

Reading Scripture

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Would you turn in your Bibles, please, to John chapter 15? We're going to read from verses 1 to 17. John chapter 15, verses 1 to 17, which is entitled, in my Bible, The Vine and the Branches.

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 trims clean, so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

[1 : 18] If you remain in me, and my word remains in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

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

I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, than one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business.

Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learn from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

[2 : 23] Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command, love each other. Amen, and the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word.

We're looking at the Christian life, how to live the Christian life, how to abide in Christ, if you like, to use the language of John chapter 15, where Jesus likens abiding in Christ to grapes, or the vine, and the vineyard.

And he likens God to the vineyard keeper, and he likens his relationship with us to that of the vine and the branches.

He gives us life. He gives fruit to the vine. He is the one that the branches must remain in in order to stay healthy and fruitful and good.

It's a very simple metaphor, one perhaps we're less familiar with because we don't see vines in most of our gardens in Whitby, although I believe you can grow them, but I've never attempted to do it.

[3 : 42] But this is about remaining in Christ. It's about sticking with him. It's about recognizing that apart from him, we can do nothing.

Yeah? So it's reinforced by what Alan said earlier on. We are in Christ. He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.

He will do it. It's not that we desperately hold on, but it is that we remain in him as the secret of our fruitfulness.

Isaiah says, The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. And here is the new Israel of God, the people of God from every nation, every tribe, every tongue, now in that position of the vineyard of the Lord of hosts.

And when Jesus was speaking this to his Jewish heroes, of course, they would have been quite shocked. They would have known the background to this text, and they would have been quite shocked at what he has to say.

[4 : 48] But it's a reminder to us that God is not necessarily a respecter of where we come from. You know, as much as I would like God to be a castle supporter, he doesn't favor them over any other team, as is evident by their lack of success.

As much as we would like God to be British, he doesn't favor the British over anyone else. God is no respecter of persons.

Jesus says, Come to me, and I will give you rest. Jesus says, Believe in me, and you will be saved for eternity. And no other conditions are put on that.

Believe in me if you're Jewish. Believe in me if you're British. All, anyone who comes to him will find life, whatever their background, whatever their ethnic origin, whatever their condition.

God is no respecter of persons. But when we get invited to Christ, there's only one way of staying in him. One way of remaining in him. And that's ensuring that we do the things that he commands us to do.

[5 : 58] That we are his friends. That we love him, and we obey his commands. And so what we're looking at is, how do we structure our lives on a daily basis to ensure that we remain in Christ?

So we've looked at things like prayer, community, generosity. And today we're going to look at reading Scripture.

the importance of Scripture, the Bible, as a means by which we remain in Jesus and stay attached to the vine.

Just as we can't really live this Christian life without Christian church, without community, we can't live this Christian life without the Bible. Jesus himself said, man does not live by bread alone, but by what?

By every word that comes from the mouth of God. God's word is like food to our souls. Jeremiah said, your word came, sorry, was it Ezekiel actually?

[6 : 59] Your word came to me and I ate it. And it was sweet like honey to my taste. God's word nourishes us. It helps us to abide in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And it's not just about making sure we read it every day. It's about getting the best from it. Because you can just go through the motions, can't you?

And we have all kinds of tools available to us. You can do it very quickly. In the morning if you get up, you can get a Scripture, read our daily bread, or have it read to you, even now. And then it's done and it's five minutes.

But it's not enough if that's all it is. It's about then taking what you hear and then just letting it flow through you.

Letting it go around your mind and your heart. Seeking to apply it to any circumstance that arises that day. It is quite remarkable how God will give us a word and then things will happen and we'll say, please speak to me God, please help me through this.

[8 : 02] And we forget that he already had. We just forgot what he said. Our attitude would be like that of Samuel. Remember Samuel when he was a little boy and he heard the voice, or he heard a voice, he didn't know whose voice it was.

He heard a voice and then he went off to Eli and asked Eli, what's going on here? And Eli then suddenly realized this is God speaking to the young boy and he told him, say to him, speak Lord, for your servant is listening.

That's a way to get up in the morning. That's an attitude to take to when we hear Bible reading and when we come to ask God to speak to us, we say, Lord, speak to me.

I'm listening. I'm listening. And listening doesn't just mean I'll take it on board. It means, more than that, it means, I will obey. I will do what you say because I want you to guide me in my life.

I want you to help me every day in my life, whether I'm on the building site, whether I'm in a factory, whether I'm in a restaurant, whether I'm at school, whether I'm working at home, whatever I'm doing, I'm listening to your voice, Lord.

[9 : 14] I want you to guide me through your word. And that's why Scripture is so very important for us to get to know Scripture, to engage in regular Scripture reading.

So let's think, for example, of Psalm 1. What does a psalmist do every day? He meditates upon God's Word day and night.

That's a good guide. Begin your day with God, end it with God. Yeah? Just a few words of Scripture to encompass your day, to be encompassing your life, and allowing Scripture, the Bible, to be your guide every day.

There are people in this world who couldn't get through the day without reading their horoscopes. Imagine that. Stars out there. They're going to guide you somehow. Or they've got to read the latest celebrity gossip, or they've got to be on their Instagram accounts, or their Twitter accounts, or whatever else it may be.

And oh, I couldn't survive without it. Well, you couldn't survive without the Bible. That's for absolute certainty. Meditate upon the Scriptures day and night.

[10:25] Or listen to this from Psalm 119. Next slide. Psalm 119. How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.

I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Jesus said in John 15.3, You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Let the word of God be in your heart. Let it cleanse you. Let it change your life. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

And if the word of God is in our hearts, it's much more difficult to sin. Because the Holy Spirit takes that word and then prompts us. What is it you read this morning? Do you have a right to be angry? Oh, I have every right. The scripture says, Do not be angry. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath. Do you have a right to covet that thing?

[11:35] Oh, I have every right. Why shouldn't I have all that I want? Do not covet, says the scripture. Remember that riches will never satisfy you.

Do not build up treasures on earth. You see how the scripture works as the Holy Spirit takes it and then applies it to us and say, Now, come on. Order your life according to my words.

Or think of what Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3 verses 14 to 15. He says, But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have become convinced of because you know that those from whom you learned it and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Timothy had a grandmother who taught him the scriptures. He had a mother who taught him the scriptures. As if you can just picture the scene. He sat on their knees while they taught him the scriptures and from infancy he knew those scriptures and they made him wise to salvation.

Children are never too young to read the scriptures too because you saw a seed that might bear fruit many, many days many, many years later.

[12:58] But what's important is you put the right things into their hearts and minds. Dallas Willard used to say everybody gets an education. The question is what kind of education are you getting?

Yeah? Yeah? The world will educate. The world will tell them to be a certain way, to be a certain type of person. Scripture will educate because the Holy Spirit can take Scripture and make it live in the hearts of our youngsters, our children as they grow up and as they become wise for salvation. Well, listen to this from the Apostle Paul, Romans 12, verses 1 and 2. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

What is the design of Scripture? Paul says, to renew your mind, to change the way you think, to enable you to live according to the will of God for the glory of God.

[14:18] That's why reading Scripture is so very important. And I love the way J.B. Phillips translated this. Some of you will remember, with eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him.

Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your mind within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands, and moves toward the goal of true maturity.

I love that. Do not let it squeeze you into its mold. See it as a battle that's going on for the mind. An attempt by the devil, the God of this world, to control our thinking and to lead us astray.

Don't allow that to happen. See, He doesn't say, just sit back and it will happen for you. He says, let your mind be renewed. Make every effort.

Put in all of the energy into the reading of Scripture and to the imbibing of Scripture so that your whole mindset is changed by the Holy Spirit of God.

[15:37] And your life will be so much better if you do that. Trust me, it will be so much better. So, in terms of application, what is Jesus teaching us in John 15 that enables us to renew our minds in the Word of God in order that we might abide in Christ?

The first one. You've seen it already. Just go back to it. We are renewed in Christ as His Word enters into our lives. In chapter 15 and verse 7, Jesus says that if you abide in me and my words abide in you, in other words, the Word of God has to be living in us, impacting us, penetrating us, influencing us, guiding us.

That word influence and influences is very popular, isn't it? But it's very apt. What voice is influencing you in life? And some of the things that are influencing us, even as Christians, they really ought not to be.

We ought to be far more critical about what we allow past our God-given defenses because they shape our thinking in ways that shouldn't happen.

Sometimes in order to follow Christ, we have to say no to influences that lead us away from Him. We have to say, I will not watch that or I will not listen to that or I will not do that.

[17:10] And the fact that other people say, well, everybody does it and you won't be cool if you don't is really not a good thing for us to take on board. I'm not interested in whether or not you're cool or I'm cool.

I'm interested in whether or not you're godly. That's what matters. How will coolness get you past the judgment seat of Christ?

And I know for young Christians this is a particular challenge because, of course, so many, many people of your age, groups, are influenced by what is cool and what keeps you in the crowd.

And they mock you and ridicule you if you're not part of the crowd because you're different. You're that one that goes to church. You're the god-botherer or whatever the equivalent.

They would never say god-botherer now. That shows my age. What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his soul? So if the world influences and tells you what you need to be happy, need to be content, need to be in the inside, Jesus says, what's the point of all of that if you die and you haven't got me?

[18:35] Jesus says, let my words live in you. Because they make you wise for salvation. They lead you to me. They bring you to me. Let my words remain in you.

And isn't it funny how when people share scripture with us, it remains in us even if we didn't want it to. See, when I first read scripture, and it was months before I became a Christian when I first read the Bible.

It was months before. But the difference was that it was getting on the inside. like an irritant. So I'd go off and do the things I always did, but I couldn't do them in the way that I used to do them.

I used to do them without conscience. I used to do them without trouble. Everybody did them. It didn't matter. If I got in a fight, well, I got in a fight. I got in loads of fights. If I got drunk, well, I got drunk.

I got drunk all of the time. If I was womanizing, well, I was womanizing. I did that all of the time.

Well, not quite. That makes me sound awful. But then, when the Word of God was getting into my heart and mind, I couldn't do those things and not feel guilty.

[19:51] I was beginning to think, I wish I'd never read that. I wish I'd never heard of Jesus. I remember one time being in a nightclub and I'd had too much to drink and, you know, I've got to go home.

I've got to go home. I can't cope with this. I wish I'd never heard of it. But the Holy Spirit was at work. I didn't even know what was going on. The Holy Spirit was at work and He was changing me from the inside out until months later, I finally bowed the knee to Jesus and accepted Him as my Lord and Savior.

His words were living in me. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, Paul says. Don't resist it or resent it. Let it dwell in you richly because it transforms you from the inside out.

You are renewed in Christ as His Word enters your life. Be really grateful for it, thankful for it. Look for it every day. Think of it like your breakfast, your cereal in the morning.

Couldn't go without that, you say. Well, don't go without the Word of God because it will make a difference to your day. It renews your life. It makes you clean.

[21 : 04] Listen to what James says. James chapter 1, verse 21. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the Word planted in you.

Humbly accept it. You know, sometimes when the Word of God comes, it isn't easy. You think, goodness me, Lord, I can't do that. James says, humbly accept it.

Let it be planted in you. Let it grow in you. Let it produce fruit in you. Don't resist it. Don't let it go. Let it live. Let it grow.

Could be a song, couldn't it? Let it grow. A bit like let it go. You know, never mind. Psalm 119. Listen to this. Verses 97 to 105.

Oh, how I love your law. I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers for I meditate on your statutes.

[22 : 03] Let me say something about that. When I was converted, I read nothing more than the Daily Star. That was about the extent toward any reading I did.

Maybe the Bruins at Christmas for a Christmas present. My mom always seemed to buy us the Bruins. Easy to read. When I came to Christ, I just couldn't get enough of reading.

I wanted to learn. I wanted to grow. I read my Bible as much as I could read it. I read any Christian book that people would give me. I had to teach myself what words meant.

When I went to Bible college, the lady who taught me English despaired of me. She was from Cambridge and I was from South Shields. She would say, what did you just say?

Slow down. You're going to have to do... I was in Bible college. You're going to have to do an English O level. A G-C-E-G... You're going to have to do an O level. She said, I'm not sure you'll pass.

[23 : 03] And I passed. She was amazed. I had to work hard. I had to train myself. I had to teach myself. If somebody had said to me when I was converted, you're going to be a Christian minister.

You're going to go to Bible college and learn to speak New Testament Greek. You're going to end up in education and train school leaders and help school leaders to get qualifications.

I wouldn't have believed it. Never mind you. But the Scripture says, doesn't it, your commands make me wiser than my enemies for they are ever with me.

I have more insight than all my teachers. And I'm not saying I have that. What I'm saying is, is when the Word of God enters into us, it changes us beyond recognition.

Nothing then becomes impossible. No human limitation, no label that other people put on you becomes impossible. My head of year said, I was a waste of space and I would amount to nothing.

[24 : 18] He was my head of year at Redwell School, a school so bad that they closed it down as he pinned me against the wall by the throat. I deserved it.

I often wished I'd seen him since. He said, you know what, when I was in school, I had your position and went beyond it. By the grace of God.

By the entrance of God's Word that gives light and gives understanding to the simple. Do not allow yourself to be limited by what the world says because God's Word, when it enters into your life, can transform you and make you something and somebody you never imagined possible.

I have more understanding than the elders for I obey your precepts. I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.

I have not departed from your laws for you yourself have taught me how sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. I gain understanding from your precepts, therefore I hate every wrong path.

[25 : 27] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. What a scripture. How do I get through the day? Through the Word of God.

How do I get through the night? Through the Word of God. How do I get through this life? Your word is a lamp to my feet. It is a light to my path.

Secondly, we maintain our life in Christ as Christ's words live in us. Notice again verse 3, you are already clean through the Word I have spoken to you.

Clean means you have already been pruned. You have already been made into that vessel that is ready to be fruitful.

When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit cleanses us from all sin. When we come to Christ, we are born again of the Spirit of God. But what Jesus is talking about here is how do we remain in Christ? [26 : 29] once we have been cleansed, once we have been pruned, once we have been made ready to be a vessel fit for His use, how do we remain in Him? Well, my words remain in you.

You have already been made clean like we heard last week. You don't need a bath any longer. You just need your feet washed every so often. Once Jesus has made you new, He is concerned about how you will just keep in relationship.

And you keep in relationship as His Word lives in you. And again, notice it's not just as you read His Word, it's as you allow His Word to influence the way you live.

If you remain in me, verse 7, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you will and it will be given to you. There's an indication of growth. If God's Word comes into our hearts and minds, it impacts our praying.

You know, you say, oh, well, I'm not going to bother God about this because it will be too hard for Him. Really? Is anything too hard for the Lord, the Scripture would say? With God, nothing is impossible.

[27 : 41] So you say, well, I don't think I can pray for that person. They're too sick, too far gone. The doctors have said they can do nothing for them. Really? Ask anything in my name.

Don't limit what I can do. Let the Word of Christ inform you. Let it influence your faith. Let it influence your decision-making. You say, well, I'm not going to do that.

It's madness. How am I going to live? How am I going to survive? Who's going to look after me?

And Jesus says, don't worry about that. Just ask your Father.

He will give you what you need. You see, lots of people say, well, I can't really obey the Scripture because if I do, it will make it really difficult for me.

My life will be so hard. And so I have to compromise in order to survive. But the Scripture says, no, no. You don't compromise to survive.

[28 : 40] You obey to survive. However hard it is, you obey. See, we heard, didn't we, when Open Doors came about these Christian believers who were willing to come to Christ and lay down their lives for Jesus.

Now, you'd forgive, wouldn't you, if you say, well, they keep it quiet in order to survive. They're not going to follow the Great Commission because they have to survive. But that's not what they say. What they say is, I will take up the cross even if I have to lay down my life.

This is not just about losing a job or losing income. This is about losing life. But still, they're willing to obey Jesus rather than men. because the Word of Christ lives in them.

If you are going to survive in your relationship with Jesus, the Word of God has to live in you and influence everything you do. Renew your mind.

Let the Scriptures make a difference. Let's see the next slide, please. I think it's a quote. Yeah, next one. Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

[29 : 48] Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, the Word of Scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long. Just like the words of someone you love.

And just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart as Mary did.

That is all. Do not ask, how shall I pass this on? But what does it say to me? Then ponder the word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you.

You know why I love that quote? Not just because it's a brilliant quote, but because Bonhoeffer lived that quote. Bonhoeffer stood against Adolf Hitler and his racist ideology.

He stood against the church that compromised with Adolf Hitler in order to make life easier for themselves. And he was hung by the neck in 1945 by Adolf Hitler for his betrayal of Germany.

[30 : 56] But he was welcomed into glory because of his obedience to Jesus. Sometimes following Jesus will cost us. Sometimes if we take the Word of God seriously, it will cost us.

The world will not love us because of it, because of the things we have to stand for and hold to and believe in, though it be contrary to accepted ideologies.

Nonetheless, we make our stand, whatever the cost. But we will only ever do that if the Scripture lives in us. If at the point where we say, I simply could not disobey that, because to deny the Scripture is to deny who I am.

when Martin Luther was threatened by the Roman Catholic Church for teaching that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, he said, here I stand, I can do no other, God help me. Even if all of the tiles on the roof were as devils, he said, I would not compromise. And we have to have that spirit.

[32 : 05] We might not express it in exactly the same way, but we say to our friends, and we say to our neighbors, and maybe we even say to government, I will not compromise. This awful bill going through Parliament, I seldom speak about politics in this way, this awful assisted dying bill.

The country is forgetting, people are forgetting, who gives them life, and who alone can take life, only God. sometimes we have to say no, I will not bow the knee to bow.

I will obey Scripture, whatever it costs me, because by obeying Scripture, I remain in Christ. And this is not about salvation.

Jesus is talking about our relationship. if you stop obeying Scripture, and you stop listening to Jesus, he says, you don't love me.

If you love me, you'd obey what I command. And if we stop doing that, he says, it's like you become a useless branch. I'll just cut you off and throw you into fire. He doesn't mean you'll go to hell.

[33 : 23] He means your life will be fruitless. Sometimes we just have to accept that. if our lives are out of line with the will of God for our lives, we have to repent and put it right, however hard it is.

Because Jesus calls us to a life of relationship that is based upon obedience to his commands. He didn't say, you will show you love me by raising your hands in the air and singing wonderful songs of worship.

He says, you show you love me by obeying what I command. And you know that, don't you, in relationships. If you have a relationship with somebody and the relationship is tense and difficult, you can bet somebody's done something wrong.

Yeah? Said the wrong thing, looked the wrong way, didn't do the right thing. And then you know what it's like. It's a bit tense, a bit grumpy, and everybody's kind of, hmm. But there has to be a word.

And then there has to be an understanding. And then there has to be sorry. I'll try not to do that again. It's no different in our relationship with Jesus.

[34 : 38] If we find ourselves strangely cold and strangely far from Jesus, we have to put it right. Repent of the thing that is hindering the relationship, because Jesus has not changed or moved.

But he doesn't want us to live in filth when he wants us to live in him. And if your conscience is pricked by this, please don't take it out on me.

Draw near to God through the Holy Spirit and repent of the thing that is harming your relationship with Jesus. And then thirdly, we remain in the love of Christ by obeying his commands.

I've kind of said it, so I'm not going to say very much more. Hebrews 4, 12 and 13 says, For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.

Oh, it's sharp. It penetrates even to the dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

[35 : 46] Everything is uncovered and laid bare before him, before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Notice that. When we feel convicted on the inside because the scripture speaks into our souls and says, you're not doing the right thing here, accept it as a good gift, though it hurts.

Think of the Holy Spirit like a really good surgeon. You've got something wrong with you that is potentially going to kill you, and the surgeon has to hurt you to make you well.

The Holy Spirit will do that. Don't be afraid. He's concerned to make you right, to put things right. When the Spirit of truth comes, Jesus says, He will guide you into all truth.

He will not speak on His own. He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. The Holy Spirit is concerned to make you like Jesus, to teach you what it is to live like Jesus in the world, to give you joy.

[37 : 03] Jesus says, My joy will be in you. You want to live a happy life? You want to live a fulfilled! life? You want to be the best version of you you can be? That sounds really trendy, doesn't it? Live it for Jesus.

Live it for Jesus. Because nothing else satisfies like Jesus. Not alcohol, not drugs, not wealth, not holidays, not fine clothes, nothing satisfies more than Jesus.

And the Holy Spirit is given in your heart to convict you in order that he might make you right and make you like Jesus.

Next slide, please. Next one. Next one, sorry. This was a, sorry, Wilbur Chapman.

Wilbur Chapman was converted under the ministry of D.L. Moody and became quite a famous evangelist. He influenced Billy Sunday, who you might have heard of. I love this in closing.

[38 : 10] The rule that governs my life is this. Anything that dims my vision of Christ, or takes away my taste for Bible study, or cramps my prayer life, or makes Christian work difficult, is wrong for me.

And I must, as a Christian, turn away from it. It's a good guiding light. Anything that leads you away from reading the Bible, anything that leads you away from praying, anything that takes you away from church, anything that takes you away will take you away from Christ.

So let one of our disciplines in life be, I will read the Scripture every day in order that I might feed and be more like Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Nab Nab