

Deep Change (Week 2) - Being and Doing
Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Bullet Points or Less

1) We started yesterday by looking at one the opening of the most beloved passages in the gospel of John, John 15.1-11 (click [here](#) to read it), which also offers a window into some of the most bedrock truths about the spiritual life.

2) First, we as people of faith are branches, not the vineyard owner or keeper, not the fruit we produce.

Ours is a life of dependence, not independence, connection, not merely production.

3) Second, the word that defines how a branch relates to Christ the vine is to "remain" or "abide," which very literally in ancient Greek means to take up residence with or make a home with Christ. This speaks to something ongoing, something warm and inviting, something day to day.

4) Last, God's goal as we who are branches remain in Christ is to "prune" us so that we "bear more fruit" (15.2). What's "fruit"? It starts with character, attitudes, and the heart, and flows outward (see Gal. 5.22-23 [here](#)). It can include anything we do or say that good, right, and true (see Eph. 5.9 [here](#)).

5) Chp. 3 of our Lenten book talks at length about the interplay between "being with God" and "working for God." According to John 15 and its parable of the vineyard, how are those two vital aspects of the spiritual life related to each other? First, they're interdependent, you can't have one without the other; second, "being with God" ("remaining/abiding") inexorably leads to "doing for God" ("fruit").

6) Presbyterian pastor Lindsay Armstrong, in *Feasting on the Gospels*, describes the dynamic this way: "Jesus knew our tendencies and addresses them here. You are going to have to abide, He says. Not because the kingdom work is finished, not because everyone knows I am the way, the truth, and the life, not because there is nothing more you could be doing, but because abiding is what is best for your relationship with Me...No matter how tempted we are to be busy for God, Jesus does not leave us with a to-do list. He calls us to reject the notion that constant action gives us significance...We are not responsible for knowing how everything is going to work out in the end. We are called, first and last, simply to abide."

7) It's when we get these two facets out of balance that we run into trouble. First, "being with God" without "doing for God" is ineffectual: the absence of "doing for God" should actually call into question our supposed "being with God." (For two New Testament examples of this warning, click [here](#) and [here](#)).



8) The reverse is also a major potential stumbling block: "doing" without "being" is our cultural norm and it bleeds over into how we approach both church and the Christian life. We overextend ourselves, we try to find our self-worth in "doing," and we suffer the predictable consequences.

9) Leslie Williams at Harvard Divinity School, wrote a book in the 1990s entitled, "The Seduction of Lesser Gods," and one of its chapters is entitled "The Cult of Busyness." In that chapter, she identifies three core beliefs and their consequences of those who are chronically busy, even in their spiritual lives.

Belief #1: Doing is the highest virtue in my life; a day without results is a day wasted.

Consequence #1: We live increasingly routine and hollow lives, detached from our hearts, doing what we've always done over and over again thoughtlessly.

Belief #2: People who aren't as busy as you are lazy and unmotivated. Consequence #2:

Busyness is what we model for our friends, fellow congregants, and children, thus our addiction becomes theirs or becomes the lens by which we judge them.

Belief #3: I will be valuable and satisfied if I stay busy. Consequence #3: Because I am not consistently satisfied and content, I must not be doing enough, so I need to do more, which in turn seems to make me even less satisfied.

10) Our Lenten book summarizes the relationship between "being" and "doing" really well on pages 41-42: "A person who practices being before doing operates from a place of emotional and spiritual fullness, deeply aware of themselves, others, and God. As a result, their being with God is sufficient to sustain their doing for God. Healthy Christian disciples...are those who consistently live from this emotional and spiritual fullness, and it impacts every aspect of their lives. Emotional fullness is manifested primarily by a high level of awareness – of their feelings, their weaknesses and limits, how their past impacts their present, and how others experience them...And they carry their maturity with them into everything they do. Spiritual fullness reveals itself in a healthy balance between their being with God and their doing for God. They are careful not to engage in more activities than their spiritual, physical, and emotional reserves can sustain. They receive from God more than they do for God. They enjoy the Jesus they share with others...Their cup with God is full, not empty, because they are consistently receiving the love from God that they offer others. They recognize that their presence – with God, themselves, and others – is their greatest gift...Because of this, they carry an unrelenting commitment to not allow their doing to exceed their being."

More This Week

- Some scripture reading this week...First, on the Old Testament background for Jesus' powerful metaphor about God's people being like a vineyard - click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Second, a couple of examples of the similar metaphor of the spiritual life being like a tree planted along a riverbank: click [here](#) and [here](#).

- Here are four good devotionals to read at some point this week about being a "branch" that "remains/abides" in Christ who is our "vine": [Now, to Abide](#) and [Abiding in the Vine: A Pause for Maundy Thursday - Trevor...](#) and [Abiding in the Vine – Today Daily Devotional](#) and [The Vine – Today Daily Devotional](#)

- A longer excerpt from a spiritual classic on "abiding in Christ" (from Andrew Murray, South African pastor, teacher, and missionary): [Come, Then Stay - Andrew Murray](#)

- Worth your reflection this week:

a) If "abiding/remaining" in Christ is the singular key to a vibrant spiritual life and experience, how do you do that? What are your personal, distinctive ways to "come home" to Christ daily and weekly? What has worked well for you in the past or in the present? What would you like to try that might be new?

b) How's your "being with God" and your "doing for God"? Does the former lead to the latter in your life? Do you tend to favor one more than the other? How can you take a step or two toward a better balance between the two?

- A prayer for the week...we used this at the close of worship yesterday: "Christ, You are the one true vine, from whom I draw life. I am Your branch – slight, spindly, and frail. Prune and shape me so that I might bear more fruit – more love, more justice, more forgiveness, and more goodness. Reside in me; help me reside in You. Move with me; help me move with You. This I ask, amen. (Adapted from St. Louis University (Ann Osideck)