

# Maintaining A Fruitful Connection With Jesus

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] to the passage we read in John's Gospel, chapter 15. I'm going to look this morning at verses 1 to 11. Looking at it particularly in relation to the importance of maintaining a fruitful connection with Jesus.

There are many other aspects of the teaching of the passage that we could focus on, but that's mainly the point that we're going to focus on throughout our study of this passage this morning. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit. And so on, down as far as verse 11 especially. We lost our living connection with God in the fall of Adam, or in our fall in Adam.

While that's a difficult theological proposition to get your head round and to understand, that throughout all the teachings that we have in Reformed teaching is an important element in understanding our sinful condition today, and the sinful condition of human beings from that time of Adam's fall.

[ 1 : 1 8 ] We were in Adam when he fell from the state in which God created him. And when we fell in him, we lost that living connection that we had with God as he had created us.

And that connection needs to be restored if we are to have eternal life. If we are to live in friendship and companionship with God in this life, if we are going to enjoy eternal life in heaven in the next. That connection needs to be remade or restored. And of course, as you know, that connection is made again for us through Jesus Christ, who is referred to in the Bible as the last Adam. And indeed, in chapter 10 and verse 10, where he speaks of himself as the good shepherd, you can see there in verse 10 of chapter 10, he says this is really the purpose for why he came into the world.

I came, or I have come, that they, that's his sheep, that they may have life and have it abundantly. He came to restore that connection with God through which we now come to have life as we come to know Jesus as our Savior personally.

[ 2 : 3 5 ] And that's really what's here in the imagery of the vine as well. The branches, as they are connected with the main trunk of the vine, receive the sap that enables them to produce fruit.

And in a spiritual way, that's the first point we're going to look at, the importance of being connected to Jesus. Secondly, the importance of maintaining a good connection to Jesus.

And thirdly, very briefly, the fruitfulness of a good connection to Jesus. Importance of being connected to Jesus.

Now, in a way, what is said here of the vine is found in many aspects of our lives commonly from day to day. You unplug your television, it ceases to work. You unplug your kettle.

Anything else that actually requires the power of electricity to make it function according to the way that it was designed to function, it will not do that unless it's plugged in, unless it has an attachment to the power source.

[ 3 : 3 9 ] And in many ways, in principle, that's what is being set before us in the imagery of the vine as well. The branch does not fulfill the purpose for which it was created if it is not properly and firmly attached to the vine, to the trunk of the vine, to the main stem of the vine.

And that's an indication, as Jesus is speaking to the disciples, of how a proper connection with him is so important if we have it in our minds, in our lives, a purpose for which we are created, which we should have, to bear fruit.

Now, the fruit he speaks about, of course, as it's represented by the vine, is the fruit of a righteous life, the fruit of a God-pleasing life, the fruit of a Christ-like life, the fruit of a life that knows forgiveness of sin, the fruit of a life that has hope towards being with Christ forevermore in heaven.

So many things that you could say come into the description in the Bible of that spiritual and moral fruit that you find in the life of someone connected to Jesus.

Sometimes, of course, it's difficult to discern that fruit in looking at yourself and myself personally. But even so, it's still obvious in most people's lives that have come to know Jesus that they have a changed life, that they are living a fruit-bearing life, that they live a life that bears the fruit of a righteous life, a life that's devoted to truth, to honesty, to respect, to love for God, to honoring God, to the fear of God, to serving their fellow human beings in the name of God, all of these things.

[ 5 : 25 ] And that's the proper connection that we actually have before us. Because he says, you see, if the branch does not abide in the vine, it can't bring forth fruit.

If it's cut off or if it's broken off, it's no longer of any use. You can't reattach the branch of a vine the way we can come spiritually to be reattached to Jesus.

So as it says there, if anyone does not abide in me, he's thrown away like a branch and withers.

The branches that are taken off the vine that no longer produce fruit, that don't have that living connection, there's no use leaving them on the vine because they will not produce fruit.

So they're taken away. And the importance of that is to remember that our purpose in life and the proof that we are Christ's disciples is in bearing the kind of fruit that the Bible speaks about.

Not just to have life for ourselves in a spiritual way, in a moral way, in connection to Christ. That, of course, is hugely important that you and I personally and individually would know ourselves to be fruit-bearing, saved people.

[ 6 : 33 ] That we're not the way we came into the world. That we are indeed changed by the grace of God, by being attached to Christ.

So today the nature of our relationship with Jesus is so hugely important. This is not talking about how we're attached to the church, how we're attached to the fellowship of God's people.

These are important connections. But this is the important connection. It's not talking about how we may be attached to the church by profession of faith, by taking communion, by regular attendance at the gospel, all of which things are so, so important.

We're not saying these are not important. But the important thing above all of these is a connection to Jesus himself. A connection with him through which you receive ongoing life and power and energy in your life to enable you to bear fruit.

Thomas Boston was one of Scotland's greatest theologians and he wrote one of the best books, in my opinion at least, that's ever been written. It's called Human Nature in Its Fourfold State.

[ 7 : 46 ] It talks about what we are as sinners coming into the world, what we are by the grace of God, what we are then thirdly in the state of grace or being saved people in this life, and then fourthly the fourth state is that of heaven, although he brings hell into that as well.

The fourfold state. Read it. It's absolutely superb reading. It's the best book that I know of in dealing with human nature in these fourfold states. And this is what he says in regard to being connected to Christ.

He says, There is a great difference between adhesion and engrafting. He's thinking there about what you do when you graft something onto a stalk, a root stalk, and then the root stalk, like a rose, for example, gives its energy to the graft, that thing you've crafted, the spliced in graft that you've done.

Well, as somebody said, there's a great difference between adhesion and engrafting. The ivy clasps and twists itself around the oak, but it is not one with it, for it still grows on its own root.

So many support themselves upon Christ, but grow upon their own root. They take him to support their hopes, but their delights are somewhere else.

[ 9 : 08 ] I think that's worth reading again. It's a very solemn point and a very important one. There is a great difference between adhesion and engrafting. The ivy clasps and twists itself around the oak, but it is not one with it, for it still grows on its own root.

So many support themselves upon Christ, but grow upon their own root. They take him to support their hopes, but their delights are elsewhere.

Make sure today, as I must make sure, that Jesus himself is your hope and not a means of supporting your own hopes or how you would like things to be or to turn out.

He has to be our hope. And in order for him to be our hope, we need to be spiritually attached to him with a living attachment.

That's, of course, brought out in such things as we looked at very recently in his meeting with Nicodemus in chapter 3, that need to be born again.

[10:14] Need to be born by the Spirit of God to have a change in our life at the very heart of our being, by the grace of God, by the power of God's Spirit, and not relying on anything less than that for our hope of eternal life.

Because that's where we get connection with Jesus, where the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ. How are we made partakers?

The catechism tells us of the redemption purchased by Christ. We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit, by the Holy Spirit.

That's the question now at that first point of our study. What is my connection to Jesus? Am I relying on a connection less than a connection to Jesus himself?

Am I relying on a connection that historically I've had or my family have had with the free church or with Stornoway Free Church or with whatever church? Am I relying on a connection that I have with God's people rather than with God's Son?

[11:26] Is my reliance upon Jesus himself, is that the connection that today governs my life? The importance of being connected to Jesus.

Secondly, maintaining a good connection to Jesus. Because the passage is saying that not only is it important to be connected to him, but it's so important to maintain that connection.

We can put it that way as the passage says. We'll see what he's saying in verse 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.

Verse 5. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. And so on. And always speaks there, if you abide in me, my words abide in you.

And so on. So it's a maintaining of that connection, really, in these words of verse 4. Abide in me and I in you. And that's a command. That's in the form of an imperative.

[12:29] Or to say, in other words, it's a command. He's saying, Abide in me. Do this. And then he says also, And I in you. Maintain my abiding in you at the same time as you're abiding in me.

How do we do that? How do you ensure that you abide in Christ? How do you fulfill this commandment of Jesus?

How do you ensure that Christ continues to abide in us? Of course, ultimately, that is God himself and the sovereignty of his application of redemption. And he rules over every aspect of our redemption.

But this is really bringing us to our own responsibilities in regard to that. To what we are required to do under the sovereignty and acknowledgement of God's lordship over us.

First of all, we can say that we abide in him and he in us by prayer. He mentions prayer very much here in the chapter. Verse 7. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it will be done for you.

[13:38] By this, my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit. In other words, the fruit of a righteous life, of a believing life, the fruit of a Christian life, follows upon prayer.

Where you have a living connection with Jesus, you have a living communication with Jesus. Where you have a living connection established, the living communication immediately follows from that.

The moment that you come to be connected to Jesus, you want to speak to Jesus, you want to pray to Jesus, you want to talk with him, the things of your life, you want to set them out for you, you want to go with him with your problems, you want to tell him things that you don't dare tell anybody else about, you want to open your mind to him, you want to tell him things that you know, and you want to confess that there are things that you don't know that he knows.

It's all about communication with Jesus, not just praying for certain things that you know you need, of course that's part of it, but prayer in every single aspect of what prayer is, as communication with Christ, as part of your fellowship with Christ.

That follows upon that vital connection being established. So you see, you maintain that abiding in Christ, and he abiding in you by prayer.

[14:54] Without prayer, that's not going to continue to be the case, if we can put it that way. I know there's a lot of difficult theology here to get your mind round, because in one sense, of course,

when you're saved, and come to be connected with Christ, you're never going to be unsaved again. But there are assumptions, that you and I can make in life, that are less than what is really the case. And what he's saying to us is, be careful that you're not just assuming things, rather than really putting them to the test, and proving them.

So pray, and continue to pray for yourself, and with God's people, because prayer is a vital part of abiding in Christ, Christ abiding in us.

Don't miss opportunities to pray. I know myself, how easy it is to be taken aside, by other things that enter into, even when you get up in the morning, and whatever it is you do first, before you start looking at emails, or going to your social media, whatever it is, this communication, is important first and foremost.

And I fall short on that, as I'm sure you do as well. But you know, there's a sense in which if you miss it, at the time that it's available to you, and if you don't make it a priority, at the time that you can make a priority of it, you don't catch up for the rest of the day.

[16:21] Other things fill your mind, and fill your time. So prayer is important, vital, for maintaining a living connection, which you come to benefit from, with Jesus Christ.

Secondly, a loving obedience to Christ, is one of the ways in which that connection, is maintained. Notice what he says in verse 7 here. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

And then you can add verse 10 to that. 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.

These things I have spoken to you, that your joy may be full, that my joy may be in. We'll leave that to the third point. But what he's saying here is, a loving obedience to Christ. Not just a formal obedience.

Not something that you do, just out of a sense of duty, good though a sense of duty is. Sometimes in life, you know, in the Christian life, you give thanks to God, for a sense of duty, that brings you to your knees.

[17:28] Because there are times when you don't feel like praying, when you've really lost something of the warmth of that connection with Christ. And you're thankful then, for that sense of duty to Christ, that brings you to your knees, and you begin to pray.

And as you do so, you feel more again like the spirit of prayer, and you enter in more into prayer, and so on. Well, he's saying, a loving obedience to Christ, not a formal one, but a loving obedience, is important.

Because what you find here is, if my words abide in you, and then verse 10, if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. These two really are equivalent.

His words abiding in us, and us keeping, or abiding in his commandments. You can't detach these from each other. How do we come to continue a loving obedience to Christ?

Well, to have his words, continually living within us, resting within us, consciously that we are living upon his words, and that we abide, and keep his commandments.

[18:34] That we are living in obedience to his will. That his will as our Lord, is something that controls our life. That's how you maintain, one of the aspects of maintaining, this connection that we have with Christ.

And you notice, he's giving us, he's giving us a template. He's giving us a template to follow. And a template, of course, is always useful. And when you see, people that are involved in, certain craftsmanship of different kind, very often they'll use a template, whether it's in metal work, or woodwork, whatever, the template is there, that's the master copy, if you like.

And every other copy that they make, every other object they make, in relation to that, is fitted into, or based on that template. When you have the template, you can base so many copies on it, as many as you like.

Here's the template, in verse 10. You will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandment, and abide in his love.

You see, he's saying, look at what I have done, and base you, abiding in me, and I in you, upon that. I have kept my Father's commandments, and because I've kept my Father, or by means of my keeping, my Father's commandments, I have abided, I've continued to abide in his love.

[19:56] That's a wonderful thing. That's an amazing thing, in many ways. Jesus is opening up his own heart to us there. He's saying, the Father gave me a commandment, that I must do this work,

that he gave me to do in this world, that I might finish it.

And that's what, of course, he did. And as he says in chapter 17, in his great prayer, I have finished the work, which you gave me to do. That was the Father's commandment, that he lay down his life, as he says in chapter 10.

This is the commandment, that I lay down my life, and that I might take it again. So he's saying, I have kept my Father's commandment, and as a result, or in consequence of that, I abide in his love. I remain within the Father's favor, within the Father's approval of me, by keeping his commandments. And you and I have that as our template.

We abide in the favor of Christ, in a living union with Christ, by keeping his commands, by having his word abide in us.

[ 21 : 02 ] We go on maintaining that connection, through which we continue to receive life. Now there's one other thing, that we need to mention, because it's important, that we look at the imagery, of the vine, and the vine dresser, in every detail, that it sets before us.

And one of the details there, is at the beginning of the chapter, in verse 2, especially the second part of it, every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes. That's equivalent to the painful experiences, of life.

The disciples of Jesus, the Christian in this present world, today, knows of painful episodes. Things in the providence of God, which they themselves, would not have chosen, but nevertheless, God has chosen for them.

Which he himself, has ordained by his will, by his sovereign will, by his wisdom. And as they come to us, and as we experience them, and as we know the pain, involved in them, and the ongoing difficulties, maybe for some people, it's a thing, which lasts throughout life.

Circumstances, which are always going to be with them. Not just an odd episode, here and there.

That's equivalent to, the pruning of the vine. When you see a skilled, vine dresser, or someone looking after a vine, I don't know much about, looking after vines, I know a little bit about, gardening in general.

[ 22 : 35 ] But when you notice somebody, who is actually going to, tidy up a vine, after the, fruit bearing season is over. You actually stand somewhat amazed, at the amount, of wood, that is cutting off, the branches, that have actually produced grapes.

And a person, who didn't really know anything, about what this vine dresser, was doing, would say, what on earth, is he doing, cutting so deeply, into the wood, and the substance, of these branches? Surely he's ruining, that branch, after bearing, so much fruit, this year, surely it's not going to bear, anything like the same, when he's cut, so much of it.

But of course, that's the opposite, isn't it? Every branch, that bears fruit, he prunes, he cuts away, what needs to be cut away, so that it may, bear more fruit.

Now that's a difficult thing, yet a hugely, important thing, to hold on to, in the painful issues, of life. In the losses, the pains, the traumas, the unexpected events.

[ 23 : 42 ] It's very difficult, in the midst of them, to really bring yourself, to the conclusion, God is doing, this to me, so that I can, bear more fruit, for him.

It doesn't feel like that, when the knife, cuts into your flesh, when the pain, is very acute. But it's very like, what the writer, to the Hebrews, was saying, in chapter 12, he speaks there, uses the word, discipline, which sometimes, we misuse, discipline is a very, positive thing, the way the Bible, speaks about it, and he talks there, about sons, sons of God, adopted people of God, and he's saying, it is for discipline, that you have to, endure or persevere, God is treating you, as sons, for what son is there, whom his father, does not discipline, if you are left, without discipline, in which all have, participated, then you are illegitimate, children, and not sons, besides this, we have an earthly father, who disciplined us, and we respected them, shall we not, much more, be subject, to the father, of spirits, and live, for they disciplined, us for a short time, as it seemed best, to them, but he disciplines, us for our good, that we may share, his holiness, for the moment, all discipline, seems painful, rather than pleasant, but later, it yields, what, the peaceable, fruit, of righteousness, to those, who have been, trained, by it, that's the purpose, of God, in bringing hurt, to his people, not because, he likes, to do it, and delights, in their hurt, but because, he has an end, in view, and a purpose, that they bear, even more fruit, so maintaining, a good connection, to Jesus, by prayer, by a loving, obedience, to Christ, and just as we've mentioned, the third point, is the fruitfulness, of that, good connection, it's interesting, if you go forward, to verse 16, where he says, you did not

choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go, and bear fruit, and that your fruit, should abide, he's saying, not only must you, abide in me, and I, and you, and maintain, that connection, by prayer, by loving, obedience, to Christ, your fruit, also is going to abide, he's saying, it's going to remain, how is our fruit, going to remain,

I think the key is, one of the keys, there is, he's saying, that you should go, and bear fruit, the go, is actually, a word in scripture, often associated, with being sent, on a mission, and a Christian, cannot think of, the fruit, of his or her own life, as just confined, to the moment, of their own life, or to the privacy, of their own life, it's a fruit, that is displayed, it's a fruit, that bears witness, to the Jesus, they're connected to, but it's a fruit, that they pray, will abide, when they are gone, we are the fruit, of people, who are no longer, in this world, because they prayed, over us, and they witnessed, to us, and we saw Christ, in them, and they commended, him to us, we came to believe, in the Jesus, they believed in, and we came, to bear fruit, as they bore fruit, before us, what Jesus is saying, is, I have chosen you, as my people, and I have appointed you, that you should go, and bear fruit, you remember, remember, your fruit bearing, for Christ, is not so that, we can just, confine it, to a congregation, or to ourselves, as individuals, or to any sort, of comfortable huddle, that we might find, comfortable, in this life, it's to go, and bear fruit, for him, it's to go, and be, involved, in mission, for him, in whatever way, we can, don't mean by this, that you, need to go abroad, or that you need, to be officially, appointed as a missionary, or anything like that, your life, is, a mission life, as a Christian, and one of the ways, in which you, exercise that mission, is bearing, fruit for Christ, it abides, by the fact, that, we pray, that new converts, will follow us, through our witness, they'll come, to know the Lord, and he speaks here, about fullness, of joy, we haven't really got time, to go into this, very fully, but he says, these things, in verse 11,

I have spoken to you, that my joy, may be in you, and that your joy, may be full, now we lost, our joy, when we lost, our connection, with God, and that joy, is restored, when we are reconnected, in Jesus Christ, the joy, that Jesus himself, experienced, in relation, to the Father, the joy of Christ, as one writer, puts it, Charles Ross, in a little book, called, The Inner Sanctuary, and it's on these, chapters of John, and it's still available, in paperback, what he's saying here, is, I'll quote from him, he's saying, the joy of Christ, the very joy, which he experienced, in abiding, in his Father's love, was to be, in their measure, reproduced, in their hearts, in the way of obedience, to his commandments, in other words, as Jesus experienced, joy, in relation, to obedience, to his Father's command, so we come, to experience, the same joy, because it's joy, in relation, to keeping, the commandments, of the Father, we were made, friends, we were made, we were created, to enjoy God, most of us,

I'm sure, learned, the shorter catechism, as children, and significantly, it begins with, what is man's, chief end, and as a very young, child, I often, thought, well, what does that mean, what's chief end, and of course, what it means is, the main purpose, for which we were created, what is the chief end, what is the main purpose, of a human life, man's chief end, man's main purpose, in life is this, to glorify God, and to enjoy him, forever, don't miss that bit out, don't just think, that glorifying God, is all about, the absence, of real joy, and that the joy, that a Christian has, is somehow, less than the joy, of the world, it's the other way around, the Sir Don Carson, I'll finish with this quote, from Don Carson, in his commentary on John, human joy, in a fallen world, will at best, be ephemeral, shallow, incomplete, until human existence, is overtaken, by an experience, of the love of God, in Christ Jesus, the love, for which we were created, a mutual love, that issues, in obedience, without, reserve, the importance, of having a living connection, to Christ, of maintaining, that living connection, to Christ, and of bearing fruit, through that connection, to the glory, of God, may he bless to us, his word, now we're going to conclude, our service today, singing in Psalm 92, that's on page, 122,

[ 31 : 27 ] Psalm 92a, singing to tune, St. Columba, verses 8 to 15, but Lord you are, forevermore, exalted very high, all evil doers, will be crushed, your foes, will surely die, you made me strong, as any ox, with oil, anointed me, I've seen my enemies, defeat, and I have heard them flee, like palms, and cedars flourishing, the righteous all will be, and planted, in the house of God, will grow abundantly, and so in old age, they still bear fruit, they will stay fresh, and strong, they will proclaim, the Lord is just, my rock, who does no wrong, these verses, in conclusion, but Lord you are, forevermore, exalted very high, all evil doers, will be crushed, your foes, will surely die, you made me strong, as any ox, with biofism, with oil announced in me,

I'm still my enemies, called me.

Like palms and seeds And flooding sea A righteous soul will be And planted in the house of God  
Will grow upon the tree Soil in all days Stay still with fruit They will sniff fresh and strong They will  
proclaim The Lord is just

My walk to death For all I'll go to the side door to my left this morning And now may grace and  
mercy and peace From God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit Be your portion now and  
forevermore Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen