Introduction:

“God, something about the way I’m living my life isn’t working.”

- The only way you can produce fruit that LASTS is if He is producing supernatural fruit IN you.
- Getting BUSY for God is not the goal.
- My relationship with Christ has to be the NUMBER ONE PRIORITY, if I’m going to bear much fruit.

What is fruit?

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;

Galatians 5:22-23a (NASB)

- Fruit GLORIFIES God.
- Fruit is the thing that the tree was DESIGNED to produce.
- Reminder: THE GOAL for your life is fruit… so people see Christ in you.
- The disciples had POWER, BOLDNESS, and WISDOM.
- God wants to produce in you what you DON’T HAVE in yourself.
- The way it happens is ABIDING.

The Process:

No Fruit → Fruit → More Fruit → Much Fruit
**The Goal:**

- Glorify God. It all begins with your **RELATIONSHIP** with Him.

  1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

  John 15:1-2 (NASB)

**Discipline:**

- God will lovingly bring **DISCIPLINE** into your life so you can begin to bear fruit.
- When there is no fruit, some are sick and some are even dying prematurely.

  See 1 Corinthians 11

  3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

  John 15:3-5 (NASB)

- Pruning is God moving into your life and cutting away superficial priorities and anything you’re **TRUSTING** in other than Him, that is decreasing the level of relationship and abiding in your heart and life.
- Discipline has to do with God dealing with the **SIN** in your life.
- Pruning has to do with God dealing with the **SELF** in your life.
- When God wants to produce more fruit, He will prune those He **LOVES**.
An “If – then” proposition:

If…

…your kids don’t abide with you and they don’t catch your VALUES…

…you don’t have TIME to talk with your heavenly Father, building a relationship with Him…

…you don’t have TIME to methodically, unhurriedly read through the scriptures, and let Him speak to you…

…you’re married and you don’t have TIME to talk about issues of the heart…

…then…

A lot of what you’re doing is not the will of God, because the primary goal is to produce fruit…. but apart from Him, we can do nothing.

Does God’s Word abide in you?

• It can’t abide in you if you don’t HEAR it, unless you READ it, STUDY it, THINK ABOUT it, and PONDER it.

• When I’m most tired, I shift from abiding to, “I’m going to make it happen – Oh God, I want You to help me….”

• God says: “I want you to abide in Me, and then I will show you….”

Why don’t we hear God’s voice when we get over committed?

• We’re not ABIDING. When you’re abiding, He will say, “This is the way…”

• God will prune about deep issues of the heart:

• Identity issues, priorities, significance, security.
What does it mean to abide?

- You must **COOPERATE**. Ask: Am I in a season of discipline?
  - The “Main Thing” is not what we do FOR Him.
  - The “Main Thing” is your **HEART** and your relationship with Jesus.

- How many of us honestly feel like Jesus is our friend?
  God asks: “Could you refocus? I want a relationship with you.”
  - Secretly, we believe God is **MAD** at us.
  - The wrath of God was placed on **CHRIST** at the cross.

- A lot of our Christian energy is not about **HONORING** God, it’s about helping us feel better about **OURSELVES**.
  - So Jesus said, “Guys, here’s what I want… abide.”
  - *Be still and know that I am God.*  
    
    Psalm 46:10 (NASB)

### Discussion Questions

1. How do I do this? First things first. (For me, “No Bible – no breakfast.”)

2. Ask God: What do I need to abide?

3. Do I really believe that abiding in Christ is the most important thing I will ever do in any given 24 hours?

4. How do I live out that relationship every moment of the day?

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7. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.  
8. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.  
9. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.  
10. 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.  
11. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

John 15:7-11 (NASB)
Introduction:

1. A Question:

Why would God let our most difficult problems go from bad to impossible, if He really loves us?

2. A Story:

John 11

3. An Answer:

That you MAY BELIEVE!

John 11 – A Story to Ponder

❖ A problem is brought to Jesus

John 11:1-3 (NIV)

1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”
Jesus responds to the problem  

John 11:4-6 (NIV)

4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,

Jesus announces His plan to solve the problem  

John 11:7-16 (NIV)

7 and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light.

10 It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”

13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

15 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus[a]) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Jesus’ better gift to Martha and Mary  

John 11:17-37 (NIV)

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

18 Now Bethany was less than two miles[b] from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.

19 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

20 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

21 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

22 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

23 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”
25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied. 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus solves the problem

John 11:38-44 (NIV)

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” 40 Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”
Epilogue

John 11:45-48 (NIV)

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”

Conclusion:

Sometimes God lets our problems go from “bad” to “impossible” so that WE MIGHT BELIEVE…

- The depth of His COMPASSION for us.

- The extent of His POWER available to us.
Why do our attempts to change so often fail?

“He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.”

Proverbs 10:9 (NASB)

Integrity is the pre-requisite for lasting change.
What is Integrity?

- In the Hebrew: “Complete moral innocence.”

- Webster’s Dictionary: 1. The state or quality of being complete, undivided, or unbroken. 2. Moral soundness, honesty, upright.

Why is Integrity so important? 3 Reasons:

1. **RELATIONSHIPS** are impossible without integrity.
   - With God
     - John 4:24, Psalm 15
   - With Myself
     - Psalm51:5-6
   - With Others
     - Ephesians 4:15
2. **PEACE** is impossible without integrity.

> “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, remembering that as members of the one body you are called to live in harmony, and never forget to be thankful for what God has done for you.”
>
> Colossians 3:15

3. **RIGHTeousness** is impossible without integrity.

> “Like a trampled spring and a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.”
>
> Proverbs 25:26

**Conclusion:**

- Honesty breeds “at-homeness” with God
- Dishonesty destines us to disgrace
Discussion Questions:

1. What did you learn about “lasting change” that was helpful to you? Explain.

2. Why do most of our attempts to change fall short? What’s missing in the process?

3. Give the three reasons why integrity is essential for lasting change. With which of these reasons do you most identify? Why?

4. What aspect of your life do you think needs to be more “integrated”? What steps will you take to follow David’s example in Psalm 139:23-24? Be specific.
Introduction: We’ve got a problem!

The Real Issue: How can we get the Word to “work” in our lives?

1. The Biblical Picture

1How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. 3He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psalm 1:1-3 (NASB)

- The Missing Link = MEDITATION

2. The Transformational Process

8“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

Joshua 1:8 (NASB)
THE WORD

Growth In Knowledge

Growth In Understanding

Growth In Grace

Growth In Fruitfulness

RECEPTION
Truth - Intake

“...This Book of the Law shall not depart...”

MEDITATION
Truth - Digested

“...but you shall meditate on it...”

APPLICATION
Truth - Applied

“...in order to obey all that’s written...”

TRANSFORMATION
Truth - Integrated

“...for then you will make your way prosperous and successful.”

Joshua 1:8

CHANGED LIFE
• The Key to Change is **RENEWING YOUR MIND**

3. The Daily Practice

    > And do not be *conformed* to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

    Romans 12:2 (NASB)

**Two Commands:**

1. “STOP being conformed.”

2. “START allowing yourself to be transformed.”

• How? **Biblical meditation**

• Application – 2PROAPT

**Conclusion:**

    just

STOP / reading the Bible; START meditating on it!
Discussion Questions:

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word “meditation?” How does Biblical meditation differ from popular practices?

2. Why is meditation the “missing link” in the process of spiritual transformation?

3. How would memorizing Scripture help one meditate?

4. Look up the following passages and discuss the importance of our “minds” as it relates to spiritual transformation. (Romans 8:5-8, Colossians 3:1-10, Ephesians 4:20-23, Philippians 4:8, Romans 12:2)

5. What specific means will you use to increase your time to meditate on God’s Word this week?
**Introduction:**

1. **Thesis:**
   
   God specializes in using ordinary people to do extraordinary things!

2. **Restatement:**
   
   Our “limitations” are **not** prohibitors to God using our lives, but the very platform on which He chooses to display His grace.

3. **Condition:**
   
   But something has to happen to ordinary people if God is going to use them to do extraordinary things. In fact, God’s primary agenda for each of our lives centers around this one simple, but profound thing happening in each of our lives.

   **This one thing is not dependent on…**

   ✓ Our intelligence
   ✓ Our education
   ✓ Our giftedness
   ✓ Our background
   ✓ Our wealth
   ✓ Our personality
• This one thing is available to every believer of every age without partiality.

• This one thing is what separates religious people from those who revolutionize the world.

• This one thing can transform the most mundane and ordinary of our world into those who shape and make history.

• This one thing is what God commends and values most in His people.

• This one thing is what brings pleasure to the heart of God 100% of the time.

• This one thing is always rewarded by God.

• This one thing is the basis upon which God evaluates your life at any given moment, in any given circumstance, in any given situation.

• This one thing is what God is “seeking and developing” to grow in your life above all else.

What is this one thing?

The Answer: FAITH!
Hebrews 10:32-39 (NIV)

32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For, “In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.” 38 And, “But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.” 39 But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

Hebrews 11:1-8 (NIV)

1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: “He could not be found, because God had taken him away.”[d] For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.
Seven tools to grow your faith:

1. **SCRIPTURE** - Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

2. **FINANCES** - Give our first and best to God.

3. **PEOPLE** - More is caught than taught.

4. **3x5 CARDS** - The power of sanctified dreaming.

5. **JOURNALS** - Track God’s workings in your life.

6. **PRAYER** - Ask God for a clear call in your life.

7. **DO IT** - Where there is no risk there is no faith.
Application:

- Persevere! Endure! Don’t give up!
- Step out! Take a risk!
- Refuse to tolerate the status quo!
- Step in to His promises, rooted in His character!

Why?

- Because we are all just ordinary people whom God wants to use to do extraordinary things in our sphere of influence.
- You are the hope of the world! You are God’s Church! There is NO limit to what God can and will do if you only… believe!

What’s your next step of faith?

1. Where did God speak to you? What dreams are on your heart?

2. Which of the eight tools do you need to get in your spiritual toolbox?

3. Who will go on this journey with you?
Introduction: We think “Thank you” is a polite ritual.

Four reasons why when you say “Thank You,” from your heart to God, it means a lot:

Reason #1:

20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Romans 1:20-21 (NIV)

- Giving thanks ACKNOWLEDGING that all that you are and all that you have comes from God.

- I honor God as CREATOR.
Reason #2:

1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

Ephesians 5:1-4 (NIV)

➢ Giving thanks forces us to focus on what we **HAVE** instead of what we **DON’T** have.

➢ I honor God as **MY PROVIDER**

Reason #3:

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:17-20 (NIV)
(see also Philippians 2:14,15)

➢ Giving thanks reveals, in every circumstance, the extent to which the Holy Spirit is **IN CONTROL** of my life.

➢ I honor His Spirit as **LORD** and **MASTER**.
Reason #4:

16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

➤ Giving thanks demands we live BY FAITH in every and all circumstances.

➤ I honor God as SOVEREIGN and SAVIOR.

Summary: Thankfulness is the BAROMETER of the soul.

Reference: True Spirituality by Francis Schaeffer
Discussion Questions:

1. Thankfulness is often viewed as the “nice thing to do” when we feel grateful. God’s Word, however, places “thankfulness” at the very core of our spiritual lives.
   
a. Explain why the giving of thanks is so crucial Biblically.
   
b. What does it tell us about our perspective?
   
c. What does it tell us about our view of God?
   
d. What does it tell us about our level of faith / trust in God through our circumstances?

2. How would you evaluate your relationship with God – your “spiritual temperature” - today, based on the contentment level of your heart, the thankfulness of your lips, and your overall attitude?

3. In what areas do you find it difficult to be thankful? Why?

4. In what areas do you find it easy to be thankful? Why?