

Apart From Me You Can Do Nothing

John 15:1-11

- 1 *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*
- 2 *Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*
- 3 *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.*
- 4 *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.*
- 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.*
- 6 *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.*
- 7 *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*
- 8 *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*
- 9 *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.*
- 10 *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.*
- 11 *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

The Final Words of Jesus Were God's Words & Are For Us Today

These words were spoken by Jesus to His eleven disciples (Judas had already gone out to betray Jesus) on the night before He was crucified. These words are among the final words of Jesus and therefore hold incredible significance. Final words are significant words.

And these are not just the words of Jesus, they are also the words of God the Father. For Jesus tells us in **John 15:15** that everything He was telling the disciples He had first heard from the Father. In other words, Jesus was telling His disciples what God wanted them to know. Since we also are His disciples and the words of Jesus are living words (John 6:63; Heb 4:12) then these words have something to say to us today.

Fruitful Words For Us — Words for Hope

As we have just passed over the threshold into a new year, I believe these words have a special significance for us at Hope Church. As I prayed about what passage of Scripture the Lord would have us focus on at the beginning of the new year, I was led to this passage. I think the primary reason for this is because of the focus on fruitfulness.

I believe the Lord desires for us, Hope Church, to experience a year of increased fruitfulness and the kind of fruitfulness He desires will not happen apart from Him. *Apart from Him we can do nothing.* However, *with Him* all things are possible. If we would see more fruit, then we must know Jesus more deeply. This is our greatest need at this hour. Our personal relationships with Jesus must deepen if we are to have a greater impact for the kingdom of God. I think our Lord is inviting us to fall more deeply in love with Him during 2011.

What Does 'Fruitfulness' Mean?

What kind of fruitfulness am I talking about? I have two things in mind when I say fruitfulness —the **fruit of transfer-mation** and the **fruit of transformation**. First, I mean new birth and second, new growth. First, I'm think of new believers and secondly, I'm thinking of believers whose lives are increasingly transformed.

Fruit: New Believers Transferred from Darkness to Light

Our mission here at Hope is **"to glorify God by developing a community of committed disciples of Jesus Christ, which has an impact for Christ locally and globally."** The first step in that process is the birth of new disciples. We can't develop committed disciples until you first have disciples! So seeing God bring new believers into the kingdom through the people of Hope is the first thing I mean by fruit. I'm thinking of the **fruit of transfer-mation**—not from another church to this church, but from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

Fruit: Believers Increasingly Transformed

Secondly, I'm thinking of the fruit of personal spiritual growth and inner transformation. I'm thinking of believers who will experience new works of grace in their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. I'm thinking of all of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5 (which we will eventually get to in our regular sermon series) becoming more visibly and manifestly present in the lives of those who are already believers. So I'm thinking of the **fruit of transformation**.

That is our vision here at this church, to be a transformational community for Jesus Christ. So the kind of transformation I'm talking about is the kind that affects every observable aspect of your life. I'm thinking about the kind of transformation that you need not announce but your coworkers notice. I'm talking about transformation that does not pull you out of the world, but pulls the world out of you. It's transformation that does not remove you from culture, but causes you to engage the culture. I'm talking about an inner transformation that brings outward manifestation.

The two kinds of fruit I have in mind is the outer fruit of new birth and the inner fruit of becoming in our hearts more like Jesus.

Bearing Fruit Is God's Will

It is God's will that His disciples bear fruit.

John 15:16

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...

Jesus wants His disciples to bear fruit. That's my prayer for 2011. I pray that **2011 would be a year of God-glorifying, man-denying fruitfulness through transfer-mation and transformation**. If the Lord would so lead you, then I invite you to join me in praying that prayer.

An Invitation to Know Jesus More Deeply

What is so vital about **John 15** is it's invitation. Jesus invites His disciples to *know Him more deeply*. He simply says, "Abide in Me" (ESV, NASB). Some translations read "Remain in Me" (NIV, NLT) and others "Live in Me" (The Message). Nearness to Jesus is what produces life and fruitfulness and He

would have His disciples near Him. Jesus wants His disciples to be near Him, just as near to Him as the branch is near to the vine.

I pray that this year will be a year of nearness to Jesus. Let us yearn to know Him more. Let us earnestly desire to abide in Jesus. May this be a year of living in Jesus in ways that we have never known before. **May the sap that flows through the vine course through the branches.** May the Spirit of Jesus so fill us this year that we will bear fruit in ways we have never before experienced. Cry out to God for this! Pray for this with all your heart!

For God's Great Glory & Our Great Joy

Why should this excite our hearts? Why should we yearn to know all that this might mean? Why should we pray this prayer in 2011? Why should we be concerned about bearing fruit? I'd like to point out two reasons.¹ The first is because bearing fruit brings God **great glory** and the second is that it brings us **great joy**.

God's Great Glory

We should yearn to be more fruitful because bearing fruit brings God **great glory**.

John 15:8

By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove² to be my disciples.

God is glorified when we bear fruit. When our lives are so in tune with His working in us and His Spirit is able to produce fruit through us, then **HE** gets the glory and not us. **He** receives the praise and we do not. *"For it is God who is at work in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).* When we bear fruit, He is praised not us, **"for apart from Him we can do nothing."** We in our own strength can do nothing, but He in His great power can do all things! (Perhaps we should pray that 2011 will be a year of us learning to be content with our own weakness so that His strength will work in us powerfully - 2 Cor 12:10.)

This is why I said earlier that I am praying for a year of "God-glorifying, man-denying fruitfulness." When God works wonders among His people He often does it so that it is impossible to draw any other conclusion than, "This is clearly a work of God and not the work of man. This is a miracle."

The kind of fruitfulness that will greatly glorify God is the kind that is impossible for man alone to accomplish. So we should yearn for this kind of fruitfulness because God will be greatly exalted and man will be greatly humbled. God's glory is the first reason we should pray for this kind of fruitfulness.

Our Great Joy

Secondly, we should yearn to be more fruitful because bearing fruit brings **us great joy**.

John 15:11

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹ There are more than two reasons but there is only time to focus on two.

² Apparently this kind of fruit bearing is not optional in the life of the true disciples of Jesus.

And just a little while later at the end of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, He prays the the Father,

John 17:13

But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

Jesus is saying all of this to bring joy to His disciples. *Jesus wants His disciples to experience all the fullness of the joy that He experienced.* Not half of the joy or a little tiny portion of His joy, but Jesus wants you to be **full** of the very joy that filled Him! Jesus does not want the hearts of His disciples burdened down with cares and anxieties, but lifted up with fullness of joy.

Deep-Rooted, Cross-Enduring, Indomitable Joy

He's not talking about the giddy kind of fleeting emotional wave that comes and goes. He is talking about the kind of deep-rooted, indomitable joy that transcends emotional highs and lows and causes one to endure anything our enemy can throw at us. He's talking about the kind of joy that gave Him strength enough to endure the cross.

Hebrews 12:2

*[Look] to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the **joy** that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

This cross-enduring, shame-despising joy is the kind of joy that Jesus possessed and it is that kind of joy that He holds out before us today. Jesus offers us His own joy, but how do we receive it?

How Do We Experience His Joy?

How do we experience this joy? How do we enter into the fullness of what He is describing? The answer is that **we must abide in Him**. This is important, for in these 11 verses Jesus uses the word "abide" ten times. We must know what it means to abide in Him. The only branches that are fruitful are the ones that abide in the vine. ***The sap that runs through the vine must also fill the branches.***

John 15:4-5

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. 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.

What is the point that Jesus is making? "The main purpose of the vine allegory is to stress the importance of their dependence on him."³ Bearing fruit is absolutely dependent upon connection to Jesus. ***Apart from Him we can do nothing.*** There is no life apart from Jesus, neither is there any fruit-bearing apart from Him. If we try to sustain ourselves apart from abiding in Jesus, then we will wither and die.

If we find ourselves languishing spiritually, then we need to draw near to Jesus and abide in Him. If we are not bearing fruit, then we are not abiding in Jesus. We are absolutely and completely dependent upon Jesus for life **and** fruitfulness. We were not intended to live apart from abiding in

³ D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Jn 15:1–17.

Jesus. If you are weak, then in 2011 draw near to Jesus and abide in Him. ***Apart from Jesus we can do nothing... except die!***

So how do we abide in Jesus? There are two ways that are indicated in this text.

How Do We Abide In Jesus?

There are two ways; through His **word** and through **prayer**.

Abide in Me: Abiding In Christ Through His Word

In **15:4** Jesus said, “*Abide in me, and I in you.*” To abide means “to remain.” So Jesus is saying, “Stay as near to me as a branch is to a vine.” But how do we “abide” in Him since He is now physically seated at the right hand of God’s throne? Does He have in mind that mystical union through the presence of His Spirit? Or is there something more tangible? Could Jesus mean more than simply “remain” near me?

John 15:7

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you...

In this verse Jesus replaces “*I abide in you*” with “*My words abide in you.*” So “abiding” has to do with “His words.” In fact, from the way Jesus interchanges these two phrases, we learn that He is equating the two. How does His word abide in us?

Abiding & Obeying

“Abide” not only means “to remain,” it also means “to accept, act in accordance with, to keep or to comply with.” If I *abide* by the rules, then that means that I *obey* the rules. Is there a connection between abiding in Christ and obeying Him? Jesus makes the connection explicit in verses 9-10.

John 15:9-10

9 *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.*

10 *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.*

In **15:4** Jesus said, “Abide in Me.” In verse 7 He said, “abide in my words.” Here, in verse 9 and 10, He says “Abide in my love.” How do we do this? How do we abide in His love? Jesus answers by saying, “*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.*”

According to these two verses, then *abiding in Jesus means obeying the words of Jesus*. Abiding in His love means obeying His commands. When we obey His word we demonstrate our love for Him. When we disobey His commands, we are not abiding in Him and we are not loving Him. Obedience to the words of Jesus naturally flows out of a heart that is in love with Him.

We cannot expect to know the Lord more deeply if we reject what we already know of Him. He will not reveal more of Himself to us if we disobey what He has already revealed. We will not understand Jesus more clearly if we fail to lovingly obey what we already clearly understand.

John 14:23

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

That sounds incredibly similar to, “*Abide in me and I in you.*” There is an unmistakeable connection between abiding Christ and obeying Christ. *IF* anyone loves Jesus, *THEN* he will obey His word. And the result of that love and obedience is that the Father and Jesus will come into our hearts and make it their home.

Abiding in Jesus means being at home with His word. Abiding in Jesus means welcoming His commands through loving obedience. Look at verse 7, “*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you...*” Abiding in Christ means His word is at home in your heart. Not only does it mean that His word remains near to your heart and in your heart, but it also means that you obey His word. Obeying Christ is the first way of abiding in Christ.

I Will Abide In You

Jesus also gives a reciprocal promise. He invites us to abide in Him, and then He says that He will abide in us. “*Abide in Me, and I in You.*” If abiding in Jesus means obeying His words, then how does Jesus abide in us? Jesus is right now bodily seated at the right hand of God. So how is it that He abides in us?

The answer is that He has sent His Holy Spirit into our hearts (Jn 14:17; Rom 8:14-16; Gal 4:6). Jesus abides in the hearts of believers through the indwelling presence of His Spirit.

1 John 3:24

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

We abide in Jesus by obeying His words and He abides in us through the presence of His Spirit. The first way of abiding in Christ is through His words. [Learning to be more attentive to His Holy Spirit within us will be the topic of adult Sunday School for next few months. Come and be a part of this class.]

Abiding In Christ Through Prayer

The second way of abiding in Christ is through prayer.

John 15:7

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Prayer is the natural result of abiding in Jesus. “*If you abide... then ask...*” This is an astonishing sentence. It is a conditional promise.

IF you *abide in me* (remain near me and obey me) *and my words abide in you* (my words are at home in your heart), **THEN** *ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

What an incredible invitation? Jesus is offering an amazing invitation.

“Come and stay close to me by obeying my commands, let your heart be filled with My word and then watch your prayer life explode. For if you will remain near Me and remain so in love with Me that you delight to obey Me, then your will will be so in line with My will that all that you ask for I will happily give you.”

Who would care to embrace the fullness of that promise? Who would dare to take Jesus at His word and see what adventure that would bring? Who is so willing to have your heart transformed this year by drawing so near to Jesus? What a fruitful year it would be if half of us would seek to abide in Jesus according to this invitation!

We also learn that prayer is intended to be used as a means of fruit-bearing.

John 15:16

You did not choose me, but 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.

Jesus is saying, “I have sent you on a mission, and I have intended it to be a fruitful mission, so that your prayers will be answered!”

He does **NOT** say, “I intend to answer your prayers so that you will have a successful fruit-bearing ministry.” He says, “I have sent you to bear fruit in order that you may have answers to your prayers.” Jesus has intended that fruit-bearing happen in the lives of His disciples and so He ordained that the prayer be a means for that happening. Prayer is intended for fruit-bearing. *If 2011 is to be a year of unusual fruit-bearing, then it must be a year of unusual praying.*

In others words, if you pray prayers that have bearing fruit as their goal, then “whatever you ask the Father in the name of Jesus, He will give it to you.” If you want to see your prayers come to life, then start praying fruit-bearing prayers. If you want to experience a new vibrancy in your prayer closet stop asking for greater comforts and starting asking the Comforter to through you begin to bear more and more fruit.

Prayer is the second means through which we can abide in Jesus. Through prayer we draw near to the heart of Jesus. In prayer the Holy Spirit moves our hearts into deeper and deeper conformity to the will of God. We can abide in Jesus through prayer.

Practical Ways To Get To Know Jesus

In closing, let me offer some practical ways that have helped me grow in my relationship with Jesus. Here are a few suggestions that I pray will help you abide in Jesus. Maybe the Lord would use some of these things to cause 2011 to be a year of God-glorifying, man-denying fruitfulness.

1. Repent. Repent of all intentional disobedience. Stop pretending that your sin is simply ‘character flaws’ and start confessing it to be the sin that it truly is. If you are aware of any way in which you are habitually disobeying the clear commands of Jesus, then confesses it, repent of it, and ask Jesus to change you mind about this sin. Ask Him to give you a love for Him that is so great that in 2011 you will be so drawn to Him and repulsed by that sin that you will never again return to it. Repent of all intentional disobedience.
2. Admit. Admit your need. In order for growth in Christ to happen, **you must be convinced that apart from Him you can do nothing**. You have to be convinced that you need Him or you will never seek Him. If you think you can survive apart from Him, then you will try and you will repeatedly fail. However, if you are convinced that apart from Him you will die, only then will you make the necessary changes in life that will allow you move nearer to Him.

- My relationship with Alisa changed when I admitted that I did not want to live my life without her. I stopped thinking about dating and started thinking about marriage when I could no longer imagine life without her in the picture. Admit you need Him.
3. Read His Word. Read the Bible. If Jesus expects you to obey His commands, then He naturally assumes that you will read His word. Bible reading is not optional in my life and I do not see how it can be optional in the life of any believer. I have never grown more in my Christian life than when I committed to the habitual reading of God's word. The word of God is food for your soul.
 - Therefore, you need to have a Bible reading plan. There is nothing that will stifle your spiritual growth more than picking up your Bible and not knowing where to read.
 - There are several Bible reading plans on the back table. More plans are available at esv.org. Click on "resources" then on "reading plans."
 4. Choose a Time and a Place. Make an appointment with Jesus and keep it. Decide on a time and a place where you can be alone with Him and then put it on your calendar and cherish it. Time alone with Jesus is THE most valuable use of your time. He is THE most important person in the universe. Set a time with Him and do not break it for anyone. For me it is the first thing in the morning. If you need to get up a half hour or 15 minutes earlier then commit to do it and then go to bed early enough so that waking up is not a chore. The words of Jesus are more important than the food you put into your stomach! (Job 23:12) We do not live by bagels. Our lives are sustained by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Dt 8:3; Mt 4:4). Choose a time and a place and then be consistent in keeping it.
 5. Keep a Spiritual Journal. I'm not talking about "dear diary I worked from 8:25 to 16:15 today." I mean a journal where you can write out your prayers to the Lord and record all that He has done for you. The reason most of think God doesn't care about us is because we fail to remember all that He does do. We pray things and then do not remember what we've prayed and so when the answered comes, we are unaware that God has given us the answer that we asked for.
 - Prayer during the week is available for men, Wed. mornings at 6:30 a.m. here at church, at 8:45 a.m. Thursday mornings at the home of Ruth Chamberlain's, and each Sunday morning prior to the service from 8:30 - 9:30 a.m.
 6. Retreat Periodically. Get away someplace alone on a personal retreat. Ask a friend who has a cabin in the woods somewhere and go be alone with the Lord. Spend some dedicated time in prayer. Take your Bible and your journal and go sit with your Savior. Turn off the computer and turn off the cell phone and sit and pray. When is the last time you have gotten away from every distraction and prayed for one hour. If you do this, I promise you that you will be blessed. We just don't do this as often as we need to. To help you do this is the reason we have 24 Prayer Watches. The prayer room is available for this kind of time alone. Call the office and we'll arrange a time for you to be alone with Jesus.
 7. Remember the Purpose: To Know A Person. The reason for everything I'm saying is to get to know the man named Jesus. It is possible to read the Bible everyday, know every Bible

trivia question, and not know Jesus. It is possible to do everything I'm suggesting and completely miss the person of Christ.

- **John 5:38** *and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*
- When you read the Bible, don't read it like a text book. Read it like it is love letter from the one you are madly devoted to. Read the Bible to know a person, not to acquire knowledge. When you read the words of Scripture, ask the Lord to speak to you. When you pray, let your requests be made known, and then wait for His answer. It's OK for there to be some silence. Be still before Him.

May the Lord draw you ever nearer to him in 2011. Pursue Him with all your heart. Draw near to Him through Jesus and He will draw near to you.