

We are continuing our vision series this week. The big overall vision is that we want to become the people of God, which means organizing ourselves as apprentices or disciples of Jesus around two goals—presence to Jesus and participation with Jesus. We looked at the idea of becoming the people of God, and we focused on the word becoming. What does it mean to change? How do we actually transform? Now we're getting a little more into the pragmatic. We're getting a little bit more into the nitty gritty of what does all of this mean for you and me and where we're going as a community.

The German sociologist Hartmut Rosa would say that the problem of modernity is not so much the innovation but rather what the innovation has done, which has led to what he called acceleration. He says what happens is acceleration, what the industrial revolution and modernity have done. It's impacted time. It's made everything move quickly, which brings some good and some bad. We have to understand the shadow side of innovation, of acceleration.

Andy Crouch, a Christian intellectual, talks about how technology's goal is moving towards easy everywhere. And so the result of easy everywhere is that, in theory, we would have more time. And if you were to look back decades ago, you would see that philosophers and futurists and sci-fi writers would all project that with the rise of labor-saving devices like the dishwasher or the laundry machine or the iPhone, we would actually be working fewer hours, and we'd have all this time on our hands.

Well, I think all of us realized they were wrong. What happened is actually, as these labor-saving devices came into the picture, we did not actually retreat into leisure that we believed was going to be the problem; we would just work less, and what would we do with all our time? But instead, what's happened is we filled that time with more and more and more because the goal and the aim of technology and innovation are always more and more. And so, if we can do more, then we can achieve more, then we can earn more. And what happens when we are reduced humans to just produce and to consume is that it slowly erodes our souls.

Just think about the shift in the Industrial Revolution. Before the Industrial Revolution, production was dependent on or had to move at the pace of digestion. What I mean by that is the fundamental role or fundamental thing that could produce and build something was the human or an animal, which meant if they were to expend energy to create something, they had to take in

energy. They quite literally had to eat, which had to be digested, turned into energy, and then go to work and produce.

What the Industrial Revolution does is plop a machine instead of a human at the center of production and say, "We can transcend that limitation." And so, when we then transcend that limitation, it's like we can achieve anything and everything we want. It's just a matter of time.

Is there anything that defines our particular era more than that? I think you can make an argument that we live in the innovation capital of the world—a lot of good, but also a shadow side. Jesus of Nazareth would come on the scene and say, "What good is it if you gain the whole world yet forfeit your soul?" What good is it if you earn the whole world and yet forfeit your soul?

Think of a term like hustle culture, something that we believe is actually not just a good thing, but valorize. We have to get after it. Thank God it's Monday. Let's go, go, go, more, more, more. If we gain the whole world but yet lose our soul, was it at all worth it?

You see, the fundamental sin that began all of this thing in Genesis 3 was Adam and Eve trying to transcend limitations. And maybe the most ironic thing of all of this is that the majority of us in this room carry around a device in our pocket that really is emblematic of all of this innovation. And what's blazed on the back of it? It is an apple with a bite taken out of it. Isn't that interesting?

The question I want to ask this morning isn't so much how does the church keep up with this pace, but it's what is this pace doing to our souls? The world we live in that we all feel is more, faster, quicker, innovate more and more. But the problem is there still is not and never will be a pill, an algorithm, an app, or anything that can cultivate the formation of our souls.

When we buy the myth that more is better, we buy the myth that quicker is better, we buy the myth that innovation means better, what do we sacrifice? We sacrifice the very slow, deep, formative work of our souls. The Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama wrote a beautiful little book called *3 Mile An Hour God*, where he says, "If God is love, and God became flesh, then love must have a speed, and that speed is three miles an hour. It's the pace at which humans walk because that is what God has chosen to do."

See, it's the slow work of God that gets into our souls. We want a short circuit to formation, but it doesn't exist. The work of Jesus

information is slow, and it is steady. It's not about how we keep up. It's how do we counteract this acceleration so our souls can be formed at a deep level.

This morning the text, John 15, is going to lay out a very simple yet challenging task for us in this idea of formation. How do we find our way out of these cycles of more and more and find a counter rhythm that allows us to form into the people of God slowly but surely?

In John 14, we see Jesus offering his closing words just hours before he gets arrested and goes to the cross and dies. And so he is in what is known as the "Farewell Discourse" or the "Upper Room Discourse." He's having one last meal with his disciples and giving his famous last words. He talks about how he has to go, but in his leaving, God will send someone better than him for them, which is wild! He says the Holy Spirit, the advocate, the helper, the one who will help us when Jesus goes.

[John 14:16-18](#) (Click on link to read.) Did you catch that? Jesus says, I'm going away, but this is actually for your betterment because the Holy Spirit will come to be with you. He says that the Holy Spirit is an advocate, and it's through that we will find life.

Jesus, in the very last words before his arrest and death to his disciples, says here's what we need to know. The Holy Spirit will be with us. We will not be alone. We won't be able to see him. The world won't be able to see him. Jesus will leave, but the Holy Spirit will be present.

We then get to chapter 15. Jesus is going to riff on this metaphor of the vine and the branches. It's his way of drawing out or illustrating what our relationship with God and the Holy Spirit looks like in order for us to maintain our connection to him. Keep in mind that he's gone on from this discussion on the Holy Spirit, which he returns to later. But let's pick up in [chapter 15:1-3](#).

So Jesus opens this by drawing on the vine imagery. He says, "I am the true vine." Now, this is the seventh of John's "I am" statements which he's building throughout the gospel. He has seven of these statements that are identifying most clearly the identity of Jesus. And so when he gets to the seventh one, if we had been reading through John, our ears would perk up. Here's another one of those I am statements. He says, "I am the true vine."

There's another character here, and it's the Father. God the Father is the gardener. And the gardener is the one who, in verse 2, is looking at the branches and the vines and pruning that which doesn't produce fruit. Those things which are there but aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing, and so he begins to prune that fruit or those branches away.

Then we get this line in verse 3 that says, "You are already clean because the word I've spoken to." Remember, Jesus is talking to his disciples, and he's talking about how he's already preached these things to them. It's a hard teaching. Right after he says he's pruning that which doesn't bear fruit, Jesus is reassuring them,

saying, "Listen, you've already been made clean because of what I've already preached to you." He's assuring them that this is not a moment of chastisement but rather an encouragement.

[John 15:4](#) Four times in this verse, Jesus uses the word remain. He'll use it eight times in the eight verses we read. It is clear that the central piece of this teaching of Jesus is this word "remain." If you have an older translation, your Bible might say abide. But he says that the fundamental task is that we, as his disciples, would remain or abide in him. But yet, he says the second phrase at the very start of verse 4. "As I also remain in you." And it's a little more nuanced in the original language. It's something more like remain in me and I in you. He doesn't say remain again. It's this way in which Jesus is clarifying. Like there's a mutual indwelling that takes place. We remain in Jesus, and at the very same time, he remains in us. It's actually quite beautiful. The imagery in which he's saying is, "Yes, I'm going to go, but there's this connection, this interconnectivity between us."

The word "remain" is the Greek word *meno*. It's where we would translate, remain, or to stay, to abide, to wait in. It has almost this idea of "to make your home in." It's the idea of organizing the whole of your life around connection to the thing in which you are remaining. So this word is essential because think of the metaphor that he's using. He's saying in the same way that a branch must remain in the vine if it's to live, so you are to remain in Jesus.

We are in my favorite season of the year, fall. We're going to watch this process all play out; we're going to watch leaves disconnect from the vine, fall on the ground, and wither in such a way that they are clearly dead. He's using this metaphor that would've been very similar back then. He says that if we are to stay connected and alive in Christ, we must remain in him in the same way that a branch, if it disconnects from the vine, will begin to wither. It will begin to break off. If a branch is going to produce fruit, it must stay connected to the vine. Jesus said, "So too, it is with you. Remain in me and I will remain in you."

[John 15:5](#) Now notice it's the second time that he said, I am the vine. He identifies himself twice as the vine. Here in verse one, he says, I am the vine, and the Father is the gardener. So he does it in the context of who he is to God. But then, here in verse 5, he says, I am the vine. You are the branches. He's saying, Now I am defining myself in the context of who I am to you.

There are three characters at play here—the gardener, the vine, and the branches. At the center of everything is the vine. It's Jesus. He says the gardener is on this side, and he is connected to him. The reason the gardener is around is because of the vine. We are the branches. The reason that we're connected is because of the vine. At the center of this whole framework for formation is Jesus. And he says, I am the vine. My Father is the gardener. I am the vine, and you are the branches. [John 15:6](#) says that in the

same way as the branch, if it's going to thrive, must remain in the vine, so you must also do.

I'm currently working my way through St. Augustine's *City of God*, which is like 800 pages of—I don't know what he's writing about, which makes it a good one to fall asleep to. But there's this beautiful section where he talks about humanity under the condition of sin. And Augustine, the way he talks about that condition is that the human is shriveled or shrunk. It's less than it's supposed to be.

I was listening to someone talk about the book because that's how I'm trying to understand the book. And the lecturer I was listening to talked about how the imagery that Augustine has in mind is almost, to use modern language, like a sponge. Humans were meant to be permeated by the Holy Spirit. But you know that sponge you have at home sitting next to your sink? If you haven't used it for a while, it's curled up and crusty. You can still identify it as a sponge, but really a sponge is supposed to be permeated with water. That is when it's living into its goal.

And Augustine is saying, Listen, that's what happens to the human when it is not living in line with God. When it is under the condition of sin, it's like the identity of the human has shriveled up. It's like that crusty sponge. Yeah, it's still human. We can see that, but its choice to disconnect from what it's supposed to be clearly affects it. And Jesus is saying that when you don't stay connected to the vine, what you were created for, what you were meant to be, permeated by the Holy Spirit, when you don't do that, you go to the destiny of just like any other branch that falls away—swept up and thrown out.

He says that it's not because God is sitting there casting the branches here and there, but rather he says it's because it is disconnected from the vine. And so the very destiny of those sorts of leaves is to be tossed because they're refusing to connect to the vine. So, in the same way, he says, "You are to stay connected, remain in me, and I will remain in you."

I love that it says that if you remain in me, you will bear fruit. It's not "might" bear fruit; it's not maybe. If you remain in Jesus, the fruit will come. And Jesus loves this analogy of the tree and the fruit. He used this all over the place. He used this in Luke where he said that a good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. What Jesus is riffing on is a branch on an apple tree will do nothing but produce apples because that's what it is. Jesus says if the tree is a good tree, it's going to produce good fruit. And Jesus here is saying that if you stay connected or remain, find your home in, abide in the vine, you will produce fruit. Not maybe, not might. You will produce fruit.

[John 15:7-8](#) Now again, fruitfulness is a metaphor that the New Testament loves. Galatians 5 should come to mind, which is the fruit of the Spirit, and this idea of producing fruit is this idea of Christlikeness throughout the New Testament. It uses this

example of producing an inward character that's more and more becoming like Christ.

If you remember in Galatians 5, Paul's whole thing is you don't try to produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control, etc. You walk with the Spirit, and as you are with the Spirit, the fruit of that naturally flows out of you. Paul is riffing on Jesus, where Jesus says to just remain in the vine. and that will produce faithfulness, which is why Jesus can say something to the effect of, "Ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you." Because when we are connected to the vine and it's producing fruit in us, and our inward character is becoming more and more like Christ, the desires of our heart become more and more the desires of God's heart. When we ask for things after having done that inward transformation, it's the very things that God himself would ask for.

Delight in the Lord, and he will give you what you wish. The same thing, you are a different person when you are connected to the vine; you have different desires and wants than when you are not. When you are permeated with the Holy Spirit, it changes the essence of who you are. And Jesus says that if you remain in him, he will remain in you. So, how then, in the world of the iPhone of Twitter, of labor-saving devices, of acceleration, speed, and motion, do we remain in Jesus? How do we remain in Jesus amongst the world that feels like it's pulling us in every other direction?

Well, again, Jesus, in his final words with the disciples, is trying to lay out a strategy in which we can come to that. And what I want to draw out here is that you see a sort of tri-part framework for spiritual formation. God is the gardener, Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches, but remember where we started in John 14? We have the Holy Spirit, and I like to think although Jesus doesn't bring it out here, I like to think of why he began with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is saying the Holy Spirit is flowing throughout that entire relationship. He's flowing from God through Jesus to us and then back. He's sort of in the vine. He's the life-giving source that's flowing through all of these things. Because when we walk with the Spirit, as Paul would say, that's when that happens. How we remain in the vine is by staying in step with the Holy Spirit.

So what do we do then? How do we go about this idea that we have the gardener, God the Father, we have the vine, God the Son, and we have the branches, which are us? How do we organize life in such a way that we remain connected to the vine? That's a good question and a difficult one.

This issue of how do we organize our lives around Jesus is actually a problem as old as the church, even beyond that—all the way back to Daniel in the Old Testament. In Babylon, he organized, even in the midst of the Babylonian empire and all of its formative sway, a certain set of practices where he prayed three times a day and ate a particular diet that would help orient and

index his heart towards the things of God so that he didn't get caught up in the formative sway around him. It was a small act of resistance. It was his desire to still follow God, even in the midst of an empire, that would try to pull him away from the things of God. It is practices and habits that help us navigate these types of things.

For most of us, if we've said yes to Jesus, we want to be the branch that stays connected to the vine. That's our desire. We are what we love. And if we are following Jesus, our deepest desire is to orient our life around Jesus. But the problem is oftentimes, we forget this idea that discipline must join desire. What Jesus is saying is there's all this activity. God is pruning; he's cutting. He's looking at this process. He's involved. Jesus is in there, and he's the vine, and all the growth is coming from the vine. I mean, the image of that tri-part understanding of framework is God and Jesus are really active. They're doing a bunch of stuff. He's bringing the Holy Spirit. He's entering human flesh. He's dying on the cross. All these things that we can't do, and what's the branch doing? It's doing one thing. It remains. We don't have to do everything.

Jesus is explicit in this text. Apart from him, we cannot do anything, but we abide. We make the decision. We add a little bit of that discipline, which says that I want to connect to the vine and abide, remain, and make my home in it because that's my role in formation. Not doing all the other stuff. Only God can do that stuff. But I can connect to the vine. I can organize my life in such a way that I can resist the way the world is pulling me in all these other directions. It's disintegrating my soul. I'm like the shriveled sponge that needs to be permeated with the Spirit. But we can. I don't know if a sponge doesn't have legs, but it's flopping in the water. That's all we can do. I just want to get in the way where the water's going. So, we need some way to organize that.

Well, like Daniel and the early followers of Jesus, they developed a tool that the church would use to help facilitate this. And it's what they called a Rule of Life. This date's back really again, as I said to Daniel. You also see it pop up in Augustine in the third century. You see it even later, about 1500 years ago, around the year 500 AD, with the rule of St. Benedict, which you can find online and read. Now, it's actually one of these documents that gave shape to Western civilization.

In there, Benedict wanted to organize a community of monastics and say we want to set apart our life and live with this sort of intentionality in order to stay connected or to abide in Jesus. Now, this is an ancient language for us. So this idea of rule sounds a little bit terrifying, but note a couple of things.

It's rule, not rules. The word rule is from Latin. It's from the word regular, which means a ruler or a straight piece of wood, or a pattern, or a model. This idea of a rule is, at least in Latin, there's a little bit of a debate around this, but we believe it's where we got the word trellis.

So think about the role of a trellis to a grapevine. Its only purpose is to aid the growth of the vine and the branches. The purpose is not actually the trellis; it's just there as a tool. It's a structure that helps take the vine and lift it up off the ground so that it prevents it from rotting. It gives it light and air and allows the fruit to flourish because that's what a grapevine needs.

And what's interesting is grape vines are climbing vines. If you find grape vines out in the wild, you'll find them crawling up rocks and up the sides of walls because the grapevine knows it needs a structure. It wants to get up off the ground. It knows in order to flourish, it must rise above the floor. And so a rule of life is to a disciple of Jesus what a trellis is to a grapevine.

It's simply a structure. A set of habits and practices that help lift our life out of the mess and just say that there are some things we can do that can orient it around Christ. The purpose is never the trellis, but the trellis helps the vine flourish. It helps us abide in Jesus. Notice also that it's a rule, not a law. That is an important distinction.

A law is something that's guilty or innocence. It's about doing it or not doing it right. A rule is something different. It's not guilt or innocence based, but rather it's based on relationship. A law is rigid. You run through the stop sign here at the corner of Shell Boulevard; you'll get a ticket. You can't negotiate or anything. It's the law.

A rule is meant to aid. If, at any point, you need to redesign the trellis in order to help the vine flourish, go ahead. You're not going to get arrested for that. It's flexible. It's malleable. It's meant to help us orient around that. Laws are good in certain places. They're really important. It helps our society function. But what we're talking about here is not law. We're talking about an aid, a structure to help organize and orient our life towards Jesus.

It's a set of structures to help the architecture of a life of a disciple. It's how can we orient ourselves around Jesus. A rule of life is a set of practices that organize and orient the habits of our regular days to help us practice presence with Jesus and participate in his work in the world.

What we presented a couple of weeks back was that we really believe the future of our church is to come together as a community, just like so many followers of Jesus have done since the inception of the church, and ask, "How do we collectively build a trellis for our soul"? We find that there are unique challenges that we are facing in our day and age in which we need to counter against. And so, in a world of acceleration, of hurry, of pace, we need something that draws our attentiveness back to God. We need habits that will slow us down. Because these habits of silence and solitude and Sabbath are the trellis that lifts us up out of the chaos of acceleration and understand that we need to thrive by staying connected to the vine.

Our rule of life is designed around four practices—attentiveness, renewing the mind, hospitality, and vocation. We are starting with the practice of attentiveness to God in contrast to a world of distraction and hurry. The elements of that trellis are cultivating habits of silence and solitude and Sabbath. Soon we will launch our first habit series where we're going to preach through silence and solitude, and we're going to wrestle with what it looks like. And then, we're going to roll out a community group curriculum to help dive deeper. If you're not in a group, I encourage you to get in one. It's going to help you learn in community about how to integrate this into the regular days of your life.

And then, even beyond that, we're going to launch these things called practice labs, which is the idea of how can we take what we're learning and actually sit in a lab experience and figure out how to try it. So we designed these labs to both equip you with particular tools and practical skills as well as then give you the experience of science and solitude because it would be remiss of me to say that I'm going to talk for 30 minutes every Sunday on silence and not actually do silence. We want to try it out.

Then after that whole season, we'll work on it as a community for about six months, but we'll return to our Gospel of Mark preaching series and go back into our ordinary life as the church, all the while working on cultivating this habit for about six months. Because habits take some time, we'll work on it individually, and we will work on it in community groups as we return to those regular rhythms of life.

Then come spring, it'll be time for us to take on our next habit, which is Sabbath. And in the spring, we're going to do the same thing. We're going to enter into what you could call practice time for a couple of weeks. We will preach on Sabbath, roll the curriculum out, and do practice labs around what this looks like. And then, for six months, we'll try to do this Sabbath thing as we go back to our regular ordinary time.

Because what we really believe foundationally is that if we are going to grow in Christ like this if we are to be transformed people transforming the peninsula, we need a trellis for our souls. We need a community that says, "We want to follow Jesus and try this thing out with immense grace." It is not at all about us doing it perfectly. That's the law. Can we just take one step toward Jesus?

A metaphor that's been helpful for me to think through this is you could say that Lindsay and I have a rule of life for our marriage. We don't use that language to talk about it, but we have a set of habits and things that we do that hopefully help our marriage flourish.

One of those I've shared from the stage before is that every Saturday morning, we set aside time as a part of our Sabbath practice, where it's just us sitting in our home library. We drink coffee together, and it's unstructured. It's a time where we just say we're going to connect. Sometimes it's 30 minutes, other times it's three hours. We get the chance to talk and to connect, and we don't structure it. It's not rigid and all that. The majority of Saturdays, we observe that and step into that space. But there are plenty of times when soccer practice gets in the way, or I'm grumpy and ruin it or something. That isn't a space where we feel guilt. I don't feel guilty when we bypass that. I don't. I'm not going to get arrested or anything because we missed our Saturday mornings together. But I feel distance; I feel a separation from her. I feel that pull where when it goes week after week where we haven't done that, I feel that distance, the intimacy breaks down a little bit. Not out of guilt and shame. But just because that's a structure we've created to help us connect and flourish.

The same is true with Jesus. All these practices and things that we'll roll out we're really excited about, but listen, it's not about guilt and shame. It's about how do we foster intimacy with Jesus? How do we strategically follow Jesus together in this particular moment?

It was the French priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who said, "Always above all trust in the slow work of God." I love that phrase. What he's saying is that this act of following Jesus, of organizing our community life as a trellis for our souls, is simply a step to say we always trust in the slow work of God.

Fruit does not burst out of the branch. We will go through fall. We'll go through winter. But there'll be a day in the spring when we start to see that first bloom of branches and leaves popping out. And eventually, fruit, over time, will take shape. So true with you and me that if we just take that one step towards Jesus, we can trust in the slow work of God. He will produce fruit if we remain in him, and he remains in us.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No.1471-4FC