

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

**Sermon Text:** John 15:26-16:4 (mini-series: "Abiding Undisturbed") **Key Word:** Witness

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

Our mini-series in John 15, called "Abiding Undisturbed", is teaching us 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**). To prepare you for this sermon, I posted an [article](#) describing recent Christian debates over whether our response should change based on culture's aggression. Some suggest "*changing times*" justify abandoning Christ-like character; but no matter how intensely they persecute us, the world still needs God! So, it's crucial His character is dripping from our responses because that's how His Spirit witnesses through us. Besides, character is not a strategy; it's who we are! We'll get into this as we explore John 15's final...

**BIG IDEA: Disciples are people who witness when persecuted.**

After a rather gloomy chat on how His followers will face hatred from the world, Jesus shifted the focus from persecution to the *Holy Spirit* in *verses 26-27, when the Helper comes, whom I'll send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning*. Elsewhere the *Helper* is said to comfort but here Jesus says, "My Spirit will remind you of me, so you can keep the conversation on me." The *Spirit* wants to *help* us be lights in darkness that shine on Jesus, who is the ultimate [healer](#), [peacemaker](#), and problem solver. To do this well, involves resisting lies like "*I'm alone, no one can ever understand, or my issue only affects me*." Such lies leave us self-focused and blind to how our issues always impact others. For instance, attempts to shield our family and friends from our pain often causes relational distance and ignorance of their pain. This may be hard to hear, but our pain never exempts us from loving our neighbors--the cross proves that. By learning to lean into relationships in troubling times, we also find help to maintain our faith and our *witness*.

Struggles are inevitable for God's people in a Jesus-hating world, but they're never purposeless. It may even seem evil is winning, as it did during Christ's crucifixion. Our challenge is to believe that His sufferings and ours are somehow part of a divine plan to redeem the world (cf. Philippians 3:7-11). Let's consider 2 key takeaways from *verses 25-26*: #1) ***Our witness is our weapon against evil***. We must never lean on our own understanding or the weapons of this world. Sure, that's tough with an internet that inundates us with every world issue, stirs our rage, and piles on guilt over stuff that's

beyond our control. The following truth helps, if we'll believe it...God hasn't designed us to bear the weight and responsibility of every issue in the world. I mean, most of us struggle with our own lives! Christians do have a role, but it's never to replace Jesus as history's hero. How quickly we forget that only one thing can improve the world, and it's Jesus transforming people not some great initiative we come up with! As we go about "*doing good*", let's try to remember takeaway #2) ***The Holy Spirit is the primary witness, not us.*** Christ's church must lead the world in Spirit-dependent strategies, not employing tactics that replace redemption and reconciliation with human effort (e.g., rage, protests, politics, power). Why? Because the ***Holy Spirit*** isn't our "*backup plan*" like some utility player we call off the bench when things aren't going our way. He is always our lead-off hitter, and His ***witness*** always supersedes ours! We prefer people see us as strong, powerful heroes, but 2 Corinthians 11-12 remind us that spiritual victories come by way of what makes us look weak, not power plays. Again, the cross is proof of that!

Our next section reminds us that chapter headings are not inspired. We've reached the end of John 15, but Jesus wasn't done explaining why He said all this. Check out ***John 16:1-4, I've said these things to keep you from falling away. They'll put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he's offering service to God. And they'll do these things because they've not known the Father, nor me. But I've said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember I said them. I didn't say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you.*** As He was about to go away, He said they should expect the same treatment He had received. Religious officials ***would put them out of the synagogues***, which in that culture was like saying, "*you don't belong, you have no status, and God is against you.*" They would be ***killed*** by people ***who think they are serving God***. Why would people do this to us if we're sincerely trying to follow Jesus? Pastor Bruce Milne says, "*We shall inevitably, without consciously setting out to do so, expose the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). Like our Master, the integrity of our speech, our unwillingness to spread slander, our words of kindness and forgiveness, will at times provoke opposition.*" Jesus said their actions prove one thing--***they don't know Him or His Father.***

Are you starting to pick up what Jesus was laying down? We might say it like this: ***No matter how hopeless things seem, let the Spirit's witness shine through you.*** Or we might put it this way: ***Don't forsake Jesus, or being like Jesus, when the Christian approach seems to be failing.*** If I were being blunt, I'd say it this way: ***Christian character is always the right approach...full stop!*** God's ***Spirit***

is not leading if we aren't surrendering our ways and depending on His. Scriptures like Romans 8 and Galatians 5 urge us to "*Keep in step with the Spirit*", and to "*Walk in the Spirit, we don't fulfill fleshly desires.*" We can use these passages as filters to reveal whether our faith is in God's sovereignty or self-effort. For example, we're obviously relying on ourselves when we lean into things like "*sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness...and the like.*" On the flip side, it's clear our internal **Helper** is steering the ship when, "*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" Galatians 5 goes on to say, "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.*" Let's be careful we don't allow our human urges to cover up the Spirit's witness. The world always needs to see Christ's character shining from us because He alone can fix what's broken.

**Let's pray:** Father, it's clear your followers aren't going to win any popularity contests in this world. While we'd like to think people will appreciate hearing truth, may we remember Romans 1 which tells us they'll more likely twist the truth into a lie. That is, until your Spirit replaces their stony heart with a receptive heart. It's so tempting to "fight fire with fire" or to think "the end justifies the means", but the spirit of this world will only be overcome by the Spirit of the living God. Therefore, it's imperative that we resist using their tactics. Lord, I know all too well how easy it is to stew on who's wronged us, what's been taken away, and how we've suffered; to nurse our wounds, instead of asking for help; to plot rather than pray; and replay wrongs when we should be meditating on truths that bring our thoughts into captivity and lead us to humble repentance. As we face challenges in this world, help us to keep the spotlight, attention, and conversation on Jesus. It's this focus that lets your Spirit to be the true witness and fix things on a level we can't even touch. I mean, if we truly believe that God is going to win, then why would we veer from His character and methods? Amen

**Let's sing:** "HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD"

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:**

- **The Spirit's role:** "Jesus has been on trial and like an advocate he has produced evidence and witnesses for the truth about God. The Paraclete, then, will pick up where Jesus leaves off. It is no surprise that he is also called "the Spirit of truth" (14:17; also 15:26; 16:13). He communicates the truth about God, which is the essence of God's work in Christ (1:17; 4:24; 5:33; 8:32, 40)." Professor Gary Burge

- **Our role:** “Fortunately, they are not there alone. The ‘helper’ (see 14.16), the spirit of truth, will come from the father, and live in them, telling them, and telling the world through them, who Jesus really was and is. They mustn’t get lured into talking about themselves. That might well make them paranoid, and it would make their hearers either bored or angry. They must talk about him. The world won’t like it, but it must be done.” Professor NT Wright
- **Planting seeds:** Here’s an example from my life...In 2012, I felt horrible having to tell poor folks that our church didn’t have the resources they needed. We sent them off in their barely functional cars to find agencies we weren’t even sure still existed. I often thought of James 2:15-16, “*If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?*” So, I began contacting local agencies and found 4 willing to team up to launch a social safety net, that after 10 years, has grown to 130 partners! Has it fixed all the issues in our county? No, but it’s a seed that’s clearly growing! We should certainly pray and speak truth, but Christians are most like Jesus when we also “*embody truth*” in small ways. Let’s remember Christianity began with just a few people and had grown into something that is transforming the world one heart at a time.
- **The Helper:** “The world always has the potential to ‘turn’ on the church and see it as an impediment to some social, political, or ideological program—just as Jerusalem ‘turned’ on Jesus and found in him a dangerous inconvenience...The Spirit promises to join with our testimony and to provide the courage and strength to sustain our witness before increasingly hostile audiences.” Professor Gary Burge
- **Witnessing in the mundane:** When Paul wrote to thousands of people in places like Corinth, Galatian, Ephesus, and Rome did he say things like, “*leave your cities and families to become global leaders and missionaries?*” or “*Impact the world by building a big brand or platform?*” No. he mostly said to focus on being godly parents, children, friends, and workers. While it sounds less glamorous, God prefers His people to live as Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 4, “*to love your brothers and sisters more and more, aspire to...live quietly, mind your own business, and work with your hands, as we instructed you.*” Zeal for “*bigger*” often leads to the neglect of smaller, consequential matters such as character and how we treat others. It’s not that bigger is bad, but it’s more often like the old hymn says, “*Little is much when God is in it.*” Let us just be sure that whatever we do allows God’s Spirit to be front and center.
- **Further questions:** Professor Gary Burge offers a few more questions for us to consider from John 15-16, “Does this develop an unhealthy worldview of suspicion and foster a sectarian view of the church? How can evangelism go forward if a disciple harbors feelings of fear and suspicion of the world? What does Jesus mean when he says that his followers (while in the world) are nevertheless not ‘of’ the world? Does this mean that life among non-Christians is a necessary evil, and we should carefully limit the penetration of its values whenever and wherever possible? ...If I am being persecuted, what does this tell me about the nature of my own faith? Is this a true sign of my fidelity to Christ? What are the resources of the Holy Spirit in the midst of this persecution? What can we expect? Is the Spirit-Paraclete simply a source of encouragement, or is this genuine assistance?”

**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 Adam<sup>30</sup>—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.<sup>31</sup> 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 15:26-16:4.

- This week, I'd love for you to [read this article](#) and ANY of the links it contains. It describes a troubling tendency of Christians to abandon Christ-like virtues in challenging times. While it was hard to pick a favorite part, I landed on the one below. Give it a read...let me know your favorite (or least favorite) part :).
- “The doom narrative is a poor fit for an Evangelical church that is among the most wealthy and powerful Christian communities (and among the most wealthy and powerful political



movements) in the entire history of the world. Yet even if the desperate times narrative were true, the desperate measures rationalization suffers from profound moral defects. The biblical call to Christians to love your enemies, to bless those who curse you, and to exhibit the fruit of the spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—does not represent a set of tactics to be abandoned when times are tough but rather a set of eternal moral principles to be applied even in the face of extreme adversity.”

#### **Application questions from John 15:26-16:4.**

- Read Philippians 3:7-11. What do you find challenging or convicting about this passage? Have you come to view suffering like Paul did or are you still struggling to get there?
- How does having a community of godly examples inspire you towards Christ-like character? Describe someone you know who has suffered well, and why you think that is.
- Read Galatians 5:16-26. Do you seem to be keeping in step with God’s Spirit or the Spirit of this world? Where have you seen growth? Where do you need growth?

#### **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](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded)

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

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