

**Remaining Leads to Joy**  
OTWWJ: Week 2: John 15  
4/28/19

Welcome/intro/vision: engage our world for good and Easter tag: thank volunteers

if you joined us for the first time last weekend and came back this week, welcome back!

We're delighted that you've decided to join us again for a little bit of your Sunday, we hope that this time really does help you to connect more fully with God and with other people who will encourage you in your faith, wherever you are in your faith journey

Last week on Easter we launched a new series called On the Way with Jesus

We're talking about what kind of a difference doing life on the way with Jesus might make in our everyday lives and how that might look like in our everyday lives

And to start with today we need to talk about a problem that comes with being alive in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is that just about all of us have serious ADD—amen?

Tuesday mornings, I attempt to block off three really solid hours of deep diving on preparing for the message each week. I work on it at other points throughout the week but Tuesday mornings are my first big push

And what I find is that I'll be totally dialed in and working and studying and bringing Scripture and stories and insights all together in what I think is a masterful compilation that is sure to change lives forever

And then it's as if I go into some sort of out of body experience where I black out for 5 seconds and I look up and I don't know how it happened, I'm totally a victim, but I'm checking email which has led to sixteen other emails, and to adding six things to my to-do list

And then I look at my to-do list and I see that Mother's Day on May 12<sup>th</sup>—dudes, that one's for you to help you out—May 12<sup>th</sup>, don't forget this year, your welcome!

And so I think about my wonderful wife who's a wonderful mother.

And then I wonder if I need to get my own mom something. But what? She's short and she really likes to cook, maybe she needs a new kitchen step stool

And then I remember when I was a teenager how she used to ask me to get things down for her because she couldn't reach them and I really think she probably COULD have gotten it if she wanted to, she just didn't like using the step-stool

So maybe a step-stool ISN'T the best idea for mother's day

So then of course I Google "Best grandmothers gifts for mothers day" and now as I'm scrolling through 25 different iterations of "World's Greatest Grandma" t-shirts

I'm literally 10 million miles away from anything remotely resembling a life-changing Sunday morning message!

Has anything like this ever happened to you? This is an epidemic!

Obviously there are people here who struggle with medically diagnosed ADD and in no way do I mean to make light of that

But for almost all of us, attention is one of the hardest things to manage. Sticking with one subject, one idea, one thought, one task, one thing is harder than ever--there are so many other things pulling at us

Apparently this isn't a new problem.

Because 2,000 years ago, Jesus was talking with his closest circle of friends on his last night before his crucifixion and he's going to tell them that one of the most important things that they're going to have to do is to fight back their own Spiritual Attention Deficit Disorders.

**Because Spiritual Attention Deficit Disorder makes all of us S.A.D.D.**

And Jesus going to say that if we're willing and able to do what it takes to remain focused, it will unlock two of the most valuable things in the cosmos: love and joy.

There are lots of things available to us in this world, lots of really great things, but genuine love and genuine joy, they're still rare, aren't they?

Real love and real joy, those are things worth staying up late for, worth working for, worth sacrificing for

Do you know how many people spend their whole lives on this planet and never once experience real love OR real joy much less BOTH!?

What Jesus is going to say today is that all of this is connected. If you have A.D.D. I'm going to go ahead and tell you where we're going today

***Our Spiritual Attention Deficit Disorder cuts us off from love and it undermines our attempts at joy***

***But Jesus moves towards us with genuine love and if we'll root ourselves in that love it leads to genuine joy.***

That's what we'll see as we look at John 15: Bible/no Bible/screen/ Booktable plug

Setting real quick: Jesus's last supper with his disciples before his crucifixion and John records this epic and sweeping address that Jesus gives to his disciples

And we're picking up in the middle of this teaching in John 15:5

***<sup>4</sup> Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.***

I was an English major in college, which meant that I wrote a lot of papers and one year to keep it interesting for myself I decided to see if I could work the phrase 'veritable plethora' into every paper I wrote all year long

Veritable plethora is just a fancy way of saying "a lot"

But when you're writing for English professors, you get a better grade when you find ridiculous ways of saying really simple things

Here in this section of his address to his disciples, Jesus has his own word that he's going to use about as often as he possibly can and that word is "REMAIN"

Other translations use the word "ABIDE"

He'll use that same word ELEVEN times in just ten verses. It's not a big complicated word, but especially given the challenge that almost all of us have with attention it is a huge, huge, huge challenge

And the good news is that all this abiding and remaining starts with what Jesus first

He says, "I want you to abide in me, remain in me, AS I REMAIN IN YOU"—Jesus goes first.

Jesus is talking with his closest followers and he knows he won't be with them in physical form forever, but after his death and resurrection, he's going to be present to them spiritually, available to them always

This is huge for what comes next, because when it comes to relationships, many of us know what it's like to struggle with feeling like there's expectations on us that aren't fair or are one-way

Maybe you've had a family member or friends or bosses or co-workers who heaped expectations on you but never seemed to be willing or able to meet you half way or come alongside you to help you

But Jesus starts with where we are, he comes to meeting us exactly where we are in order to get us to where we were meant to be

Do any of you know people who are just great at initiating things with people?

They've got this gift of bringing energy to situations or families or neighborhoods or just random people to INITIATE—could be one-on-one or could be larger gatherings

Jesus is THE GREAT initiator, the one who 2,000 years ago puts on flesh to come to meet us where we are

And then he's the one who here and now today says, "If you will respond to what I've done on the cross and the resurrection by putting your faith in me, if you'll trust in me

then I will come and abide in you, dwell in you, remain in you and I'm bringing a whole truckload of perfect, unadulterated, pure LOVE with me to pour into you and your heart and your Spirit."

So Jesus initiates, but initiation always requires response. Someone says, 'hey you want to get together: lunch, coffee, the game, this gathering' it requires you to respond in some way

And Jesus knows that there's **three possible** responses to Jesus's initiation:

The first is "**YES**"

The yes is what Jesus is calling his disciples and us to remain in. Here's my love, here's my grace, here's my forgiveness—the disciples have experienced that and many of us have at some point as well

Now, Jesus says, Now I'm inviting you to say yes to receiving all of this and to KEEP ON SAYING YES, to remain in that yes, even as other things come along that will distract you or tempt you or pull you away from this love being the number one thing in your life

When Kelly and I got married, I was a work-aholic with very few healthy boundaries

And initially of course I denied it, but eventually I realized that in order for us to have a real marriage

I needed to *remain in my yes* to her on my wedding day by saying "*no*" to work at some point--and initially that was really hard for me to do

Remaining in my yes to Kelly wasn't passive at all. It was active and at the time felt like a huge sacrifice.

But in any great marriage that goes the distance you make and re-make decisions to REMAIN in that wedding-day yes over and over and over again

Remaining means letting other things pass—maybe good things, maybe great opportunities—because you've got a prior commitment to something that is more valuable than whatever it is that's coming your way.

Jesus is asking his disciples to make and re-make that kind of decision over and over and over again

"You have received my grace and my love. NOW I want you to REMAIN in that love. That remaining is going to be one of the hardest things that you'll ever do

But if you can learn to remain, to say yes and continually say yes over and over again day in and day out, your life will be rich with this fruit that Jesus says will last

Jesus initiates towards us and that requires a response—one response that Jesus is inviting it a **YES, to remain in that** love

But there's another option, of course, and that is an OVERT NO

Some of us throughout the course of our lives have pushed Jesus away, actively decided a big fat “NO” on this whole death and resurrection thing, have rejected parts or all of what Jesus has to offer

That happens all the time and it’s not surprising, Jesus had people meet him face to face and reject his offer of abiding or remaining with them

One of Jesus’s closest followers was a guy named Judas, moments before Jesus is talking about this whole abiding thing, Judas has already slipped out of the room and gone to betray Jesus over to the authorities

Perhaps some of you are here and you’ve rejected Jesus at some point along the way.

Some of you are circling back, re-thinking that decision, thanks so much for joining us as you’re on that journey

Others of you, you’re here but you’re not really open to re-thinking Jesus’s invitation to remain, to abide, to stick with his love

You’re welcome here and we’re glad you’re here, we just hope at some point you might open yourself to God and God’s love and God’s joy in Jesus

And we’ll do our part to continually tell you about it hopefully in ways that are respectful of where you are and that we hope God will use to awaken you to this enormous larger reality in the cosmos available to you in Jesus

Jesus initiates, we have to respond. The yes and no responses are a little more obvious, but there’s one more option that I think is actually a significant one

A couple of weeks ago my family and I put our house on the market

We’re not leaving the church, not leaving the church, not leaving the church—just a local move

And over the past couple of weeks we’ve had somewhere around 20 showings

And if you’ve never sold a house, let me tell you what it’s like to get ready for a showing:

your house has to be perfectly staged to the point where it looks like no real people actually live there

every bed has to be perfectly made by our perfectly angelic children, every pillow perfectly coiffed, floors perfectly swept and mopped, every counter top perfectly clean

And you stash EVERYTHING into a drawer or a cabinet somewhere: do you have a bar of soap in the shower? No way!

At 95 Margaret place we don’t have free-range bar soap just laying around recreationally on the soap shelf in the shower!

Any little bit of TRASH in the TRASH CANS in our bedrooms?!? No way! We don't generate TRASH at 95 Margaret place! It just disappears!

Pollen on the outside porch? PLEASE! We're graced with an invisible bio-dome over our house that only filters out the pollen from alighting upon our perfectly cleansed porches

So in order to maintain this level of pretense, it's a ton of work! So a showing is not a small deal, I've never vacuumed this much before in my life!

And so you ask anyone you do a showing for to give you feedback on the house and their experience, even if they're not going to buy the house, you just want to know their experience

BUT they don't always do this, sometimes they just come through and leave and you never hear from them again

So if you kill yourself getting the house to look magical, and they come, and you never hear anything thing from them

EVEN IF it was Easter Sunday the afternoon AFTER you've done 3 services and all you want to do is take a perfectly angelic Easter nap but I'm not BITTER!

If we never hear from people who walk through our perfectly magical house, what's their response? It's not neutral. They're not interested. Doing nothing, saying nothing means it's a no-go

Fortunately this week we got an offer and we're under contract, so it's been an exciting week in our house!

But we had plenty of times where we did all this work and heard absolutely nothing

In politics they call it a pocket veto

If the president doesn't like a law, they don't have to veto it, they just don't have to do ANYTHING with it. They just let it sit there the appropriate length of time and it dies: pocket veto

Option number three for all of us as Jesus approaches us and initiates towards us and invites us to remain in his perfect love is to pocket veto Jesus-could be a sad but cool band name

Some of us have actively and deliberately said NO to Jesus and Christianity at some point in our lives

But I think there are many more of us who have never actively said, "No"

We've just functionally lived that life apart from Jesus through a pocket veto. We've just drifted. We haven't continually and regularly in an ongoing way made the decision to say

"Jesus's life, death, and resurrection is the most important thing that has ever happened in history, and I'm going to make it the most important thing in my life

and I'm going to continually re-make it the most important thing in my life over and over again, good times and hard times, in plenty and in want, when I'm soaring and when I'm struggling"

Some of us have had seasons of our lives, maybe decades of our lives, when we drifted. We didn't reject it, we just sort of pocket veto'd it.

We DIDN'T remain, we DIDN'T abide and re-decide to abide, there are always other things calling out to us, always other things that feel more urgent or more important

And what Jesus is saying here unashamedly and unapologetically is that there isn't.

Jesus makes some of the most audacious truth claims in history and here he makes another one: there is absolutely NOTHING more important in this life than abiding in him.

Work isn't more important. Our money isn't more important. Family isn't more important. Free time isn't more important. The stuff around the house isn't more important.

The garden isn't more important. The video games aren't more important. Your kid's sports aren't more important.

Hobbies and activities aren't more important. Politics isn't more important. Whatever the latest crisis in the news is isn't more important

Not even your own health is more important

All these things are passing, passing passing. They feel really important for a season, anywhere from about 10 minutes to ten years, but then there's something else that takes their place

There isn't anything more important than remaining, remaining, remaining in Jesus.

He says, "apart from me, you can do nothing."

Remember, he's saying this to his closest friends as he's getting ready to die and they're going to be sent out on a mission to change the world

And so Jesus isn't saying that people who don't know him can actually do nothing nothing. People who don't know Jesus build great companies all the time, create beautiful art, pass good and wise legislation

All kinds of things get accomplished by people who are apart from Jesus

But if we want to participate in something that will last, that will echo into eternity, outcomes of our lives that will remain when everything else passes, there's absolutely nothing that's more important than remaining in Jesus's love and re-remaining over and over and over again

Here's one thing that remains: Jesus. He's moved towards you, we respond: yes, no, or pocket veto

But if we say yes, we have the opportunity to put this one singularly important and eternally resilient person in the middle of your life and build a magnificent life that actually matters in this life and into the next.

A life that is, to use Jesus's word, fruitful--full of purpose and meaning and joy and around the one person who has given himself most fully for you and for the redemption of the whole world

Fruit is shorthand for any number of things—Jesus most often uses it as shorthand for the outcomes of our lives and as proof of what kind of a person we are on the inside

Whatever kind of tree you are, that's what kind of life fruit you're going to produce

Every life is going to bear some kind of fruit. The choices we make, the attitudes we cultivate, the character we cultivate, all of that will bear some sort of fruit, it's just a question of what kind, and is it healthy

Early on in my marriage when I put work at the center of my life, it bore specific kinds of predictable fruit

My whole sense of well-being was tied up in how things went at work. And so when things were good at work, I felt great about life and I was great to the people around me like my wife

And when things were going bad at work, I felt terrible about me and about life and so I was a miserable grump to the people around me, like my wife

Here, Jesus says that if you remain in me, your life will be fruitful, abundant. Jesus is the humanizing human. We become more and more human in all the best ways when we put Jesus at the center of our lives

If we put anything less than or other than Jesus at the center, especially if we miss Jesus and put religion in his place instead

our hearts get warped, we become less than who we were designed to be, we don't bear the eternal fruit that we were designed to bear

And here's the thing about fruit that's really important to hold onto: the plant that it grows on doesn't eat it

The fruit isn't for the plant. The plant doesn't eat fruit. The fruit that grows on any tree or vine or branch isn't for that plant, it's for the animals or people around it

And in Jesus's economy, that's what fruit is for, too. Whatever fruit is being born out in your life, it's supposed to be for the blessing of other people, not just for you

Question here is this: what kind of fruit are you bearing in your life? Spring, 2019, what's fresh on the vine for you? What's the crop looking like right now on you?

And one of the best way you can tell is how is the fruit of your life impacting those around you—those closest to you and even those who are distant and far away

Jesus here is inviting you into a life that matters way beyond you as you make choices day in and day out to root yourself in a love that's way BIGGER than you

And just like with many of your other decisions and responses to people or situations or opportunities that have initiated with you, there are outcomes and consequences to whatever you decide to do

And Jesus wants to spell those out for us as we close:

***<sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.***

These are some charged verses, we talked about this this past week in many of our small groups, we talked about it in our email connect devotional

I just want to touch on it quickly here before we close—especially verse 6, the warning about branches withering and burned

Warnings are gifts of love to people that we love that the course they are currently on may lead to negative consequences

If we didn't love people or care about them, we'd just let them go down that course.

But Jesus here loves his disciples and he loves us. So he warns us. If we don't remain in Jesus, then what we are like is like a branch that has come off the vine

There's no life in the branch by itself, it only had life as it remained attached to the vine, so in the natural course of things it will simply wither—eventually, what you do with a withered branch is you just burn it

Whatever that might mean in terms of our life now and what happens after we die and all of that, the basic point is clear. Not abiding, not remaining, has life and death consequences.

We have to read that warning in the context of Jesus's other teachings about God's eagerness to extend forgiveness and restoration and welcoming back the prodigal sons and daughters and how he treated sinful, broken, rebellious people

But Jesus loved his people and us enough to tell us that not abiding over the long haul of our lives has consequences. I wanted to love y'all enough to tell you that as well.

***<sup>9</sup> "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."***

If we can overcome this spiritual ADD thing, you know what the result is?

First, we just receive perfect love. Perfect love that casts out fear and that teaches us how to live. And over time as we remain in that love it leads to joy, complete joy

Perfect love, perfect joy. Two things that so many people in our world never experience, two of the most rare things on this planet, available to you and to me for free, here with Jesus

If we can learn to remain. If we can only learn to stay still. Step back and consider that these are two wonderful and remarkable pay-offs if we can just learn to not go anywhere.

Cultivating that remaining, Jesus says, starts by living a life that's in line with the manufacturer's instructions

God has created us. And he's given us good commands in the Scriptures, most of us will like or appreciate some of them and struggle to understand others of them

These are invitations to live according to the boundaries and framework that keep us rooted in love and lead us down the path to joy

Early in my marriage, my work needed fresh boundaries to help me to remain in my commitment to my wife and her love and in order for our marriage to be a source of joy

The Scriptures give us those same boundaries on a bigger scale: love God, love neighbor are the core of them

Within those commands are calls to engage in spiritual practices and exercises like prayer. Like reading the Scriptures

Last week we talked about the concept of each of us having God-given spiritual personalities called Sacred Pathways, based on a book that's on our book table this week available for whatever price you can afford, the prices are just suggestions

But the idea is that you've got a God-given spiritual personality and temperament and there's a call on each of us to experience and cultivate our understanding of God's love as we discover what that temperament is and learn how to lean into that to help us to remain in God's love

We gave away these backpacks and inside is a little introduction into the concept and some really brief exercises that you can test-drive to discover your own Sacred Pathway

We had people posting in the Facebook group about their experiences, we have a lot of people who resonated with the Naturalist pathway, connecting with God in and through nature

If you didn't get one or need another one for people in your family, we've got a couple dozen leftover in the back, please grab one

This is just one tool to help you to do what Jesus has invited you to do: to walk in the path that leads to fullness of perfect love and perfect joy, that bears eternal fruit that lasts

**Today's Take-W.I.T.H.**—one thing for you to do, think about, pray about, consider from today's message

**What's one thing you can do and re-do and re-do this week as you're on your way that would help you to remain in Jesus's love for you?**

Inside this backpack are dozens and dozens of ideas, most of them take less than 5 minutes

Or you could try some things on your own: It could be music, that could be a fresh commitment to daily dedicated times of prayer, could be listening to the Bible on audio book or checking out our new daily podcast

the Sacred Pathways book or other books on the book table that might really be intriguing for you

That could be checking out a small group this spring or getting engaged in community in a new or deeper way

**And if you're not sure about Jesus's love, we're so glad that you're here  
what's one step you could take this week to explore Jesus's love for you?**

You've got your own sacred pathway, we believe God has wired you up to be a naturalist or intellectual or any of the nine pathways

what if you explored the introduction in the backpack and just took steps down whatever you most resonated with and see if Jesus might be right there this week waiting for you?

This week, as we're on our way, the invitation for you and for me is to abide and remain in Jesus's love. It's hard work, this whole remaining and sticking with thing!

But the promise is if we're willing to do that work, there's two things available to us that are two of the most rare and precious commodities on the earth: perfect love and perfect joy