accomplish with your time here? And he, he made his statement. I want to be able to, to develop my life in such a way that people see more of Christ and less of me.

The another part of the, the setting of our text is not just in John chapter 14, but in John chapter 16, where he, Christ says that he's going to send a comforter. And this is going to be a dramatic change for the disciples.

Those apostles, they were used to traveling with Christ. And if they had a question, they simply asked him and he could respond with them. And so they could see physically Christ.

But then as Christ leaves, he's wanting them to know that they're not going to be orphaned. Or the way the Scripture states in John chapter 16, that they are going to be comfortless, that there's a comforter that's going to come and is going to abide within us. And it's going to be a great source of strength and encouragement and inspiration and development.

And so he says that the Spirit is going to come. And so you. You're going to be able to not just look at me, but you're going to be able to look within and see me in the Spirit that dwells within us, that comes to abide in us. The, the Spirit there. It goes through quite a few things, but it's in the last part of chapter 16, Christ is talking about when Christ was on earth.

The disciples, they were accustomed to taking their questions and. And issues to him personally. But when he returns to heaven, what do I do? I can no longer physically see Christ, but I can with spiritual eyes, see Christ within me, in the Spirit that dwells within me, that he, the Spirit comes to assist them, to assist us, you and me, in our praying, in our understanding of Scripture, in our growth and development, the application of scriptural principles in our daily life. The Spirit comes to help us, encourage us.

Bible prayer is to the Father through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

The, the text we look at it.

There's a couple points that I would like for us to lock into and take home with us. One is that growth and fruit, that's God's work. It's not mine. The parent says to the child, or the teacher says to the student, or one. One adult says to another adult, says, why don't you grow up now?

Can you imagine that? You hear that instruction, why don't you grow up? And so the little kid just.

And I'm trying. Have I accomplished it now? Growing up is not going to be in just a physical exertion in a short time. Growing up maturing is going to be times of sharing intimately with God's Word, with God's Spirit, being placed into situations where we need God's instruction and God's presence and God's power to be at work. And Paul, as he's talking about in the vine, he said all the nutrients flow from the vine into the branches.

Fruit is not something that the branch produces. It is simply produced by being connected to the vine. And the life and the vitality of Christ flows into our life. And we find fruit because we have made ourselves available to God and his Spirit to be at work in our life.

We use a passage of scripture that we state it quite frequently, but I don't know if we always slow down and remember and focus in on two things that the passage has said. Acts, chapter 2, verses 38 and 39. I think you have it up here. Peter replied, saying, repent and be baptized each, every, each of you, in the name of the Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Two things are accomplished in our baptism, in our being buried in the likeness of Christ's death and then raised up in the likeness of his resurrection.

That it's not a work that we do. We're completely passive in baptism. Somebody else is burying the old body, somebody else's power is resurrecting the body. And so it gives us a good picture of God is at work on us and in us at that point in time. And the results is that there's the forgiveness of sin and there's the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We actually have God's Spirit placed within us. It's almost, it's God's seed, it's an imperishable seed, it's an eternal seed, and it's a seed that's going to bear fruit. Galatians, chapter 5, verses 16 and 17 said, Walk by the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. For the flesh is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh, they are in conflict with each other. So that you are, that you are not to do whatever you want.

And then Paul goes on, shows a contrast, that these are the deeds of the flesh, these are the, these are the seeds of living in the world. And then here are the fruits of the Spirit that dwells within us. In verses 22 through 25 he makes the statement.

I think I read it, read it from, from His Word, Galatians, chapter five. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. Against such there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

So our life becomes a walk with the Spirit of God.

A second point is we become a part of, of a new kind of kingdom. It's not the kingdom of this world that's passing away, but it's the kingdom of God that's, that's still unfolding and coming in its fullness. Christ in his priestly prayer said, you know, Father, hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That this earth can be our heaven on earth as we find ourselves living with the principles of God's kingdom.

That I guess maybe one way of saying it is we are cross cultural people. We live in a world that is in, quite often in opposition to God. But in that world we're not to be of that world, it's like the boat on the water. It's okay for the boat to be in the water, but it's not okay for the water to be in the boat. That when the church begins to reflect too much of the principles and the livelihood of the kingdom that's passing away, we need to draw closer to God and let his Spirit and His Word walk with us and grow us and mature us in being more and more like Christ.

The Israelites, they spent a very short time under Moses leadership and God's blessing and provision and power to get them out of Egypt. But they spent 40 years trying to get Egypt out of their hearts.

It was a maturing process for the nation, and they had a lot of things that they needed to learn and a lot of things that they needed to unlearn.

The apostle that wrote our passage of Scripture this morning as John the Apostle John, he was first identified not just as a fisherman, but as a son of thunder. Because his attitude, it was pretty volatile. And the way he was willing to treat people or be in competition with people, that needed to change. And so as Christ called him to be an apostle, there were things that he had to learn, but there were also some things that he had to unlearn. Same thing's going to be true for us.

There's things in the Christian life that we're going to have to learn and things about the world that we're going to have to unlearn.

John is the one that writes so much about love that he is referred to in his latter years as the apostle of love. Such a transformation because of his continual intimate interaction with Christ, His Spirit, the Word of God.

I need, after looking at this passage, I need to have a deeper relationship with God. I need to have a plan of regular times with God, Christ, and impress the disciples as he would seek those intimate moments with his Father. He would go off apart from everyone else and all the distractions and all the. The things that could occupy his mind and his attention so that he could simply focus on his interaction. Praying with the Father One of the greatest things that we can do developing and maturing in our Christian life is to spend time regularly in His Word with His Spirit.

Two of the greatest things God has given us to grow in Christ likeness, the results of our union with Christ.

It's going to be joy and.

The communion that we have with God.

A little story, Lloyd Ogilvie. Very quickly, he. He shared that he met a man, that he went to his congregation, it was a Presbyterian congregation. And he writes in his book, Let God love you, he said his congregation was the length and shadow of a Of his own stern efforts to be adequate for God. That everything about the church was suffocatingly proper.

Stained glass windows, impeccable Goth architecture, the lovely organ music, the classical blended together with the symmetry of a religious institution, he said, but joy was missing. Then he talks about the next visit that he had, and he found that it was a. It was a different congregation, he said, it was the same people, but the people were warm and they were gracious. The worship had a ring of reality and adventuresomeness of Christianity as a life to be lived, not a set of principles just to be observed or talked about. When I visited with the leaders, I was aware of a permeating love and closeness with them.

What made the difference? He said, looking at it. The building had been not been remodeled. The hymns, they were the same order of worship had changed, maybe only slightly. The same people were there, but they were not the same people.

Something had happened, he said. The minister, he went to a conference. And at the conference, the theme of the conference was to love God is to let God love you. And that theme transformed the

mindset of that preacher.

In the personal emails during the conference, he would get into small groups and interact. And he began to find out and realize that it was okay to admit his needs and to begin to envision what God could do in him and through him. He'd always felt that he had to show himself to be strong. And people responded to his personality of being a strong person. But it carried a heavy weight on him.

He didn't feel like he was adequate for the task. And so at this conference he learned that it's possible to open up ourselves and to open up our relationships and to let God love us.

When he went back, he shared with the people what happened. He began to talk about what God was doing in his own life.

And his talk began to let people evaluate and talk about what God was maybe doing in their life.

It allowed the people to know him, become a part of a genuine renewal that spread throughout the whole church. It was a joy that was missing Christ. In his passage of Scripture, he makes the statement that I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be made complete. In Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 18 or 8 through 10 lets us know that God, he's always at work. He chose us, he loves us.

He gave his Son for us so that we could in faith respond to Him.

God is, as the passage says he's the gardener and he's going to come alongside the branches and do some pruning so that we can bear more fruit and that we can remain in the vine and be fruitful. Paul writes it this way, for by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of your own doing. It is a gift of God, not because of works, lest any man would boast. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. God knows what he's doing in our life.

And if we will walk in hand in hand with the Spirit, we can find ourselves growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We're going to have a moment of communion and there's two words that summarize John chapter 15 there is the union that we have with the vine, and then there's also the communion that we have with the Spirit and the Word. And in the communion time, it's a time for us to celebrate the union that God made possible and the communion that we have, living together in joy, grace and love of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As we take of the emblems, we ask that you remember God's greatest demonstration that he loves you is the giving of His Son. Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for these simple emblems that remind us that

Christ was willing to sacrifice himself to be the sin bearer, even though he was sinless, to bear the sins of the sinful, so that we could stand confidently as forgiven people, made whole by the work, the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and His Spirit. It's in Christ's name that we pray to his glory that we live. Amen.

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