

Good morning. If you're older, do you remember when people would just show up at your house to visit? They would come unannounced and you would just stop what you're doing and talk and visit. It was great. I have very.

Boy, that's loud. I have very fond memories of my Grandpa Gray, my mom's. My great Grandpa Gray, my mom's grandfather. He would drive up from Pekin in a white Chevy Corvair, not Corvette. Corvair was just the opposite of the Corvette.

And he would just show up, and I was a little boy, and we'd be playing around the house and my mom would announce, grandpa Gray is here. And we would all run to the driveway and greet Grandpa Gray. And he would just come in and we'd visit. I just loved him. He was always so good to me.

Now, if you show up at my house today unannounced, expecting to visit with me, I'm going to be really suspicious. Like, what did I do? Is this an intervention? I would be confused. I would be stressed.

Can you imagine 15 people, maybe 20 people, showing up at your house unannounced? And here they come. They're friendly, they're patient, and they're hungry. You know them, you love them, glad to see them, and you want to feed them. But it's a lot.

It's an awful lot. It's very stressful. It's a big deal to host that many people on notice, short notice or no notice. As Jesus and his disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Her sister Mary sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught.

But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me. But the Lord said to her, my dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details. There's only one thing worth being concerned about.

Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her. Can you see Martha? Martha is super responsible. She's productive. She's cooking and preparing in all kinds of ways.

There's just so much to be done, and she needs some help. Can you see her frustration level rise as she keeps peeking out the kitchen door? Mary's just sitting there doing nothing. And maybe Martha's thinking, well, give her another minute or two, and then surely she'll come in and help me. Well, the minutes pass.

Patience leaves the kitchen. It's clear Mary is going to leave all the work of meal prep up to Martha. A pot boils over, and so does Martha.

She comes out of the kitchen, hands on her hips, a dish towel over her shoulder. Jesus and his disciples, likely Lazarus and Mary, are all there talking, and they stop their conversation suddenly.

I think they were talking about the kingdom of heaven, but now they've stopped. It doesn't matter to Martha. She's angry. All the eyes fix their attention on Martha, and Martha speaks and it's words of frustration and words of accusation. Lord, it's just not fair.

It's just not fair that Mary sits there while I do all the work. Now tell her to come in the kitchen and help me.

I think I'm not a smart man, but I think it got really awkward at that point. I think an awkwardness settles over the room and all the eyes move from Martha to Jesus. What's he going to say? What's he going to do? I just imagine that Jesus smiles as he gently rebukes and corrects Martha.

Martha, Martha, you are so upset and worried and distracted over all these details. But you know what? There's really only one thing that's really important, and Mary's figured it out, and I'm not going to ask her to leave. Ouch. I confess I am more of a Martha than a Mary.

I'm often more about doing than being. I'm more of a human doing than a human being. And Jesus is not against doing. He's not against meal prep. He's not against activity.

He's just gently correcting Martha regarding priorities. It's easy to get distracted. Like Martha regarding the most important thing, doing should come from being. An activity should come from identity. If you know who you are, you know what to do.

And Mary is choosing to focus on being. She's choosing to focus on her identity as a follower and a worshiper of Jesus. She's focused on the connection and improving that connection. I believe Martha is also a lover and follower and worshiper of Jesus, but she's distracted. She's more focused on doing rather than being.

She's more focused on production rather than connection. She's temporarily lost sight of the most important thing, which is being connected to Jesus. So she's distracted. She's focused on production over since she's focused on production over connection, she's frustrated. Frustration is an interesting thing.

It's very closely connected with disappointment. Frustration and disappointment go hand in hand. They're both about unmet expectations. When you think about it. Mary expected, or Martha expected help, but she didn't get it.

And so here comes frustration, here comes disappointment, and here

comes Martha. She's lost sight of the most important thing because meal prep has pressured her. In this series of sermons that Tim started last week from John 15, Jesus talks about the vine and the branches. In fact, he says, I am the vine and you are the branches. Now these are some of the final words of Jesus.

So it's really interesting what he says and what he doesn't say. You would think there would be some strategic planning. There might be some kind of five year plan, some kind of organizational chart about who's in charge and a to do list. There's none of that in Jesus final words. Instead, Jesus focuses on connection.

He emphasizes connection, connection to him and then connection to each other, which we'll talk about in a couple weeks. The connection to Jesus leads to production. And that's the right order, not the other way around. It's very important to realize Jesus absolutely emphasizes connection as a priority. Listen to what he says in verses 4 and 5 of John 15.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine. And you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who remain in me and I in them will produce much fruit.

But apart from me, you can do nothing. So 10 times, literally 10 times. In this broader passage, Jesus uses the word remain, remain. It's a Greek word, *meno*, and it means to stay, to abide, to continue, to endure, to remain and not leave or depart. It just means to stay connected, to stay connected.

And from that connection comes production. But connection to Jesus is the absolute priority. I think this is a good, good spot to kind of pause and say, are you connected to Jesus? It's a good time to reflect for all of us. Are we connected to Jesus?

Connection to Jesus is, is by faith and comes to us and is possible by grace. The grace of God offers salvation for our sins. We're rebellious. We separate ourselves from God, but God loves us and extends grace. But there's more to it than that.

He also offers us a new life that begins now, that reaches all the way in and through eternity. And while we wait for eternity, to experience eternal life in its fullness, where there's no more death, mourning, crying or pain, we, while we're waiting for all that, Jesus says, stay connected. Stay connected to me, and I will give you my spirit to empower you so that you can live with peace, joy, and confidence in that section. John 14:16. Jesus emphasizes the Spirit of God, and he's talking about all these connections that come because of the Spirit of God.

And he is the vine, Jesus is vine, and we are the branches. When we connect to Jesus by believing who he says he is, the Son of God, we come to him and say, I want this. I want what you have to offer. I want salvation. I don't want to live the old way of life.

And so we look at him and he says, I will pay the price for your sins. I will take the punishment that is yours. I will endure it so that you don't have to. And so he dies on the cross. He pours out his life.

Leviticus 17:11 says, Life is in the blood. So he pours out his life for my life and for your life. He gives us salvation. But that's not the end of the story. Jesus not only dies, but he overcomes death.

He is raised from the dead and he lives forever. He offers us the same thing. He offers us resurrection from the dead into a life eternal in the presence of God forever. When we believe that, we turn from our sins and we embrace the story that he is giving us a new life, a resurrected life. When we're baptized and we talk about baptism, fair amount, because baptism is a beautiful reflection of this whole story.

Because baptism is a reenactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And so when we look at the story of Jesus, we embrace it and say, you know what? I'm going to die to this old way of living. I don't need to live that way anymore. So I'm going to crucify that.

And when something is dead, we bury it. So I'm dying to the old way of life. I'm inviting Jesus to come into my life and. And I'm going to be buried in water to symbolize the death of my old way. And then I'm going to come up out of the water to live a new life.

So it's, I'm dying to sin. I'm going to be buried in water. I'm going to rise to live a new life. It's a reenactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That's how we stay connected to Jesus.

Today we want to talk about remaining. How do we remain? Jesus says 10 times, I want you to remain. And so what does he mean? How do we do that?

What are some of the challenges to remaining? Recently, I read Kyle Idleman's book When your Way Isn't Working. It's a really good book. It's an easy read, easy book to read. It's basically a book about the vine and the branches.

About John 15. He says, One of the big problems we have is distraction. That takes us away from Jesus. And so we get distracted and then we get busy doing all these other things. And it takes our eyes off Jesus.

It takes us away from Jesus. It loosens the connection, shortens the

connection, all these things. And we put our trust and our hope in other vines, believing that they will produce some kind of fruit. So Eidelman mentions a whole bunch of things that I'll just mention, but I don't really want to talk about them. He says there are all kinds of false vines that promise to produce false fruit.

He talks about information, politics, romance, self centeredness, wealth, entertainment, pleasure, and maybe even religion. I would say really all you need to do is read the book of Ecclesiastes, where the main character, which may be Solomon, explores the meaning of life and wisdom and wealth, pleasure and power. And he finds it empty everywhere he goes. And at the end, he says the conclusion is to fear God and keep his commandments.

If we seek peace, and what we really want is peace, joy and confidence. If we seek peace, hoping to find it in these fake vines, then we're going to end up with moments and times of peace based on external circumstances. So if my car's running well, the kids are getting along, my boss is good, everything's going along, I have peace. But the moment you have a flat tire, the kids start fighting and your boss is unhappy, then the peace is gone. This is not the kind of peace that Jesus is offering.

This is not the kind of peace that comes from remaining in the vine. The peace that Jesus offers remains and abides, no matter what happens outside of us, because it comes from within us. Peace, joy and confidence. If we seek joy trying to find it in these fake vines, we end up in the same boat with fleeting circumstance based happiness. But the moment something goes wrong, we're not happy and it's God.

But joy is not like that. The joy that Jesus offers remains regardless of the things that we're constantly experiencing and changing around us, in and around us. If we seek confidence, hoping to find it in a fake vine, then we're going to be disappointed. I talk a lot about peace, joy and confidence because those are the three things that I think I want more than anything in life. And I think that's what most people want.

And when I talk about Confidence. I'm talking about the assurance of a good future that backs into my present life and makes me feel secure about who I am. Our English word for confidence is rooted in the idea of trust, fidelity. And so it's an evolution from a Greek word which really means the idea of a firm foundation. So when I speak of confidence, it's a solid and secure connection to the promises of God found in Jesus.

The preacher in Hebrews would say it this way. Now, faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. And so, again, if we seek confidence, hoping to find it in a fake vine of politics or wealth, pleasure, power, whatever, then we're going to

be disappointed. Because at the end of all of it, there'll be nothing lasting but the emptiness of false promises. Here's the thing, God.

God wants us to flourish. He wants all of us to flourish. He wants us to have peace, joy, and confidence. That's what he wants. His final words were promising that from John 14, 15, and 16, let not your hearts be troubled.

And he ends by saying, in this world you have trouble, but I'll give you my peace. You can overcome. So he wants us to flourish. And peace, joy and confidence are found in Jesus. The key is connection, and sustaining that connection by remaining, sustaining and remaining.

So how do we remain? John 15:7. Jesus says, My word must remain in you. My word must remain in you. Then he elaborates in verses 9 through 14.

Listen to this. Look at this. I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain my love. When you obey My commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

I have told you these things so that you will be filled with My joy. Your joy will overflow. This is My commandment. Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command. So the key to remaining with Jesus is to have the Word in you. I think he's talking about the Word who became flesh. He's talking about himself, having a personal relationship with him, having him in your heart. But you can't separate that from knowing his teachings.

You can't separate that from the knowledge of what he says, the knowledge of his words, and then putting that into practice by doing what he says. Connection does not lead. Connection does lead to protection. Sorry. Connection does lead to production.

Connection with Jesus produces loving relationships. So he loves us. We Love him. We love each other. We have a common love.

And that becomes the basis for unity. It becomes the basis for connecting with Jesus. And each other has to be something outside of us. We focus on our differences. We're not going to be united.

But if we focus on our commonalities that we have in Christ, then we can be united. When we connect and remain to Jesus, connected to Jesus, we have joy and overflowing joy. We become his friends. So I guess the question is, how do we do that? How do we remain?

What are the practical ways of sustaining our connection that allows us to flourish in this life with peace, joy and confidence? It's not that hard. First thing is, you spend time with Scripture. Read the Word of God. It's so easy with Bible apps and all the things that are available today.

Read it through a relationship with the Word who became flesh Jesus. Read it. If you just begin, just maybe a verse or two a day, it doesn't take much. And then say, you know what, I'm going to think about that all day, and I'll see how it kind of affects what I do and how it comes into play with everything that I do today. Second thing is just prayer and time with God.

Develop a consistent prayer life. Again, this could be really simple. Just share your thoughts, your desires, your struggles, your gratitude with Jesus. Just imagine him sitting there and say, hey, this is what I've got going on today. This is what I'm worried about.

This is what I'm thankful for. This is what I'm struggling with. Just have a conversation, imagining that Jesus is there with you. And then listen. Imagine what he might say to you.

Be still and know. The third thing is to obey his commands. Just do what he says. It's interesting that Jesus reduces all of these commandments, the entire Old Testament, which he embodies and lives out. He reduces everything to two things.

He says the greatest commandments, and these are his commandments, is to love God with all you've got and to love each other, to love your neighbor as yourself. So the commandment of Jesus is relational. The production that comes from connection is relational. It's not about doing a bunch of things, checking lists. It's about how we treat each other.

It's about relationships now. So what I see in my own life, and I see it in others as well, is the danger of distraction. This is where I'm tempted to take my eyes off Jesus. I get up from sitting at his feet, I get busy doing other things. And then I'm really tempted to look for quick fixes, fake vines, hoping that they will produce some immediate satisfaction that I'm after.

And then I think what happens further to me in my life being my experience, is that then I start feeling guilty because I've gone the wrong direction a little bit and I feel guilty I didn't stay connected. And then I get discouraged. And then I'm starting to lack confidence, which then robs my peace and my joy. And then I start to have doubts about whether I'm really pleasing God. This is not so much now my life, but in the past I have doubts about whether I'm pleasing God.

And I hope I'm okay, but I'm not sure. And I see this all the time with other people. I don't know if I'm really okay with God or not. I tell you what we need to remember.

The way we stay connected with Jesus, the way we sustain and remain is the same means by which it began, and that is by grace and faith. Even if our connection is very weak, we're still connected. God is for us. He loves us, he wants us to be with Him. We need to rest in that.

And the fruit will follow, the growth will come. Jesus says we will produce fruit. And I think he's talking about making disciples. Really, he wants us to make other disciples. He wants us to bring other people into relationship with Him.

But I also think he has in mind the fruit of the Spirit. Our connection with Jesus includes the Spirit within us and it produces beautiful fruit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. The fruit of the spirit, if it's manifest in our life, will likely make disciples because people want to know why, why do you, why do you act like that? Why are you so peaceful and joyful all the time?

Most of you know that. My dad died a little over three months ago.

I guess the word that comes to my mind about all of that is the word surprised. Surprised. I have been surprised by my grief.

Thoughts and feelings that are surprising show up at surprising times. Can anybody relate to this? Wow, where did that come from? Why am I thinking that? Why am I feeling this?

Another thing that surprised me is how many people came to the visitation and the funeral for a 92 year old man. I've preached, I don't know, lots and lots of funerals for 90 year olds over the years and usually there's not that many people because they've outlived everybody. But there were hundreds of people and I was really quite surprised by that. And I've thought about it and I've analyzed it, and I've come to the conclusion people didn't come because of what my dad produced. He did well in life, but there's no list of accomplishments or achievements.

Nothing really. Nothing that spectacular at all.

I think they came because of how he was, because of who he was. He was a faithful, fruitful man because he connected to Jesus. That's it. I think that's it.

Life.

I'm slowly figuring this out as I get closer to the end of my life. I

guess life is not about what we do as much as it is about how we do it and how we do it. How we do life comes from who we are. And in Christ. We are beloved children of God.

And he says, I want you to be like me. I want you to be imitators of God. Paul says in Ephesians 5:1, seeking to love as he loved.

I fail all the time because I get distracted, and then I get discouraged. Recently, I read a fairly new and interesting book about John Newton. Newton lives in the 1700s, dies in the early 1800s, and he grows up going to church with his mom. And he develops a faith, but like most of us, it's a borrowed faith. It's his mom's faith.

And later he develops his own. And he becomes quite passionate about his new faith. But his life took him away from it because his life was mostly about being at sea. He got involved with slave trading since 1700s, and he was on ships that transported slaves from West Africa to the West Indies.

It's hard to read his diary of how inhumanely people were treated. He saw that he lived, that he got caught up in it, and he seemingly lost his faith. He considered himself a wretch. Those are his words. Absolute wretch.

He believed there was nothing left for him but hell.

Once, on a journey in the Atlantic Ocean, a terrible storm came up and all but destroyed the ship he was on. It seemed totally hopeless. And so Newton, like the others, just waited to die. But somehow, somehow, they survived. Most of them.

Newton believed it was a miracle, and it brought him back to faith. His life was so full of ups and downs as he experienced all kinds of things and as he got farther on in his life and settled down, he wrote a song about his life. And really, it's a song about God. Newton, this is the key I want you to hear. Newton realized that there was nothing he could do to save himself.

He also realized, and I really want you to hear this, that even when he felt lost, he knew that God was still working and never stopped loving him. He didn't know that at the time, but later he could see that God was working. So Newton writes a song. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me I was once lost but now I'm found I was blind but now see, the way we connect with Jesus is by grace and faith. The way we stay connected with Jesus is by grace and faith.

And it's not always easy to remember that. And when we forget, when we get in trouble, communion is a powerful reminder that we are helpless and hopeless unless and until we connect to Jesus. And so communion is

a powerful reminder about remaining and sustaining. We remain in Christ through intentional time with him. And that sustains us in a life that allows us to flourish.

A life of peace, joy and confidence. So as this morning, as we take communion, I want you to join me in thinking about our connection to Jesus. If you need help or have any concerns, Tim's around, I'm around. Many, many people in this room could help you. So just reach out to somebody.

Let me pray, Father. As we prepare to take communion, we're reminded in a powerful way of the importance of remaining and sustaining our relationship. And we thank you for this opportunity to remember who we are and whose we are. As we take the bread and the cup and reminded of the incarnation of Jesus and his willingness to come and to live a perfect life, to become the sacrifice for our imperfect lives. And when we embrace that story, we thank you for a new life and salvation.

We thank you for the cup that reminds us of his blood, the pouring out of his life. So God help us to evaluate our connection today and to do what we need to do to make that connection or to strengthen it. Empower us with your spirit. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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