



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

September 27, 2015

"Why Should I Abide" (THE VINE Sermon Series)

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John 15:1 *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinegrower.*

John 15:2 He removes every branch in Me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit He prunes to make it bear more fruit.

John 15:3 You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

John 15:4 Abide in Me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:6 Whoever does not abide in Me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Last January my pastor friend John Ortberg told me a story. John drives an old Honda. One day as he was pulling out of a parking stall, he heard a sound. It's the kind of sound you don't want to hear when you're backing out. It was the sound of your car hitting a parked car. He said it wasn't a big sound, but he knew he had to get out and see if he had

indeed hit a car.

Unfortunately, he did hit the car next to him. And unfortunately, it was not a beat-up car. It was a nice Italian car—a car that rhymes with Ferrari. He said it wasn't a bad scratch. In fact, he said, it looked "artistic." But he knew, with fear and trepidation, that out of honesty he would have to leave a note on the windshield of that car with his name and number.

If that happened to us, deep down inside we know how we need to leave a note and be honest. But deep down inside, we would also hope against all hope that the owner of the Ferrari would NOT call us back. And that's exactly how John felt.

But the owner of the Ferrari did call John back. He told John he appreciated the note. (Ah, good news for John!) But that he would like to restore his car to its original mint condition, so he would call back. (And that my friends is called bad news!)

Throughout the week there were more phone calls. Each call was civil and gracious. But each one brought more bad news. The Ferrari owner said he couldn't buff out the scratch and that he would need to change the whole panel of the car. The next call said that the panel would have to be shipped from Italy. But in the next call, the guy said, "I've decided to get a new car, so you don't owe me anything."

Whew! John felt a huge wave of relief! Then he had an impish thought. What if he called the guy back to ask if he could have his damaged car? But then John decided that every Ferrari is only a ding waiting to happen.

John told me this story earlier this year, but you can also read it in his book called *Soul Keeping*, where he wrote: "We live in a world that teaches us to be more concerned with the condition of our cars, or our careers or our portfolios than the condition of our souls. Maybe it's because a dent in a soul is more easily concealed than a dented car. Maybe because a dented soul is harder to fix. After a while the dents pile up, and they stop bothering us. We hardly notice. One dent more isn't going to make much difference."

Or as Dallas Willard, John's mentor, once wrote in his book *Hearing God*: "The visible world daily bludgeons us with its THINGS and EVENTS. They pinch and pull and hammer away at our bodies. Few people arise in the morning as hungry for God as they are for cornflakes or toast and eggs. But instead of shouting and shoving, the spiritual world whispers at us ever so gently."

Can we hear God's whispers to us every day? Two thousand years ago, Jesus said we won't be able to care for our souls unless we ABIDE in Him. What does that mean? Why should I abide?

He was saying basically that our souls and abiding in Christ should matter MORE than money, our homes, our careers, and even our family and friends and especially our cars. But before you say “No way” let’s see what He’s really saying.

Our passage today has Jesus telling us to abide in Him. To remain in Christ. To always be grafted into Jesus. That is what *abide* means—to remain. The entire passage is built on this reality: Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. Jesus is trying to make it visually clear. We need to remain connected to Him, to be all in.

A branch must be always connected to the main vine. It is from the vine that the branch gets ALL of its nourishment. The branch is not grounded in the soil. It has no roots. But the vine does. The vine is grounded in the soil. The branch needs the vine for life. It has to be connected to the vine to survive and flourish.

What Jesus is saying is that we must be fully connected to Him at all times. To say you are a follower of Jesus means just that. We have to depend on Jesus, and Jesus alone for nutrition, sustenance, direction, everything.

When I was young I played this crazy local *kine*, *hanabuttah*, childhood neighborhood game called Steal Egg. It’s similar to Capture the Flag but a crazier game with an even crazier name. Crazy because it involved no eggs. Crazy because it was so simple. Crazy because on the surface it seemed really stupid. But it was also crazy fun.

In Steal Egg there were two teams each with its own base. The rule was that whoever was the last one to touch base was the strongest, and if you were the last one and you ran and tagged someone from the

other side who didn’t touch his base as recently as yours then that person would go to prison. And they are out of the game unless you ran to their prison and touched one of them. The one who had the last touch had the most power.

So you can imagine with 20 people running back and forth to the base and then trying to touch your opponents it was crazier than a dogfight with fighter planes. So you didn’t want to get too far from bases or else you would lose power. But the basic principle here is that the person who had touched the base the most was the most powerful.

Jesus is saying to you and me that whoever is in touch, connected, grafted into the Vine. Whoever is touching me the most is the most powerful on this earth. Powerful in the sense that you will have the wisdom of Jesus, the inner strength to carry on, and you will be probably doing His will in this life rather than just doing your own agenda. It means all the choices we make in life is through Him and powered by Him.

Jesus gave these strong words in John 15:5: “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” Think on these words: “Apart from Christ, we can do nothing.” Yes, we can work hard at our job, but apart from Christ all that work is nothing in the eyes of God if we are not grafted in Him, if we’re not connected to Jesus, the Vine.

How can that be, we may ask. But I have done great things in my job. I have made a lot of money. But money made or spent without God’s wisdom will lead us to nothing. Jesus tells us, any time spent without God’s wisdom and power will lead to nothing. We need to be connected to The Vine so it’s not a waste of time.

Case in point: Do you know of parents who made a lot of money and spent a lot of time on their job,

but neglected their children? It wasn’t worth it to have a successful career if it cost them to lose their families.

What Jesus is saying is that when we work, when we recreate and have fun, when we have hobbies, when we try to raise a family, every single ounce of our effort and purpose has to be grafted into the vine of Christ or it means nothing. It may be building a house on sand.

Abiding actually means: We are always asking, WWJD, which stands for What Would Jesus Do? Or Jesus, what do YOU want ME to do? Think about it, why would we want to build a house, have a job, or have a family if Jesus is not part of the process? It would be futile.

As the Bible says, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” (Psalm 127:1)

The challenge for us today is to really, seriously try to live a life where Jesus is at the center of our lives. What if we try to abide in Jesus in everything we do? Let me give some practical hints on beginning the journey of abiding.

For starters, I think it is really important that we say grace at each and every meal whether by ourselves or with family or friends. Every meal, every meal, every snack, say a prayer of thanks to God. By saying grace we are saying that we do not take for granted and we thank God that we can have food and have lots of food choices in this country. Not taking anything for granted and thanking God is a way of abiding in Christ.

So I challenge you. From hereon, make it a point to say grace, a prayer of thanks before you eat. And if you are with nonbelievers, then quietly look down at the food, eyes open if you want, say it in your head before you start. No need to embarrass them or look pompous.

I know one family that starts dinner by having every family member or guest say one thing they are thankful to God for that day. It's a beautiful discipline to keep focusing on God. That's Abiding 101.

Another way to abide: Do your best to have more of a focused time to talk to God and read His word, the Bible, regularly. Traditionally this has been called quiet time.

True confessions: I know this is hard. For me I try to write a journal entry every day to God. Dear Lord, here is how my day went. Here are the things I am thankful for. Here are my prayer requests. It becomes a log, a history of God active in my life. I have done this for 46 years. Some day my kids will find it and read it and will see how I talked to God about everything.

To be honest, while I strive to make it daily, there are times when it becomes a weekly entry. Some times it even becomes a 10-day entry. I read the biography of the great theologian and author Henri Nouwen, and I was relieved to read how he also struggled to have his daily devotionals and quiet time. But he did it. And when I do mine, I find that I become more resilient thanks be to God.

One thing I have been disciplined about in the last four months is to read my BIOY every day. And if I miss it I catch up. Remember, B-I-O-Y, which stands for Bible in One Year, a free app that features daily devotionals written by Nicky Gumbel of the Alpha Course. He takes you through the Bible in one year by reading various passages—one in the Old Testament, one in the New Testament, and then a chapter of Proverbs or Psalms.

That is how we can abide. Every day I read the Bible, read the devotional that comes with it and I try

every day to write a short journal entry. Get the App BIOY.

I am amazed when I read the journals of people like Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. Bush. They wrote every day. Jimmy Carter had a daily 30-minute quiet time. (Notice, that's Democrat and Republican!)

I thought to myself, "Man, if an extremely busy President of the United States can make time to journal, then surely I can make time." I think the only time President Reagan didn't write on his journal was when he got shot. A very legit and understandable reason. But then when he got better, he got right back on it.

Here's the deal. I confess I am not always consistent with my journaling. And Satan can say, "Oh you missed some days so forget the whole thing." No! I would rather be late or erratic than stop doing it. For when I do write an entry and just talk to God about the last few days, or that specific day, and pour out my heart on what is going on, I can say without exaggeration that it ALWAYS makes that day a great day. Not a good day but a GREAT DAY. ALWAYS. I see His hand at work in my life. I feel His purpose. I have more of His wisdom.

Somehow, supernaturally, every time I set aside time to read a devotional, pray, and write on my journal, things fall into place, things are harmonious. Strength and wisdom come in the face of trials. My work seems to be supercharged and effective. This is true every single time I log in. Call it the power of the Holy Spirit or just being more in tune with the Almighty God. So you can see logically and practically that it is super dumb not to abide in Jesus.

Every single day I abide in Him is a really great day. It's not a day without pain or obstacles, but a day

that I can get through the pain. It's a day when things seem in sync, enhanced, blessed, effective, and fruitful. I become more resilient and whining is non-existent.

Can we live a life where everything we do is centered on Christ? Where our prayer is basically Give Me Jesus? More of Him. It's not an easy life but a better life. Try to be in constant prayer all day asking Jesus, "What do you want me to do?" Or try to always see how God is at work in your life.

Do we really think that it is far better to do our business without God? To make money without God? To build a family without God? To build friendships without God? To do vacations and recreation without God and our asking Him what to do? Let's slow down and really think about it.

Where would it ever be beneficial to avoid, ignore or forget God in any area of our life? Why should I abide? What would be the advantage? What would be the blessing? What would be the fruit? There are 3 reasons why we don't abide.

1. We are selfish and stubborn.

We don't want to pray because then we might have to do God's will and not do what we want to do. Deep down inside we want to be in control and have things our way and not some other person's way let alone God leading us. And so we ignore Him for most of our waking hours and then one day we get in trouble and we ask, "Why me, why me? Where is God?"

If you feel far from God, guess who moved? You did. He was always there, but we ignored and walked away from Him every day for months, and maybe even years.

But the foolishness is that what we want to do is so much more inferior to what God wants us to do, how He wants us to live, and how He wants us to relate to colleagues, friends, and family.

What I said earlier that abiding in Christ is more important than your business, family, or friends might have stung some of you. But logically, if you have Christ in your business, family, or friendships, it will make your business, family, and friendships far better with Him than without Him. Christ promises that. Believe Him. God has to be the priority. We have to be all in with Him.

Big tip from Jesus. Remember, He says in our passage in verse 5: **Apart from Me you can do nothing of worth.** He's not being mean. He is just giving us reality.

2. We say we are too busy.

If that is true for us, then starting this week, we really need to overhaul our calendar. Do we really want to stand before God on Judgment Day and tell Him, "I was too busy for You. I had more important things to do. I was too busy to like talk to You often, unless I needed help."

And God will say, "Really? And so how was your life without me down there? More like heaven or hell?" And we will say, "It was really more like hell. I felt pressured, crazy, overwhelmed."

If we are too busy to be connected to the Vine, too busy to pray often and connect with Jesus, then something is really wrong. We really have to stop and prioritize. We may be able to sprint, but we won't be marathon runners in life. We need to put away the hurry in our lives. Slow down! And if we say we are too busy to even find 15 minutes to stop and prioritize, then something is

really, really wrong.

Are we really going to go through this life like a withered branch that's unconnected to God where our wealth and worth and time is into making sure the Ferraris of our life is worth maintaining? Oh, we may not have a Ferrari, but are we driving the Toyota of Time Crunch, or the Ford of Faithlessness, or the Chrysler of Continual Crisis, or worse yet, are we like Volkswagen which just busted last week for deliberately designing a software that allows Volkswagen car owners to cheat on their cars' emission levels so that it doesn't show that they may be polluting the environment.

Are harmful emission levels of our life really a lot higher than we think? Do we keep lying to ourselves that our busyness and wrong priorities are not polluting our soul? Is it possible that our calendars are filled but filled with toxic pollution instead of Christ-like solutions of how to live a better life? Why not abide in Christ? Just stop the merry-go-round, get off of it, and think, "Am I really abiding in Christ? Why not?"

Jesus can't say it any straighter. He said, "Apart from Me, you are nothing. I want to help. I want to be your friend. I am your friend, waiting. I want to save you."

3. We ignore the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said He gave us the Holy Spirit to live in us. He would empower us to do amazing things, to supernaturally have the patience, joy and strength, and love and peace that we so desperately need.

But many, if not most Christians, have no idea of how to be filled with the Spirit and how to live in the Spirit. Many of us live in our own human power. When we plan our business or family, we don't pray. We think we have to do it using our own

steam and smarts. But the fact is we are not strong enough or smart enough to save ourselves.

Continually through the day we should be asking God for guidance. I am not saying be neurotic about it, but as part of your rhythm, regularly ask God, "What should I do about this decision or that decision?" Or, "Could You please help me change?" Or you can also make it a habit to continually thank God. We can't do anything of real worth apart from Jesus. Therefore that means we need the power of the Holy Spirit in us.

Those in Alcoholics Anonymous know this that their first step in recovery is admitting that they are powerless to make any changes for good in their life unless they rely on a Higher Power, which we know as Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We must learn to live supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and not by our own human power. This is a tough world, and in many ways it's an evil world. It's getting harder. We need the Holy Spirit.

Christianity is not a self-help pop psychology course or just the power of positive thinking. Being a Christian is a supernatural experience with God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It's about a relationship that should be maintained daily and continually with the Almighty God who wants to be involved in our everyday life.

It is very tiring and depressing to keep trying to do good and to achieve goals without the Holy Spirit because in the end, if we don't do it in God's power, we will burn out. Or as Jesus says, you will be like a withered old branch that needs to be thrown away. Abiding in Christ means we are always trying to center our lives on Him, plus all of our plans and hopes and dreams. We are constantly talking to Him all day.

He flows into all areas of our life – family, friends, business, home, hobbies, and free time.

Jesus wants that kind of relationship with us. It's like if you meet a friend for a cup of coffee and all you talk about is the weather, you leave that coffee place feeling kind of empty.

But if you have a cup of coffee with a friend and you start talking about your dreams and hopes and struggles and pain, that conversation is much richer! It is the kind of conversation you have with a good friend.

That is what Jesus wants with us, to have that continual conversation of substance. He wants us to talk with Him about our hopes and dreams and struggles and pain. Jesus wants a friendship with us. That is what He clearly says, "I no longer call you servants but friends."

We can't do anything of a supernatural nature that God wants us to do without the Holy Spirit. We can't hear His voice, We can't figure out His will; We can't really abide in Christ without the Holy Spirit. Jesus said He gave us the Holy Spirit. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We need to be led by the Holy Spirit.

For many people they say they are Christian but they are not living in the Spirit. They say they are Christians but in all honesty when they are at the office or at the home there are no connection with God. For a long, long time, Jesus is in a Star Wars galaxy far, far away. It takes discipline to be focused on Christ in everything we do.

I had a friend, who actually happened to be one of the most successful car dealers in the country. Before answering any phone call, he would say this quick prayer: "Jesus

help me." That's it. "Jesus, help me." Before answering EVERY phone call. EVERY phone call. Asking for Jesus' help got him through the stress of dealing with problem calls and complaint calls. But the discipline also got him to thank God if it were a good call or if he had made a sale and to remember his MINISTRY (like other business people) is his customers and employees.

See, it's not THAT hard to try to abide in Christ. Part of our soul care is to get in the rhythm of saying grace at meals, talking to God when the phone rings, or when the boss tells you to write that report. Help me Jesus!

What can you do to abide in Christ? Maybe if you are a nurse, every time you go into a patient's room you say a prayer, "Jesus, help me." And maybe when you leave you say, "Jesus, thank you." Business people, maybe before any phone call you can say, "Jesus, help me." If you're a teacher, say a prayer before you walk into the classroom. "Help me, Jesus."

Last year I heard of a judge in London of the highest level who said that every morning she stands in her office with her hands outstretched saying, "Jesus, I'm yours." It focused her for the day as to who her Lord is and how she should behave.

Could you do that? That's a way of receiving the Holy Spirit. Jesus I'm yours! What can you do? And what can you do to have the Holy Spirit be more evident in your life? We need to pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit because He is part of the Trinity. The Bible refers to Him as HE and not IT.

Sometimes when things go wrong and a Christian gets angry or whines or cusses or want revenges or holds a grudge or gets really stinky about a subject, and I feel like asking,

How would you have acted if you were not a Christian? Does it make ANY difference that you say that you have Jesus and the Holy Spirit in you? Does it make any difference that you know Jesus? Have you really abided in Him and He in you?

Jesus says it clearly that if you as a branch are not plugged into the Vine, then you will be withered and thrown away. And for some people here today you may be feeling withered. It could be truly because of an external event. But sometimes it is because it is an internal problem. We haven't really abided in Christ. We the branches have not been truly connected to the vine.

I want to end this with a prayer that you all be filled with the Holy Spirit. I want you to be willing to have Him supernaturally fill you and soak your souls. Raise you hands. Palms up. And now let us pray.