

Captain Barb Stanley:

Since the pandemic began, I've been trying really hard to go for a walk every day. And this park is right beside my house. And so I get to walk down here and do the trails pretty much every day. A couple of months ago, I took a picture actually, while I was down here of a tree that had dislodged from the top of the ravine and made its way down to the middle of the creek. And this picture is of this barren tree dislodged, uprooted, disconnected from its life source. So a couple of weeks ago, I was really surprised to see this exact same tree full of these lush green leaves. Now I know that I thought it was dead. And I think the reality is, it is dying. It's still uprooted, dislodged, and disconnected from its life source.

When I got home later that night, I thought to myself, "I never really want to be like that tree. I don't want to have these signs of life on the outside, but my internal reality be about being dislodged and disconnected from my life source, which is the person of Jesus Christ." I think Jesus spoke to this idea of being connected when He used the language of the vine and the branches in John Chapter 15. And he simply said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them will bear much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing." It's usually at this point that someone says, "All right, Barb. Tell me what I need to do to stay connected, remaining, abiding in this vine." And here's the good news and we always have to start with this. We are a recipient of a work that has already been done. We are on the receiving end of all that Jesus accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection.

And in fact, Ephesians 2 says, "God in His mercy made us together alive in Christ for by grace you have been saved, not by works." So we are in Christ and joined with Christ because of what he's already done. And it gets actually even better because not only is that beginning work done in the person of Christ, but my growing up and maturing and developing into the person that God wants me to be is also a work of Christ. So Philippians speaks to that when it says, "With confidence, I can declare that he who began a good work in me will bring it to completion." So usually, at this point, someone says, "Okay. So does that mean that I'm just a passive participant in this whole story?" And I would say no.

If we can just put aside the language of work and agree with scripture that that work is done, then I think where we can land today is the language of alignment. How do I align my life in such a way, my life, my time, my energy, my passions, how can I align that or position that to agree with the work that God wants to do in me? That is the language of the spiritual disciplines. If you haven't already read the book, I highly recommend it, called Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster. And it speaks to these ways that we can position and align ourselves with the work that God wants to do in me. For today though, I want to do just a short exercise with you that helps us respond to the invitation of Jesus when he says, "Abide in me and my word abide in you." So if you have your Bibles with you, open them to Psalm 25, and I'm going to meet you back in the chapel for a short exercise. We...