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Good morning. Children may be dismissed. I don't see any. Okay. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for getting us all safely here today. Thank You for Your Word. That we can study and learn from and thank You for Your Holy Spirit that confirms to us that what we're reading is Your truth. Please help us to apply it to our lives and transform us on the inside God. Look more and more like the people You want us to be. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen. Today I am speaking on the subject of alignment and that comes from John chapter 15 verses 1 through 11. This is Jesus talking. I am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit, He prunes that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask whatever you desire and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit so that you will be my disciples. As the Father loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full. Well, the overriding message there, in case you missed it, is abide. Abide in Him, abide in His love. He used the word abide eight times in 11 verses. And he summed it up succinctly in verse four, "Abide in me and I in you." A lot of times we think that the primary purpose of being a Christian is personal holiness. To get our act together, to clean ourselves up, we think this is what Christianity is all about. But what Christianity is all about is abiding in Him and abiding in His love. The idea that cleaning ourselves up is the whole point of the matter is the Old Testament way of thinking. It's what the Pharisees were very focused on, very serious about. In Ephesians 2, 11-22, we have kind of an example of that. "Therefore, remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, laid by the flesh of hands, that at the time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both one and has broken down that metal ball of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace. And that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. There's a lot there, but the point is that Jesus has, where God brought the law and said this is the standard you have to live up to, and all of humankind was not good enough to live up to that standard. Jesus came and lived up to that standard so that we wouldn't have to meet that requirement anymore in order to have the relationship with God. The requirement has been met on our behalf, and now we can achieve the outcome of that standard of holiness, which is to abide in Him and to abide in His love. So that's the first point I want to make, is that what Jesus primarily wants for us is to abide in Him and abide in His love. The second point is that by keeping His commandments, we abide in His love. Verse 10 says, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." What He's saying here is His ultimate goal for you is not to keep commandments. Heating commandments is not the end, it's just the means to the end. It's how we abide in Him. It's how we abide in His love. The interesting thing that I've learned in my life is that the times in my life when I have set personal holiness as my goal and I've made that my focus, those are the times when I didn't have the energy or the strength to achieve that holiness, and I was missing out on the relationship with God in the process. But when I finally stepped back from that and I made Jesus in my relationship with Him with the goal, then the personal holiness fell right in line with that because that was the means that I used to get to what I was going for, which was Jesus. Personal holiness is the means to the end. It's the means to abiding in Him and in His love. Point 3 that I want to make is that by abiding in Him, we bear fruit. Verses 4 and 5 say, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in Him bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing." Bearing fruit, part of that is personal holiness. And when we abide in Jesus, when we abide in Him, He gives us the spiritual life and the strength to bear fruit, to achieve the personal holiness that we long for. And it's kind of an interesting circle. We set our goal on abiding in Jesus, on walking in Him and living with Him daily. And He gives us the strength to maintain personal holiness. And then that personal holiness helps us to walk closer with Him. And walking closer to Him helps us stronger in our personal holiness. And so it's this cycle that feeds back on itself and grows, and we mess it up when we choose not... when we walk away from personal holiness, that's when we mess up our relationship. That's when we break that cycle. But by abiding in Him, that's when we can bear fruit. And when we bear fruit, God's glorified. As it says in verse 8, "By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit, so you will be my disciples." God, your personal holiness is in God's best interest. He wants you to be strong. He wants you to have good character. He wants you to live a moral life. Because in doing so, it brings Him glory. Our fruit that we bear glorifies God. And so He doesn't want to make it difficult for you. He wants you to walk in that freedom. But if that clean living is all you're interested in, and if you neglect the relationship, then you're going to stumble and fall. Because primarily it's about the relationship. Personal holiness flows from our relationship with Him. My fourth point is, this abiding that we're talking about takes place moment by moment, and situation by situation. I know you guys have heard me plenty of times say, you need to start each day with Bible and prayer time. And I absolutely continue to stand by that. That is absolutely completely true. But I don't want you to think that that early morning Bible prayer time, that that is just... It's not eating a meal, and then you walk away, and you're done eating the rest of the day. And you just live on that food. It's more like taking a compass and getting your bearing for the day. And as you continue to walk throughout the day, you continue to look back at that compass and make sure you're still headed in the right direction. Starting your day with God, with that personal time with Him, is important. It gets you pointed in the right direction for the day, but you must continue to abide moment by moment throughout the day. And prayer is key to that. 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ for you." Ephesians 5 says, "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, in hymns, in spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always, for all things, to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." And Romans 12 says, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and continue steadfastly in prayer." What we can learn from those verses is prayer is not just asking God for stuff. There is prayer of rejoicing. There is the prayer of giving thanks. Throughout the day, to maintain that abiding with Jesus, you have to maintain a dialogue with Jesus. You have to keep Him at the front of your heart throughout the day. And the best way to do that is just to keep talking to Him throughout the day. You don't have to necessarily talk out loud. You can if you want. He has to be at the front of your mind as you go through the different things. As you're at your job, talk to Him about your job. How should I be doing this? How should I respond to that coworker? As you're driving in your car, you can turn on the radio, you can sing to Him. You can pray for the angry drivers. But moment by moment, if you want to abide in Him, if you want to have the fruit in your life that produces the holiness that you long for, you must abide in Him. You must keep Him at the front of your mind. Jesus wants us to abide in Him. We can do that by keeping His commandments. And when we keep His commandments, He will allow us to bear fruit. He will give us the strength to keep those commandments because that will glorify God. We must do it moment by moment throughout the day. Let me pray as we go into a time of open worship. Heavenly Father, please speak to each one of our hearts now. Help us to sweep the things off of the altar of our hearts that get in the way of You. Help us to clear off the throne of our life so that you don't have to share it with us. You don't have to share it with anything else. Be the absolute central focus of everything we think, say, and do. Forgive us for the things that we obsess over that get in the way of our relationship with You. As we open up our hearts to You now, God, please reveal to us those things we need to deal with. And as we deal with them, please pour your spirit into our hearts and speak to us. Help us to abide with You right now and to walk like that throughout the rest of this day. In Jesus' name. Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son Jesus. Lord Jesus, thank You that You want to abide with us. You want us to abide with You. Thank You that You have placed Your spirit in our hearts so that we can do that. Thank You that You want to do it. That You help us to do it. Give us the strength to do it. Forgive us for all the little things we chase after that distract us from simply abiding in You. Help us to put those things aside and put You at the front of our hearts at all times from this day forward. Give us the strength to do that in Jesus' name. Amen.