

“Abide in God”

Psalm 1 & John 15:1-17

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Charles Schwab once asked an efficiency expert to help him be more productive. The efficiency expert told Charles he could increase his productivity by at least 50 percent with a simple system. He then handed Charles a piece of paper and instructed him to write down the six most important tasks he would have to do the next day and number them in order of importance. Tomorrow, first thing, look at your list start working on the first priority and so on. Do this everyday. Charles Schwab called this advice the most valuable he had ever learned and he cites this one idea as the key to his success.

Today we have Franklin Planners, Day timers, Steven Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and on and on. They all have a similar message; determine what is really important and then do what is really important. Long before any of them, Jesus revealed this truth and much more in his parable of the vine and the branches. Jesus even tells us what is really important, what our number one priority should be and how to be productive.

God is the vine grower. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches and love, in many forms, is the fruit. Jesus gives us our top two priorities. Number One to abide in Jesus; and Number Two producing the fruit of love. If we do these two things in order, then we are friends of God and we will have complete joy.

Right from the beginning it is easy to switch Number One, abiding in God, with Number Two, producing the fruit of love. There once was a grape branch that was very proud of the grapes it produced. The grapes were beautiful, plump, and were emitting a delicious aroma. The branch was overwhelmed with pride in producing such wonderful grapes. The branch thought, wouldn't it be great to produce even more grapes. I bet if I detach myself from the vine then I can produce grapes from both ends of the branch. The branch had no intention, nor desire to be anything less than a healthy, productive grape branch. It just thought that it could produce more grapes detached from the vine. So, the branch detached itself from the vine and before long the branch no longer felt strong and vigorous. In fact, it felt utterly drained and limp. Its grapes withered and dropped off. Eventually, it became just a stick on the ground. The other branches remained attached to the vine and were nourished producing a bountiful harvest. The other branches realized that without the vine, they could do nothing.

If we go it alone without God, we will dry up, burnout, and become exhausted and overwhelmed. We have beautiful flowers here this morning, but they are cut flowers, dead flowers for without the nourishment of the plant they will soon wither and fade away. Perhaps it is so easy to switch our Number One priority of abiding in Jesus with our second priority of loving, because God is loving, gracious, and always there for us the moment we want to reconnect ourselves to God. It has been said the two quickest ways to determine a person's priorities is to look at their checkbook and calendar. I will confess that I struggle to bring my calendar in line with my priorities. It is crystal clear to me that my number one priority is abiding in God, my second is love of my family, and the third is my love of you, my ministry here at North. Yet if you look at my calendar, you may perceive that the order is reversed. The dilemma for all of us is if we focus only on producing the fruit and not nourishing ourselves by abiding in God, then we have nothing to give. One can easily fall into this downward spiral. It starts subtle with a busy week of urgent but not truly important demands. One shaves some of the ways they abide in God and shaves a little quality time from family to complete the tasks. With less nourishment from God one has less energy, love, creativity, and inspiration resulting in the person needing to spend more time completing these tasks taking even more time away from God and family. Now the person

becomes fatigued and says a harsh word, they regret, which causes damaged relationships which now will take time and energy to heal and soon the downward spiral spins out of control. Without Jesus we burnout. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing." Jesus was well aware of our human dilemma and stressed the utmost importance of abiding in God and pruning.

A man was working in a remote jungle and had a portable generator that ran a single light that hung from the ceiling. The native people marveled at the light and begged for a light bulb. Communication was difficult, therefore he was unable to explain the need for electricity for the bulb to shine. They persisted in their desire to have a light bulb, so he reluctantly gave them a bulb. It became a great source of frustration for the native people as they hung the light bulb by a variety of strings but it never shined. If we are to shine, we must be connected to God.

In our scripture lesson the word abide appears eleven times. Other translations use remain in God, be in God at all times, live in God and be joined to God. Our Number One priority is always to abide in God. We are productive and thrive when we are firmly joined to Jesus.

Half of the abides in our scripture are reciprocal; Jesus abiding in us. In reality God is doing 99.9% of the work. God is the vine grower providing everything for abundant growth the soil, rain, sun, seed, and nutrients just as God has created everything and given everything to us as a blessing. Jesus is the vine, the source of all love and nourishment. God knows we will have bad days, do bad things and get our priorities all mixed up, but if we can just hang onto the vine even by the smallest thread, even if all we can do is just pray, "God help me," then God will forgive us, nourish us, and infuse so much love into us that we will become vibrant and joyful again. How do we know this promise is true? Jesus said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends." Jesus is personally saying to you, "I love you with an endless perfect love so great that I will do anything for you, forgive anything, go anywhere to pick you up at anytime of day. I am your friend. I will rescue you from any predicament you get yourself into just call." The way we call is pray. Scripture says even if we cannot even verbalize one word but if our heart wants to be connected to God, then the Holy Spirit will take that desire and turn it into a prayer and carry that prayer to the throne of Almighty God. Jesus said, "Ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." I don't think Jesus means God is a cosmic vending machine where you insert wishes like a new car, big house, professional sports ability, et cetera into slot and then you get just what you want. It is more personal, powerful, and glorious than that.

You wish to have all your mistakes forgiven, to wipe the slate clean and have a fresh start. God will do that for it glorifies God by showing the world the magnificence of God's grace.

You wish for God to help you abide in Jesus, to nourish you will an endless supply of love, joy, and peace. God is eager to do that for it glorifies God by showing the world the endless perfect love and blessings God longs to pour into us. Jesus is our rock that keeps us from being blown away by the storms of life. Jesus gives us living water when we feel dry or find ourselves wilting under the pressure of scorching hot demands. Jesus gives us the bread of life when we need energy for our tasks. Jesus supports us when we fall, forgives us when we sin and infuses new life into us when we are hurt. Jesus is the vine giving us everything we need and just what we need at just the right moment.

You wish for God to clarify your priorities to reveal the meaning of your life and your eternal purpose. God longs to do that for it glorifies God showing the world the wonderful creation you are and the wonderful plan God has for your life. When we abide in God, then God will prune us. Grapes are plagued with runaway growth they want to expel all their energy in growing in every direction and developing lush foliage. For the plant to be healthy and produce delicious plump grapes, it must be pruned so the branch becomes strong and the nutrients can be focused on certain bunches of grapes. Often we are tempted with runaway growth; trying to do everything but not doing some things well.

Other times we are drained by the clutter of urgent but unimportant tasks. The pruning is not for punishment, rather it is to replace wild growth, growing out in all directions, producing sour grapes, with focused growth producing the finest fruit of love. Our scripture says we are pruned by Jesus word. Allow yourself to be shaped by God's word that comes from scripture and prayer, through the church and one another. God desires to reveal to you how to live an abundant life full of love and complete joy. God's pruning will enable you to discover the way, your purpose, and the eternal meaning of your life. Can you eliminate, or at least reduce that which is life draining so you can do what is life giving?

You wish for God to do spectacular, miraculous things through you that will last for eternity. God rejoices to do that for it glorifies God revealing God's creativity, abundant generosity, and goodness. God delights in every fruit produced by us. God is all powerful and could produce endless fruit of any kind in an endless amount, yet God takes greater delight in producing fruit through you. Are there tasks you are doing alone that you can do with others? There can be uniting joy in completing a task together.

God delights in bringing love, joy, hope, and peace to the world through you. Jesus said, "My Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." I hope you will have time to pause from your labors this weekend to celebrate the wonderful fruit God has produced and is producing through you. Thank God for the abundance of blessings and love God has poured into you. Consider what fruit God is eager to produce through you in the future. God is glorified by forgiving us, nourishing us, pruning us, and producing love through us. God is eager to do all of this and abundantly more than we can ever ask, or even imagine, whenever we abide in God. Amen.