

Series: Receiving life by believing in God's Son (a Gospel of John study)

Sermon Text: John 15:14-17 (mini-series: "Abiding Undisturbed") **Key Word:** Fruit

(*The accounts in chapters 14-17 are only found in John)

Who hates mushy or rotten **bananas**? I know some of you weirdos like them and they can be used to make yummy chocolate chip banana bread; but I wish fruit stayed fresh longer or that I could learn how many pieces to buy, so I can enjoy them before they spoil. Artificial preservatives are often used to improve longevity and appearance, but there's only so much to be done once fruit is disconnected from the vine, right? In John 15, Jesus equates growing healthy fruit to growing healthy churches. He isn't impressed when we prioritize quantity, appearance, and production over quality, character, and connection. Jesus lived with urgency yet was never in a hurry. Hurry can cause imbalances like when we glorify 'preaching and outreach' to the neglect of things like 'discipleship and care'. A sure sign of trying to grow quicker than God intends is when we use artificial methods and measures to appear healthy. Wouldn't it be odd to drive by a field and see screens next to each plant affirming them and instructing them how to grow? If crops don't grow like that, why are trying to grow people this way? If the internet has proven anything, it's that information alone doesn't make things better. It may be enough for robots, but humans need relationships (families) to shape and support our who we are. We need more connection, not more content on what to believe, how to behave, who to follow, or how to navigate the latest crisis. Think about it...God not only sent Words; He provided a person to show us the way along with His indwelling Spirit to empower and guide our path! **I'm excited about our John 15** series which we've subtitled: "Abiding Undisturbed" because we'll learn how disciples are people who...enjoy attachment with God and others (**9-13**); bear fruit that remains (**14-17**); endure hatred from the world (**18-25**); and witness when persecuted (**15:26-16:4**). Today, we'll focus on this...

BIG IDEA: Disciples are people who bear fruit that remains.

How many of you have heard Casting Crowns sing, "[Jesus Friend of Sinners?](#)" I probably mention it too much, but it's been my go to jam to remember who Jesus is to me and who He wants me to be to others. It's hard to believe God wants to be my friend, yet *verses 14-15* say, *you are my friends if you do what I command you* (support my aims/goals). *No longer do I call you servants, for they don't know what their master is doing* (his ways/purposes); *but I have called you friends, for all that I've heard from my Father I've made known to you*. Despite how it feels, God doesn't treat His children like fearful, uninformed *servants*. He doesn't hide His intentions, nor keep us in the dark. He

is superior in every way yet doesn't view power and authority as something to be clung to or flaunted (cf. Philippians 2). He proved all this by becoming one of us, living among us, and calling us *friends*! Isn't it remarkable that the highest and holiest being offers a "peer relationship" to those He created, despite our past rebellion and ongoing struggles to support His aims? There's truly no greater honor!

Jesus renews our view of *friendship* in a world of fickle *friends* who drop us in one click if we disagree or show the slightest empathy for their perceived enemy. This world keeps detailed public records of all our wrongs and sums us up by our worst moments. Past financial problems? Fear not, your credit score won't forget! Served time for a youthful error? Don't worry, Google will inform all future employers, landlords, and busybodies. In a punitive world, we all need a restorative *friend* like Jesus, who canceled our debt instead of canceling us. He invites enemies to a table His Dad prepared to nourish and support transformation in a family atmosphere. As far back as Genesis 15 and Psalm 23 we're told God's mercy and grace compel Him to prefer restorative justice over punitive justice.

Our next verses remind me of childhood games where we picked teams. Everyone lined up hoping to get picked by the 2 sportiest (bossiest) people. We'd smile and shout "pick me" while telling them why they should. Such experiences condition us for performance-based *friendship* and make it hard to believe what He said in *verse 16, you did not choose me, but I chose you*. Jesus offers *friendship* based on His unchanging *choice*, not our fickle moods. While I don't fully grasp this doctrine, I'm super glad Jesus said it! Some think it implies we have no *choices* or God predetermines every move, but we know better because John 13-17 is about humanity being restored, not diminished. This is the Old Testament God in a New Testament body saying, "I fully know you and your struggles, yet I still want you on my team! I'm drafting you from a place of love that requires no begging or striving for perfection. I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (cf. Hebrews 13:5-8).

Why did Jesus make such a big deal about the permanency of our relationship with Him? Because healthy fruit requires constant connection to the vine. Look back at what He said in verse 5, "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." Now, consider the rest of *verse 16 and verse 17, I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, 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*. Sometimes we get so excited about God *choosing* us to be His *friends* that we forget the goal of our *friendship* with Him is help us become *friends* with sinners and His partners in restoring creation to all He intended. Pastor Bruce Milne said, "It's a mark of a worldly church and a

worldly discipleship when we're content with short-lived 'fruit' that feeds the fallen appetite for praise, but effects no long-term changes. Fruit that honors God is fruit that will last and bring glory."

I'm blessed with pastor friends from just about every denomination, and we often talk about how dangerous it is for churches to adopt worldly definitions of success. Recently, we've been discussing how easy it is to measure the wrong things. Sure, it helps to know how many chairs we need, who has been saved, and who needs to be baptized; but it seems best to quantify success by standards Jesus values most...the lives and stories behind the numbers; church partnerships, restored marriages; children adopted into Christ-centered families; widows served; addicts set free; prayers answered; how we've shown up during distress; how often we're involved in forgiving, reconciling, and helping people develop. How often we exhibit the fruit of love from 1 Corinthians 13--patience, kindness, not envying or boasting, not arrogant or rude, not insisting on our way, not irritable or resentful, rejoicing in truth not wrongdoing, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things. Instead of measuring numbers, we should be measure how often we exhibit the Spiritual fruit found in Galatians 5--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In John 15, Jesus said these things matter most! The **fruit** (product) of relationship with Him--what we measure--is how our activities **bear fruit that abides** (remains, stands the test of time). Such a focus will transform our **prayers** from selfish, short-sighted demands to asking for things God cares about and for His will to be done. And most importantly, such a focus will help us do what is supremely important above all things--**loving one another**. I'll leave you with **3 Questions** to ponder this week: #1) What kind of friend is God to you? #2) What kind of friend are you to others? #3) Will the fruit of your friendships endure and stand the test of time?

Let's pray: Father, help us not to build your church with flimsy materials. Sadly, churches and big named pastors have given Jesus a bad name by constructing platforms and systems that got bigger than their character could sustain. While the internet has magnified their failures and makes us think all churches are like that, the reality is there are thousands of no-named churches around the world doing exactly what we're supposed to do...reaching and caring for those you give us! My prayer for such churches, especially ours is what the Apostle Paul envisioned in Ephesians 4:13-14 (NLT), "*...that we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we'll be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ...no longer immature like children... not tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching ...not influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.*" In Jesus name, we ask you to make us a John 15 church that values attachment more than appearance. Amen.

Let's sing: "Jesus, Thank You"

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Laying down our lives:** Referring to John 15:13 Pastor Chuck Swindoll wrote, "While this verse has in view the act of Jesus dying in the place of all humanity, His sacrifice illustrates an important principle. Love for a friend doesn't keep a record of sacrifice; this kind of love values the other more than self so that sacrifice becomes a matter of small significance... As a young man, I wanted to have as many companions as possible. I mistakenly called these casual companions 'friends.' But as I matured, I realized that being friendly is not the same as being a friend. We should be liberal with our kindnesses; however, genuine and deep friendship is costly. Therefore, I now choose my close friends wisely, because I realize that I do not have inexhaustible resources to sacrifice. I have only so much to give in support of another's endeavors."
- **Friendship with Jesus:** "As a young boy, I enjoyed the company of older men who treated me like a man; and for a time, I felt like their equals. However, whenever we got into an automobile, I was reminded that I was not their peer... So it is with Christ. He elevates us to the status of "friend," He shares with us the details of His redemptive plan for the world, and He calls us to stand beside Him in accomplishing it. He treats us like equals even though we can never actually be His peers. Intimacy between friends affords little room for secrets. And when friends share every detail of life, regardless of how embarrassing or scandalous, opportunities for recovery, healing, and growth abound." Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Chosen and appointed:** "Their standing and relationship with him is a matter of grace. Therein, however, lies the ultimate encouragement in mission. We go, not because we are worthy, or equipped, or attractive, or skilled, or experienced, or in any way suitable and appropriate. We go because we have been summoned and sent. Since he has called us he will equip and enable us for our witness. As with Israel his choice is with a view to service. We are chosen to go and bear fruit." Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Lasting fruit:** "He has come so that we can bear fruit that will last (verse 16), whether in terms of a single life changed because we loved somebody as Jesus loved us, or in terms of a single decision that we had to take, a single task we had to perform, through which, though we couldn't see it at the time, the world became a different place." Professor NT Wright
- **Abiding enables endurance:** "That there are those who respond with a sudden burst of enthusiasm and then die away is, as Jesus himself acknowledges, a regrettable fact (Mt. 13:20–21; cf. Jn. 6:66). When we 'remain in Christ' we are in such harmony with God's purpose that the yearning of our hearts accords with his divine concerns and so prayer is answered 'according to his will' (1 Jn. 5:14) ... where hearts are set to conform to his will, and open to share his yearning for the world, prayer's potential is limitless." Pastor Bruce Milne
- **Looking to Jesus:** There will be moments, if you haven't had them already, where trials will cause you to second guess everything. We're tempted to say, "*If this is God's will, why is it so tough or painful or seemingly endless?*" Such moments are survived by remembering who has

called us into service and what that looked like for Him. Was Jesus' life easy and painless, and were all His problems resolved quickly and neatly? No! Consider this... Prior to Satan tempting Him in the wilderness, Jesus' Father spoke these words at His baptism, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am pleased.*" Immediately after, the Spirit that settled on Him during baptism led Him into a 40-day wilderness torture! What got Jesus through that? No doubt, He recalled everything that happened at His baptism, including the audible and physical love of the Father and the Spirit. When following Jesus gets difficult, as He promised it will in the next section, what will get us through? We can recall the day Jesus saved us (proof we've been made new); or we can recall our own baptism (like Jesus', it conveyed God's approval); or we can recall Jesus has **chosen** us and **appointed** us (set us apart) to be on His team and follow His footsteps. That's what I do when I start dreaming of jobs that would be less stressful than being a pastor. Sometimes, I even recall the day a group of pastors came together with our entire congregation and ordained me for ministry. Of course, it also helps me to remember my life isn't just about me, my agenda, and me figuring things out on my own. I'm part of a family into which I need to lean for gospel support, encouragement, and partnership. I'm no longer alone! Not only has the life, death, and resurrection of Christ permanently reconnected me with my live-giving Creator; but it also reconnects me with others who've been redeemed and reconciled to God. I'm not only a child and friend of God, but His amazing graces make it possible for me despite many flaws and failures, to have deep and lasting friendships with those who've also been included in the family of God.

- **Biblical productivity:** To Jesus, discipleship is a life-long and eternal friendship with the All-Mighty Creator that **bears fruit that abides** (remains, lasts). Beginning in verse 1, Jesus painted a picture of His Father as a happy gardener tending to one true vine (Jesus) with branches (His people) that were attached and **bearing eternal fruit**. Sadly, this isn't how some view the work of the church. As we learned 2 weeks ago, "fruit" is a biblical metaphor that speaks of what's produced when we are connected to Jesus, the vine. It's a product of attachment, not something we force by effort. I'm not saying Christians shouldn't work hard, it's more about the focus of our work. Think back to the illustration John Crabb used...when we walk by a field, we don't hear the plants grunting and groaning to make themselves grow. In a field, we observe creation as God intended...soaking up His blessings and functioning as God made it to function. Friends, the secret to biblical productivity is all about where you focus...our attention must always be on abiding, not production. An old phrase we used to say is, "*Focus on the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves.*" A better phrase was given by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "*By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*"
- **Different operating standards:** The question must always be about, "What kind of **fruit** are we aiming for?" Do we seek **fruit that abides** (remains, endures) or are we an "*end justifies the means*" kind of people? Christians must resist operating in the detached ways of unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says, "*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*" Are there times I'm tempted to "*do things my way*" or "*return evil for evil*"? Yes, but decades of following Jesus have opened my eyes to

how short-sighted my understanding can be. Scheming, manipulating, and taking short cuts may seem satisfying, but *eternal fruit* is only produced by following the ways of Jesus, even if they get us killed or make us wish we were dead.

- **Crucial contextual considerations:** “First, this passage has meaning for believers only. Any nonbeliever trying to apply these truths will be hopelessly confused. Jesus was not describing how one becomes a Christian, but how one lives as a Christian after placing his or her trust in Him. Second, Jesus draws heavily on the metaphor of a vineyard, a powerful symbol with roots running deep into the soil of Israel’s history (Ps. 80:8-9; Isa. 5:1-7; Ezek. 15:1-5; Hos. 10:1). Third, the primary subject of Christ’s teaching is abiding, not bearing fruit. At no point in the discourse is the believer commanded to produce fruit. Instead, we are promised that if we abide, fruit will result. We must be careful not to milk every detail for symbolic meaning. Illustrations allow us to see the big picture—that must be our focus here... As Warren Wiersbe so succinctly states, It is unwise to build a theological doctrine on a parable or allegory. Jesus was teaching one main truth—the fruitful life of the believer—and we must not press the details too much.” Pastor Chuck Swindoll
- **Discipleship Defined:** “John 15 emphasizes that neither doctrine nor ethics can alone define Christian discipleship. Without a transforming spirituality that creates a supernatural life, doctrine and ethics lose their value... This means that Christianity is not simply about believing the right things (though this is important). Nor is it simply a matter of living a Christ-like life (though this is important too). To be a disciple means having the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit living in us (14:23–26). It is a way of believing (doctrine) and a way of living (ethics), but these are nurtured by the life-giving connection with Jesus Christ.” Professor Gary Burge

Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Full life:** John said he wrote this letter to help us find “*fullness of life through believing Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*” Chapters 1-12 contain 3 years of real-life stories where people met Jesus during His public ministry. Chapters 13-21 slow way down as Jesus began to reveal His (God’s) heart to His disciples in the week leading up to the cross and resurrection.
- **The bigger picture:** *Chapters 13-17* form a unit, which is often called His “*Farewell Address.*” **13:1** begins, “*Jesus knew his hour had come to depart out of this world*”, and **17:1** begins, “*Father, the hour has come*”. The middle 3 chapters (**14-16**) are about another Comforter. The bullseye of this unit is the parable of the true vine, making it the central theme of the entire unit (**13-17**) “*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*” (John 15:4). Why such a huge section on comfort and abiding in Christ? Well, because the disciples were becoming uneasy as Jesus ramped up the cryptic talk about His departure and death. Anxiety is evident in their questions (**13:36, 14:5, 8, 22**), and Jesus affirms His purpose for this address in **chapter 16:1**, “*I’ve said all these things to keep you from falling away*”; **16:6**, “*Because I’ve said these things, sorrow has filled your heart*”; **16:25**, “*I’ve said these things in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father*”; and **16:33**, “*I’ve said these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*” This unit of Scripture gives the church her marching orders (i.e., *to glorify God by loving one another like*

Jesus loves us” and is filled with comfort for when the world wears us down and we lose sight of the goal.

- **Farewell Addresses:** “Academic studies have compared Jesus’ Farewell Discourse with those of dying teachers and leaders in antiquity. Jacob’s last words in Genesis 49 are typical of this form, as is Moses’ farewell in Deuteronomy 31–34. Not only does Moses identify his successor, but he gives teachings that must be recorded and a final blessing. Apocryphal Jewish literature from Jesus’ day offers more tantalizing parallels. In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs each of the twelve sons of Jacob give farewell instructions, blessings, and prayers. In the Testament of Moses, we overhear Moses’ final words to Israel and Joshua. We even possess ‘testaments’ of Solomon, Job, Isaac, and Adam³⁰—fictionalized farewells imagined by Jewish authors between 100 B.C. and A.D. 200. Jewish testaments imagine the dying (or departing) person surrounded by his most intimate friends and family. Standard literary elements generally appear. For instance, they always show a concern for the comfort and encouragement of those left behind. Often there is an exhortation to obey the law, and a deposit of writings is left behind.³¹ In some cases, the departing person passes his ‘spirit’ to his followers or successor. Moses and Elijah do this respectively for Joshua and Elisha (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9; 2 Kings 2:9–14). In the farewell of Jesus many of these elements appear. He encourages his disciples and comforts them (John 14:1). He also urges them to be obedient (13:34; 15:12), and from John’s perspective the ‘literary deposit’ Jesus leaves behind is the Fourth Gospel itself. Moreover, Jesus promises that his Spirit will indwell and empower his followers following his death (14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:3, 13). In other words, we have in John 13–17 all of the elements of a Jewish farewell.” Professor Gary Burge
- **Change of focus in Chapter 13:** “This section signals a change of focus as Jesus turns to ‘his own’ and shows them his love...In the end there is no explanation of the cross other than the love of God. There can be no other, for we certainly do not deserve it and can never earn it.” Pastor Bruce Milne
- **The heart of God:** “Here, in five chapters (13-17), in only 155 verses, and in less than four thousand words we are given what the Puritan writer Thomas Goodwin called “‘a window into Christ’s heart.’” Professor Sinclair Ferguson
- **Book Context:** The Gospel of the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, provides a clearly stated purpose. *John 20:30-31* says, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” Some people demand to have all their questions satisfied before bowing to Jesus, yet John claimed his limited account was enough to bring anyone to faith. As we read it, our Savior and friend emerges from the pages as a real person in the real world. Jesus shows us what we could become, if we too would rely on His infinite Father who will gladly supply whatever we need.
- **Life in his name:** Life is the Greek word, “zōē”, which means “Life, Living, Lifetime, Life-Giving” and is where we get the word, “zoology” in English. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says it’s “used in the NT of life as a principle, life in the absolute sense, life as God has it, that which the Father has in Himself, and which He gave to the Incarnate Son to have in Himself, Jhn 5:26, and which the Son manifested in the world, 1Jo 1:2. From this life man has become alienated in consequence of the Fall, Eph 4:18, and of this life men become partakers through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, Jhn 3:15, who becomes its Author to

all such as trust in Him, Act 3:15, and who is therefore said to be 'the life' of the believer, Col 3:4, for the life that He gives He maintains, Jhn 6:35, 63. Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ, Jhn 5:24; 1Jo 3:14, and that it will one day extend its domain to the sphere of the body is assured by the Resurrection of Christ, 2Cr 5:4; 2Ti 1:10. This life is not merely a principle of power and mobility, however, for it has moral associations which are inseparable from it, as of holiness and righteousness. Death and sin, life and holiness, are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures.”

Other Articles/Songs/Videos:

Direction for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the discussion around 30mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Preparation questions for John 15:14-17.

- As you read John 15, notice how Jesus not only speaks of things required for fruit production; He also lists stuff that challenges fruit production. Take a moment to ask Google, “What is involved in producing fruits and vegetables?” As you read articles from the search results, do some comparisons between agriculture and spiritual development. God created both processes, so what can the work of farmers teach us about the work of the church?

Application questions from John 15:14-17.

- What kind of friend is God to you? How does it feel to know Jesus is your best friend who will never hold your mistakes against you or stop loving you no matter what? How does such truth transform your thoughts, desires, and activities?
- What kind of friend are you to others? How do you view yourself as a friend? How do others see you as a friend? You should ask them if you haven't already!
- Will the fruit of your friendships endure and stand the test of time? Begin by asking questions like these...Are my aims usually short-term or long-term? Am I insistent or am I patient? Do I often set the agenda or am I listening to learn what God is up to in someone's life? If you need help with this question, please ask!

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life...

How life together looks <http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story>

Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded

Numerous articles to provoke thought <http://tod dengstrom.com/archives/>

What groups of 2-3 might look like <http://tod dengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf>