

What is the Key Ingredient to Live the Daily Christian Life?
~ John 15:1-11

Pastor Tom
September 17, 2023

Since we're in the "back to school" season, I thought it would be fun to start our time together with a quiz. But it's a short quiz with just 2 questions. 1 – What is a Christian? If you had to define the term Christian, how would you do it? 2 – What is the Christian life? Imagine you had to explain what life looked like for an average Christian. What might you say? What might you include?

So, let's go back to question 1. What is a Christian? Here's a couple of dictionary definitions. "A Christian is a person who has received Christian baptism or is a believer in Christianity." Another says, "A Christians is a person who believes in Jesus Christ and follows His teachings." I also came across a definition on Compassion International's website. It states, "A Christian is someone whose behavior and heart reflects Jesus Christ." I think that's a great definition. "A Christians is someone whose behavior and heart reflects Jesus Christ."

Question 2 – What is the Christian life? What does the Christian life look like? I sought to find some biblical answers to it. Did you know that the phrase "Christian life" does not occur in the Bible? Therefore, we need to look for something else. There are several other descriptions of Christians that may help us answer this question. Christians are called "saints" or "set apart ones." That means they are set apart or holy for God. Christians are known as disciples of Jesus. A disciple was someone who followed a teacher and imitated their life. So, a Christian disciple follows Jesus and imitates His life.

We find activities that Christians do in the New Testament. These include baptism, teaching, ministries of mercy, prayer and fellowship with others. I would define an authentic Christian as someone who takes walking with God seriously and desires to follow Jesus.

That means a Christian is much more than someone who was baptized at some point. They are someone who devotes their life to walking with God and following Jesus. Friends, if you have lived this way at any point in your lives, you know the Christian life is hard. It is a high calling. So, is it reserved for the few, the proud, the elite Christians? Or is it possible for any Christ follower to live out this high calling? Is it possible for Christians who are broken, beaten down and barely coping with life to still live

the Christian life? The last thing some of you need to hear is that you must just try harder or do more. I have prayed that this message will not come across that way. It's not about trying harder or doing more. It's about a key ingredient necessary to mix into our lives wherever they are at.

That's what we will discuss today in the first message on Abide in Christ series. We're going to the Gospel of John where Jesus is teaching at the Last Supper. Today, we will see the critical ingredient necessary to live the Christian life regardless of the circumstances of our lives. You and I cannot live Christianly without this ingredient. However, if we have it, anyone can receive power to live the Christian life each day. After this passage identifies this ingredient, we will talk about some ways to access it. I pray that you will be both encouraged and inspired to live the empowered Christian life.

John 15:1-11 (ESV) (Page 763)

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Jesus is talking. He's talking to the disciples a few hours before his arrest. These are some of the last words He will share with them. So, He's preparing them for His physical departure from their presence. He uses loaded language especially for Jewish disciples and readers in the 1st century.

First, he says, “I am.” In fact, He's made 7 major “I am” statements throughout John. You might have heard some of them before. “I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door of the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth and the life.” Now he says, “I am the true vine.”

Well, what's so important about the phrase "I am?" "I am who I am," was the name of God from the Old Testament. So, this immediately alerts the reader to a divine claim that He is God.

Here he says, "I am the true vine." That's kind of a weird phrase. We don't usually look at plants in our yards or gardens and label them true or false. But the vine played a significant symbolic role in the people of God's history.

God called the Israelites to be His true vine. They were supposed to be the people through whom God would bring His light and proclaim His good news to others. But they collectively failed this calling. They failed to remain faithful to Him. This is explained especially in Isaiah 5.

Listen or turn to Isaiah 5:1-7.

5 Let me sing for my beloved

my love song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard

on a very fertile hill.

²He dug it and cleared it of stones,

and planted it with choice vines;

he built a watchtower in the midst of it,

and hewed out a wine vat in it;

and he looked for it to yield grapes,

but it yielded wild grapes.

³And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem

and men of Judah,

judge between me and my vineyard.

⁴What more was there to do for my vineyard,

that I have not done in it?

When I looked for it to yield grapes,

why did it yield wild grapes?

⁵And now I will tell you

what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge,

and it shall be devoured;

**I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.**

**⁶ I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briers and thorns shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.**

**⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry!**

The Lord planted a vineyard expecting it to yield the good grapes or fruit of the kingdom. But instead, it yielded wild grapes symbolizing this rebellion against the Lord. So, when Jesus says, "I am the true vine," He fulfills the Father's purpose. Jesus will be the true vine who brings and delivers the good news of God's kingdom. He also states that His Father is the vinedresser or gardener.

Then in verse 2 he talks about the branches of the vine. Branches symbolize people who say they are connected to Christ. In that verse, he also describes what the Father does to the branches. "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit the Father takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit." Jesus emphasizes the importance of fruit bearing. This critical factor determines what the Father will do with a branch. Those that bear no fruit are taken away. This is a relatively common practice in looking after plants. Non-fruit bearing branches are removed. Fruit bearing branches are pruned or cleaned to ensure the production of the most fruit.

Another translation of the word prune is “clean.” In verse 3, Jesus addresses the disciples saying, “you are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” So, when a disciple both hears and heeds God’s Word, it does a pruning and cleaning work in their life.

Then we come to the critical verses of the passage for our purposes today. Here we find the ingredient necessary to living the Christian life. Verses 4 and 5. Jesus says, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

So, what is the critical ingredient necessary to live the Christian life? The key is abiding or remaining or staying in Christ. **Who can live the Christian life? Anyone who remains constantly connected to Christ.**

The word “abide” or “remain” occurs 11 times in this passage. The word means “to remain where one is.” It can also be used figuratively for someone who does not leave the realm or sphere in which they find themselves. So, abiding or remaining or staying in close connection with Jesus involves maintaining a vital, life-giving connection to Christ.

It is like Christ is the power source for the Christian life. We need to remain connected to Him to receive that power. God the Son is our source, but we need to connect to His power. Jesus is the true vine through whom we can find the power to live the Christian life. But we must remain or stay closely connected to Him to receive that power. Now in just a moment, we’re going to talk about some practical ways to abide or remain connected in Christ.

But we might wonder if this is really that important? I think of the disciples who were so confident in their own ability to rule and reign beside Christ. Yet they would soon come to the end of themselves and realize their desperate need for Him. Jesus anticipates this. So, he lists several benefits for them if they remain in close connection with Him.

Verse 5 again. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. So, what is the benefit of abiding in Christ? **Benefit**

1 – We bear fruit for the kingdom of God. By remaining connected to Christ, we are empowered to bear fruit for the kingdom. Remember the problem with Israel in Isaiah 5? They were supposed to bear or produce good grapes. But instead, they produced wild grapes or bad fruit. They may not have originally intended to go that way. But their lack of connection to God resulted in drifting away and ultimately producing wild grapes.

Jesus warns us about this possibility at the end of verse 5. “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” I often wondered about that statement throughout my Christian life. I also thought it a bit weird. Lot’s of people can do lot’s of things apart from Christ. Billions of non-Christians who live life every day apart from Christ. Jesus must be referring to this fruit bearing in the kingdom. When we depend on Christ, we can minister and live in ways that honor and glorify Him. Fruit bearing does not just mean we do ministry at the church. Fruit bearing happens in everyday life. We can treat our spouses and families in the ways He commands in Scripture. We can do our jobs in ways that glorify God. We can resist the pressures of the world and the assaults of the evil one when we’re connected to Him. But apart from him, we cannot. We can do nothing of lasting eternal value. Staying close to Christ brings the benefit of bearing fruit. This glorifies God and benefits us and those around us.

In verse 6, Jesus goes back to talking about the branch that does not produce fruit. “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.” This sounds harsh. It almost seems like God is just waiting for someone to wander away from Christ for a while. Then he will cut them off and cast them out.

But I don’t think that’s the main thrust of this verse. It’s more about a person who seemed like they were a follower of Christ. They seemed connected to Him. But they weren’t. They weren’t a believer. This was revealed by the lack of fruit in their lives.

Remember, this is the night of the Last Supper. Just 2 chapters earlier in John 13:21, Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” Then verse 26. “It is he to whom I will give the morsel of bread when I have dipped it. So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What

you are about to do, do quickly.” Then listen to John 13:28. “Now no one at the table knew why Jesus said this to Judas.” None of the other 11 disciples thought that Judas was an obvious choice to betray Christ. They thought Judas was one of them. But he was not connected to Christ despite seeing the miracles, hearing the teachings and walking with Jesus those 3 years. Friends, please heed this warning. If you’re comfortable keeping Jesus at a distance, your soul might be in danger.

But then in verse 7, Jesus returns to benefits of abiding in Him. He says, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Here’s another benefit of abiding in Christ. **Benefit 2 – Our prayers will more likely align with Jesus will.** Jesus words here sound like an automatic guarantee to get whatever we want. “Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” But notice the condition for this request. “If you abide in me and my words abide in you.” So, the closer we are to Christ, the more aligned we become to His purposes and His will. This will affect our prayers.

Notice I didn’t put the benefit “Our prayers will certainly align with Jesus’ will.” In my 52 years of walking with Christ, I’m sure I still pray things that may not align with Christ’s will. I still may pray selfishly or fearfully. Yet when I spend time with the Lord, it increases the likelihood that my prayers will align more with His will. So I don’t want us to think this a magic bullet or a 100% guarantee. It is a process of getting to know Christ and learning His ways and love that will gradually affect our prayers.

Another benefit of abiding in Christ is found in verse 8. “By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” There’s the fruit bearing piece again. But notice what fruit bearing does? It glorifies God the Father. **Benefit 3 – We will bear fruit and glorify the Father.** Did you ever wonder why God created us? What is the purpose for humanity? The Westminster Confession of Faith addresses this in its first question. “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” That’s our ultimate life purpose. If you’re looking for purpose in life, here it is. We can glorify the Father in whatever life circumstance we’re in right now.

I think of you moms of young kids who are home with them. A lot of the time, no one sees what you do. You have moments of joy and happiness. Other times you deal with messes and diapers and

irrational little humans. It can seem like a thankless and purposeless time that you just have to get over with.

But what if you started the day simply by praying, “Lord Jesus, please empower to glorify the Father in whatever comes today. I offer this day to you.” Then when you change a diaper that is for the good and health of the child, you are doing God glorifying work. When you bear with an overwhelmed or irrational toddler, you are glorifying God as you try to figure out what’s best for them. As you expend your physical and emotional energy for these little lives, you are glorifying God by caring for them. You are imitating God because He cares for us. The main purpose for humans is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. When we stay close to Christ, we’re empowered to live that out.

We can glorify the Father with good fruit like caring for an elderly person or looking after someone with special needs. We can glorify the Father in our work or our studies. We can glorify Him in the way we treat our family members at home or one another in the church. Yes, we can glorify God by participating in ministry for others here in the church or in our community. Anything we can do can be injected with deep eternal purpose when we choose to glorify God in it by the power of Christ.

Jesus lists more benefits of abiding in Him as the passage goes forward. These include living in God’s love in verse 10. Or experiencing the full joy of Jesus in verse 11. The main point I hope you can take home with you today goes like this. **With constant connection to Jesus Christ, we’re empowered to live the Christian life.**

But how do we go about abiding in or remaining in Jesus? One important practice is something called personal devotions. This is a tool that can help us regularly abide or remain in Christ.

Ingredients necessary for personal devotions

1. A good Bible for reading and memorization – New Living Translation; New International Version; English Standard Version, New King James Version. If you are a new believer, I would recommend the New Living Translation. It has translated the Bible into our modern language. It will help you get an understanding of what’s going on. The New International Version or NIV is also a good translation. It aims to accurately translate the Biblical text in a way that is still very

readable and smooth. Now I use the English Standard Version because it is committed to giving us all the words that are found in the Biblical text, even if including them makes it a little harder to read. This translation or the New King James is good for those who really want to dig into the text and its meaning. You might also consider getting a study Bible. These contain footnotes that help explain some harder to understand verses or passages. My only caution when getting a study bible is to remember that the footnotes are written by humans with certain perspectives. The Bible is inspired by God. The Study Notes are not inspired by God. They are helpful but recognize them for what they are.

2. A paper or digital notebook to write things down or say them out loud. We increase our learning, remembrance and resolve when we externalize something we've been thinking or reading.
3. A personal prayer list. This will include situations or needs that you want to bring to the Lord about yourself; family; friends and others.
4. A quiet place somewhere. To gain the most from personal devotions, try not to do them with some screen playing a movie in the background or people talking. A quiet place can be a chair, a car, a bus seat or a park bench.
5. A specific time during the day. It helps if we can integrate personal devotions into our daily schedule. It's not about adding one more thing to the schedule. It's about including time with Jesus in your schedule.
6. An expectant spirit – Ask, "Is my heart open to tell Jesus all that is on my heart? Is my heart open to hear what Jesus wants to say? Am I only trying to rush through this?"

Suggested Format for Personal Devotions.

- Pray, sharing your heart with God and your expectancy to meet with Him.
- Read/listen to a passage of Scripture. Start with Gospel of Matthew; Mark, Luke or John.
- Write down or note one thing from the passage that spoke to you.
- Respond in prayer to what stood out to you.

- Confess sin; thank Him for forgiveness; bring prayer items before God.

Christians throughout history have engaged in variations of this practice to facilitate ongoing connection with Christ. If you're using the Abide material, it provides a daily guide to help you in this. But remember, the most important thing is not to get through some material. It is to connect with Jesus. Without constant connection to Jesus Christ, we cannot live the Christian life. With constant connection to Jesus Christ, we're empowered to live the Christian life.

He paid the ultimate price for us to experience this. Without Christ's death, we could not experience close connection to Christ. Yet when we trust our lives to Him, We are reconciled with Him. We are rescued from the domain of darkness. We can receive power to live lives that are dead to sin and alive to Christ. We become more like the Compassion definition of a Christian – Someone whose heart and behavior reflects Jesus Christ.