

Pastor Kyle Mercer
The Fruit of Discipleship

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Series: Disciple
John 15:1-17

**BIG IDEA - DISCIPLESHIP IS DEMONSTRATED BY A LIFE THAT
BEARS SPIRITUAL FRUIT**

Good morning, Two Cities Church. Whether you're here in Winston or down in Lexington, you're probably tired of me saying this, but this is what we're about. We are going to make and mobilize disciples in an environment of prayer and worship, and if you come back in 20 years, we're going to still be doing that.

Here's the thing about discipleship: discipleship is not a nicety; it's a necessity. Just because it's necessary, though, does not mean it's easy. When you think about discipleship, I don't know what you think of. Some of you, when you think of discipleship, think of, "Ah, reading my Bible with somebody else. Praying together with somebody else. Going on a mission trip or a retreat with somebody else."

We love all of those parts of discipleship, but here's what discipleship is also: It's discipleship in the hard places. It's discipleship as you walk with people through their hopes and their hurts. Here's what happens to a lot of us. When somebody we love ends up in sin and suffering... We love them, but here's how we often feel: "I don't know what to do. I don't know if I'm going to get in this and make this thing worse. I don't know how to help." That's why Restore is for you.

You heard Pastor Jordan say Restore is seasonal. Here's what that means. We're doing it twice a year for 10 weeks. For many of you, this is your next step. And I'm excited for you, because there are three reasons you'd want to do Restore. You'd want to do Restore to deal with your own hopes and hurts in your life. You'd want to do Restore just to understand yourself better.

John Calvin, that great theologian from a long time ago, basically said all true knowledge of self is connected to knowledge of God, and all true knowledge of God is connected to knowledge of self. So, through Restore you get to know yourself better, you get to know God better, you get to know your story better, and God's story better.

So, one reason is you might want to know yourself better or want to walk through the hopes and hurts, but here's another thing. Restore can help you better help others. It can help you better minister to others. Here's what I think. I almost want to say *all* of you, but I'm not going to say all of you. I think most of you have never been through anything like Restore. It is going to take you deep into your story to understand your past, and it's going to take you deep into God's Word.

I know that's a lot. You watched the video, you hear me, and you go, "Kyle, I still don't know if it's for me." That's fine. That's why we're having an interest meeting on June 1. This is just to get in the shallow end of the pool, hear a little bit more about it, and see if it's right for you. Pastor Jordan has promised to keep it short on June 1, but after every service he's going to give you a simple version of it and you can better ask, "Is this my next step?" With that said, let's pray and we'll get to work.

Lord, we just want to pray right now for people in here who want to go deeper in discipleship. They want to understand themselves and your Word more. I know that's all of us to some extent, but we ask that you would use Restore to uniquely equip our church to minister to itself and to help, first, ourselves but to help one another walk through sin and suffering. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. We're in a series called *Disciple*. You can type to or turn to John 15. I'll meet you there in a few minutes. Here's what we're doing. In this series we're asking a bunch of questions. Questions are powerful. Questions can redirect your life. Questions can make you cry. Questions can encourage you. In this series (by the way, we're in the fourth week if you're new), we've been asking three different questions, and today we're going to ask a fourth.

In the first week, I got up here and asked, "Are you a disciple?" And I tried to let that sit there. Not "Do you go to church?" Not "Do you call yourself a Christian?" Not "Are you religious?" Not "Are you moral?" Not "Did you grow up in the church?" None of that. Are you a disciple of Jesus? We asked that question.

Then the second week, I got up here and asked, "Are you trying to follow Jesus by yourself?" Is that what you're trying to do? Don't do that. Jesus had a group of disciples, and discipleship happens in relationships, and becoming a disciple happens in community.

In fact, this week, I got a message from someone from our church. Listen. This is just an average, normal dude in our church, and here's what he wrote to me: "Hey, Kyle, I meet with three guys from Two Cities once a week in a DNA Group." Then he said, "This is your fault. We never would have started this without your leadership and encouragement. It has changed our lives. Thank you."

I'm not telling you that so you think I'm great. I'm telling you that because... I'm talking to men and women, but particularly to the men. I am almost completely convinced that most men, even most men in the church, have never been a part of a group of guys that's helping them be more godly.

The third week was, "Does your Christianity cost you anything?" Because Christianity is a horrible hobby. I told you that last week. The whole idea of last week was if you realize that Jesus served you, Jesus sacrificed for you, and Jesus suffered for you... If you realize that just a little bit, then in response... It might at first just be a teensy-weensy, itty-bitty amount, but you're going to want to serve, sacrifice, and suffer for others.

This week, here's the question: *Are you growing?* That's it. Are you growing as a disciple? Most Christians in America aren't, it feels like. They're stale. They're stuck. They're stagnant. By the way, sometimes some of you are like, "Kyle, why are you so direct with us? Why are you so hard on us at times?" Because, it has been said, if you baby Christians, you get baby Christians, and we don't want that.

So, we're going to ask, "Are you growing?" Here's the way Jesus is going to say it in John 15: "Are you bearing fruit? Are you being fruitful?" So, that's where we're going to spend the rest of our time this morning. If you'll turn with me now to John 15, we'll unpack it together. We're going to go through the first 17 verses, but I want to stop in verses 1 and 2. We'll spend the majority of our time there.

"I am the true vine..." Why does Jesus say that? Because there are many false vines. We'll get there. ***"...and my Father is the vinedresser."*** Or a lot of translations say *gardener*. Same thing. Jesus is like, "I'm the Vine, and God the Father is the gardener." ***"Every branch in me..."*** That's you. You're a branch. ***"...that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."***

So, a little background, and then we're going to get back to John 15. This is part of the "I am" statements in the gospel of John. There are seven of them, and we're in the last one right now. Now here's the thing. This is a helpful hack. Whenever God tells us something about himself, he also tells us something about ourselves.

So, if Jesus says, "I am the Light of the World," he's saying, "You're in darkness." If he says, "I am the Bread of Life" and "I am the Living Water," he's saying, "You're hungry and thirsty for meaning, for more, and for me." If he says, "I am the Good Shepherd," he's saying, "You're a sheep." So, he has all of these "I am" statements.

Now, this isn't really that important for you to know, but in the Greek he actually says "I am, I am." Why am I telling you that? Because the "I am" statements are not just like, "Oh, that's neat. He says that seven times in John," and whatever. The "I am" statements point back to the second book of your Bible and Moses' interaction with God in the burning bush. Do you remember this?

Moses is wandering, and he sees this burning bush. It says he turns aside, and God basically says, "Moses, I'm going to set my people free." Moses is like, "This is so awesome." Then he's like, "And I'm sending you," and Moses is like, "Eh, I'm not that person. Not as awesome." Remember what Moses then says next?

It's interesting that it took us this long in the Bible to get here, but he says to God, "What's your name?" It's like, "We're in Exodus and we don't know God's name?" He asks, "God, what's your name?" He says, "Because I can't just go and say Bush sent me, because then they would say '41 or 43?'" "The band from the 90s?" "No! A burning bush." Let me show you. This is Exodus 3.

"Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses..." Here it is. This is what Jesus is picking up on, right here. ***"... 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"***

This is deep. When God introduces himself and says, "I Am Who I Am," what does that mean? It means God is the self-defining, self-existing God that every person must deal with. God is the foundation of reality. In other words (and I love you, so don't hear this more intensely than I mean it), you will either deal with God in *this* life or you'll deal with him in the *next*. There's no escaping or avoiding dealing with God. That's what he's saying.

Now, this is hard for modern people, because modern people can escape anything. "Mom, I don't like this school." "Great. You get to move." "I don't like this job." "Great. We'll move to another job." There is no escaping you having a face-to-face meeting with God. God is like, "You're going to have to deal with me. I am reality itself." In fact, the Bible begins with the assumption, "In the beginning God..." No defense for, no apologetics of, just the assumption that God exists.

Okay. So, Jesus picks up this imagery, and he says, "I am." By the way, Jesus is the only religious leader who can say, "I *am*." Every other religious leader has to say, "I *was*." Buddha, Joseph Smith, Muhammad... They can say, "I *was*." Only Jesus says, "I *am*." Here's the other thing Jesus says. To understand this is important. He says, "I *am*," not "I will be what you want me to be," which is what Americans want.

We want "Jesus is my copilot." People want the Jesus of *South Park* and *Family Guy*, if you've ever seen that. Here's what we tend to do. God said, "I'm going to make you in my image," and we said, "We'll return the favor. We'll make Jesus in *our* image." And we domesticate Jesus. Here's what Jesus is for the average American: a bigger, better version of themselves who is occasionally, maybe, slightly bothered by a few things they do. Jesus says, "Hold on. No. I am the true Vine."

So, here's what we're going to do. We're going to talk about what it means to bear fruit. Let's go back to verses 1 and 2. I want to show you this. I wanted you to get that. He's grabbing this imagery, and he says this: ***"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."***

Okay. Here's what we need to talk about. The main idea in John 15, no question, is being fruitful. It's mentioned three times in the first two verses. The word *fruit*, at some level, is mentioned seven times in the passage we're going to look at today. By the way, what does it mean to be fruitful? It means Jesus is changing you and using you to change others.

By the way, your fruit should be visible. Your fruit should not be hard to find. We're looking at the tree of your life, going, "Is that...?" This is what parents do all the time with their kids. It's like, "Is there any little piece of fruit anywhere that we can say there's spiritual life there?" By the way, this whole idea of being fruitful also fits really great in our Multiply Initiative where the main verse for this whole year is "God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'"

So, here's what I want to ask you. Don't answer this out loud, obviously. This is just between you and the Lord, but think about this for a second. Here's my first question for us today: Do you *want* to be fruitful? You have to *want* to be fruitful. I think the average American, even the average American Christian... They want to be successful or comfortable, but I don't know if their first desire is to be fruitful.

Thank God for successful people. We're not against that. And thank God for modern comforts. We're supposed to enjoy our lives. There *is* feasting and sabbath and rest and enjoyment of God's creation. But here's what I want you to consider doing. Just praying about this, going...

Ask the "How can I be comfortable? How can I be successful?" question. Can you make that question second or third in your life and ask *this* question first: "How could I be fruitful in this area?" It's such a powerful question. Imagine asking this question. "How could my marriage be more fruitful? How could my time at work be more fruitful? How could my time with my children or my parents be more fruitful?"

Here's what's so powerful about this. I really believe this. If you honestly ask God that question, if you sit on the edge of your bed or get on your knees and say, "God, I want my home to be more fruitful..." Here's what happens when you genuinely ask the question: the path appears. That's the weird thing about asking. You'll get the answer. It will usually be a bunch of things you don't want to do. That's how that works.

But here's the problem with you and me. For some of you, your life isn't really fruitful; it's just full. What's the number-one thing everybody says to everybody? "I'm just so busy." I try not to say that, but I'm busy. It's hard. I'm not saying my life is any more full than your life.

A version of this may have happened to you this week. This was the middle of the day. I can't even remember what day this was...Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. Margy calls me, and we literally have to talk for...I don't want to exaggerate it...at least 10, if not 15 minutes.

We were trying to figure out how to coordinate our lives that evening. "*This* kid is going *here* but getting picked up *here*, but *this* kid... They're bringing a friend, so don't forget to pick up the friend. Well, they need to change clothes. Well, what are we doing for dinner?" This was one night of our lives. Everything is just full. My challenge to you guys is... It's great that your life is full, but can it also be fruitful?

On the other end of things, some of you... This is more the middle schoolers, the high schoolers, the college students, the young singles, and dare I say, the empty nesters and retirees. Is your life fruitful or is your life just fun? You know, you're playing a lot of pickleball. It's going great.

God wants your life to be fun. That's great. I'm glad you're having a lot of fun. I just think that's... When I think about us, for the average American, our life is full, hoping one day our life will be fun, skipping over our life being fruitful. Okay. With the rest of our time, I want to show you from this text five ways that your life can be more fruitful than it is. We'll take them quickly.

The first one is so simple we could teach this in kids' ministry to 5-year-olds, but what I'm learning, years into this now, is sometimes the most simple things are the most profound things. So, here's the first simple way. You don't even have to write

this down. *If you want your life to be fruitful, you have to connect it to the right vine.* That's it.

I already said this to you, but if you look back at verse 1, Jesus says, "I am the true Vine." Why does he say, "I'm the true Vine"? Because there are false vines. Let me tell you a couple of false vines in your life. By the way, I should probably define what a vine is. A *vine* is a source of life, or you might say a source of strength and satisfaction.

Here's what's interesting. In the Old Testament, God uses the imagery of a vine, but guess who's always the vine in the Old Testament? Israel. With your Community Group or DNA Group, go read Isaiah, chapter 5. God is like, "Israel, you are supposed to be a vine, and you're not a great vine."

By the way, that's the whole Old Testament story. The whole Old Testament story is "Israel failed, now Jesus is going to finish." That's the story of the *New Testament*. So, Jesus is taking on this idea and going, "Actually, Israel is not the vine. I'm the truer and better Vine."

Let me tell you some vines we tend to attach ourselves to...the vine of *sin*. Everybody sins because they think it's going to bring life to them. You've never in your whole life sinned out of duty, like, "I didn't want to do it, but I had 15 minutes and I decided to." No. Here's the thing about it. If we connect ourselves to the vine of sin, we think it's going to give life, but it ends up taking life.

This is a PG-13 story, but basically, when I was doing ministry at Duke, I had all of these fraternity Bible studies. I didn't call them Bible studies, because no Duke student wants to go to a Bible study. Everybody there thinks they're a leader, so I said, "It's a spiritual leadership study," and then they came. Then when they got there I was like, "It's just a Bible study, but welcome."

This one guy messages me, and he says, "Kyle, I joined your spiritual leadership study because I got addicted to pornography." This guy is not a believer. He's writing to me. He said, "I tried to talk to my dad about it, and my dad said, 'Don't worry about it. It's normal.'" He said, "The only problem is I can't stop looking at it, and it's making me question my sexual orientation. I'm coming to you because I need help."

I know that might be a little bit of an extreme example, but it's the perfect example of how we look for something to give us life. We think in the short term it's going to give life, but in the long term it just sucks life from us.

Okay. This is so simple, but there's a second place where some of you are looking for something to be a vine, and it's why you're so miserable. I'm going to say this, and

some of you are going to go, "Kyle, I got what I need; thank you," and you can head out early. Here's what it is. Some of you are looking for other people in your life to be the vine.

People are just branches. The most miserable marriages are where one or both people are looking, and it's like, "You have to be a vine for me." By the way, how do you know if you're making someone into a vine? I can give you a little personal litmus test. Here it is: they constantly disappoint you all the time. If that's happening, most likely you've made them into a vine.

This is why... I actually watch this. This particularly happens in politics. People idolize someone and then turn around and demonize them. Why? Because everybody is going to let you down, because everyone is sinful, broken, finite, and fragile. Here's another way you can know that either someone has made *you* into a vine... Because every once in a while, you're just going to need to say, "Listen. I am not Jesus. I can't meet all of your needs. I'm not omniscient and omnipresent. I can't do this."

Here's how you either know you've turned somebody into a vine or someone has turned *you* into a vine. You know you've turned somebody into a vine if you are wearing them out. Parents do this with their kids. "You've got to play seven sports and get your GPA at 4.2 because you have to get into Wake." It's like, "Why? You're wearing me out, Mom and Dad. That's *your* dream."

This is why unhealthy parents, especially unhealthy moms, can never let their kids go and grow up. "You're a vine. You can't be a branch that goes somewhere else and bears fruit. You have to be my vine." What is codependency? Codependency is somebody else becoming my vine.

People look for sin to be a vine, they look for people to be a vine, and they look for *opportunities* to be a vine. I won't spend a lot of time on this. We talk about this all the time. When you're young you think this. You think, "If I could just get into medical school, it'll be a vine to me. It'll bring so much life and strength." "If I could just get the right job..." "If I could just get in the right neighborhood..." "If I could just get into the right school, the right career path..."

All right. The first thing is very simple, but it's profound. If you're not connected to the right vine, you're not going to have life flowing through you, and you're not going to bear fruit. Secondly (this is not as fun to talk about), *if you're going to be fruitful, it's going to be painful*. I'll show you this. We'll go back to verses 1 and 2. You might say, "Well, why isn't everybody fruitful?" The same reason that everyone is not fit. If it was easy, everyone would do it. It's painful.

All right. Here it is. John 15:1: ***"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes..."*** That's the word of pain. He cuts. ***"...that it may bear more fruit."***

God is showing up in this passage as a gardener. Now, you might think of God as a gardener, and it may give you warm, fuzzy feelings. Let me tell you what a gardener is. A gardener is a judge. I should say a *good* gardener is a judge. A good gardener walks around his or her garden and inspects everything and says, "*That's* not doing well. *That's* doing well. Oh, that's doing *really* well. Let's cut away so it will be more fruitful. Oh, that's *not* doing well. Let's cut away so that some fruit will come up."

Here's maybe another thing: God, as the gardener, gets to decide if your life is fruitful. We all want to go, "Oh, my life is fruitful." Is that what God would say? Here's the thing. Let me talk about how God prunes. Well, first, what is pruning? *Pruning* is when you cut away that which hinders growth so something can grow some more.

Normally, when you're pruning, you're cutting away things that are dead or things that are diseased, but also, at times, you're cutting away some healthy leaves so we can have more fruit. Let me tell you three ways God prunes us and three purposes for pruning. I mean, there are a hundred ways God prunes us. I'm just trying to think through "What are the biggest ways we see?"

The number-one way God prunes us is by the Holy Spirit bringing conviction to some area of our lives. The longer you live, the more you realize this. Things one day will bother you that didn't use to bother you. That might be the Holy Spirit. By the way, don't just think of deep and dark things. Yes, God needs to prune the deep sins of your life, but you may be like, "I watch too much TV. I don't want to spend the last two hours every night... God wants to cut this away."

I actually know a pastor... He never talks about it. He doesn't have a TV. He has told me before, "It's just a personal legalism for me." He said, "Sometime in my 40s I just realized if I didn't have a TV, I could get a lot more work done, so I just got rid of all of my TVs." He said, "My wife has one TV in this area, and she watches it, but I don't watch any TV." Just God pruning. It might be how you spend your weekends. Who knows? God brings conviction that way.

Secondly, God prunes you through other people, both through their example and their correction. Here's what happens. Every once in a while, you go over to someone's house, and you watch how they interact as a married couple or how they are with their kids, and you get in the car with your wife or your husband and say, "What are we doing? What's wrong with us? We don't have what they have, and they have what

they have because they've cut some things out to make that possible. It's time for us to cut those things out."

Sometimes God speaks to you through the correction of another person. That has happened to me many times in my life. God just says something to you... It might be through your spouse, through your kids, or through someone at your Community Group, or whatever. They say something, and you're like, "You're right. God wants to cut this away."

The third way is the way most people think about. God prunes us through putting us in difficult circumstances and situations, through trials and tragedies and suffering. I've seen this for 20 years now, that your greatest ministry will almost always come out of your greatest sin, suffering, struggle, or weakness.

Think about the Zappias who were with us two months ago. They have a nationwide marriage ministry that happened because they had the worst year of marriage you could ever imagine. They had to be completely pruned individually and brought back together and then pruned together, and now they're having this great ministry.

Okay. So, those are three of the ways of *how* God prunes you. There are three things I want you to know *about* pruning, though. First, pruning is painful but seasonal. Pruning is always painful, obviously. It's cutting away. You could just Google this yourself or ask ChatGPT, like, "Tell me everything you know about pruning." One of the first things it'll tell you is it doesn't happen all the time. Thank God. There are certain seasons of your life where God is pruning you.

The second thing you have to know about pruning is pruning is almost always preparation. There's a purpose in the pruning, even if you don't know what the purpose is. And you won't oftentimes. You're like, "I'm going through this horrible situation in my life, and I've got this sickness" or "My kid is breaking my heart" or "I lost my job," or whatever it is.

We say this all the time. You can't see it through the windshield, but you'll later see it through the rearview mirror. You have to believe there's a purpose in the pain and a lesson in the loss. The one thing we humans cannot handle... We can handle a lot. It's amazing, actually, how strong and tough we are. What we cannot handle is meaningless suffering. It'll make you mad. It'll make you *go* mad.

Here's the third one. This is a very important Christian perspective. When you're being pruned, God is not punishing you. If you're a normal person with a normal conscience, when something bad happens you will scour your conscience. If you find a lump somewhere, you will scour your conscience. "Have I done anything? Is God mad at me? Why would this happen in my life?"

You have to know before it comes that any pruning and any pain that God allows into your life is not punishment. Jesus Christ was punished in our place for our sins. Jesus was punished. If something happens in *your* life, it's just a pruning. So, the first thing is we have to be connected to the right vine. The second thing is we have to be willing to endure the pain of pruning, and we can only do that if we know it's not punishment, it has a purpose, and it's seasonal.

Here's the third one. This is going to sound simple. *If you want to be fruitful, you need to see yourself as a branch.* Don't take yourself too seriously, by the way. You're not the vine. You are not the vine. The most unhappy people I know, by the way, are the people who are trying to satisfy themselves with themselves. You're not a vine. I'll show you what he says about branches. Follow this. Verse 2:

"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

So, he starts talking about branches, and you'll see this in a few more verses. He's going to say there are two purposes for branches: fruit or fire. Kind of intense. He's like, "There are two purposes for branches: to bear fruit or to burn in the fire." That's what he says. Think about it. He's like, "If it's a great branch and it's connected to the vine, then its purpose is to bear fruit. If it's not connected to the vine, it's dead. What's its purpose? Let's go burn it." That's what he's saying.

Now, here are two questions you might ask. First, why is he talking about this? Why is he using different branches? In context... This is why it's so helpful. When reading the Bible, it's the same principle as buying real estate. Location, location, location is most important.

Here's what's interesting. In chapter 13 (which is what begins this sermon that we're now jumping into that Jesus is giving his disciples), the last thing that happens is Judas leaves to betray Jesus. So, what is he writing about? He's writing about Judas and the future Judases, people who say they're branches but aren't connected to the vine and bear no fruit.

Here's where we get serious. We're serious all the time, but we're going to get serious again for just a minute here. Let me ask you this question. Maybe this is a question within the question. Are you faking your fruit? Judas faked fruit for three years. One of the most startling things is not that Judas betrayed Jesus but that no one saw it coming. Remember that at the Lord's Supper?

"Who will betray you? Is it I, Lord? Is it I? Is it I?" They all said the like. Why? Because no one looked at Judas and went, "He's a fake follower of Jesus. We know it." Here's what happens. Again, I'm going to talk to our middle schoolers and high schoolers who might be in here. You're going to have to decide early... I didn't have this issue. I became a Christian. My life was so transformed. I didn't have the vocabulary. I didn't grow up in church. I didn't know any of that.

But now I'm watching this next generation. You middle schoolers and high schoolers... If you want to, you can fake it. I mean, you've heard people pray so you can fake your prayers. You know how to talk about struggling with sin when you're just giving in to it. You know all the Christianese. You know how to hide big sins and trade them in for little ones. You have to decide, "I need to actually be connected to the vine, not try to staple and duct-tape fruit to a dead tree." That's the image.

Now, here's the other last thing. Some people who have a sensitive conscience read this passage, and they wonder, "Could I lose my salvation? Is that what happens here? If I'm not bearing fruit, he rips me off the vine and throws me into the fire?" No. The Bible does not teach that you can lose your salvation, but you *can* lose your *assurance* of salvation.

Do you know what that is? Assurance is the feeling you have when your life is fruitful. You're like, "Man! I'm changing." You don't mean this in a prideful way, but you're like, "God is using me in the lives of other people. As far as I can tell I'm..." We could be self-deceived. The Bible says that. "But as far as I can tell, I'm a believer."

But when you have no fruit for a season...maybe you're still connected to the vine, but you have no fruit for a season...it will make you question if you're really a Christian. You'll wake up at 3:00 in the morning and be like, "Can somebody who has the Holy Spirit inside of them do that? Can somebody who's born again and going to heaven live with this unrepentant sin for two years?"

What Jesus is saying is his desire for your life is to be fruitful and not to fake fruit. This is why one of our student ministry's main plumb lines is "Give us the real answer, not the right answer." If you've been around for two years, we know you know the right answer. We want the *real* answer.

Which leads to the fourth one. *If you are going to bear fruit, you need to connect to the vine daily, or constantly*, whatever word you want to use there. I'll show you this. This is what most people think of... When they read John 15, they actually think of verses 4-8.

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are

the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit..."

Jesus said there are two types of Christians: those who bear fruit and those who bear a lot of fruit.

"...for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

Again, Jesus wants us to be fruitful. He wants us, by the way, to be fruitful in our character and in our ministry. In fact, a great thing to do this week with your Community Group or DNA Group is read through the fruit of the Spirit. That would be a great question. "Am I being fruitful? Well, is the fruit of the Spirit in my life...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control?"

By the way, here's another great thing to know, just for a perspective thing. If God is going to grow you in the fruit of the Spirit, he's going to bring people and circumstances into your life that make you want to react the exact opposite of the fruit of the Spirit. That's how it's developed in you.

I wish it worked like this. I wish you could just sit on your bed and go, "God, please make me patient," and then you open your eyes. "Did it happen? Am I patient?" It doesn't happen that way. The way it happens is God brings in people and circumstances that test my patience. Or you would like to be a person of self-control. Well, then get ready for God to bring circumstances and situations into your life where it's going to cause you to not want to be in self-control, so you're going to have to flex that spiritual muscle.

Okay. Jesus says the phrase that you're probably familiar with if you grew up in church or know this passage at all. He says, "Abide in me." Again, we never use that phrase anymore. When was the last time you used the word *abide*? Here's what it means: to dwell, to stay, or to remain. He's like, "I want you to have this constant back-and-forth relationship with me where you know my Word and you're thinking about it, and then you're talking to me about my Word, and then you know more of my Word."

So then I thought, "Okay, is there anywhere today that we actually abide?" Because I think it's helpful to go, "Okay, where are we doing this? So this is what it would feel like if we did this spiritually." Here's the number-one way I think the average modern American abides: on their cell phone. They have a constant back-and-forth, moment-by-moment relationship with their cell phone.

The average American spends four and a half hours just on their phone. This is not your iPad. This is not your screen. This is not your computer. This is not your TV. This is your phone. The average American touches their phone to check it 205 times a day, which is just about every five minutes they're awake.

When I heard that... "Okay, the average person touches their phone every five minutes they're awake." I was like, "Yes, they do." Have you ever given somebody your phone just for a moment? The other day Margy was like, "Hey, I want to show you something." After like two minutes I was like, "Give it back, please." My whole life is there. "Someone might text me. I might get an email. Give it back to me." Right?

What would it look like if we treated our relationship with Jesus like we treated our phone? I know that sounds 10 percent cheesy, but I'm serious. Like, we would have this back-and-forth relationship where we're thinking about the Word of God and talking to him about it.

What if every five minutes as you grabbed your phone you said, "Lord, help me be fruitful this week. Open my eyes to where I can be fruitful." You're just thinking about it, and then he brings something else to mind. He brings another Scripture to mind, and you start praying over *that*.

I want to show you the connection between the Word and prayer. I don't do this often. I want to read an old quote from George Müller, a godly man who started a ton of orphanages and basically never asked for money. He just prayed for money and led everything through prayer.

This is what he said. "When we pray, we speak to God. Now, prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire..." No one talks like this anymore. Look at this. To pray you have to have a measure of strength and godly desire.

"...and the season, therefore, when this exercise of the soul..." That's what he calls prayer. "...can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the Word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, [and] to reprove us."

What would it look like if you abided with Jesus the way you most likely abide with your phone? Which leads to the last thing we're going to talk about. We've talked about a lot of different things about this. Jesus is going to completely switch the paradigm for a moment.

This whole time, he has been saying, "My Father is the gardener. I'm the Vine. You're the branches." He has been doing this kind of vine/branch thing. Well, he moves from fruit to talking about friendship, which is the final thing we're going to talk about. *If you're going to be fruitful, you have to have a real friendship with Jesus.*

Let me show you this. These are Jesus' own words. ***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."*** Again, Jesus is talking about going to the cross and saying, "I'm going to lay down my life because you're my friend."

He says, ***"You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing..."*** The definition of friendship, by the way, is to be invited into someone's life. I hate to break it to you. If you don't have their cell, you're not their friend. If they're like, "Email me," it's like, "Okay, we're not friends. Great. I got it."

Seriously. Having someone's cell phone is the sign of access, immediate, instant access. It's the sign of friendship. He says, ***"You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."***

I've told you this before, but the first time the word *friendship* shows up in the Bible is when God calls Abraham his friend, and he calls Abraham his friend after he shares a secret. That's exactly what friends do. Maybe that's the number-one thing friends do. They share things with each other of great importance. That's what Jesus is doing.

He says, ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you..."*** He goes back from friendship. He goes "fruit, friendship, fruit." ***"...that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide [remain, stay], so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another."***

Here's what we're going to talk about as we close: bearing fruit is not a formula; it's about having a friendship with Jesus Christ. Don't fake it. Don't try to have a formula. Instead, have a deep friendship with Jesus Christ. See, maybe because I grew up as a nominal Catholic... I grew up in a religious environment. I'd go to church. It's bells. It's smells. It's little homilies. It's eucharist everywhere. It's stained glass everywhere.

Literally, I was 16 years old, and no one had ever told me, "Hey, Kyle..." When I was 16, someone told me this. "Did you know Christianity is more about a relationship than a religion?" I was like, "I had no idea." Jesus ends by going, "Guys, I am a friend."

According to John 12, he says, "I'm not just a friend who loves you; I'm a friend who's going to die for you."

Then in John 12, he says, "If I die..." He gives this illustration of wheat. He says, "A grain of wheat has to die, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." So here's the thing. Jesus Christ experienced an enormous amount of pain and punishment to make us fruitful, and the death of Christ has been bearing fruit for 2,000 years.

So, here's how I want to close. I just think of three different types of people in this room. For some of you, you need to give your life to Jesus Christ today, and for the first time, you need to be a branch that is deeply connected to the vine that is Jesus Christ so that life could flow through you and you could experience that. That's some of you.

Some of you, I'm guessing a large part in this room... Here's what *you* need to do. You don't need to give your life to Christ. You already are a Christian. You need to figure out what it looks like for you to be more fruitful. Not just have fun, not just have a full life, not just be comfortable, not just be successful, but what would it mean for you to be fruitful?

Finally, guys, I feel like I'd be remiss not to do this. As I was talking today about pruning... You know, "There's something painful happening in my life." By the way, it's not a sin to be pruned. Pruning is what God is doing to prepare you for something next, but pruning can be painful. Pruning can be confusing. So, if you're going through a season of pruning, we want to pray for you.

So here's what I want to ask. If for some reason you would say, "I'm in a season of pruning," can I ask you to stand? We want to close this service by praying over you. There's no shame. If you're like, "I'm in a season of being pruned..." Yeah, we're going to pray for you guys. There's no shame in it. We want to come alongside of you. We had a lot of people last service just say, "We're in a season of pruning."

Thank you, guys. We're just going to pray over you. If you're near them, you can put your hand on them. We just want to pray that God would comfort them in this season, that they would believe the gospel, that this is not punishment; this is pruning, and that God has a plan. Let's pray.

Lord, as men and women are standing up... It's amazing in this room. You never know people's stories. You never know what they're going through. Some people are standing because they're going through some kind of suffering. Some people are standing probably because, I'm guessing, their kid is suffering or their dad is suffering or they're just stuck in a hard season, Lord, and they feel like you're cutting away.

Lord, I pray that they would know the truths of Scripture that when you prune, it's painful but not punishment, that you have a purpose in the pruning, that, Jesus, you experienced the punishment, now we experience the pruning. I pray you would encourage them. I pray you'd bring people around them. I pray we would bear burdens with them as they're in this season of pruning. We thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.