

3 - “How to Grow and Change” (Growing as Disciples) // John 15:1–8 // *The Whole Disciple #3*¹

Announcement

Welcome at all of our locations... I want to give a special shout to our West Cary Campus, who is celebrating their 1 year anniversary today, and our Garner Campus, who is celebrating their 5 year anniversary, and last but not least, our Blue Ridge Campus, who is celebrating its 10 year anniversary today. Time flies when you're having fun, right?

We are one church--one assembly--that meets in 13 different locations throughout the Triangle each week. 13 campuses in the Triangle but one church. So, wherever you are, welcome.

You've probably heard your CP talk about our RNSOP that is coming up this Friday as the conclusion to our 21DOPF. My only admonition for you is: Be there. Whether you've been actively participating in our 21DOPF or not, BE THERE. Whether you've been actively participating in these 21 days of prayer or not, make sure to be there. We won't be checking your report card, okay? **This is probably the most important thing we do as a church.** Pastor **Jim Cymbala** of the Brooklyn Tabernacle always says: “You can tell how popular the pastor and worship team are in a church by who shows up on Sunday mornings, but who shows up for Prayer Meeting will tell you how popular Jesus

is in that church. So, I guess we'll see on Friday night. So, see you there. And we have about an hour or so of prayer programming scheduled, and then a bunch of us are just going to stick around and pray through until midnight--whoever wants can stay--as we pray out these 21 DOPF. I hope you'll join us.

Introduction

Alright, John 15, if you have your Bibles. Today we're going to deal with a question almost all of us ask--whether we're Christians or not--and that question is: How do I change in me things I don't like?

Some of you are **already facedown on a New Years' resolution** you made. Maybe your New Years' list looks like this one I saw. [PIC](#)

- My favorite on this is #4, “Stand up to boss” has changed to “find new job” and “be nicer to my wife” has changed to “try to be nicer to my ex-wife.”
- Some of you had a New Year's resolution this year to lose 15 lbs, and 3 weeks in you're like, “Well, **only 25 more lbs** to go!”
- Or, you were like, “I resolved to get to the gym 3x a week. I've done that. Now, I just need to actually go **INSIDE** of it...”

This question of how to change is a major focal point in our society--if you don't believe me, just go to Barnes and Noble--the self-help section takes up basically ½ the store! Or look through the list of the most popular podcasts. They are all about:

- How can I develop more self-discipline?

¹ Sources consulted: John Mark Comer, “Be With Jesus,” preached at Bridgetown Church, October 9, 2016; John Mark Comer, “Become Like Jesus,” preached at Bridgetown Church, October 16, 2016; John Mark Comer, “Developing a Rule of Life,” part two from the series

“Unhurrying With a Rule of Life,” preached at Bridgetown Church on Nov. 3, 2019; Tim Keller, “[Growth in Grace](#),” sermon on John 15, preached Januar 5, 1992. And others as noted throughout.

- How can I stand up for myself better?
- How do I get rid of my anxiety?
- How do I become a truly generous person? (Maybe you've observed somebody who was just so generous and patient and kind and it seemed so natural for them, and you thought, "I want to be like that." Because when you try to be like that, it's like rubbing a cat's fur the wrong way. And you wonder, "How can I become *that* kind of person? I want to be better.")

By the way, if that's you, would you just raise your hand? I would dare say that every hand is up in this room. You aren't alone.

In John 15, Jesus explains the path to change. Let's walk through it together, and then I'm going to give you the two important components in a strategy to change. *It's a 1-2 strategy, and without either one of these, change will not happen:*

15:1 "I am the true vine (Jesus said), **and my Father is the vinedresser.**

- Jesus here compares his disciples to branches on a vine--he is the vine and we are the branches and his Father is the one shaping the bush.

V. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

- Many plants have to be pruned if they are going to flourish. **For example**, rose bushes need pruning because, if not, 2 things happen: **1**, the vines grow in on themselves and block the roses from getting the light they need; And, **2**, all those extra vines divert the plants' resources away from the few good roses, and you end up with a bunch of little, scraggly flowers rather than vibrant, healthy ones.

- So a good gardener will constantly be looking for unproductive branches and pruning them away so that the branches with the good roses on them will be vibrant and healthy.
- In the same way, Jesus says, our Father constantly prunes us so that our energies stay focused on the right things and our lives produce real fruit.

3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

- In Greek, there is a connection of words there that is missing in English. Jesus didn't just switch metaphors from pruning to taking a bath. "Clean" in Greek implies something like "stripped." Or, purged. It's actually the same word used in verse 2, translated "pruned." Jesus' words have already pruned (or stripped) a lot of the bad away from our lives. But there's still more there!
- For example, when you believe the gospel, you learn that your relationship with God is the most important thing in your life; you learn that the world is passing away; you learn that we're saved by grace and not by good works; you learned that pride and domination are not the way of success with God, humility and service are.
- The WORD of Jesus has already taught us that, and just embracing that, believing that, word strips a lot of the bad away from our lives.
- But, as you know, just believing the gospel doesn't get rid of all the bad, sinful patterns in our lives immediately.
- There's a lot of things I understand with my head, for example, that are not yet realities in my heart. I KNOW that God is the most important reality in my life, but throughout the day I get distracted by a lot of realities that I act like are the most important. I KNOW God's opinion of me is the most important thing, but I'm still pretty obsessed with your opinion, too. I KNOW sin is futile, but I'm still so attracted to it.

- So, the Father has to prune me. **Martin Luther said that the Word does a lot of the cleaning in our lives, but some things in our lives can only be removed by suffering and disciplined work.**

Jesus continues: **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.**

- A branch's life depends on its connection to the vine. Disconnect the branch from the vine, and it will die.
- In the same way, we have no spiritual life in ourselves, Jesus says. Only as we abide in him does the life of the HS flow into us.
- "Abide" is the Greek word "meno," which means literally to "dwell in; to make your home in." Plant yourself into me, Jesus says, and never go away, and my life will flow into you.

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.

- Nothing here can't mean *nothing*-nothing, because clearly a lot of people who aren't connected to Jesus do lots of *things*. Elon Musk is not connected to Jesus—I'm pretty confident in that—but he's revolutionized the energy sector and will likely be the first person to put a human on Mars. That certainly seems like *something*.
- No, what Jesus means here is that apart from him we can't do anything *of eternal value*. We can do nothing with real, eternal, abiding life in it. Apart from him, even the good earthly stuff we do—like providing for our families or raising kids or leading a small group or studying the Bible won't have the life of Jesus in it.

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.

- The sobering reality is that there are only two categories of Christians. Disciples who are growing and those who are dying. ***You're either one or the other.*** And to grow, Jesus says, requires constant, vigilant pruning.
- I read recently that the painting of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco literally never stops. Painting crews start at one end, and by the time they get to the other, it is time to start over. That's because the salty air coming in from the Pacific Ocean eats away at the paint, and if they don't keep the metal of the bridge properly sealed with paint, the salt air corrodes it and compromises its structural integrity.²
- In the same way, the Heavenly Father and I are constantly going back through different parts of my life. We'll focus on one area of my heart for a while and get it painted over with the gospel, and then I'll turn to another area, but after I work on that new one for a while, the old one will be corroding again and I'll have to circle back and put a new coat of gospel paint on again.
- John Calvin said that the human heart is like an idol factory, constantly manufacturing new idols that take my focus off of God. To keep your heart in line with God requires constant vigilance. My heart feels like a spiritual whack-a-mole game sometimes. **(GIF)** New idols constantly popping up that I have to whack back down with the Holy Spirit--and when I focus on that, another one pops up over here. And then here, and her, then here. (And look, an olive branch for you cat lovers!)

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.

² Courtesy of preachingtoday.com

What do we learn from this passage about growing as a disciple?

Let me give you one statement that I will spend the rest of our time unpacking: **Christian growth is a combination of resting in Jesus and a disciplined, active pursuit of him.**

OK? Let's start with "**resting in Jesus.**"

All life comes from the vine, and the way a branch bears fruit is to stay connected to the vine. The branch doesn't really have to work to produce fruit when it's properly connected to the vine. Fruit just happens.

Tim Keller explained that there are two ways we can attempt to grow spiritually. The first he called "mechanical growth."

- Think of mechanical growth as how you would grow a pile of bricks. If I had a pile of bricks up here on the stage and wanted to grow the pile, the only way to do that would be to add more bricks. **When my oldest daughter, Kharis, was very young,** I walked outside one afternoon to find her with her mom's watering can watering her sandbox. So I said, "What are you doing, sweetheart? You're making a mess." And she said, "We need more sand, daddy. It's almost gone now." She'd heard mom explain that the reason we watered plants was to make them grow, and she assumed that was how we could make the sand pile grow, too. (So I just waited until she was done, went out and secretly bought more sand at Home Depot and dumped it in so as not to dispel the magic). **But, you understand, for non-living things,** the only way to grow them is by mechanically adding to them.
- **Mechanical growth** is how a lot of people attempt to grow spiritually. They are constantly adding things to their spiritual lives. "Do this over here. Now do this over here. Now back to this.

More of this. Oh, you've forgotten about this." Bible Study. Attendance. D-groups. Tithing. Witnessing. Fasting. Serving. Mission trips. And the result is... exhaustion.

- **Or, to go back to our rose-bush metaphor...** I am a pretty lazy yardsman. To my wife's chagrin, I don't (willingly) plant flowers; I don't fertilize. In fact, I know some of you will lose respect for me here, but I pay someone else to cut the grass. All I care about, as it relates to the yard, is that I don't get complaint letters from my neighbors. My wife, on the other hand, loves a plush, bright, neatly manicured lawn. Well, one day she complained that our flower beds had too many weeds in them, and that I needed to do something about it. Now, you may know this, but there are two ways to kill weeds. You can get on your knees and spend several hours pulling them up by the roots. This is the correct way. Or, you can napalm them with weed killer. This is the lazy way; this is my way. So, multiple times that summer I blasted our flowerbeds with weed killer... and all our weeds died, just like the advertisement promised, AND... so did all our rose bushes in that bed. (I ended up soaking the beds with so much weed-killer that everything in it died. Beautiful, lush rose bushes with budding scarlet flowers turned into tumbleweeds. My wife, of course, complained about that, too. In a Spirit-filled way, of course.

But, let's say that to make her happy I went down to the florist and bought several dozen roses, brought them home, and began stapling them to the dead branches of the rose bushes. Would that have fixed anything? Well, for a while, those dead rose bushes would have looked alive, at least from a distance. But, of course, they wouldn't really have been alive, and I would not really have been out of the doghouse.

- This is where a lot of people are spiritually. Constantly trying to add spiritual fruit to their lives. Constantly going back over dead bushes to staple new fake flowers onto them. And I can tell you from first-hand experience, it's exhausting.

Well, good news--there's another kind of growth--organic growth, and that kind of growth comes just from being alive! Rose stems that are properly connected to the rose bush naturally grow roses, no stapling required.

So, to grow, Jesus says vs. 4, "Abide in me, and I in you..." and you'll bring forth fruit. There are 2 sides to that verse; both are important. Don't overlook either one. Us abiding in him and he abiding in us.

First, us 'abiding' in him. Specifically, **vs 9**, Jesus tells us "abide in my love." Rest in my love. His love was given to us freely as a gift. His love was not given to us because we were spiritually fruitful. His love was given to us as a gift, and that **MAKES US** spiritually fruitful!" Don't reverse the order. Many of us think that we have to get ourselves into a spiritually healthy condition before Jesus will love us. "Got to get my life together; get my morals cleaned up, get my family fixed, and then I will go to God." But that's not how we receive Jesus' love. Jesus loved us **WHEN** we were spiritually dead, separated from him. And in that condition, he plugged us into his love. Jesus says, "Remain in that love." You didn't start the Christian life by earning his love; you won't sustain your Christian life by trying to earn it, either.

Abiding in that grace-based, gift-love is what produces spiritual life in you. God's love is not the reward for you having worked up spiritual fruit in yourself; God's love is the power that creates spiritual fruit in you. Remember the Martin Luther statement from last week? God's love is different from all other loves, in that **"God's love does not find, but rather creates, that which is pleasing to it."** You just receive it.

Write it down this way: **Love for God grows in us as we abide in the love of God for us.**

- Only by resting in the love of God for you will love for God (and others) be produced in you.

- The irony of the Christian life is that the only ones who ever bear fruit are those who realize that their acceptance by Jesus has nothing to do with how much fruit they bear.

Spiritual fruit comes only from intimacy with Jesus. Only by knowing him intimately, swimming in his love, will spiritual fruit grow in you. There's an analogy here in how we humans create biological fruit. Think about this for a minute, and I promise to keep this G-rated. How do a man and woman produce physical fruit? They come together in a moment of intimacy with each other, and *the fruit of that* is a child. It's God's little genius thing there. At that moment, they're not usually thinking about the science or the mechanics of making a child. Or, at least, they shouldn't be. No, they get caught up in a moment of loving intimacy, with each other, and the fruit of that is a child.

In the same way, spiritual fruit is produced not by thinking about the mechanics of the fruit. Many of you, when you think about producing spiritual fruit, you concentrate on the mechanics. You're thinking, "love, love, love," "patience, patience, patience," "goodness, goodness, goodness," "SERENITY NOW!" Or whatever. That's not the real way to produce spiritual fruit. **Spiritual fruit happens when you get caught up in moments of loving intimacy with Jesus--and the fruit of that** is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, mercy and self-control. **Get caught up in loving intimacy with Jesus**, and spiritual fruit will come as naturally to you as roses on a rosebush.

One more time: **Dwelling on the love of God for you will produce love for God in you.**

Here's the other side of that coin: We don't just abide in him, Jesus says, he abides in us. Again, **Vs. 5: "Whoever abides in me AND I in him, he it is that bears much fruit..."**

Last year I re-read one of my favorite books from my early days of ministry--Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret*, written posthumously by his son.

- Hudson Taylor was the legendary missionary of the 1800's whose bold labors single-handedly opened up inland China to the gospel. This book is a biography of sorts, but the title advertises a secret to learn, and I'm all into learning Christian-life secrets and spiritual-life-hacks--but you have to read $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way through this book to get to the "secret." (Every page I turned, I thought, "Is the secret on this page?") And finally, $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way into the book I finally got to it! So I did the work for you, and I'm going to tell you what it is.
- Hudson Taylor had spent several decades as a pioneering missionary in China, accomplishing more than any of us could even dream of accomplishing--but he came to a point where he felt exhausted; overwhelmed by the enormity of the task in front of him; frustrated at what felt like his lack of success; frustrated even at the lack of spiritual growth in his own heart. He was at a breaking point when God revealed to him the secret--"not I for Christ," he said, "but Christ in me."
- He says, "(For years I had tried to imitate Christ)... But there was no thought of imitation now! It was the blessed reality of 'Christ liveth in me.' And how great the difference! Instead of bondage, liberty; instead of failure, quiet victories. Instead of fear and weakness, a restful sense of sufficiency in Another. Not even a striving to have more faith ... but a looking off to the Faithful One who is all that we need."³

There's 3 different ways we think about our relationship with Christ: 2 wrong, and 1 right.

- The first one is **"me FOR Christ."** That is, you think of the Christian life as you doing a bunch of things FOR Jesus and then he rewards you and blesses you for those victories. This is how most

Christians think. Christianity, for you, is about what you DO for him. You work, he rewards. This is wrong. It's what we call DO-DO religion, because all the focus is on what you do-do for Jesus. It's artificial and exhausting.

- The second one is **"me AND Christ."** This one might be a little better than the previous one, because in this one, you've at least learned you can't successfully live the Christian life by your own strength, but you still think of it like some kind of hybrid where you and Jesus work together. You think of it as his power rescuing you when you fail. You see the Christian life like a wrestling match (wrestlin'! Pro wrestlin'!) with the world, the flesh and the devil, and Jesus lets you go in and wrestle for a while and for a while you're doing ok but then the devil hits you with a camel clutch and comes down on you with a flying elbow drop from the top rope and you're about to go down for the count when, at the last second, you reach up for Jesus and say "help me!" and you tag him in and the Son of God comes off the top rope with the powerbomb and brings a chair down on Satan's head and then puts him in the figure-4 and just wears Satan out for a while as you rest, and then eventually you come off your sabbatical and tag Jesus back in again, and then you rest and come back in until you get tired and tag Jesus back in... and this is your spiritual life. You AND Jesus. Though entertaining, this also is wrong.
- The third option, the **right** one, is **"Christ IN me"**. "I am crucified with Christ," Paul says, "but nevertheless I live. Yet not I," he says, "but Christ liveth in me." "Christ in me," he says, "the hope of glory." "It's not by might nor by power, but only by my Spirit," said the Lord to the prophet Zechariah. Or Jeremiah: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes the arm of the flesh his strength, his heart will turn away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert dwelling in an uninhabited salt land. (Ah, but) 'Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the

³ Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret*, 86, 84.

LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain ever-green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it never ceases to bear fruit."⁴

- Listen, the Christian life is hard. Has anyone told you that yet? It's not all sunshine and prayer koozies and warm fuzzies. It was so hard that only one person in history has ever been able to do it, and he was so good at it, they named it for him. And now he offers to come and live it through you.
- "I am crucified with Christ, but nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but *Christ liveth in me.*" Amen?

I remember early on in my Christian life feeling very discouraged--specifically, at all the jealousies and selfishness that filled my heart toward people. I could force myself to be kind to them, to be nice to them, but inwardly, I didn't love them, and I knew that--and I remember one day kneeling down beside my dead, feeling utterly defeated, feeling like there was no way I would ever be a successful Christian, that maybe I just wasn't cut out for it--and it was one of those moments where I heard God speak to me--not in a voice that was audible--though it might as well have been, it was so clear. God said, "Finally you're in a place I can work with you. Because at the end of your "I can't" is where my "I can" begins. You'll never hear him say "I AM" until you've become thoroughly convinced of your "I AM NOT."

Maybe this is where some of you are--and you, like Hudson Taylor, need to learn the secret of the Christian life--not you for Christ or even you AND Christ, but Christ in you.

OK, let's go back to our statement: **Christian growth is a combination of resting in Jesus** (and resting in Jesus means abiding in him and

yielding to his power in you) **AND** (here's the other side of the equation) **a disciplined, active pursuit of him.**

Christian growth is a combination of both resting in Jesus AND a disciplined, active pursuit of him. **In this passage, Jesus talks not only about our need to abide in him**, he points also to the importance of pruning in order to grow.

Now, **some of the pruning he talks about is what the Father brings into our lives through suffering**, and that's super important, but I'm not really going to talk about that today. Instead, I'm going to focus on the pruning and cultivation that takes place through the habits we inculcate into our lives, because that's also present in this chapter.

- **For example, Jesus says in vs 7, "If my words abide in you,"** you'll bear much fruit.
- Also, **vs 7**, he points to the importance of prayer in this: **"Ask whatever you wish,"** he says, and it'll be done for you.
- Later on in this chapter he'll talk about **loving others** as a way of abiding in him.
- These are all **active things**: things you DO that help you abide in Jesus. I mean, **the very verb for "abide in me"** is active, not passive. Abiding is not a passive thing that happens to you; it's something you actively pursue. It takes work to rest in Jesus.

Think about the analogy of the vine: It's true that branches on the vine grow naturally, but every vine needs a trellis (PIC) to grow properly. It needs some kind of a support structure to lift it up off the ground, to guide its growth in the right direction, and to keep it untangled. A wild vine out in nature without a trellis only bears a fraction of the fruit it is capable of, and the little fruit that it does bear is vulnerable to predators like coyotes or rabbits or the rot of bacteria and disease.

⁴ Gal 2:20; Col 1:27; Zech 4:6; Jer 17:5-9

Think of the **trellis** as active disciplines you put into your life to create the space and opportunity for the life of the vine to flow into you.

Let me teach you an ancient term here called “the rule of life.” The roots of this phrase go back to the second century A.D., in the first Christian communities, though the term was popularized by Benedict in 527 A.D., when he wrote a “rule of life” for his new monastic order. BTW, note: I’m not saying ‘**rules**’ for life, but a “**RULE** of life.” In Greek the word “rule” means a pattern, or a rhythm, that you live by--a **STRUCTURE** for your life. (**What’s really interesting, btw**, is that some scholars say the concept was taken from the idea of a trellis--a “rule” was the structure along which the vine grew that enabled maximum fruit production. A “rule of life” is the trellis along which your life can produce maximum fruit.⁵)

Your “rule of life” is how you order your life so you stay connected to the life of Jesus. Your **rhythms** of life, so to speak. Now, before you object and say, “*This is what I don’t like about religion. It’s too many rules*”--**You already have a rule of life**. You have rhythms around which your life is set up. Your **daily routines**; your **weekly routines** and your **yearly routines** are a kind of “rule of life” for life.

- You probably have a set of things you do to start & stop each day.
- Most of us have a set of things we do at least weekly. For most of us, our week goes in a cycle and we build in weekend time for fun and family and faith and hobbies.
- Yearly, you probably take time for vacation or family travel or a hunting trip.
- So, **you have a rule, a rhythm**, of life.
- My question is whether your “rule of life” is **sufficient for producing the kind of spiritual** life you want to have.

⁵ JMC, “The Rule of Life”

Think about your daily rhythms. Your weekly rhythms. Your yearly rhythms. Are they designed to infuse you into Jesus and to open up your life to him?

- What things are part of your day every day?
- What are the “big rocks” for you each week?
- What things are part of your yearly calendar?
- If we were to talk to someone who really knows you well, what would they say you **never** miss doing? What would they say is really important to you?
- What do you pull out first? Hurricanes schedule? Duke schedule? Kids events? Work?

Is your rule of life sufficient for accomplishing the objectives you have in life? Some of us have a “rule of life,” but practically speaking, we allow the chaos of life and that little instrument of Satan we carry around in our pockets to run our schedules. And so we’ll have whole days, whole weeks, whole seasons where we don’t really make any progress in the things that matter to us.

I’ve done a decent amount of reading on a “rule of life,” from everyone from Justin Earley to Stephen Covey to John Mark Comer to James KA Smith to Jordan Peterson. So, people all over the ideological map. They don’t all agree on what a good rule of life IS. But they all agree on what it DOES. A **good rule of life will do at least three things (and this particular list comes from John Mark Comer):**⁶

1. **A good rule of life will turn aspirations into reality.** Or, as we often say, it’s never the dreams you dream, it’s the small decisions you make. It’s not dreaming about being healthy and in shape that changes your life. It’s making a decision to create space in your calendar tomorrow to work out, and to plan out

⁶ This particular summary was compiled by John Mark Comer. See message, “The Rule of Life.”

meals so that you eat healthily. Otherwise, it will be pizza, chips and a night in front of the TV as usual.

2. **A good rule of life will help us live in alignment with our deepest desires.** Developing a good rule of life is you taking control of your life. Again, every day we carry around in our pockets a little device that beckons us onto everyone else's agenda. Amazon has an agenda for me. Literally it's probably listening to me right now and it heard me mention weed-killer a moment ago and when I open up Amazon later it will have 4 different kinds of weed killers for me to consider. I don't know how it does it, but it does. The app formerly known as Twitter, or (X) has an agenda and that is to keep in front of me all the people I'm irritated by so I'll reply to them and get into a Twitter-spat. A study done by Chris Bail over at Duke University found that just 6% of the radical positions on social media drive 73% of all online traffic. So, thank you, Silicon Valley algorithms. **TikTok has an agenda.** *My friends* have agendas for me. My co-workers have agendas. Your boss has an agenda for you--and of course I'm not saying all these agendas are bad. But I am the only one who can determine what is most important to me and how to order my life. A rule of life is an act of defiance against the digital empire that seeks to cultivate you as a consumer. It's you taking charge of your life saying, "This is how I'm going to live my life."
3. **A good rule of life will help us experience peace.** Stephen Covey says that *"we achieve inner peace when our schedule is aligned with our values."* You think peace is found by lowering the number of things in your schedule. That's not true. It's less about the number of things and more about the alignment of those things. When our schedule is not aligned with our values, we feel this low-grade hum of anxiety that never goes away, and, to quote John Mark Comer, a nagging sense that our life is more reactive than it is proactive. We constantly feel behind, burned out, exhausted, and never like we are getting to the things that matter most.

A "rule of life" means putting the big rocks into your life first. Let me go back to Stephen Covey for a minute. He teaches a really helpful principle called the principle of the "big rocks." And the analogy he uses is this: If you have a bowl of rice and a bowl of (some kind of) bigger ball...

- A rule of life is basically putting the big rocks into your life **first** and letting the day-to-day rice grains fit in around them. Some of you just let the rice of your life drive things, which is why it feels so out of control and you don't have room for any important things.

Which brings me back to the identities. I showed last weekend that being a disciple meant shaping your life around 5 identities, 5 identities Jesus lived by.

- **Growth as a disciple means growing in each of these 5 identities**, and I gave you a couple of action steps in each identity that would help get you started.
- **Doing these action steps is not the sum total**, of course, of living out this identity, but think of them as the first stages of a trellis to get your growth started.

Identity 1 was Worshiper: The idea that God comes first in your life in all that you do. Worship is not part of the Christian life, I told you; IT IS the Christian life, and I gave you 2 disciplines for that: A daily QT and weekly corporate worship.

- Daily QT. People ask me, "J.D., what do you do?" 15/15/15
- Summit App "Daily Revival"
- I also use Lectio 365
- And also ESV Study Bible app

Identity 2 is Family Member: For action steps I encouraged you to join the church and be a part of a small group. Believers should be belongers; there are no Lone Ranger Christians. Jesus considers your commitment to him as equal to your commitment to your local church.

Identity 3 is Servant: For your action step, I encouraged you to volunteer in some ministry here. Make it a part of your weekly or monthly rhythm. **Build a mission trip into your year.** If you are in a family with kids, instead of going on beach vacations every single break, build in a family mission trip. We're here to help.

Identity 4 is Steward: Your first action step, the first piece of the trellis is to tithe, which means giving the first 10% of your income to your local church for God's work in his kingdom. You're not giving to the church as much as you're giving *through* it. As I said last week, your responsibility as a steward doesn't stop there, but it does start there.

Identity 5 is Witness: Two immediate action steps here; two rungs on the trellis: **The first is to have a "one,"** someone you are reaching out to, praying for, and looking for chances to share Christ with. Do you have someone in your life like that? By the way, the greatest ministries in our church, the ones really thriving, are doing this. Did you know Summit College, who does this really well, just had their annual winter conference this weekend, with right at a **thousand** students? It's just students inviting students. So, identify a "one" and start to share Christ with them. **The second action step is GO ON A MISSION TRIP**--either locally or internationally. You'll pray for

missions so much more effectively once you've had a chance to be there and see things with your own eyes.

Those actions are a trellis, the beginning of a rule of life, on which your spiritual life can grow. They are how you make space to abide in Jesus and let him abide in you.

Growth as a disciple is a combination of abiding in Christ and doing trellis work. So, I want to encourage you, **if you are serious AT ALL about spiritual growth,** to take these action steps and press in. **And if you are already doing them,** to think about what your next steps in each of these areas would be.

And **if you make a decision to build these things** into your rule of life, your rhythms, let me encourage you to commit to it for a set amount of time. Don't just do it for 2 weeks and say, "Well, I didn't feel any different" and stop. Real change takes place, Eugene Peterson says, only through "a long obedience in the same direction." So, commit to do it for more than just a few weeks. But let me also encourage you not to make it an unlimited amount of time, because you'll probably get overwhelmed and just quit. **Make a 3-month commitment,** such as, *"From now until Easter, every morning at 6:30, I'll read a chapter from the Gospels."* Or, "I'm going to commit to be in a small group until April." Even if they say wacky and crazy things and it feels awkward sometimes, I'm just going to stick it out until April. Or, "I'm going to serve in Summit kids or on the parking team or in our ministry to refugees until summer." **Or something like that.** OK?

VAMP

Christian growth is a combination of resting in Jesus and a disciplined, active pursuit of him.

- On the one side, rest in Jesus' love for you, and yield yourself to him for his life to flow in you and through you.
- On the other, pursue the long, slow, work of change.

When I served as a missionary overseas, I was able to learn the language relatively quickly. It's not because I was a genius. And it wasn't because of a long, intense class. I've told you that when I got there, I'd had one week of language training and I could say, "Hi, my name is J.D. Where is your bathroom? My house is on fire." And I didn't even take any classes after I got there. But I added in some disciplines to expose me to the language. I forced myself to go shopping so I could interact with the store owner. I took a walk every evening with some kids in the neighborhood, and they would point out objects to me and I'd identify them. They were so patient. I'd point at a rock and say 'batu' and they'd say, "Yes, Mr. J.D. Batu. Very good." I'd watch TV with their language subtitles on so I could always be learning. And in 6 months, I had it.

What am I saying? To grow as a Christian--yes, take classes. But just as importantly, **build into your life the rhythms** that will teach you the language of the Kingdom of heaven, and the activities associated with these 5 identities will do that. Engage in the disciplines, and put yourself in environments by which God can weave his language into you.

Christian growth is a combination of resting in Jesus and a disciplined, active pursuit of him.

Bow heads:

- What immediate steps do you need to take? Commit to do it for 3 months.
- Maybe you just need to sit and dwell for a moment in Jesus. Sit in his love. Say, "Jesus, I've tried to live the Christian life for far too long in my own strength." And then yield yourself to him and say, "Not by my might or power anymore, but let your Spirit fill me now." And let his power fill you now. **Tell him that.**
- Hey, maybe you realize that you've never actually given your life to Jesus, and you are ready to make the transition from cultural Christian to disciple. The Christian life, from start to finish, is just knowing Jesus. Receiving his love. **He loves you, friend, more than you have ever realized, and wants you to receive him.** To trust him and follow him. Are you ready to do that? You can do that right now.

(PRAY...) worship teams come