The Importance of Staying Connected With Christ

John 15:1-8 (NKJV)

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of John chapter fifteen. And let's read verses 1-8.

JOHN 15:1-8 (NKJV)

1 “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 bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.
INTRODUCTION

In 1971, the very first email was delivered. And now 45 years later Social Media has taken the world by storm.

There’s FACEBOOK…….there’s TWITTER…….there’s MY SPACE …….there’s LINKED-IN and PINTEREST and a whole slew of other social networking websites.

In fact, one in four people worldwide now uses one or more of these social networks. These social networks were originally created to give people a means to communicate and stay connected with others. But what started out as a novelty has now turned into a serious addiction for many. Americans now spend an average of 270 hours per month staring at a screen. That’s a little over 11 days out of every month. These electronic tools that are supposed to help us stay connected have actually caused us to become more disconnected than ever before.

If you don’t believe me, look around the room at your next family gathering or at the next social event you go to, and take notice of how many people are staring at their SmartPhones or Tablet screens, totally disconnected from everything that is going on around them.

This addiction has even created a whole new problem in our Churches. Many are now looking at their SmartPhones instead of the Scriptures during the worship services. They are tuning in to their social media messages and tuning out the message from God’s word.

There’s even a name for this phenomenon. It is called Spiritual Attention Deficit Disorder.........or S.A.D.D. I can’t think of a more appropriate name, can you?
Our scripture text this evening is all about “staying connected” not with people, but with **JESUS CHRIST**.

Before we get into our scripture study, let me tell you about the setting in which Jesus spoke these words.

Jesus and His disciples had just finished the Passover meal in the Upper Room or “The Last Supper” as we have come to know it. In less than twelve hours Jesus will be nailed to the cross of Calvary to die for the sins of the world.

Up to this very night, Jesus and His disciples had been a united and peaceful band of men; but that unity had been broken that night when it was revealed that Judas Iscariot would betray Jesus.

After singing a hymn, Jesus and His apostles minus one, left the Upper Room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane. As they made their way through the dark streets of Jerusalem they would have passed near the Temple which had **great vines carved into its doors**. When they reached the outer wall of Jerusalem it is very possible they passed through **The Golden Gate** which also had **gorgeous grape vines carved into it**. And since it was the springtime of the year, perhaps March or April, **the grape vines in the vineyards outside of Jerusalem would have been starting to blossom**.

Perhaps Jesus even grabbed hold of a **grape vine** to use as an object lesson for the words He spoke to His disciples here in John 15.

Let’s go back to our text now and there are **four key points** I would like to share with you about **Staying Connected With Jesus**.

As we go back to our text there are three key points I would like to share with you about **The Importance of Staying Connected With Christ**.
First of all.....

I. Jesus Teaches Us About Our RELATIONSHIP (v. 1 and 5a)

v. 1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine dresser.”

v. 5a “I am the vine, you are the branches.”

1. In these two verses JESUS is talking about the three-way relationship or a “three-way connection” between Himself.....His heavenly Father.........and us.

2. Perhaps if Jesus had lived on earth in our day and time He might have said, “I am the true social network, My Father is the Service Provider, and you are the subscriber.

3. But since they didn't have the internet or social networking two thousand years ago, Jesus used a “connection” analogy that the people of His day could easily understand: “I am the TRUE VINE......and My Father is THE VINE DRESSER.......and you are THE BRANCHES.”

4. Let's look at this three-way relationship more closely.

(A) Jesus is the TRUE VINE (v.1a)

In the Old Testament, Israel is often referred to as “the vine.”

Psalm 80:8,9 (NKJV) You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

Jeremiah 2:21a (NKJV) Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of the highest quality.
GOD did everything possible to make Israel bear fruit. He provided for her. He protected her. He raised up prophets to teach the people His truths, yet Israel continually rebelled and disobeyed God. So God took down the protective hedge around “His vineyard” and allowed Israel to be trampled on by foreign nations and she forfeited her divine privileges.

So when God sent His Son into the world He planted “The True Vine.” There is an inseparable connection between God the Father and God the Son. Jesus says in John 10:30, “I and My Father are one.”

The Hebrew word for TRUE means eternal. So Jesus is saying, “I am the ETERNAL VINE” or “I am the source of ETERNAL LIFE.”

Moving on we see that……...

(B) God the Father is THE VINEDRESSER (v.1b)

As the name suggest, the Vine Dresser is the one who “dresses” or “prunes” the vines so that they will be fruitful and productive.

Jesus explains this very clearly in verse 2……...

John 15:2 (NKJV) “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it may bear more fruit.”

GOD the FATHER is the One who cares for or tends to the branches that are connected to His Son.
Throughout the Gospels Jesus is never portrayed as acting independently from His heavenly Father. They work together in full cooperation.

So Jesus is **THE TRUE VINE**, and His heavenly Father is **THE VINE DRESSER**.

Now here is where you and I fit into this three-way relationship.......

(C) **We are THE BRANCHES** (v. 5a)

Jesus says, “I am the Vine, you are the branches.” Some have suggested that “the branches” refers to the various denominations of the Church that have arisen since the Church was established on the day of Pentecost. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The “branches” refers to those become **disciples** or **followers** of the LORD Jesus Christ. The eleven faithful disciples were “branches.” The apostle Paul was a branch, as were Barnabas, and Silas, and Timothy.

And the day you and I gave our lives to Jesus Christ we too became “branches.” We became “connected” to the **TRUE VINE**, the **source of eternal life**.

After teaching us about **OUR RELATIONSHIP** .........
II. Jesus Teaches Us About Our REPRODUCTION

Illustration: Right beside our house there is a big pond. It doesn’t belong to us, it belongs to the Fish Farm adjacent to our property. But because the pond is so close to our house I have always taken the responsibility of keeping the grass mowed around the pond. In fact the owners of the fish farm call it “Preacher’s Pond.”

Years ago, the owners of the Fish Farm planted a strand of Scuppernong and Concord Grape vines on one end of “Preacher Pond” and as payment for keeping the grass mowed, they told me to feel free to get all the grapes I wanted from the grape vines, as well fruit from the fruit trees they had planted on their property.

Well by late summer and early fall each year I always look forward to those grape vines being loaded with luscious, juicy grapes. And while I’m mowing around the pond I will stop the mower beside the vines and eat grapes until my heart is content.

Imagine my disappointment this last year when there were hardly any grapes at all on the vines, and what grapes were there never fully ripened. What good are grape vines that don’t produce grapes?

1. Here in our text Jesus teaches us that “as branches” we have one primary responsibility and that is to bear fruit or to be fruitful.

2. We emphasizes this truth in several verses:

v.2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it may bear more fruit.

v. 4b As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

v. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit.
By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so that you will be My disciples.

3. Now I want to make a very important point so listen carefully. Our responsibility is NOT to “produce” spiritual fruit, our responsibility is to “bear” spiritual fruit. There is a difference!

4. Our “fruitfulness” is dependent upon staying connected to Christ, the True Vine, not upon our own human works or human effort.

5. The point Jesus is making is that the stronger our connection with Him, the more fruit we will bear.

6. Remember earlier I told you Jesus spoke these words shortly after the Last Supper as He and His disciples were on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. That very night a branch that had not born any fruit was “cut off”.........that being Judas Iscariot. He followed Jesus in body, but he was totally disconnected from Jesus spiritually, and thus Judas bore no spiritual fruit and was cut off like a dead branch.

7. Do you know your “fruitfulness” or “lack of fruitfulness” reveals how closely connected you are to Jesus?

(a) The more closely connected you are to JESUS the more you BEHAVE like Jesus.

**Galatians 5:22,23 (NKJV)** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.
(b) The more closely connected you are to JESUS the more you are BURDENED like Jesus.

For one thing, we become more burdened for the **LOST**.

**Romans 1:13 (NKJV)** Paul said, “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you, but was hindered until now, that I might have **some fruit among you also**, just as among the other Gentiles.

We also become more burdened for those who are **in NEED**.

**Matthew 25:37-40 (NKJV)** “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

True “fruitfulness” is not so much about you living the Christian life to the best of your human ability, it is about allowing Jesus Christ to live His life through you.

**Jesus Teaches Us About OUR RELATIONSHIP.**

**Jesus Teaches Us About OUR REPRODUCTION.**

And thirdly.........
III. Jesus Teaches Us About Our RESPONSIBILITY

1. When it comes to “staying connected” in our relationship with Christ, the responsibility lies squarely upon your shoulders and mine.

2. I want you to notice Jesus' emphasis on the word “abide” in these verses.

   v. 4 ABIDE in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it ABIDES in the vine, neither can you, unless you ABIDE in Me.

   v. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who ABIDES in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

   v. 6 If anyone does not ABIDE in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered.

   v. 7 If you ABIDE in Me, and My words ABIDE in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

3. Seven times Jesus commands us to ABIDE IN HIM. In other words......STAY CONNECTED TO ME......STAY CONNECTED TO ME......STAY CONNECTED TO ME......STAY CONNECTED TO ME.......
   it is your responsibility to STAY CONNECTED TO ME!

4. Remember that old cliche' “If God seems far away, guess who moved?” Well if it seems as though you are not as close to Christ as you should be, guess who broke the connection? You can blame it on the preacher. You can blame it on the Church. You can blame it on your job. You can blame it on whomever or whatever you want, but the truth is IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO STAY CONNECTED WITH CHRIST!
5. It is your responsibility to **STAY IN THE WORD**.
   It is your responsibility to **STAY IN PRAYER**.
   It is your responsibility to **STAY IN SERVICE**.
   It is your responsibility to **STAY IN THE LORD’S CHURCH**.

6. What is it that is keeping you from **staying connected** to Christ? Is it because you are **too busy**? Are you clinging to some **secret sin**? Have you become more **worldly**? Are you harboring **bitterness, hatred, or anger**? Have you become **selfish and self-centered**?

7. Whatever is standing between you and Christ, you can be sure OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, **THE VINEDRESSER**, is not going to let it go on and on and on. He will **“prune”** whatever is hindering your relationship with **THE VINE** through His loving discipline in order that you might become more fruitful.

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**CONCLUSION**

In closing I want to give you some food for thought. Many of us have become so addicted to our cell phones and social media it would drive us absolutely crazy if we had to go a day or two without them. But isn't it sad that many of us can go days or even weeks without “connecting” to Christ?

Makes you wonder just where our priorities are doesn't it?

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing.”

**STAY CONNECTED.......STAY CONNECTED.....STAY CONNECTED!**