

Today we are talking about Christ's influence in me. Tell us a little bit about what that's looked like for you. There's obviously life before being saved and life being, you know, saved. God, I feel like, has really put more of a pull on bettering myself ever since I now, you know, really found him, really started pursuing him. It's obviously been hard with outside influences.

Yeah. Without, I guess, God's guidance there, my I would still probably be falling into those influences that are all around us. So how would you kind of just reflect on like that transition from college to now and if you have any advice for a college student? I've learned that with God you can find so much more joy and so much more fulfillment than what those other entertainment factors can provide for you. Walking with Jesus does change your desires.

Like God can change your heart and help you to want the things that he wants for you. Exactly, and it's definitely been, I guess I could say, one of the tougher parts is like, oh, these older friends, they're gonna see that I'm following Christ now instead of following their influence, but at the same time, they're gonna see how much I've changed from following Christ. Yeah. And they're gonna see that I don't need their influence as much as I need the Lord's influence.

Well, good morning. Thank you, band, leading us into worship this morning. Good— thank you, kids. They were in the back worshiping back there with the sign language. It was amazing to see.

I've kind of missed having them back there. They're doing something different in worship normally, but every once in a while it's good to have them back in here with us. And so if you didn't get a chance to see them, if you didn't turn your head back, just know your kids were back there. They're doing great. They were worshiping, had their hands up, singing out.

Fantastic. I love to see it. I love to see you guys, everyone enjoying what started out this morning— amazing, amazing weather. Was anyone out at 5:30 like I was, taking the dog out to poop? Anyone at 6?

Yeah, it was the most delightful poop I've ever experienced with that dog. It was amazing, just Beautiful, beautiful. I'm getting older, and so I'm very sort of sensitive to the passage of time, but when the heat of summer is over, honestly, I don't care if death is around the corner. I'm still happy about it. I'm still happy about it.

The signs of fall are all around us. School is back in session, and even more importantly, the kids are back in school. Anyone? Amen? Amen?

That's great. Mornings are cooler. Dusk even is starting to feel a little bit different. Last night I got home, the porch had a different

vibe to it. The breeze was coming through.

It was amazing. This is my favorite time of year, if you can't tell. For me, the surest sign though that summer is nearly over is that I look around at my planting beds and I just don't care anymore. Is anyone with me on that? I don't care.

I don't care. Tomatoes? I don't care about tomatoes anymore. Cucumbers? Let 'em go.

I don't care. I'm not getting out there anymore. I'm done with that. In the spring, I am full of energy. I plant with abandoned enthusiasm.

The weeds are still dormant, quiet. There's nothing like that going on. The rain is coming down just, I mean, you just think this is how the world should be. It's almost like paradise. I walk through the Lowe's garden area like I'm a Rockefeller.

Just throwing money on everything and anything I see that looks fun. Everything feels possible because everything just wants to grow in that season. And then summer hits, and I can keep it up for a little while. I can get out there. I can do it.

Then it gets hot, and then I'm like, "Ah." And the squirrels— I don't know if you have squirrels, but you plant things and the squirrels just eat them up. Eat 'em up. By August, I'm walking around and I'm looking at things and trying to assess the damage. And some plants are still blooming, others are just ready to be ripped up and thrown away. And I, I, I, I, I, I don't, I don't care.

But you look at those things, those two different plants, you're like, well, what, what's the difference here? What happened? Why is this one thriving and this one's just like, please put me out of my misery? The healthy plants, we know this, are planted in the right soil. They've got the right amount of sun.

They're getting adequate amounts of rain or my nursing of them with some water. At least enough water to keep drawing life into the roots. The others did not. And I don't blame the plants. I blame me.

My enthusiasm for gardening sometimes outpaces my willingness to get up off the porch and go out there and actually tend them. I tend to neglect the ones that aren't on my daily path. That's just how I am. But all of this reminds me that life, that growth, that plants, it's not a set it and forget it sort of world with plants. You put them in and then you've got to continue to tend and cultivate.

This is what God told Adam, wasn't it, in the garden? I'm going to put you in this amazing place. But it's not time to sit back and drink piña coladas. You're going to have to work and tend this, and it's

going to be a delight. It's going to be lovely.

You're going to love the work that I've given you to do.

The Christian life is the same. It's not a once and forget it. It's not declaring your confession of faith and being baptized and then, yep, you're good to go. We sometimes treat it like it is, but it requires Ongoing nurturing, ongoing cultivation. We need to stay daily rooted and connected, nourished, grounded in Christ so that our lives keep bearing fruit like my plants don't.

I'm going to pray. I'm going to have you guys turn to the book of Colossians, the letter Paul wrote to the Colossians, and we're going to be in chapter 2. We're going to hang out right there for a while. So if you get there, you're going to be there for a little bit. Can we pray?

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the way you, you root us in you, the way that our lives bear fruit when we stay connected to you. As we open your word this morning, we pray that we would be reminded again of the importance of that. In Jesus' name, amen. So I began with my plant story because I like plants. Plants do not talk back to you.

You rarely have to get them out of bed to go to school, so that's nice and easy. I like plants. I think Paul likes plants too because he uses plant imagery quite a bit, and in this verse he uses it again in Colossians chapter 2, verses 6 and 7. And, and if you will, just read this aloud with me. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

There's an old hymn I grew up singing at the end of every service, and I think probably some of you did too. If you know it, you can sing it with me. Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me. And that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come. I can always tell the Methodists and the Baptists in the room by who sings along with me on songs like that.

But it's a very simple lyric. It starts this way: Just as I am, without one plea. Plea, without one contributing benefit to me coming to you. I'm just presenting myself just as I am.

The only thing I have to claim is that your blood was shed for me. And the second thing I have to stand on is the fact that you've asked me to come. And Paul says, that's the way you began. And that's the way we should continue on. We come empty-handed.

We come with no argument in our defense except the blood of Jesus and no hope except his invitation. And Paul says that's how we begin and

that's how we continue. Just as you received Christ, continue that way to live your lives in him. And then he, then he turns to this image of, of plants, specifically, specifically roots. Roots.

Now, now, when you think about your beautiful gardens and your flower beds overflowing, sometimes it takes a while before we get to roots as something we think about. Roots are not flashy. No one ever sits on my front porch and drinks a cup of coffee and says, oh my word, the roots on these plants are absolutely stunning. You know what I mean? No one talks about the roots, but roots are what actually determines whether a plant will survive the heat or be burnt up in the heat.

A plant with shallow roots will look fine for a little bit, as long as someone's really nursing those things, they can keep them alive. But when the dry season comes and that constant bit of water ends A plant without roots is going to wither up. A plant that's rooted deeply can endure because it's drawing life from deep down, deep down, deep down. And this is the picture, I think, that Paul wants us to carry with us as we read this scripture. Life without Jesus is not about just flowers and fruitfulness.

It's about being rooted as well and making sure those roots are connected where they need to be connected. Becky Muncy grows these geraniums. They're massive. They're massive things. The first time I went over there and saw those, I thought they were some sort of wild tropical thing that she had, she had, she had flown in from, I don't know, South America, because they're just massive things.

And, and I was impressed by them. I, I've got fond memories of geraniums. The smell of geraniums, there's nothing like it, you know what I mean? It's a very unique smell and it takes me back. I have like, like, like deep memories of geraniums.

Maybe my grandmother, maybe my great-great-great-grandmother. I don't know, but there's something in me that responds to the smell of geraniums. I saw her geraniums like, oh my word, those are amazing. And I thought nothing more about it until earlier this summer when she says, hey, I got some geraniums that I'm needing to get rid of. Do you want, do you want some?

And I'm like, uh, okay. I'm picturing those giant geraniums. She goes, how many do you want? I said, I don't know. I said, "Just one?" She goes, "Oh no, oh no, I've got more than that." I said, "Two?" She goes, "I'll bring you a bunch.

I'll bring you a bunch." So she shows up. She shows up with two Walmart bags. And I open them up and it looks like she's chopped up geraniums and given me like a geranium salad. And I didn't want to be rude, but I thought to myself, you You've picked up the wrong bag. You meant to throw these away and the nice ones— you— what's going on

here?

She goes, no, no, these— here's what you do with these. And she patiently explained, all you have to do is just, is just put those in the soil and then water them and they'll be fine.

I had my doubts, but because it's Becky, and Becky's a former teacher, and when teachers tell you to do something, I As Alan talked about last week, I want to obey the rules. There's— I want to, I don't always, but in this instance it's Becky. So I'm going to do it. I put them in, put those little, those little stumpy sticks in the soil, threw some water on them and walked away.

And lo and behold, those little stumpy things took off. I didn't pay that much attention to them. They were getting rain. They were in the soil. I walked away, came back, and all of a sudden they've got leaves on them.

I'm like, well, okay.

Touched them a little bit, said, hey, hey buddy, good job, good job, keep doing it, keep it up. Come back the next week and they've got little flowers growing out of them. Oh my word, somehow those little clip stems settled into the soil, drew in life, and began to thrive. I think I've got a picture of them. Do I?

Look at those things right there. I mean, look at that. They're pretty good. Becky, how do they look? Yeah.

Those geraniums are a picture of grace. They're not just geraniums. They're a picture of how God loves us and does His work in us. We come to Jesus broken, unimpressive, unable to produce life on our own. Others are ready to throw us in the trash.

We may even be tempted to throw ourselves in the trash. But Jesus says, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I'm gonna take you. I'm gonna settle you in my soil. I'm gonna water you with my word.

And as my soil and the word waters your life, you're gonna start to grow, and you will see fruitfulness begin to emerge." And Jesus calls this sort of settled-in-ness abiding. In fact, if you have the old King James, that's the verse— that's the word that they will use in that verse. Now I'm going to use the NIV, and here's how the word abiding is translated in the NIV. Jesus says this— he likes plants too — he says, I am the vine, you are the branches, and if you— what? Remain.

The old King James is abide. Anyone using a King James this morning? You Yes, the old King James, James says abide. I love that word abide. Remain is great, but abide is beautiful.

He says, if you will remain in me, if you will abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

Abiding, remaining. What does that look like? For me, abiding looks pretty ordinary.

It looks like waking up with an awareness that Jesus is with me and has a plan for my life today. It, it looks like sitting on the porch with a cup of coffee when friends drop by and we talk about anything. It's when the neighborhood kids are over doing gymnastics and smudging up my clean glass door. With nose prints and fingerprints and just sitting there and enjoying that and being present for those little kids.

But it's also challenging. It can feel very ordinary, but there are times where it's very challenging. And I think about Kathy Fields sitting with her husband Mark, who passed away this week, in the hospital room and going I'm trusting Jesus and how this is all going to work out. That's what abiding is. It's simply spiritually staying where Jesus has put us and drawing our life and our peace and our identity and our hope for the future and our strength for the present from him rather than trying to make something happen.

It's resting, but it's not passive. It's not just chilling out with Jesus. That's not what abiding is. There is an active response on our part, and that active part is the determination to stay with Jesus and not wander off into places where we think, "Oh, that's a better option for me right now. Jesus is good, but this could be better." Abiding is saying, "No, no, no, I'm gonna stay." Right here with Jesus.

When life feels uncertain, I'm going to stay connected to his word. I want to follow his lead even when obedience is hard. I'm going to stick with Jesus. That's abiding. That's remaining.

And if we live that way, then Jesus says we're going to bear much fruit. And that fruit looks, looks different. Um, there's a couple of different ways that it shows up in our lives. And the first is internally where Jesus is working inside of us and we begin to find that we have a little more patience with people than we used to have. We have a little more gentleness with tender shoots.

We have a little more love for people that could be difficult and challenging to love. We have a little more self-control and we don't say the things that we really want to say. Yeah?

It's the fruit of our character growing, the fruit of the Spirit growing in us. But there's also this fruit that happens through our influence as we are in the world, whether it's with our families or at home or at school, in the cafeteria, whether it's at work with

coworkers, whether it's at Walmart dealing with people, dealing with Duke Energy on the phone. This is where influence begins to happen, fruit begins to happen. In a different way. It happens through our influences, where God opens opportunities for our words or actions or presence or just simply our faithfulness to help move someone closer to him.

Influence— this is the title of the sermon series we're going through, and it's a very trendy word. It's a trendy idea. Influencers are pretty important people in our culture.

The truth is all of us are influencers. We're also being influenced. All of us are being influenced by someone or something. All of us are influencing someone or something. We're all shaping or being shaped by the people and the places and the situations around us.

And this is true of the Colossians. This is, this is the letter Paul wrote to them. He's writing to them to, to remain just as they started, keep going. Because they were being influenced as well. If you read a few verses down in this chapter 2, you're gonna see that the Colossians were dealing with voices, with influences in their ear trying to draw them away from Jesus.

Those voices were pointing and drawing and trying to influence them with impressive-sounding ideas or— religious actions and behaviors and rituals or spiritual shortcuts that got them to the place where they felt really religious, they felt really in touch with God. But Paul says, ah, some of them aren't even bad. They're just, they're just not Jesus. They're shadows of Jesus, but they're not the real thing. And Paul will bring them back to the center and he'll say, hold on, just remember, kids, the fullness of God in Jesus dwells in you.

All those other things, that's the shadow of that. You've got the real deal inside of you. Jesus has conquered and overcome and disarmed all of the other spiritual influences out there. So they are way down on the list of people and things that you should pay attention to. Your focus should first and foremost be on Jesus.

He's the, he's the, he's the only influence that really should matter in your life. He should be your primary influence. But before you go trying to influence anyone else for Jesus, you have to really own him as your own, own primary influencer. And that begins by saying yes to Jesus, saying, yes, I want to follow Jesus. You follow him in obedience into the waters of baptism.

You confess that Jesus is Lord. Um, you surrender your life to him. That's where it starts, but it doesn't end there. Just as you began, continue, Paul says. Continue the same way you began by coming to Jesus, trusting Jesus and staying rooted in Jesus, abiding, remaining, sticking.

Every day, every day you do it. Just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness. If you got a Bible that you can write in, if you got an app that you can highlight, or if you just need to pinch yourself to remember this little thing right here, That little phrase, "overflowing with thankfulness," is not just something thrown in at the end so Paul sort of feels like he ends up on a high note. That's not what he's doing here. He's saying, "Hey, this is perhaps the culmination of what it means to really be abiding in Christ." It's one of the most underused tools in our lives, I believe.

We do not appreciate what thankfulness does. But it is— it's transformative. And it's not optional. 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Paul tells us this: Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is what? God's will.

You want to be in God's will? Start by being thankful. This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. If you want to live in God's will, thankfulness has to become part of your daily abiding rhythm. Why?

Why is thankfulness so important? Thankfulness protects your heart and your mind from the wrong influences.

That's your fortress and bulwark against your mind being controlled by things other than Jesus. Philippians says it this way, Philippians 4:6–7, don't be anxious about anything, But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with what? Thanksgiving, present your request to God. And what will happen? The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Thankfulness always accompanies prayer and petition. Lord, please help in this situation. I don't know what's going on, and I'm really, really scared. Let me add some thankfulness. But Lord, thank you for the way that you have brought me faithfully this far.

You've sustained me and my family. You've sustained me and, and my hopes and dreams. I know I can trust you. Thank you for being present in my life. And when we add thankfulness to the prayer and petition, what happens?

Our minds go, oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, I don't need to be anxious because God has never failed me yet. It'll guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus. So it does that. It shapes the health of our spirit. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is a good medicine.

A crushed spirit dries up the bones." A cheerful heart. What is a cheerful heart? A cheerful heart is looking and going, "Look what the Lord has done. Yeah, I'm a little crazy. Yeah, my yard is out of

control right now.

Yeah, I'm not really sure where my oldest son is this morning." But look at this. God is good and, and he's never failed me yet.

Thankfulness shapes the health of our spirit and it, and it strengthens the health of the church too. We together benefit from your thankfulness. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, encourage one another and build each other up. Now, how do we build each other up? By rehearsing how hard and how miserable and how difficult everything in life is.

No, that doesn't build anybody up. We build each other up by pointing one another back to the blessings that God has given to us and that are all around us, by being thankful even when things are not always hunky-dory. Remember, give thanks in all circumstances. This brings us to communion. As we come to communion, let's just, let's just go through these words of Paul one more time.

So then Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Communion brings us back to the very root of our lives. We don't come to this table because we have been fruitful enough. Lord knows I can't say that. Not because we've been faithful enough or influential enough.

We come because Jesus gave his body and shed his blood for us. This bread that we're going to take reminds us that our life is rooted in his sacrifice. He paid the price, and the cup reminds us that our forgiveness is rooted in his blood shed for us. And the table is a place to come back to Jesus just as we are, without one plea, to receive grace again, to be reminded of his grace again, and to remember that apart from him we can do nothing. So as you take communion today, you may feel a little dry, a little dusty.

Maybe you feel like your roots are shriveled up. Maybe you feel like you've been watered too much. Is that a thing? Maybe you feel a little yellow, crunchy. Come to Jesus.

Have him root you more deeply in love, nourish you with his grace, and make your life fruitful for his glory. Heavenly Father. I thank you for the ways that in very ordinary ways you remind us that you are with us. And as we simply make the decision to be thankful, as we stay connected to you through your word, as we show up to encourage others around us, It's almost as if it happens without any effort at all, even though there's so much intention going into it. I'm thankful that I don't have to manufacture righteousness to you.

I'm thankful that I don't have to puff myself up or make myself

something more in order for you to love me. I'm thankful that my value to you is not based on how many people I baptize baptized or how many sermons I've preached, but that you love me and you're doing good things in me and through me and around me, just because I'm where you want me to be rooted and abiding in you. That's what I pray for this congregation this morning. As we take the cup, as we take the bread, bring us back to you, center us around you. May all other influences fade into the distance.

And we hear first and foremost your voice. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church. Did you know you can watch all of our video content, both current and past, on our YouTube channel?

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