

I Am a Branch

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala emphasizes that the Christian life is about being a branch connected to the true vine, Jesus, to bear fruit for God's glory.

Duration: 36:14

Scripture: John 15:1-2, John 15:4-7, John 15:9-10, John 15:12, John 15:16

Topics: "Abiding"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of abiding in Christ and staying connected to Him. He explains that simply trying to change our behavior without truly abiding in Christ is ineffective. The speaker encourages listeners to listen to and meditate on God's word daily in order to stay connected to Him. He uses the analogy of a vine and branches to illustrate the relationship between Christ and believers, highlighting the need for dependence on Him for life and fruitfulness. The speaker also challenges the legalistic mindset that focuses on our own efforts, reminding listeners that Christianity is about receiving and sharing in the life of Christ.

Transcript

Here's a good question. What is the Christian life? Someone said, okay, you become a Christian. So what is the Christian life? So you all in the choir, you're Christians, aren't you? Yeah, we sing in a choir, we love the Lord, we serve the Lord.

So what is the Christian life? In a minute, just tell me, what is the Christian life? A lot of people would say this. Well, Jesus is my Savior, and now I try to live a life that would please Him. That's the Christian life.

That's not really the most basic answer. No, the Christian life is, I go to church on Sundays. When I'm free, I come on Tuesday.

I go to a certain church called the Brooklyn Tabernacle. That's what the, I give, I try to read the Bible every day. I try to read the Bible.

That's the Christian life. No, you try to do good. No, you know what it is? The Christian life is this.

It's a life of love. I try to love everybody, and you see where we're going with this? There's a lot of different ways to describe it, and everything I just said now has elements of truth in it, but it's not at all the answer from the Bible. The answer from the Bible is revolutionary, and it's so revolutionary that most Christians in

the world today don't understand it, but it's brought out in a chapter in the Gospels which I think rivals 1 Corinthians 13 as being so vital to our walk with the Lord.

1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter, right? Love is patient. Love is, what's the next one? Kind. Some ministers and great devotional writers have said, every Christian should read 1 Corinthians 13 once a week because it's so easy for us to get away from what it's all about, love, but this chapter is deeper than that even because it shows us how we get to 1 Corinthians 13.

This is the deepest of the deep. Jesus has had the Last Supper with the disciples. Some commentators think he has sung a hymn with them as we read in John, and now he's on his way to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, and it's either in the garden or on the way to the garden that some people think he sees something.

He sees a certain vegetation which makes him start to teach this. It's only six verses. Let's look at it.

I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He 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.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me. Now that word is translated abide, continue, cling to.

Remain in me, and I will, same word, 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 what? Branches. If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. Verse eight, this is to my father's glory. What will bring him glory? That you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

I am the true vine. This is the last one of Jesus's I am statements. Can anyone think of anything else he said in John? I am the what? I am the way.

I am the what? I am the, give me another I am. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the good shepherd.

Very good. Now this is the last one of seven, and he says, this is the one we know the least about, and maybe it's the most important. I am the true vine.

All of the vines are just examples of I being the true vine. A living organism, symbolically. And my father is the what? He's the gardener, the one who tends the vine.

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. So he cuts off things, because what in the world is a branch good for if it's not bearing fruit and it's connected to the vine? The whole purpose of a branch or a stem going out is to bear fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes it so that it'll bear even more fruit.

So as my friend Warren Wiersbe says somewhere, fruit, more fruit, abundant fruit. The whole thing is about fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Remain in me and I will remain in you, or abide in me and I will abide in you. Have fellowship with me and I will have fellowship with you. Have communion with me and I will have communion with you.

No branch, nothing that grows out of the vine can bear fruit by itself. A branch is lifeless by itself. It must remain in the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. Now I am the vine, you are the branches. Now the vine includes, by the way, everything, the roots and everything, and the branches.

So I am the total package, you're part of the package, you're the branches. If a man abides, remains, stays in communion with me and I stay in communion with him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit. Showing yourselves to be my disciples. So what's the picture? The picture is a plant.

And the picture is, I am the vine, and you are one of the branches. And what do we learn about this vine? What's the teaching that we have here before us? Well, number one, in the vine, we know we have life. Christianity is about life.

Jesus did not say, I am a microphone stand, and you are the microphone. Why? These things are dead. This is dead, has no life.

Christianity is not about death, it's about life. It's not about head knowledge, merely. It's not about understanding doctrines, merely.

It's not about bringing your body to a church like you have this morning, it's about life. A vine has life in it. You can't see the life, it's hidden in the sap.

But there's life flowing throughout the vine, going into the branches. That's the only way fruit is gonna come, the life of the vine making it to the branches. So Christianity is about life.

A lifeless church, a lifeless Christian is a contradiction of terms. It's an oxymoron. You can't have a Christian without life.

When a person is born again, what does that mean? They now have the life of God in them. Peter says in one place, through these precious promises, we can become partakers of the divine nature. That means it's amazing.

In you and me is the spirit of the living God, life. Life. Another example God gave us of what Christianity is about Jesus is the head and we are the body.

Head and body connected life. Not a corpse, life. Head, body, head giving directions to the body.

This is what Christianity is about, being so connected to the Lord that we share his life. Oh, brothers and sisters, this is a word of deliverance for so many of us. It's not about you doing anything.

What are you gonna do it with? What can a branch do separated from the vine? Most of us have gotten a legalistic concept of Christianity. It's all right, he died for me. He shed his blood for me.

Now I'm a Christian and now I'm gonna try to live the Christian life. No. Does a branch try to do anything? It just receives.

Why it's so quiet here is lights are going on in people's minds and hearts through the Holy Spirit. I am the vine. You are the branches.

What is the job of the branch to stay connected to the vine? The branch is weak and useless unless it's connected to the vine. The moment I take some cutters and cut this off, if this was all living, if I cut this, the moment I cut it, it's dead. Oh no, but it looks still pretty.

Just hang around. It'll shrivel up and die. Why? It's only life is to be connected to the vine.

Once you break communion, once I break fellowship with the Lord, we start to die up and shrivel. Is it not so? Is it not so? Notice this is going deeper than relationship. This is going into communion.

The problem with most believers is not that we don't have relationship. Thank God we have relationship. We've been born again.

We're part of the family of God. We're sons and daughters of God. But there's something deeper than that.

For relationship to be fulfilled, you have to have fellowship, communion. Because if something blocks the flow of the sap into this, this thing is gonna get wilted. It's gonna be messed up.

Christianity is about life, not death. When we say God is a rock, he is my rock, that's used a metaphor for another kind of teaching. But Christianity most essentially is life.

A lifeless church, what a terrible testimony to Jesus Christ. No love, no life, no energy to serve. No, nothing flowing through it.

Just go to church like a robot. Sit, sing some songs, go home. But is that not Christianity to a lot of people? Nothing supernatural, nothing of life.

But Jesus said, I am the true vine, and you are the branches. Now he said, my father is the gardener. What does the gardener do? His job is to watch the vine and to prune it with a knife.

And the thing about pruning is it's not pleasant. Why does he prune? He prunes because he removes two things, dead wood or things that are dead. Why? Because disease can come in them, insects can form in there, and it'll stop the growth and the fruitfulness of the plant.

Notice the only, the vine he's talking about is the vine that produces grapes. And the vine was a symbol of Israel. And there was a vine carved on the top parts of the temple.

The gardener comes and says, no, that's not good, I gotta cut that out, it's gonna mess up the fruitfulness. Because the whole thing of the reason for the plant is to bear fruit. The whole thing that Jesus wants from us is to bear fruit.

What's the last verse we read? By this my father receives glory, that you bear fruit. By this you prove you're my disciples. When you don't see different fruit from a person's life, it doesn't matter what church they go to, including this one, they're not a Christian.

When anybody is part of the vine, they will bear fruit. I am the vine, you are the branches. What's the purpose of branches? To bear fruit.

What brings glory to God? Bearing fruit. We'll get to what fruit means in a second. So now the gardener comes, and he cuts away dead things in our lives.

Things that are hindering us, and it hurts us sometimes. Not only that, he cuts away living things. If the grapes are weak, he'll cut off a whole bunch of grapes so that the life of the plant will bring even better grapes, bigger grapes, more grapes, stronger grapes.

This explains a lot of stuff that happens in our life. The Lord puts his love on one of his children. He sees the fruit isn't coming out the way he plans, so what he does, he takes his knife.

The gardeners back in those days, they would study for years how to prune a plant. You had to be skilled, because if you cut wrong, you hurt the plant, you'll kill the plant. But our father knows exactly how to prune the plant.

They would study what knife to use, where to cut the plant, what angle to cut the plant, how deep to cut the plant. It was a science. And that's what happens in our lives.

The Lord is pruning us. He brings disappointments into our life. He takes things away that he sees are getting totally out of control.

Totally out of control. Some affection for something or someone that is totally out of control to the fruit bearing that he planned for us. So he takes the knife and cuts it.

See, you all are not saying amen now, because see, that's not triumphant to a lot of people. But listen, you're never closer to Jesus. You're never closer to God than when he's pruning you.

Oh, but I don't feel the glory. Forget the glory. He's pruning you.

You're never closer to him than when he's pruning you. Just think of what Christianity means to some people today. I hear people talk, and they don't read their Bibles much.

It almost staggers my mind. It's like, what style of music do you do? Are you old school? You're new school. How do you do your PowerPoints? That's what they have in the church conferences now for pastors.

This is how you define Christianity now. Do you have contemporary service? Do you have like for old school? You sing hymns like, whoa. This is what people are talking about, and you wonder, these things are not even mentioned in the New Testament.

That's all the way we think. But Jesus told them what Christianity's about. He said, I am the vine, you are the branches.

What good does it matter what songs we sing if we're not abiding in the vine? What does it matter what we sing? Notice also the whole fallacy of getting changes in your life by getting to the man of God for he can pray for you. Think of that. It's right to pray for someone, and it's right to pray for someone to grow in the Lord, but unless it ends up with you having a new kind of abiding, a new kind of connection, what's gonna happen? Nothing's gonna happen.

It wouldn't matter who prayed for you. Paul doesn't say, listen, when I come line up everybody, I'm gonna pray for them. That's what we've got this deliverance mentality in us, but here's what Jesus said.

Here's how you grow. Stay connected to the vine. The life of the plant will flow through you.

You won't be able to not produce fruit. The fruit will come flying out of you. You never see a branch going, argh.

Come on, apple. Never, never. What does it do? If it receives the sap, it produces apples.

If I'm connected to him and his spirit is flowing through me, there will be fruit. Come on, let's put our hands together and thank God. As someone has said, church work and Christian life is not about results.

It's about fruit. Results are not a word in the Bible. Results are never found in the New Testament.

Fruit. What does fruit come from? Life. How do you get the life? Well, how does the branch get the life? And I close.

The whole secret of the branch is to stay connected, open, receptive, and just stay connected to the vine. As long as the branch is connected to the vine, everything's gonna be fine. Sure, there'll be a little cutting once in a while because the gardener says, yeah, you're getting some fruit, but I want more fruit.

So I'm gonna send a little cross in your life. I'm gonna bring some tears to your life. I'm gonna break your heart.

I'm gonna take something away. You're getting a little bit too dependent on things that I give you rather than on the giver, so I'll take something out so that now you'll get refocused on that. So let me just cut it away.

Come on. Has the Lord not done that to our lives? If you've ever been pruned, lift up your hand if you've ever been pruned. Come on.

And what is the goal? Fruit. Fruit. What brings glory to God? Fruit.

What proves that we're his disciples? Coming to church, joining the church, becoming a member. That doesn't prove anything. Fruit.

One of the fruits is love. By this shall all men know you're my disciples. How? Because you love one another.

You meet a hateful, mean-spirited, racist person or just ugly person, and they can know, have memorized the whole New Testament. You can't prove they're a Christian because you're looking for fruit. Fruit is not eaten by the branch.

It's eaten by others. What he wants to produce in our life is not for us. It's for others to eat.

You never see a branch just reach out and grab an apple and. You never see that. What happens? The apples fall, or they're picked, and somebody else eats.

See, a lot of people don't even have that concept of Christianity. To them, it's all like, how am I feeling today? How am I feeling? Things aren't working out. And the Lord's trying to produce fruit.

What is the fruit he's trying to produce? Well, let's stay biblical about the whole thing since we're preaching from the Bible, John 15. One fruit is to be holy like him. You know, the way to overcome besettings and sins is not just by fighting the sin.

It's by having his life flow through you. That'll drive out the sin. Most people try to fight sin with a vacuum behind them.

The way that we overcome sin is by being so flooded with his purity because we're so connected to him that there's no room for that stuff to develop. But most of us don't think of staying connected. We just focus on the sin.

I gotta overcome that. I gotta get victory over that pornography. I gotta get victory over this thing and that thing and that gossip in my mouth.

Just let that sap flow and your mouth will speak sweet things because it won't be you. Notice the branch has no life in itself. The name of this message is I am a branch.

Every morning, we're gonna get up this week and we're gonna just say to ourselves, I am a branch. Say it with me. I am a branch.

Say it louder. I am a branch. That's all I am.

And a branch has no purpose except for one thing. Receive. And whatever I receive will grow out of my branch.

Whatever life, that's all a branch does is receive life. If I'm cut off from that life, that's why Jesus said, without me you can do. Why? Because if you cut off the branch, the minute you saw it and it falls, it's dying.

It is dying. Why? It only exists to be connected to the tree. I am a branch.

You are a branch. What's another fruit? Oh, the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy.

A lot of people try to have joy. What a joke. You know, I gotta be happy.

Ha, ha, ha. No, you just stay connected and it'll be joy unspeakable. It'll be joy even when you're crying.

There'll be a deeper joy, something the world can't take away. There'll be peace. Why? Because you're connected to the vine.

The vine is the secret, not the branch. And not where the branch goes on Sunday. The pastor will be measured in the end.

I'm gonna stand before Christ and he's gonna ask me, did you get them and encourage them to abide in the vine? Because the only life, the power you and I need during the week, you can't get it from this building. You have to get it from Jesus. Abiding in him.

Not quoting his name once in a while. Notice, abiding. Love, joy, peace, meekness.

Here's another fruit the Bible mentions. Winning souls. A lot of people try to make big efforts.

Oh, I'm gonna win souls this week and all that. No, listen, forget that. Just abide.

Just abide and you'll have opportunities. It'll flow out of you. Just words will flow out of you.

Things will flow out of you. I say this for the glory of God. I recently was in a store.

I went to the woman and started asking her about something that they were selling there. And she looked at me, she said, I think I know you. Now that day I had really been abiding in the Lord.

I had really been in fellowship. We'll talk about what abiding means. Because not all of us abide.

I certainly have had times in my life I wasn't abiding at all. Very little communion with the Lord. So she said, wait a minute, I think I know you.

How do I know you? I said, I don't know. I said, I'm a minister. So then we just started talking and she started crying.

And I asked her just one question and she started to get convicted. It wasn't me. But I just knew the sap was flowing.

The life, the words, it doesn't have anything to do with feelings. You can be totally with a broken leg and be in pain and the sap will still be flowing. You'll know what to say, you'll know what to do.

You'll have fruit, there's life, there's stuff happening in you. Not by feeling the glory. Thank God for the moments we feel the glory.

But when Paul was in prison getting beaten up, he wasn't feeling the glory so much, but the sap was producing fruit. And I knew, and I told her, you know I met you today for a reason. You know that, don't you? She said, yeah.

And it was all Him. Wasn't even me, I wasn't even looking for it. I wasn't like, praise God, I'm gonna witness to somebody today.

No, it's a flow of life. It's love. How many want that? Put up both hands if you want that.

Come on. All right, now, it's ours. It's ours if, if you abide in me.

If you stay connected to me. If you abide in me. That word, it's so rich word.

If you remain in me and I in you. How, this is the secret. How do you abide? Do all Christians abide? No, because I unfortunately and the pastors, we deal with and counsel with people where the husbands who come to church here curse at their wives when they get angry.

Are they abiding? No, no, no, no, no. And in front of the children. I said this week to someone, I must be the worst pastor in America.

How could somebody sit and how could I have so little influence on someone? Oh God, help me to preach better. So we're not all abiding because look at some of the stuff that goes on. Think of some of the stuff that goes on in our lives.

Are we abiding? Is that the life of the vine coming through us? No, it's the flesh, it's us. Anger, wrath, gossip, running our mouths. If his life was flowing through us, you think we'd be talking that way about another person? Never, never, never.

But you don't change by saying, oh, I ain't gonna do that no more. You can't change that way. Haven't we all tried that? Come on, how many have turned over more new leaves than Prospect Park? Lift up your hand.

Come on, lift up your hand, lift up that leaf. And before the sun goes down, we violated it. No, it's abiding.

So how do you abide? Shh, listen. Well, how do you commune? How do you stay connected with a person? It means listening to his word every day. It means meditating on his word, not just reading it.

I've had times in my life where I didn't stop the reading of my Bible, but I wasn't abiding because I didn't meditate on his word. I just read it to say I did my devotions. How many follow me? So I gotta meditate on it, say, I am the true vine, you are the branches.

Maybe just that sentence for five minutes, Lord, speak to me about it, teach me. So you listen for him in his word. Then you talk to him.

Abiding is not just him talking to us, it's us talking to him. It's worship, it's worship. It's praise.

It's what the choir was helping us to do, worshiping God, praising God. It's thanking God, it's listening. It's staying connected all day to God, never losing sight of him.

And when I was young Christian, what I did was I did my devotions and I had my little time with Jesus, and then I walked away and I left Jesus there for the whole day, and then I wondered why I struggled. How in the world does a branch do that? Just stay connected in the morning and then leaves and runs around the garden? No, stays connected all the time. I have set the Lord always before me.

He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Even though I'm talking to him, I got one eye on the Lord. I develop that consciousness that the Lord is with me, that I am in him, he is in me.

Serving the Lord, helping others, that's all acts of communion so that we stay connected. But come on, some of us have drifted. We drift during a day, we drift during a week.

You don't have to say amen, I know it's true because I know me, I'm no different than you. Come on, are we all in the same boat together? The whole secret of the Christian life, the deepest truth is how to stay abiding in Christ, because if I abide in him and he is in me, guess what, I'm gonna produce good fruit. And the Father will be glorified and souls will be one, people will be blessed.

We'll have good words to say to one another. We won't be snippy, we won't be angry, we won't have an attitude. We'll see people the way God sees them, why? Because his sap is running through us.

His spirit is running through us. Of course I'm gonna look at everybody the way God looks at them. His spirit is making me do that.

We don't need symposiums on racial reconciliation. We just need to abide in the vine, then we'll love everybody. White people will love black people, black people will love white people.

There'll be no animosity, there'll be nothing, why? Because it's not in Jesus, and his life is in me. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Come on, let's just put our hands together.

Last verse, that's why the Bible said if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a what? A new creation, why? Because there's a new life flowing through the guy. The girl has a new life flowing through her. I'm looking at the picture up in my office with Brother Craig of my friend David Berkowitz, who I just wrote a letter to this last week.

Son of Sam, 35 years ago, he killed the last of seven people he killed. Terrorized New York City, the summer of 77. Stacey Moskowitz, 86th Street and 14th Avenue.

And then he was arrested because of a parking ticket. And Pastor Olmo was working then for the post office, and I think, if I remember correctly, he knew the lady who was working next to Berkowitz in the post office, and who every day would show him the articles and say to him, her coworker, who is this madman? Who is this crazy person who did this? And she would go, you know, I don't, he would say, I don't know, must be some madman. And when he got arrested and she saw his face, the guy she works with, she almost had a heart attack.

The son of Sam was next to her. And then somebody witnessed to him in prison. Someone also tried to kill him.

When my wife and I spent time with him, he still has the scar right like this across his neck. Some guy took a razor blade, wanted to get famous, and while bringing him a book, tried to kill him and slice him, and it cut this close to that main artery in there. But someone else gave him a New Testament.

And David Berkowitz became a believer. I wrote him a letter and said, I said, David, you know, I love you in the Lord, and if I could have anyone speak in my church on Sunday, it would be you, the most godly, Christ-like person. You say, pastor, I don't even wanna hear that.

Nobody could do that vicious thing and become a Christian. Yeah, because where sin abounds, grace even more abounds. Nothing's too hard for God.

And when the door opened, am I right, Carol? When the door opened and we're sitting there, this is, of course, he had been a Christian for 10 years already. When he walked in, as I speak before God, there was a light on him. There was some kind of light.

He used to call me every Friday night for a year. You're receiving a call from a federal penitentiary. This call could be monitored.

Will you receive this call and all of that? And then I would talk to him every Friday night. We became friends for a while there. How could he become so meek now and so? Larry King interviewed him like 15 years ago, and God gave him such wisdom.

He had written me and said, I'm being interviewed in the prison by Larry King. Pray that God will give me wisdom. He made mincemeat of Larry King.

Larry King wanted to poke a hole in that and say, you know, nobody wants to hear you're a Christian because you're Jewish. In fact, he was born Jewish, but he was given up by his parents and adopted by other Jewish parents. And you're Jewish.

You know, why would you turn away from Judaism and go to Christianity? And he said, no, I'm more Jewish. Jesus is Jewish, Larry. You should be Jewish like that.

He just knew what to say. And then he said, no, your conversion, you know what a lot of people say, David, is that you're a jailhouse conversion, that when people go in jail and they're gonna spend the rest of their life there, they get converted. And we were praying.

I remember myself watching the TV with Carol, and I'm just praying, God, God, now give him wisdom. And yeah, he said, you know, people go in prison, they all get converted. They all have experience with God.

And he said, oh no, Larry, the people are very hard back here. I'm trying to reach them. Come with me and I'll introduce you to these guys.

They're very hard to convert. No, they get harder when they get in here. He knew what to say.

Why? Because he was connected. I am the vine, you are the branches. That's what changes life.

Hold your hands up with me. Close your eyes. Lord, no altar call, no space in the front of the building is enough for all of us to come to.

But we lift up our hands to you and we ask you, Lord, teach us to abide. Make all of us to be branches that bear fruit so that your Father might be glorified. That we show we're your disciples because not by the church we go to or by the Bible we carry, but by the fruit we bear.

Help us to learn these lessons. You are the vine, but I am a branch. If I stay connected, as I stay connected, as you help me to stay connected, your life will flow through me.

The very divine life of God. And there will be love. There will be conversions.

There will be patience. There will be peace. Apart from you, all of us can't do a single thing.

For branches have no life. They only partake of the life of the vine. I have nothing.

I am nothing. I offer you nothing except my availability. Keep us connected to you.

If there's anyone here who has never been born again, I pray that in this moment, they don't need to come to an altar. They'll just start to trust you today. And they'll stop struggling.

Those of us who have grown up under legalism where we're always trying to change our ways, help us to release that now and let it go. Anything good gonna happen in my life is gonna be you doing it, Lord. Every eye closed, I'm gonna say a benediction now.

If there's anyone here who's not a Christian, you've never been born again. You've never had that experience of a new life flowing through you. Everything you've ever known is just struggle.

Just you trying to be better. Even as I'm getting ready to say the benediction, come out of your seat from upstairs or downstairs and say, pastor, that word was for me. I want some deacon to just stand with me and I just wanna yield myself as a branch to be plugged into the vine so that I can bear fruit.

Just come up out of your seat. Pastor, that was for me. I don't care if there's just one of you.

One of you is very precious to God. And if there's more, there's more. But you just come from the balcony or downstairs.

I cease today from my self-struggle, my self-effort, and I just yield myself to you, Lord. And let the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your people all day today. Help us to love each other now and hug each other, Lord, with real meaning and feeling.

We pray it in Jesus' name. And everyone said. Give somebody a hug before you leave.

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