



TIME OF GRACE®

Jesus' Love, My Life: Love Leads to Action

Study Notes

Summary

God wants us all to be “fruitful,” to do good things according to his will. How? By staying connected to Jesus, trusting in God’s “pruning” work, and remembering the love we have received from the Father and the Son.

- **John 15:1-17:** ¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain 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. ⁵I 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. ⁶If 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. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.
- Jesus commands we _____ and insists we’re _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Compare a gardener pruning a branch (John 15:2) with God calling us to repent (to change our minds about sin). What do the two have in common?

2. Read 1 John 3:1-10, which was written by the same man who authored the gospel of John. What similarities do you see between these verses and today's message?

3. Which one of Jesus' commands do you need to do more of this week? Which one of Jesus' promises is bringing you the most comfort today? Share your answers with a trusted friend.

Homework for Next Week

Read John 15:18-16:4.

Time of Grace Ministry
Jesus' Love, My Life: Love Leads to Action
John 15:1-17
March 15, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

I'm curious how many people you know that are super religious, that are all about like the Christian rules and the behavior, how many of them are pretty famous at work and in the neighborhood for the way they love people and how happy they are because of God? And I'm guessing your answer would be a lot like mine: Not many.

You don't have to raise hands or anything but I wonder how many of you kind of grew up with that view of God that was all about the rules; all about what you do and what you don't. If you're pretty familiar with the Ten Commandments, if you know all about the idea of sin and needing to be saved, if you've heard very particular rules about the way you spend money or spend your weekends or use your body or use your words, if you've heard all the do's and don'ts of marriage and divorce and sex, you maybe grew up in a culture that was focused on the rules.

And I think that's why a lot of families and a lot of people, especially a lot of younger Christian people, have swung away from the rules-focus to this relationship with God. That it's all about a personal connection. That Christianity is about love and acceptance; it's about welcome and tolerance. That God's love is unconditional and it's unfailing; he's a great Father. He loves you just as you are, he accepts you just as you are, he couldn't love you more than he loves you right now and he will never love you less than he loves you right now. If you've ever been part of a spiritual community that just opened up its arms wide and didn't ask you to change because God made you and he doesn't make any mistakes, you're very familiar with the relationship side of Christianity.

Which sounds amazing, right? And actually, it is pretty amazing. But there's something that doesn't quite seem right with that either because doesn't God care when people break the rules and real people get hurt? Doesn't it bother you when you hear stories about religious people or church leaders who say they have a relationship with God but they're breaking all the rules about sex and about money and about integrity? And when you find out, you don't say, "Well, that's cool, they have a relationship with God." You say, "That's messed up." Like if you have a relationship with God, shouldn't you care about the rules? And then you find out as you're reading the teachings of Jesus that he talked about a lot of rules. He talked about love and peace and our Father in heaven but he also called people out and called them to repentance. He talked about heaven and hell and weeping and gnashing of teeth. He judged people who had religion wrong and, you know, their prayer and their worship was all about a show instead of a real connection with God. He judged religious leaders and people who didn't have much of a connection to the church. He talked to people about the way they used their bodies and viewed marriage and divorce and spent money. Like Jesus was pretty famous. They didn't put him on a cross because he went around the ancient world just hugging people. He cared about rules.

And so these two different ideas, they're kind of hard at times to fit together. How does this like rules-focused and behavior fit with this unconditional love and relationship with God? And I'm asking you that question today not just because it's like some biblical debate or something pastors talk about at Bible college. It's something actually that you're going to have to deal with in your spiritual life. It's an issue that's going to happen time and time again here in our church family and probably in your family and among your Christian friends; that when certain things happen, some people are going to instantly run and focus on the rules in the Bible, while other people are going to ignore that and focus on the relationship they have with the God of the Bible.

Let me give you a few examples to tell you what I mean. Let's imagine you grew up in church; like a Lutheran or a Catholic church. And you just kind of felt as a kid that you were going through the motions and you were being dragged along. But later in life, something happens and you sense that God has really changed your heart. You feel like you know Jesus as a person for the first time; that you're passionate about his love and his grace. And despite all the services of your childhood, you have something now that you didn't have then. And so you go and you try to talk to your parents about this relationship that you have with God that you desperately want for them. But what do they talk about? Relationship? Like, don't you know we go to church and we pray? Like how could we not be good with God before bed, before every meal, every Christmas, every Easter - why do you think we do that? And you want to talk about this and they want to focus on that.

Or tell me if this doesn't sound familiar: A 22 year old who grew up in a Christian homes moves in with his girlfriend. And they're not just sharing a budget; they're sharing a bed and they're sharing their bodies with one another so what does grandma, who goes to church every Sunday, say? The rules! Like they're rules about relationships in the Bible; like you should know better than this. The Bible says that marriage should be honored by all. The marriage bed should be kept pure. That God takes seriously not just the adulterer but the sexually immoral. She's going to say to her grandson, "You have to change! You can't do what you're doing because there are rules that God gave." And what do you think the young man's going to say back? "Grandma, listen, we're good. I still believe the things I used to believe. We pray together. We open the Bible in our home. We still trust in Jesus. Nothing has changed. And honestly, you're not perfect and you really can't judge the connection and the relationship that we have with Jesus."

It happens when someone's a Christian and they're thinking about divorce. And mom and dad want to think about, you know, the rules and what Jesus said about divorce and can they or can't they? And the other person says, "But God knows my heart and he just understands my motives." It happens when it comes to church attendance and schedules, when your kids grow up or your little brother stops attending because he's busy, and you want to think about the rules and keeping the Sabbath Day and not giving up meeting together and they're going to say, "But I'm still good and my faith is still strong." And it happens with parents and grandparents and kids and church members and pastors. All the time, there's this tension between the rules and the relationship; between the laws of God and the love we have from God. And sometimes the tension is so tense that you just wish on the back cover of the Bible there was a number you could text and Jesus would show up and answer the question, right? Like do people need to change? Do we need to behave differently? Or are we good because of your love and your mercy? And I checked the back of this Bible before speaking to you today and there's still no

number there. But I am kind of thankful that there actually is a page where Jesus answers that question.

Did you know the night before Jesus bled, he talked repeatedly, passionately, and powerfully about those two things - the rules and the relationship? The laws of God and the love of God? And I want to read to you what he said. But to be honest, Jesus said a lot. I'm going to read a massive chunk of Scripture; way bigger than I normally read here in church. And just because it's maybe been a long day for you and I don't want you to zone out on me, I'm going to have you participate in Jesus' teaching, okay? So here's what I want you to do. Every time you hear Jesus talk about the rules, about the commands, about the way that we live, when Jesus says, "love another," or you need to "bear fruit," or you have to "remain in me," or you have to make sure you "keep my commands," I want you to take your right hand and tap yourself on the right leg. Just so you know, I'm aware this is my left hand but I'm trying to help you guys from your perspective. So I want you to take your right hand and every time there's a command, a do, a don't, a behavior, an imperative, I want you to tap your right leg.

And then whenever Jesus talks about the relationship, whenever he says, "you and I have a connection," whenever he says, "I love you," and "I forgive you," and "you're clean," and "I choose you," whenever there's like that good news of the gospel - not something you have to do but someone you already are because of God's grace - I want you to take your left hand and tap your left leg. Alright? Are you going to participate with me? So all the rules on the right hand; all the love and relationship on the left hand. And we're going to turn our attention to John 15, the night before Jesus bled, when he said this:

"I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I've spoken to you. 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. 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. If you do not remain in me, you're like a branch that's thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 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. I've told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything that I have learned from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. And so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other."

Alright, so what was it? How many bruised legs do you have right now? I see someone doing this because that's what Jesus did, right? Jesus didn't have like two separate concepts for

behavior and belief. To him, what we do and the love we receive from God, were so intimately connected, like a branch that produces fruit because it's connected to the vine, that's what Jesus said about you and me and God. In fact, if you're taking notes, I'd love for you to write down Jesus' big idea for today. Jesus, in summary, said this: He commands that we do and he insists that we're loved. If you want to know what real Christianity from the mouth of Christ is actually about, it would be that he commands that we do. He doesn't suggest, he doesn't offer. If you're going to be a Christian, a disciple, there are commandments, there are expectations, there are rules that you keep. But Jesus said it's not just that. He also wants you to know, he insists, that you're loved, that you're chosen, that you're clean, that you're connected, that you're a part of God's family. In fact, you are a friend of God himself.

So let's talk about what each of those means. Let's start with the do, the commands, and then let's move later to the love and the connection we have with God. You know, hopefully you caught how often Jesus was passionate about his commands. If not, let me put it together. He said, "If you keep my commands," "my command is this," "you're my friends if you do what I command," and "this is my command: Love each other." So again and again and again and again in just 17 verses, Jesus says I have expectations and commands. If you claim to be my friends, then care passionately about my commands.

Now Jesus knows we're not perfect. He's not saying if you ever sin, you're not my friend. But he is saying if you're my disciple, you will have a desire to do. When you hear my teaching, if you're a Christian, you'll care. And you might struggle and you might feel weak and you might even be wrapped up in an addiction but you will repent if you have a relationship with God. And that should make a lot of sense to us, right? Because every real relationship comes with an expectation of behavior. Just imagine, just for a second, this isn't a church service but a wedding service and you're the family and friends of the couple who's standing right here in front. Can you picture the bride? She passes her bouquet to her younger sister and she extends her hands and there's the groom and he takes his future bride's hands and I'm the pastor and I start the vows. And I say, "Mark, will you take Melissa to be your wife? Will you be faithful to her? Will you love her? Will you cherish her? Will you support her? Will you be there in sickness and in health as long as you both shall live? If so, answer 'I will.'" And Mark says, "No." He says, "Pastor, why are you talking to me about rules? This is a relationship. She knows my heart; there's not stuff I have to do or not do like she just gets me." And ladies, if that was actually what happened in a wedding, what would you say to your friend? You should say, "Run." Yeah, you should say run as fast as you can. You take that ring to the pawn shop, you grab your bouquet, and get out the back doors because a guy who wouldn't even care about the rules, who wouldn't care about loving you or sacrificing for you, or treating you like Jesus treats his church, that's not a real relationship at all. You know, it's not that they're only married if he keeps all the rules but he has to care, he has to try, or the relationship won't exist.

And that's what Jesus is saying about you and God. Like if you can stand in front of a church and say, "No, I'm not going to do that," then maybe there isn't a real connection. And maybe like a spouse, you're not going to be perfect, but if you love Jesus, then you will care and you will try. And maybe I'm taking kind of a humorous look at it but Jesus actually was deadly serious when he taught this to his disciples. Look once again at John, what he said here. He said, "If you don't remain in me, you are like a branch that was thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked

up, thrown into the fire, and burned." And I really need some of you to see that and to know that those words aren't from like some stuck in the mud, legalistic, Lutheran preacher. Jesus said that.

I've noticed this interesting swing, you know, kind of in the past 50 years in American culture. I think what happened is that churches used to be like famous for the fire and brimstone. You know, pastors put on their official gown, they pound their pulpits, they threaten people repent or else, and like what we came away with was this pressure and this burden and this guilt. And in response, something shifted; like we moved away from the rules and repentance and we connected with like this gentler version of Christianity. And there's some truth to it but sometimes, Christians - and especially younger Christians - think there's no expectation; that there is no need to repent. That no matter how you live or how you behave, you know, God is love and he loves everyone and everyone goes to a better place. But that's just not true. I want you to see here that these words are not from some man who needs way more coffee and compassion; these are from Jesus. The Jesus, who that same night and in the same sermon, washed his disciples' feet and told them the world is going to know that you're my people if you love. That same Jesus, in the next breath, said but if you don't, and if you don't care, you're going to be tossed away, thrown into the fire, and burned. The fire and brimstone wasn't a human invention; it came from the lips of Jesus. Same Jesus, same message about peace and joy and love and friendship with God. He said but if you don't care about God's rules for relationships or your words or forgiving people or alcohol or your gender or your sexuality or your bitterness or your schedule or your money - like if you're struggling and coming to Jesus day after day, that's all good. But if you're not going to change, if someone can open the Bible and tell you the rule and you're going to push them away and just do your thing and don't judge me cause God knows my heart? Well, God does know your heart but maybe you don't.

I want you to know this: It might be serious but that's not because God hates you. It's because he's pruning you. You catch that in Jesus' language? He says, "I'm the vine and my Father is the gardener and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." I want you to know that real Christianity, like faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus, will sometimes hurt. Sometimes you will come here and you will smile and you will laugh and you will raise your hands in praise and sometimes, rightfully, you will hang your head and breathe a sigh of confession to God. And if you find a family like that, a friend like that, a church like that, you should not run from it because what God is doing is making you more fruitful.

So I'm going to give you just a moment right now, as maybe God is working on your heart, as he's pointing out that part of your lifestyle that might need to change, that relationship that's not quite filled with love and compassion and grace. I'm going to give you just about 30 seconds to have a quiet moment with your God and to ask him for a heart that's soft enough and humble enough that you would hear his word and, with his help, be willing to change. Let me give you just a few seconds to talk to your Father in heaven.

~ Moment of Silence ~

But if I left you with that, this church would be a burden and Jesus' plans to change you would never work. You see, Jesus knows what so many religious people forget; that guilt and arm

twisting and lectures might make people feel bad for the moment but it will not change them for a lifetime. And that's why Jesus said so much more than just the rules and the fruit and the commands and the love. Jesus talked about the relationship that we have with an amazing Father in heaven.

There's this picture I want to show you; a picture from my kitchen. Those are the chore charts for my children. My wife is a rock star. She's super beautiful and smart and organized and so she made these like color coordinated charts; all the things that my daughters have to do. And in our house, those are not seven suggestions for the children; they are commandments. They are things that need to be done; they are the rules of the house that have to be kept. And I suppose my daughters could read the chore charts for their homework and practicing piano and packing lunches and reading books but we pray as a couple that before they get to the chores, they remember that they're children. That before the "to do's" and the rules, come in big bold letters their names. Names that we've given to them because they're part of our family and they belong in our home and we hope to bless them with a whole bunch of parental love. Maybe we're asking for too much as parents giving our daughters something to do but we hope that they see their names and they remember just a little bit that my mom made those rules. That the mom who loved me and gave me life, the mom who read me books and changed my diapers, the mom who sacrificed her sleep, her energy, her everything - she turned her life upside down to make us feel loved. The mom who makes meals for us and tucks us in at night, the mom who forgives us when we mess up and is so faithful to the love that she has for us. I just pray that when my daughters see those sheets of paper, they don't start with the little boxes below but with the big rectangle on top that we are part of a family; we have a relationship with an amazing mother.

And Jesus wants you to know the same thing, too. You might freak out over all the stuff you have to do and how I'm supposed to spend money as a Christian and view my body as a Christian and choose my words as a Christian and that's all important but Jesus says before you get there, there's something I want you to know: It's about the relationship you have with God. And if you didn't catch the beauty of that, let me show you just all the things Jesus said back in John 15. He said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. I've told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one's life for one's friends. I have called you friends and I chose you." That is so good! Like, even if you're the serious church type, you have to smile a little bit when you see promise after promise, friendship and choosing and relationship and love and joy and it's all this free gift that comes from Jesus.

So if you ask me what this church is about, what the Bible's trying to teach, what Christianity could be summarized as, I would put it in three words: The loved do. The loved do. We want you to know more than anything else that you are loved. That Jesus gave up his life and he bled to prove it. You are loved by God more than you will ever comprehend. And when you grasp that deep in your heart, you will do whatever he says. Jesus, I'll follow. Wherever you want to lead me, I'm going to go.

Which is what Nicholas Von Zinzendorf found out. Ever heard of that guy before? Nicholas Zinzendorf lived in the early 1700's and he was a German aristocrat who was young and powerful. He was born into privilege and so much money was about to pass through his fingers.

But do you know how he lived his life? Giving it all away. Here's what happened - when he was 19, Nicholas wandered into a museum in Germany and he stood face to face with a famous painting of Jesus. The painting was by an Italian artist who tried to capture Jesus the moment before he was led off to the cross to bleed and die for us. And Jesus' hands were bound and the crown of thorns was around his head and the master artist had painted Jesus with this look that just demanded your attention when you stood in front of the painting; like he was just looking you dead in the eye. But at the bottom of the painting, the artist had inserted two short sentences that were meant to be communicated with Jesus' stare. The sentences were: All this I did for thee. What doest thou for me? And Nicholas' life was changed.

He had heard about a religion that was all about the second; what are you doing for God? How are you behaving? Are you keeping the rules? But now he grasped what was always meant to come before it: All this I did for thee. This cross, this sacrifice, this grace, it's for you. And brothers and sisters, when you see that, when you know that, when you're thrilled by that, you won't say about God's rules, "Do I have to?" You'll say, as our pastor taught us so well, "I get to!"

Christ's love compels us and we love God because he first loved us. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you so much for your crazy love for us. And I wouldn't love me if I knew everything that you know, but you do. Your love is unfailing and it's glorious and we are so grateful for the things you've done. I pray for your Holy Spirit right now for anyone who has heard this message who has only heard a skewed view of the Christian faith, who has only been told what to do and how to behave, and they were never given a good reason why. They never clearly saw your unconditional love and your grace; that you saved us when we didn't deserve it. You forgive us every day, even though we still don't deserve it. So open their eyes to see your heart, to see your mercy, to be amazed by your forgiveness that they would be changed from the inside out.

I pray, God, that we would be faithful disciples. I pray somehow that you help us as people and as families and as a church to balance the rules and the relationship that we could be faithful to your teaching. Help us not to be cowards and help us not to be condemning but instead to balance grace and truth just like Jesus did. I thank you, heavenly Father, for what you're doing in our hearts and that you're producing fruit. I pray that that fruit brings you glory and the way that we treat people, the way that we love you, makes you look good, God, so that people are drawn to your light and find a new and vivid relationship in your presence.

Finally, God, I thank you for hearing this prayer. Jesus, you said in these words that if we would ask something in your name, the Father would grant it because we're not just anyone; we're his children. Because you chose us. So it's with expectation and hope that we pray today, in Jesus' name, Amen.