

# STEP INTO REALITY

“Experiencing God” Series

Week 2

North Point Church...why are we here?

- **REACH UP TO GOD AND WORSHIP HIM WITH EVERYTHING WE HAVE**
- **REACH OUT TO OTHER TO SHARE JESUS CHRIST WITH LOVE, ACCEPTANCE, AND FORGIVENESS**
- **REACH IN TO THE CHURCH FAMILY TO ENCOURAGE AND TO EQUIP**

We are in week two of a series entitled, “A Mile in His Shoes”...I am glad you are here because this because this is one of my favorite topics to preach and teach. As we talk about what it is like to step into the shoes of God...what we mean by that is obviously we are not God...but we want spend time getting to understand who He is and His perspective on life.

Now, the truth is that I think sometimes we have misconceptions about the realities of God. We come into this relationship with Him with presuppositions based upon life situations like hurts from others or the church or misguided teachings about who He is...or that life has just sucked for you and for you to even believe there is a God at all... is a stretch!

So today...as humbly as I possibly can...I am going to challenge you to take a look at the reality of who God is through Jesus Christ. To step into His shoes today and really try to experience who God is through Jesus Christ.

This week I was working on my sermon and Thursday mornings is when I kind of wrap things up and send out to my peeps for a look before I bring it to you all on Sunday morning. Thursday morning was Sept 11...that is my youngest son, Roman’s birthday...but obviously it is also a day in American history that we will not soon forget...at least I hope not.

**But I remember Sept 11, 2001 like it was yesterday. I had been at home in our little house in Atlanta IL working on some homework when the disaster took place. Talk about a shock...talk about just spinning everything out of control and not knowing what to do next. I remember picking up the phone and calling my friend and seeing if he was going to go to class that day or not...and he was so I went.**

**So I packed up my books and stuff and headed to school. Man, when I got there that is all everyone was talking about...”did you hear” ...”did you see” ...”man I cannot believe what just took place”....”I wonder what is going to happen now?”**

**And my friend and I sat in the back of the class room and just discussed all this that we had just seen and heard with the terrorist attacks.**

Maybe you remember the uncertainty from that time and all the things that came with it:

- how many more planes will there be...
- then anthrax became an issue...
- declaration of war against terrorism...
- what is that all about...what was this war going to lead too.

There was so much uncertainty going on.

We have uncertainty all around us. Where is the bottom? When will things pick up? What is going to happen? I mean now we are going to go to war against ISIS...but not really just going to train others to fight (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).

In a world full of uncertainty, where can we find a voice of Hope?

**pray...**

I want to show you something that is just awesome here in your Bible...go ahead and turn to **John chapter 15**.

Here is what makes this passage so cool...we need to understand what is happening in the life of Christ. He doesn't have much time left. When we catch up to Jesus in John 15, He is down to His final moments with **His peeps**.

Literally, just hours is all that He has. You have to think that in these last moments that these words by Jesus are carefully chosen and precisely spoken and something we should listen intently too.

Now just earlier in **CHAPTER 14** He said to the disciples, **"In just a little while the world will no longer see Me."** And I wonder if, maybe He saw the concern in their faces and the anxiety in their eyes...the disciples are anxious about what all of this means.

Here is the problem...I know that many of us, if not all of us fall into this same mindset. We feel as though we cannot handle life...we **don't feel** like we are properly equipped to be His disciple...we **don't feel** as though we can go out and share about this life change that He has created in us with other people.

And here is the deal...Jesus isn't just saying these words to His disciples, his boys back then...He is thinking of us too. He knows the challenges that we'll face, the strength that we're going to need. He knows that we **don't feel** we have the strength...the ability...the knowledge...the faith to be His disciples.

Now, I think I need to clarify something before I move on...I have used this **churchie religious word**, **disciple** many times already this morning...let me clarify what I am talking about. **A DISCIPLE IS SIMPLY A FOLLOWER AND STUDENT OF A MENTOR, TEACHER, OR OTHER PROMINENT FIGURE.**

Jesus calls you and me...to follow Him...to be His disciples. I need you to understand that Jesus' call for us to be His disciples is an awesome awesome thing.

His call is to everyone across every social and economic scale...rich, poor, educated, uneducated, white collar, blue collar. When you look at His disciples that he put together...can I tell you something...the Bible is very clear about this...He gathered those that were not considered good enough to be disciples of other rabbis.

Did you hear me on this...Jesus calls together a group of people that were not considered to be good enough by other religious leaders. Jesus calls these men together that would be considered the B Team...the "Not Good Enoughs" **...and He makes them His peeps.**

Think about Peter and John, these guys were just simple fishermen...from what we understand young apprentice fishermen. So they are young, inexperienced, passed over by other Rabbis, regular Joes. The Bible says that when people saw them and heard them they could see and hear that they were simple and uneducated fisherman.

Jesus takes these people who were just a simple cross section of people...people from all walks of life and He say, “come follow me, and I will make you my disciples”. I will teach you to be like me.

Jesus, takes these men and spends three years just simply living life together and teaching and encouraging them to go and create other disciples for Him...who will in turn be like Jesus.

And so let me bring us back to John chapter 15. **Again Jesus has just told this motley crew of disciples that He is about to leave them and turn them loose on the world.** And I can't help but think that maybe Jesus senses and see that they are beginning to question their abilities, their knowledge, their faith.

I wonder if Jesus doesn't sense in them the feelings of inadequacy to be His disciple.

- “Jesus, I don't know enough” ...
- “Jesus, I don't understand these scriptures enough” ...
- “Jesus, I have only been following you for a short amount of time” ...
- “Jesus, I am just simply not ready to do this” ...
- “Jesus, when I consider this check list of qualifications and characteristics that I think I need to have or other have told me I need to have, Jesus, I just don't measure up.”
- “Jesus, I cannot teach kids in **K-town**”
- “Jesus, I cannot facilitate a **Growth Group**”
- “Jesus, I cannot **commit to serving every week**”
- “Jesus, I need more training...and teaching...and mentoring...and strength...and time...and faith.”

Does this sound familiar? When you hear someone say, “that we need to go out and share our faith or this life change that has taken place in our lives because of Jesus Christ” ...do we ever feel like these first disciples of Jesus? Woe, let's not get crazy here.

Do we just **feel like** we need more strength to accomplish this awesome privilege and responsibility?

So, Jesus is thinking of the disciples and He is thinking of us and the strength we're going to need. So they walk out into the cool of the night, in silence. Jesus is leading.... They don't know it, but Jesus is leading them to the Garden of Gethsemane.

And He knows what awaits Him there...the betrayal and arrest, beatings, death. He is winding them along these paths that follow along these ancient vineyards where fruit has been growing for generations.

He stops and He breaks the silence. I am sure, he gestures towards a vine on the side of the road and here is what He says. Look at **verse 1**. He says, **“I am the true vine,** and in vs. 5 **“I am the vine; you are the branches.”**

Do you see this...He says, He is the vine and that they...that we... are the branches. This is cool...this is powerful...the one message He wants to make clear with His time left is...**YOU STAY CONNECTED**. You stay connected because all the power and strength comes from the vine. **Your strength is found in me!!!**

But why, why did Jesus give such a message to His disciples before He goes to the cross...in just a few brief hours. Because He knows they will need to find strength to endure. And the same advice is given to us today...the same principle applies to you and to I today.

Hopefully what I am about to say make sense, because this goes so counter cultural. Listen, if we are looking for strength what must we admit...is we have a weakness. The most powerful thing we can know about ourselves is that we are weak. In our human state of life...we are weak. I have to know my limitations as a human being...particularly as Tim Bycroft...and then say God...I need some serious help in these areas of my life...God I need your strength.

Sometimes we come across that we've got all of our stuff together and we can handle anything that comes our way. But the Bible teaches that when we acknowledge our own weakness, we are in a perfect place to receive the strength of God.

I absolutely love this passage of scripture in **I Cor. 1:26-29, Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God."**

Here is the deal, when and only when we acknowledge and understand our weakness, are we in a perfect place for God's strength to flow through us.

Jesus and God choose the **misfit dorks...like me**. They choose the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong. His strength flows through us when we humbly accept our weakness and recognize our strength is found through the same Spirit that Raised Jesus from the dead that now lives in us to strength us and guide us.

The call here is not to make yourself weak. You're already weak. I'm already weak. My physique may not show it, but I am a scrawny little twig...the branch that Jesus was talking about. I am just the scrawny branch dangling from the vine of the true source of all strength and power. You and I are the branches compared to the vine which is God.

This is not to make you feel worthless...on the contrary... I want you to see how absolutely awesome this is...when we humble ourselves before God then He infuses His strength into you.

So this relationship between the vine and the branch...it's just so important to get it right. He is the vine and we are the branch. So the power and strength and life...come from the vine...from God!

Pause.....

You notice what Jesus says in verse 1. He says, **“I am the true vine.”** And the use of the word “true”...what does that indicate?

It indicates that there are other vines that aren't true, that look like they're life-giving, that look like they will give us strength. We think they will empower us, but in the end they don't. I think we get into the most trouble when we make ourselves the vine, when we say, “I'm going to find strength from within.”

The challenge of this is that it is the central message of our culture, that you can be the vine if you want to be the vine. If you'll just dig down deep enough, you can find strength to get through anything in life. It's the message of pretty much every daytime talk show. It is the theme of more than hundreds of self-help books that are published every year: “You can be the vine. You're not the branch. Don't you dare settle for being the branch...You be the great and mighty vine.”

In **verse 2**, listen to what Jesus says...**“He (God, the gardener) cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”**

Now I had to reread this because it says the opposite of what I thought it said the first time I read it. You wouldn't think that God prunes branches that bear fruit. You would think it would say, “Anyone who doesn't bear fruit He prunes,” because pruning is painful, right? But it doesn't say that. It says, “Anyone who bears fruit God prunes.” And pruning is not an easy process.

**Some of you who have gardens have seen this. It looks like you're just devastating the plant, but in reality you know that they're going to come back stronger than ever before. In reality you know that they are going to bear more fruit because they've been pruned.**

**So here is the second thing that we do to grow in strength: WE ACCEPT GOD'S PRUNING IN OUR LIVES. We just accept it.**

Now this is not easy to do. It hurts to be pruned.

- Maybe God is allowing some **financial difficulties** right now because He wants you to learn dependence on Him.
- Maybe He is allowing some **physical challenges**, health challenges, because He wants you to know how weak you are so that His strength can flow through you more perfectly.
- Maybe He is allowing some **difficult relationship** because He wants to see the fruit of grace and patience bear forth in your life.

So these difficult challenges are in reality an act of love by God, as He prunes us, so we will be stronger and we will bear fruit. And your sitting there going Shut Up...A loving caring God cuts on us...prunes us...puts us through this stuff...Shut UP!!!

**Hebrews chapter 12:11** says, **“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”**

I know, I know, I know...I have to admit...I don't like it much either. But I have come to understand more fully that the only way that we are really going to have the strength God wants us to have...the only way we're going to bear the fruit that He wants us to bear is by going through this pruning process. It's not easy. But we need to learn to accept God's pruning.

Now check this out **vs 4-10, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.**

**"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

**"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.**

Does anyone see a pattern here? I want you to understand something... the message...the words...the concept and instructions that Jesus shared with his disciples literally hours before He would go to the cross is this...**REMAIN IN ME.**

He says, you want to know where your strength will come from...it comes from your faith remaining in me. Do you want to experience me...remain in me. do you want to know what it is like to walk in my shoes...remain in me.

It is just so vitally important to get this right. We focus on our connection...we make sure that we the branch stay connected to Jesus...the true vine.

When we walk in obedience to Christ, when we worship Him together **like this in church**, when we **engage in life together** in a **growth group**... what happens is that connection gets stronger and stronger, circumference grows, more strength flows out to us. Jesus says, It's all about the connection.

Do you see this...Jesus doesn't have much time left before He is going to allow the Soldiers to arrest Him and take Him away. And this is what He wants some of His last words to be to His disciples and to us.

So He says, "Stay connected...Remain in me."

- In just a few moments when they come and they **arrest Me**, you **Remain in Me.**
- When they **beat Me** and they **nail Me to a tree**, **Remain in Me.**
- When you **watch Me die**, **Remain in Me.**
- When they **come after you**, **Remain in Me.**
- When I **ascend into heaven** and you **Reach Out to the others**, **Remain in Me.**
- When you **face persecution** because you are a follower of me, **Remain in Me.**

And Jesus says to you and to me:

- When your **portfolio takes a tumble**, **Remain in Me.**
- When your **car breaks down** and **nothing seems to be going right**
- When your **spouse disappoints** you,
- when your **child breaks your heart**,
- when you **lose your job**,
- when you **don't think you can take it one more second**, **Remain in Me!**
- when **people make fun of you** because of what you believe or where you worship, **You Remain...You Remain...**
- When you **don't feel worthy or able to be my disciple** to others. **You Remain in ME!**.

You stay connected. Just be the branch. Be the branch and let life and strength and power to overcome...come from Me! **Remain in Me!!!**