

# Staying Connected

by Jim Cymbala

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of staying connected to Jesus and living from His life in order to bear much fruit and glorify God.*

**Duration:** 31:09

**Scripture:** John 15:1-7

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that Christianity is about life and invites people to believe in the Lord Jesus to receive this life. While attending church, living a good life, and reading the Bible are important, they do not determine one's status as a Christian. The preacher also highlights the importance of bearing fruit as a result of having this life in Christ. Using the metaphor of a vine and branches, Jesus is portrayed as the true vine, and believers are the branches connected to Him. God's plan is for believers to bear much fruit, which brings glory to Him.

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## Transcript

We're gonna read now from one of the most important chapters in the New Testament. I would rate it one of the top five places, all scriptures inspired, but this is a very deep part of scripture, very vital, but almost been lost to us, which I'll explain. Let's look at John 15.

John 15, reading from the first verse. Jesus said, I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. Okay, who's the true vine? Who's the gardener? He cuts off, who's he? The father.

Every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes, so that it'll be even more fruitful. You are already clean, he's saying this to the disciples.

This is on his way to Gethsemane, or possibly still at the upper room where they took the last supper. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me as I also remain in you.

Remain in me, that's the NIV. The King James has abide in me. It's a word that has maybe five or six that I've found alternate translations depending on which Bible you're reading.

Some say stay connected with me. Remain in me, abide in me, as I also 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 you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Such is the teaching of our Lord. In the book of John, there's two main metaphors that Jesus uses. I am the good shepherd, and what does that mean? His relationship to us is shepherd, sheep.

What does a shepherd do for the sheep? Protection, guidance, bring to food, fight off predators. He's the good shepherd. So in that case, we're sheep, he's the shepherd.

Here's a different metaphor. I am the vine, you are the branches. That's different.

Now, starting way back when Christianity began, there's always been, and we're involved in it, there's always been a fight, not to discover a new Christianity, but to rediscover and recapture what Christianity is supposed to be. Because Jesus, when he was on earth, warned that there would come false teachers, and that there would be a continual temptation to drift away from the Christianity that he intended into, shall we say, another form of religion. But it wouldn't be Christianity.

It would have the name Christian to it, it would be called Christ followers, but it wouldn't be what he intended. Paul warns about this, the apostle in his writings, saying watch out now, don't go veering off, because you gotta stay true to God's original plan. He warns about another gospel, which is no gospel, that people would be preaching something that would mention Jesus, but it wouldn't be the gospel that he received from Christ, and that he spread so faithfully.

So sure enough, it happened that way. The period right after the time of the book of Acts is shrouded in mystery, but right after that, they're called the early church fathers, you see things creeping in that were never part of the simple Christianity of the New Testament, the book of Acts and the epistles. As time went on, bishops, which is another name for pastor, bishops became very prominent, people became powerful and exerted great influence.

There were bishops or head bishops or pastors, head pastors, in the major cities that Christianity was spreading. These people exerted great influence, people started to look more to the bishop or to the pastor, I'm gonna use the word bishop, which is what they used, than to scripture. What did the bishop say, rather than searching the scripture? That wasn't what Christ intended.

The early leaders in the book of Acts were just servant leaders, they were fishermen, they were tax collectors. God had changed them and sent them out, but they weren't to be revered. In fact, one time, Peter went to a place where people bowed down to him, like people bow down to certain religious leaders now, and he said, get up, I'm just a man like you.

What are you bowing to me for? I ain't all that, just, I'm a follower of Christ. Then, depending on the city, the bishop was more important, and then Rome, being the capital of the Roman Empire, the bishop of Rome became the super bishop. And then the next thing, his name changed to not bishop, but pope.

And now, all kinds of things were invading the church, which were totally foreign to the Christianity that Jesus had given us and the apostles practiced. Now, other teachings came in, so that what the pope, over

the centuries, what the pope said was of equal value with what the scripture said. Well, of course, this was foreign to the Christianity of the Bible, because in the Bible, it says anything anyone says, like with me right now, you check it out with the word.

If I say anything contrary to the word, you're not to listen to me. I'm wrong, I'm deceived. But now, this was of equal authority with the scriptures.

Then, in another part of the world, those who were following Christ started to have painted icons and statues, which supposedly had power and religious efficacy in terms of your devotion. And now, pictures of Jesus, now the apostles. Soon, the teaching was you could pray to saints.

He could pray to Saint Michael. You could pray to this one, that one. Eventually, Mary was elevated, and Mary was elevated to the place where you prayed to her, and she was the one to talk to her son, Jesus, about your problems.

Totally foreign to anything that was in scripture, but it can't be refuted if you accept that the teachings of someone else are equal with the scripture, which Orthodox Christianity will not accept. You gotta show it to me from God's word. All in favor, say amen.

Amen. And everything's to be judged and tested by the word of God. You don't believe anyone.

Not me, or anyone, or a miracle worker. You don't believe a soul. And you don't believe someone who talks truth for 50%.

If the other 50 is false, you say, get outta here. I don't wanna listen to you. It's not according to the word of God.

So, all kinds of things developed, and next year, we're gonna celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. So, what was the Protestant Reformation? It was the Reformation. So, now, the world is lying with just one religion, basically, that anyone knew, the Roman Catholic system.

They don't have the scriptures. They don't read the scriptures. They're taught that they wouldn't understand it if they tried.

Totally foreign, again, to Christianity. So, only the priest or the bishop could interpret the scripture. So, what you know is what you're told in mass, or when you go for religious instruction.

Well, Martin Luther, a poor German monk, couldn't take this anymore, had no peace, realized that as hard as he tried, the legalistic system that had developed for Christianity, legalism, in other words, I gotta do enough so God approves me. I gotta live good enough so that I know I can go to heaven because I merited it. But the question was, how much good do you have to do to merit it? Do you have to be good 90% of the time? How about 95? How about 98? How about just 50 because God is fair? Luther couldn't tell, so he began searching, and then he realized that the whole message of God's grace and what salvation means had been lost to the church.

And that began something which we could call the recovery, yeah, the reformation, but it was really the recovery of what Christianity was supposed to be. So, they went around now preaching the gospel. They said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved.

You don't have to join any church. You don't need a priest. You don't need to go to mass.

You have a great high priest named Jesus. You don't need to confess to a priest. And of course, this caused an uproar and wars and all kinds of persecution.

And then in the next century, in the 1600s, the 17th century, Luther was 15, 17. So, that's when he began. So, then it went to, wait a minute, we got the message back, but you know what? We're missing, let's say, missionary work and evangelism.

We're not going out to try to win people who don't know the Lord. Others came in the next century and said, we've departed from what the scripture teaches about the Holy Spirit. No one even mentions the Holy Spirit, but he's mentioned all over in the New Testament.

We gotta find out what does God want us to know about the Holy Spirit, and on and on. And then holiness, wow. The Bible says, don't love the world, neither the things in the world.

If you love the world, you can't love God. That's what the scripture says. The world is opposed to God, God is opposed to the world.

The world crucified Jesus. When he came, it would crucify him again. So, you can't be in that world system and enveloped in it and be separate also at the same time to serve the Lord.

So, over the centuries, more and more people have been digging and searching, how can we recover true Christianity? Other people who recovered some part of it went backward and lost what they had and went back to more tradition than they started with. So, many denominations, for example, what I would say kindly that many things that are being taught and done in the Lutheran church now, Luther would be spinning in his grave if he knew. And likewise with John Wesley and the Methodist church.

Because what they were trying to do is get back to the original. Get back, the power is in the original. You can't leave the ancient paths that God has laid down for us.

Innovation is great in industry and in our culture, many places, but not with religion. I'm not talking about style now in music and instruments and microphones, I'm talking about doctrine and what it means to be a Christian. John 15, where we read, is the most radical because I don't know if anyone's recovered this, really.

Some have touched on it, some have taught on it. But for the average Christian that's in the building today or that is going to church somewhere in America or around the world on Sunday, I'm not so sure, you be the judge. So Jesus now is describing the religion that he's bringing to the earth.

And he doesn't say now shepherd and sheep, teacher and student, he's going way deep, way deep. And this is for all of us. He said, now I am the true vine.

The vine was a symbol of Israel, but Israel had really failed God always and turned away from God, so it was a spoiled, rejected vine. But now he's saying something strange. He's saying, I am the whole vine.

I am the true vine. You are just a branch. All of you are branches.

I am the true vine and you are branches that are connected to me. I'm the whole vine and all you'll ever be, and the best you could ever be, are branches. That's who you are, you're branches.

Now, my father's plan is that you would bear much fruit, that you would bear much fruit. That's God's plan for all of us here today. How is God glorified? By us bearing fruit, just like the branch produces fruit.

Imagine apple or grapes on a vine and so on and so forth. So, I am the whole vine, you are the branches, and my father is glorified that you produce fruit. So let's step back from this before we define fruit.

What's so striking about what Jesus said? What is different about this plant than this pulpit? This pulpit weighs more. What is different from this plant from this speaker or those chairs? This has life. So Christianity is not about church, it's not about commands, it's not about trying to live a good life, has nothing to do with that.

Christianity is about life. Whose life? Christ's life. Supernatural life, Holy Spirit life, eternal life.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll have eternal life. You'll have a life that will never die. The Spirit comes and lives in you, produces fruit, and that life will never die.

You now become immortal. Even when your body dies, you will keep going because you have the life that Jesus is. You know where Paul says in one place, Christ who is our life.

What does he mean by that? See, that's hard for us. We only know biological life. He's saying no, Christ is our life.

How we live every day is not just through breathing in oxygen and CO2 goes out and all those things. He says no, to live for God, you live out of the life that he puts inside of you. The power, the love, all of that.

So Christianity now is about life. That's why Jesus said you must be born again. With a new life.

If you don't have that new life, you're lost. Even though you're trying to live a good life, you're lost, I'm lost. Because Christianity is not about trying anything, it's about sharing in life.

In the New Testament, Peter says we are partakers of the divine nature. We have God's life inside of us. How many are Christians here today? Lift one hand.

How many, keep the hand up. How many of you now believe that you have the life of God inside of you? Lift the other hand. Well, that's the truth.

So it's about life. So what are we supposed to do when we tell people about Jesus? Invite them to church, share with them. We want them to partake of life.

When you believe in the Lord Jesus, you now receive life. Without that life, you can say, well, come to church. Try better to live a good life.

Read the Bible more. Those things have their place, but it has nothing to do with how you become a Christian. Christianity is about life.

Now notice this. It's also about fruit. Because life is supposed to produce fruit.

How is God glorified? By producing fruit. Jesus said, now look, I am the vine, you are the branches, okay? Now, every branch that doesn't bear fruit, it's cast away. Whatever that might mean, depending on your theological position, it certainly is noteworthy enough to say, Lord, keep me close to you.

Every branch that does bear fruit, my father, who's the gardener, he comes and he prunes it. Why? It's bearing fruit, but it could bear more fruit if it was cut into and cleansed so the sap would run through stronger. What produces the fruit in the branch? It's the sap, the life of the plant.

Even branches that produce fruit. God says, no, my father comes and says, that's good, now I want more fruit. So let me cut into that.

So now let's think what fruit means and what that all is teaching us. By this, my father is glorified that you as branches produce fruit and I want you to produce more fruit. Well, what is fruit? Fruit here is to act like Jesus, be pure like Jesus, love like Jesus, talk like Jesus, be kind to people like Jesus.

That's not natural for us. We need his life for that. Turn the other cheek when people are ugly.

Pray for people who hate us. Love all races. When we grew up around an environment, some of us, where you don't love all races and you justify your lack of love.

No, Jesus said, I'm gonna let you have my life so that you can be like me, so that you can be pure and holy. That will make you also happy. You'll also have peace and you'll have joy because my life will be flowing in you.

Has nothing to do with you. It has to do with my life flowing through you so that you can produce fruit, winning others to Christ, going the extra mile with somebody, storing furniture so when someone is burnt out, you help them. Is that not a fruit or what? Right, you get it? Serving others, being kind.

That's how my father is glorified, that you bear fruit. So when you're bearing fruit, he wants you to have more fruit so he's gonna come and take a knife to get rid of the impurities or things that block the sap from flowing. If the sap flows strong and healthy, what's gonna happen automatically? Fruit.

If it's an apple tree, what will those branches have on it? Apples. Pears, pears. Corn, corn.

One time I was in the prison down in Angola in Louisiana State Penitentiary with the warden. I was in a SUV with him. He went down this embankment right into a cornfield.

He has degrees in agriculture but he was the warden there of that huge famous prison and he knew everything about everything and he says, come here, pastor, let's have some corn. All I ever knew was you take corn, someone takes it, you buy in a store, you cook it at home, right? How many like corn on the cob? All right, I do too. So he says no and he shucked it right there and he pulled off the covering and he said, I can tell this is strong corn, this is good corn.

He says, here, eat it. I never ate raw corn in my life, right? And he's eating away like a little beaver and I put it to my mouth and I start eating. It was so good, right? Because it was healthy corn.

There's shriveled corn, there's bad corn, there's rotten apples, there's small apples but if everything's right and it's been pruned and it's healthy, you get those big apples. You get that fresh corn. So this is what's going on sometimes in our life.

The Lord is pruning us. How does he prune us? Well, many different ways but sometimes he'll speak through a verse in the Bible and say, I'm putting my finger on that attitude you have toward that person. You have unforgiveness, it's stopping my sap, my life from going through you.

You gotta forgive, you gotta forgive. You're making a little practice behind closed doors that no one knows about, not good. You're watching some things, not good.

This will grieve my spirit. This will stop the sap from flowing healthy and strong. So when God is dealing with us, it's not that he doesn't love us.

He wants us to bear more fruit. He wants fruit. How many wanna have a lot of fruit? Say amen.

So that's the process. He's gonna prune us. Let me bring this to a close.

Jesus now is bringing to us an awesome truth which I wanna be careful how I say this so I'm not misquoted. Most of us have grown up with the concept, the best concept that we've learned is come on everybody, let's live for God. Let's live for Jesus, and that's good.

Come up and give your life to Christ. Let's live for Christ. How many wanna go to the mission field so that we can serve Christ and live for Christ there and so on and so forth? On the job, let's live for Christ.

We've all aware of that term. Am I correct? Jesus is saying no. There's something deeper than living for me.

It's living from me. You can't live for me unless you first learn the secret of living from me. I am the vine, you are the branches.

I'm the only one who has life in me. If you just stay connected to me, you will bear much fruit. Don't live just for me, live from me.

Get your thoughts from me. Get your desires from me. Get your plans from me.

Oh, see how quiet it got here? Because this is like, well, where are you going with this? Well, Jesus enforces it even stronger as I come to a close. He said the secret is just to remain connected with me, remember that word, that verb? Abide, stay connected, remain in me and I in you. As long as you stay connected to me, I'm gonna be connected to you and the sap will flow.

And when the sap flows, which is my life, you will produce fruit, it'll be beautiful. But if anything separates you from me, you can do nothing. Without me, you can do nothing.

Tell me something. Hear this branch, I'm gonna get a small one and cut it. Ah, look at this.

I can feel it, I can taste it. And the moment I did that, guess what? That's dead. No, it's not, it looks like the rest.

It's dead, just a matter of time. Why? Because it's been separated from the vine. What is Satan trying to do with all of us every day, every hour? Separate us from trusting Jesus.

Separate us from abiding in Jesus, resting in Jesus. You mean pray a lot? Yeah, prayer will help you. You mean come to church? Listen, a lot of times when we're drifting and we get disconnected a little bit, coming to church gets us right back where we belong.

I've had that happen to me. Anybody ever have that happen to you? It's like the Lord uses it to say, come on, hey, abide in me. Stay with me, stay with me, stay with me.

But it means more than that because imagine, for most Christians in America, church is measured by do you go to a building once a week? Jesus knew nothing of that religion. He said, no, it's not where you go once a week. It's where you live 24-7 because without me, you can do what? Come on, I can do a little, I'm a pastor.

I know a lot of Bible verses. You're telling me that if I get clipped off, I'm hopeless? Very hard for people to accept that. Very hard for us to accept it, starting with me.

I'm really that helpless that apart from him, I can do nothing. So what's the logical conclusion of this? What it is is what some people have sought after. Some people have gone out, let's go back in church history.

Some people have learned that and said, I gotta stay connected to Jesus. I can't do it in this world. So I'm gonna become a monk.

Back in the three, four, five, 600 years, those early centuries, some people so wanted to stay connected, were so sick of their sinfulness, knew that Jesus was the only way, so they went to monasteries and places isolated from all human beings. And some then took a vow of not speaking because they found if they talked, they got in trouble. So they would live for years never speaking to anyone and doing nothing but reading the Bible and meditating and maybe working in the fields.

What was their desire? How do I stay connected to him? Because all this other stuff just pulls me away. Come on, all the noise in this world, does it not tend to pull us away? Could I get an amen or an affirmation? It does, but you can't live like that. Jesus didn't live like that.

The apostles, they lived in the real world. They held jobs, they went and ministered. So what we have to do today as we close is say to Jesus, Jesus, teach me how to abide in you.

Because notice, there's no lifting by the branches. See this branch here that I didn't cut that has this flower here? See this branch? Shh, don't talk. I don't hear a thing.

This branch is not going, argh, I gotta get this fruit out here, argh. Go near an apple tree and see if any of the branches are going, apples, come on out. No, no, it happens naturally.

Listen, it happens automatically. Just abide and the apples come. The fruit comes by just abiding.

I've often struggled in my earlier years of serving the Lord by having the wrong aim when I wake up in the morning. The aim should not be so much for us, oh God, help me to do right, talk right, avoid sin, not gossip. God, help me that.

That's all true, it's not wrong to pray that way. But the first prayer should be, keep me in you today. Teach me how to trust you every hour, every minute.

Even when my boss is yelling at me. He's yelling or my coworkers talking. But I can still see you and I can reach out and touch you.

And I can say, Lord, not just keep me today. Oh, now your prayers change. Keep me every hour.

Or how about this, keep me every minute. How many need to be kept every minute? Oh my goodness, right? So there's no act of God that comes on you and that's gonna now produce fruit because you had this mystical experience with God. No, no, no.

Jesus said, I'm the vine, you're the branches. Just stay connected with me. Oh, by the way, just by doing that, I had one last thought come to me.

Never thought of this. If I'd lay there like that and somebody walked in, they would say, look at all those branches. And this one would fool them because it's laying there.

That's the way it is in the church. There are some branches that are in there, but they're deader than a doornail. How many say amen? Ain't no fruit coming.

No, but are they there? No. So Jesus taught us, don't you go picking which bear fruit and dot, don't. You're not a fruit picker.

He said, when I come, I'll separate the true from the false. Your business is just one thing. Abide in me.

Stay connected with me. Because I will stay connected with you. If you look to me, I will help you.

If you trust me, I will flow through you. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, it's a lot that we just read.

It's a lot. And Master, I ask for myself. Teach me to abide in you.

Not just come to you when I need to preach or write a book or make decisions for the church involving lots of money. Teach me to abide in you 24 seven. Lord, teach us to avoid the distractions that pull us away from abiding in you.

Any kind of entertainment, any kind of friendship, any kind of anything that hurts our abiding in you. Caution us, teach us. But we admit today that we receive your word and we accept the fact that without you, we can do nothing.

We can fake it for a while, we can act religious, but the sap isn't flowing. Don't let anybody be cut off, Lord. Don't let anybody bear no fruit.

And even when we bear fruit, teach us and reveal to us what you're doing as you prune us so that we would bear more fruit. We confess our sins to you today. We ask you to forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.

Clean everything out, Lord, so that your power can flow through us, your blessed Holy Spirit. And help us most of all in the day that we live in, that we will be peacemakers and examples of your love. Help us to live every day in your word because your word is life and your word draws us near to you.

Help us to be alone every day and talk to you because that draws us closer when we drift. Help us never to forsake fellowshiping with other Christians because you use that to help us to abide. You've used it in my life.

You create hunger to be close to you by seeing other Christians who love you. Help us to love each other, Lord. We ask your blessing and that your face would shine upon us as we leave today and that our new goal will be not living just for you, but living from you, from your strength, from your life.

You do the work. Let us just be recipients of everything you have for us every hour of the day. Teach us these things by your spirit for we ask it in Jesus' name.

And everyone said. How many are a branch? Say amen. Amen.

How many are sick? How many are sitting next to other branches? Everybody stand, every branch stand and hug another branch. Don't hug a tree, hug a branch. Come on, everybody hug somebody, encourage them.

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