

**OUR MOST VITAL ENGAGEMENT**  
**January 21, 2018 Morning Service**  
**John 15:1-5**

Well it's the year of engagement. The word is engage. The verse is Titus 3 and verse 8. It is our word for the year and you're going to hear this from time to time and I'll be dealing with it again this morning, in two more weeks, and then from time to time throughout the year so I'm going to ask you to stand. Everybody all over this room, we're going to stand. Our friends at Warrington, I'll ask them to stand and they'll be a part of this. Thank God for what's going on at that great campus and for the good work that goes on there. So we're going to look at Titus chapter 3 and verse number 8 to begin with. I want you to read it out loud with me. Here we go.

*This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.<sup>1</sup>*

Now look in that text. So that those who have believed God. Those that have believed God. Have you believed God today? Are you a believer? He said, "I'm praying that those that have believed God will then engage in good deeds. Before you engage in good deeds, you must engage in believing God. The most vital, important, essential thing for mankind is to have the full life of Christ in us and working through us. It is that you are engaged with God. That begins when you get saved. You've got to ask Jesus to come into your heart. You've got to ask Him to step out of heaven and step in and save you.

Even if you're a Baptist you've got to be saved. If you're a Catholic you've got to be saved. If you're a none – that's a big word today in theological circles. N-O-N-E. Those that are nothing. The nones. "I've never believed anything." You must be saved. How do you do that? You believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Confess with your mouth, believe in your heart, and God'll step into your soul and you believe God. The most important, essential, vital thing for man is to have the full life of Christ in us and working through us. That is engagement. Not on a horizontal scale but on the vertical that we know God and God knows us. That we are in Christ and Christ is in us.

Father, teach us in these next few minutes what it means to be engaged with you. Lord, I am nothing and I ask you to be everything in this message. For Jesus' sake and Your glory I pray. Amen.

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Turn in your Bible this morning to the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of John. John 15 and I want to read the first five verses. Now engage. To be engaged. I'm going to be preaching these next three weeks on the word engage. Engage with God. Next week will be engage with one another and the following week we're going to be engaged with our culture, of how we engage the world with the gospel and what we do.

Today, engaged with the Father. Next week, engaged with one another, the fellowship factor. Then the following week on the evangelism side of engagement with a lost and a dying world. We must be engaged in these good works and the greatest work that you can do is to have the full life of Christ in you and working through you. Jesus spoke of that in John 15 when He uses the illustration. He has a grape arbor in mind here and you see that cut of that arbor is down, that grapevine is in the ground and it comes up. Then those branches begin to go out and the fruit comes and hangs on that grapevine. That's what Jesus is alluding to in this text in John 15. Look in verse 1.

*"I am the true vine [Jesus is], and My Father is the vinedresser. 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. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. [You be in Christ. Christ will be in you. 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. I am the vine [say these next four words with me], you are the branches [I am the vine. Say it again. You are the branches so]; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*

I live a mile and two-tenths right around the corner here now from the church and on this busy highway out here called Olive Road people go up and down this road all the time. A lot of men I see riding bicycles on this road. Others with cars but there's one individual that rides a motorcycle. More than one but one I see frequently. It's always intrigued me that he pushes that motorcycle more than he rides it. I see him. He's pushing his motorcycle. I woke up one day and I said, "That's half the Christians I know right there." They've got a gasoline engine that if they'll just turn it over and get on it, it'll go but they'd rather push as ride.

I know a lot of folks that say they're Christians but the only time they ride is when it's going downhill and they can coast. Let me tell you, friend, when you got saved, God put in you a dynamic engine, the engine of the Holy Ghost of the presence of God Himself. For every hill you climb and every straightway you go down, for every difficulty you go through, I'm here to tell you, you need to make sure you've cranked the engine and that you are allowing the God, the full life of Christ, to be in you and work through

you. You need to quit pushing and start riding what God has provided for you. It's the inner man. It's the power of God. It's our engagement with the Lord.

Now I want to preach to you for a few minutes on what I'm going to call this morning branch life. Branch life. He is the vine. Who are the branches? We're the branches. So I want to talk to you about branch life. Now let me be in full disclosure and honest because I normally don't do this but I have stolen this outline. Well not really. I have creatively borrowed it from a dead preacher who preached this outline 150 years ago in South Africa. I found it in an old, dusty book and I said, "Lord, I don't believe I can improve on that." He snickered. So I just borrowed from Andrew Murray his outline and then I filled in my own jelly between it, alright? But I think the five things that Murray said in South Africa in 1860 about this text is something that we need to hear. So I've borrowed from him just a little bit and just jumping off into the deep end of the pool.

Branch life. I want you to think about your life as a branch. You're not the vine. You're not the fruit. You are the branch. So let's look in this text about this engagement with the Lord. If you're ready, say, "I'm ready." Half of you so that's good. Alright. Five simple truths about branch life.

Number one. Branch life is a life of absolute dependence. It is a life of absolute dependence. Jesus said, "I am the true vine." Now, friend, the true vine is Jesus and He is the one who sends the root down into the ground to find the nourishment and the moisture so that it will bring life back up to the branches so the fruit will come. The Christian life is absolute, unalterable dependence on God alone. Listen to that one more time. The Christian life – it's not a little bit of you and a whole bunch of Him. It's none of you and all of Him. The Christian life is absolute, unalterable dependence upon God alone. If I am something then God is not everything. We are nothing and He is everything. What you need to learn this morning, number one, is to ask God to teach you to be nothing, to be helpless. That's branch life.

Branches can grunt, lay out in the sun, and they will not produce one thing because the life is in the vine and it's the Spirit of God that is the sap that God brings and puts in us and we must have absolute dependence. I'm not talking 95%. I'm not talking 50%. I'm not talking about 99%. I'm talking about 100%. I'm not talking about 110%. You can't do that.

I love Coach John Wooden. That aggravated him to death. He'd hear coaches say, "You've got to give 110%." He said, "That's absolutely impossible. You can't give 110. You can give 100 but you can't give 110." God's not asking for you to give more than you've got but He's asking you to give all you've got in full surrender of absolute, total dependence on Him. That's branch life.

Number two. Branch life is not only a life of absolute dependence, number two, branch life is a life of deep restfulness. The branch rests in the vine. Jesus said, "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." We rest in the vine. You say, "Well now, pastor, if it's all on Him and I'm resting on Him won't that make me slothful?" Oh no. Commercials. I love the commercial with the sloth where he's drawing slowly. He's drawing a tandem bicycle and they're playing the game of trying to get it. The sloth is so slow. Every time I see that come on, I chuckle. I say, "Baptist." We can be slothful but I'm here to tell you, resting in Christ will not be that that produces slothfulness.

Let me tell you what it does. When you rest in the vine the love of God flows through you. Romans 5 and verse 5 the Bible says: *and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.* It's the love of God. When you are tied as a branch back to the vine that that flows through you is the love of God. Now the love of God displays itself in many ways but it does not make you slothful. It makes you passionate and it flows through you. II Corinthians 5 and verse 14 says: *For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died.* Jesus died for us and we are dead unto Him and it's the love of Christ that controls us.

Dear friend, it is not – listen to me – rest is not inactivity. It is His activity. It's not that we are inactive but it is that He is active in us and through us. You say, "Pastor, this is just weird. It's mystical." You're right on it. It's the Spirit life. It's a life of absolute dependence. It's a life of deep restfulness.

Number three. Branch life. Branch life is a life of much fruitfulness. In this text that we've read in John 15:1-5 He says that we are to bear fruit. We're to bear more fruit and then we're to bear much fruit. This fruitfulness. Now don't confuse – listen to me now – don't confuse your work with God's fruit. Not all Christian people's effort produces fruit. As a matter of fact, some stuff you do you ought not even be doing. You shouldn't do anything until God tells you to do it. You shouldn't teach a class until God says that's where you're supposed to be. You shouldn't stop teaching a class until God tells you you're supposed to stop teaching a class. You say, "That doesn't make sense." Well that's the way you pay for pastors and staffers to come to your church. You say, "We wouldn't want anybody to be here God didn't send." Let me tell you, you shouldn't make a step that God doesn't send you. That's the fruitfulness.

You see, the sap is flowing and it's the Holy Spirit and the only way to have freshness and buoyancy and joy, it only comes as we are rooted in Christ. The branch life is a life of much fruitfulness. Now watch this. It goes down in the ground. The vine comes up and it starts growing. If it doesn't give fruit, it gets pruned. There are two kinds of branches. Dead, false branches like Judas that get cut off and burned up in the fire.

All in the Old Testament, Israel is likened to a vine. That is the primary illustration of Israel is a vine and where one is not fruitful God takes the dead branch and casts it into the fire. But the true branch that is going to bear fruit, the only way for that to happen is for it to be pruned and God cuts us back. A pruned vine is ugly.

My little house over here where I live, I have a grape arbor. The people that lived there before me planted it. I take care of it. Here in just a few weeks when I'm sure it's not going to freeze again – now don't come give me a horticulture lesson. I do it my way. You do it your way. Then I'll go in and cut that thing back. I'll take all of that growth off and I'll burn it and get rid of it. Then as the sun shines and it comes like a beautiful spring day that today is, when we know that's going to happen into February and March then I'll begin to see those little green chutes that start coming. Before long I'll walk out there and they'll be that long. Then they're just running off and they're hanging down to the ground. I'll be cutting grass and I'll look on there and there'll be little bitty green. That doesn't come unless we've pruned it back.

You see, there's some things you're doing you need to quit. God'll prune it back in your life. There are times God prunes the church. Churches don't just grow like this. Churches go and God sometimes prunes them back so they can really take off. We've gone through some pruning in this church. You go through pruning in your own personal life. God cuts that back. He says, "You shouldn't be active right there."

God pruned me through Fred Wolf one day. Fred Wolf is an old preacher. He's old enough to be my daddy. He's still on television. I love Brother Fred. He pastors a church over in Mobile. He was at Cottage Hill for 106 years and then he started this other church.

I remember the day I walked by and Brother Fred put his arm around me. He said, "Brother Ted." I said, "Yeah." He said, "I've been watching you." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You're pastoring your church and running around all over the country preaching." I said, "Well, God just keeps you busy." He said, "Let me tell you, you don't have to take every invitation that comes." He said, "As a matter of fact, you can't be fresh all the time if you're running all the time." I said, "Who put you in my life as the Holy Ghost?" He said, "I'm not here to judge you, son. I'm here to tell you that I liked to killed myself doing what I see you doing." He said, "Just prune your schedule a little and God'll give you more fruit." Whew.

Friend, you ought not do anything until the Holy Ghost says you can do it. Amen. When He prunes then He brings this fruitfulness. It is the branch life. Not much activity but much fruitfulness. God will give more fruit in a minute than you can try to grunt and work on in ten years. Oh what if we had a church full of folks that the only time we got

active is when God – I'm telling you, He'll wear you out. He'll keep you as busy as you need be.

Branch life is a life of absolute dependence. Branch life is a life of deep restfulness. Number three. Branch life is a life of much fruitfulness. Number four. Ya'll are listening slow. We've got to hurry now. Branch life is a life of close communion. Close communion. Look at it right here in verse 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 [do what?] abide in Me.*

"I'm the vine. You're the branches. He who abides." There's that word again. It's a little Greek word with four letters in it. M-E-N-O. *Meno*. Not a minnow like you fish with but spelled differently and pronounced very closely. *Meno*. M-E-N-O. It means to reside or to dwell. When you abide in Him and He abides in you. The branch life is a life of close communion. You abide in Him. You live in Him.

There are two ways of abiding. The first one is reading the Bible. I John 3:24 says to us: *The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him.* Well how do you keep the commandments? You've got to read the book to find the commandments. The one that abides in the commandments reads the book. That's who abides in Him and He in him. You see, when you're keeping what God's truth says to do, you're abiding in Him and He's abiding in you. *We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.* So you get into the commandment of God and the commandment of God gets in you and you obey the commandment. Therefore, you abide in Him and He abides in you.

Secondly, not only do we abide in Bible study but with secret prayer. Your time alone with God. No one else knows. It's just you and the Lord. I'm telling you, that's how you abide with Him. You read His word and then in your quiet place you speak to Him. Let me tell you, you have not known secret, abiding prayer unless you pray more than you watch the evening news. If you know more about the government shutdown than you do heaven's open door you're abiding in the wrong place.

I didn't come to be your friend today. I've come to tell you the truth. We must keep close communion. March 4 is coming right around the corner. On a Sunday night right here, March 4, we're going to have another evening when we have a call to prayer. I am telling you, you must be here that night when we will spend the evening together calling out to the Lord. We'll read the Bible. There's not going to be any preaching. We're just going to pray. We've done it before. You know about it. I believe it's time again for us to close ranks to abide in Him through the word and through secret prayer.

Have you ever stayed at somebody's house when they weren't there? I have. I have a friend in Birmingham. If I'm there for a meeting and he travels a lot, I'll go by

and he'll just say, "Here's the keys to my house. Refrigerator, anything you want, just eat it. Your house is my house." It's like I abide there. So I go in and he's not there. He's got a little study so I go back and go through all the desk drawers. He comes in and I've got his checkbook. I said, "You don't make as much money as I thought you did." He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Just making myself at home." I said, "I was looking at your calendar over here the other day. It seems like you're taking a lot of time away." He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "You said just make myself at home. Your house is my house." That's not really what they meant, is it?

Let me tell you, when you ask Jesus to come in, you give Him rights to the checkbook and the schedule, the children, your grandchildren, to your in-laws and your outlaws. Let me tell you, you give Him ruling rights to every part of your house or He does not abide if He can't walk in every room. If He can't open every drawer. If He can't look at every DVD. If He can't go to everything you visit on the computer. If He can't open every cabinet, eat and drink what you've been eating and drinking, let me tell you, branch life is close communion. You abide in Him. He abides in you. Anything else is hypocrisy. It's playing a Baptist game. You've got to throw open the door if you're really going to live branch life.

It's absolute dependence. It's deep restfulness. It's much fruitfulness. It's close communion. Number five, lastly. Branch life is a life of absolute surrender. Absolute surrender. Notice what He said right there in verse 5. *I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit.* Boy, that's great, isn't it? Hallelujah. But look at this last phrase. *For apart from Me you can do* [How much? Man, that's a mouthful right there, isn't it? I am to be totally given to the vine and His plan, His pleasure, and His providence. Not my plan, not my pleasure, not my providence. For without Him I can do] *nothing.* So it must be His plan, His pleasure, His providence. You must ask this question if you're going to have absolute surrender.

Lord, is there anything in me not according to Your will? Is there anything? Anything in me not according to Your will? So how much can you do without Him? How much can you do without Him? One more time. How much can you do without Him? Nothing. So let me ask the question this way. So what is everything that you do without Him? Nothing. Whew. That question drives a stake into my heart. What can I do without Him? Nothing. So what is everything that I try to do without Him? Nothing. It is absolute surrender.

So I want us to make a declaration today. In a moment I'm going to have you stand and make a declaration. It's a short declaration. It's found in verse number 5. I've changed it just a little to help us with the declaration. After we make that declaration, Jon, you can come on right now and he's going to be playing, getting ready to sing. After we make our declaration then in this room and in the room at Warrington, there are going to be people to receive you.

Some of you are here and you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Today you ought to get saved. Some of you have been saved but you've never been baptized by immersion. You say, "I was baptized when I was little or a baby." But you've never on your own, you ought to make that declaration. You say, "Well, why should I do that?" Because God said you should. If you're going to follow Him, you obey Him and one of the steps of obedience is baptism. Some of you ought to join Olive Baptist Church today. You ought to move your membership right here. You say, "Why should I do that?" Because He's the vine, you're the branch, and what He's told you to do, you ought to do. You say, "I don't want to." Well that doesn't have anything to do with it. You do what God tells you to do.

When I was growing up in my momma's grocery store with my daddy, when they said do something you did it. You say, "Well I don't like that." Well you don't get a vote. I put a silly tweet on Twitter this week. I said, "If they'd send my mother to Washington she'd solve this shutdown thing in about 30 minutes." It wouldn't take long at all. You've got to balance the checkbook. She'd say, "Ya'll don't have a budget?" No, we don't have a budget. We haven't had a budget in a long time. Well how do you run a place without a budget? She'd make her famous statement. She's told me a thousand times. If your outgo exceeds your income, your upkeep will be your downfall. I've heard it over and over. I've read it in several books. I said, "I wonder who called my mother. She's the one that used to say that."

I watched her one day. There was a guy leaning on a broom that was working. She went by and kicked the broom out from under him. She said, "Do you work here?" She almost broke my neck. She thought she was in charge. Let me tell you, friend, if you're going to follow Jesus, He's in charge. What He tells you to do, you do it because He knows what's better for you than you could even think you'd know what's good for yourself. He loves you. He's got a wonderful plan for you. He has a providential plan for you. He has a pleasurable plan. He knows.

Stand with me. Let's make this declaration. Here it is. It's coming up on the screen. I want you to say it out loud with gusto. Here we go. Say this. Lord, You are the vine. I am the branch. Let's do it again. Lord, You are the vine. I am the branch. Now this time I'll do the first part and you do the last part. Here we go. Lord, You are the vine. I am the branch. You're the what? Branch. I am the branch. Don't get over your branch life. You are not the vine. I am not the vine. He is the vine. I am the branch.