

Have you ever watched a child go outside and play? Even the smallest child quickly discovers the laws of cause and effect. I’m thinking of kids who go outside, very small children who just sit on the lawn, reach down in the grass and start pulling it up out of the ground, their little fists full of green grass. As they get older, kids try things like breaking branches off trees, which to a child seems harmless, but at some point, it dawns on them that they may have damaged something. I mean, at first, everything looks fine. Let’s say I broke a branch off of an apple tree, and there’s still a couple apples hanging off of it. Right then and there it looks OK. It looks like any of the branches still on the tree. But if I set that branch on the ground and come back in a couple days, what am I going to find? I’m going to find a branch that is starting to dry out, leaves that are beginning to wither, and fruit that is starting to rot.

This is the type of visual picture that Jesus paints in order to talk about our relationship to Him. In John’s Gospel He says, “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. 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.”

Jesus is the vine; you and I are the branches. Jesus is the source of life. He is the vine, the root, the trunk. The person who is a sincere follower of Jesus is connected to Him. The Christian person is hooked into that life source. When you live in that connection, when you’re intentional about maintaining that connection, what’s the result? You bear fruit, which is a poetic way of saying that Jesus inside of you causes you to do things Jesus would do. On the other hand, if you neglect your connection to Jesus, if you’re not intentional about maintaining that connection, if other things take precedent, what’s the result then? Faith withers and dies. You’re like a branch that’s gone rotten from the inside out. Jesus says that person becomes like a stick that you gather in order to burn on the trash pile. Do you hear what he’s saying? Jesus’ own object lesson gets right to the point. Remain in me, abide in me, and you’ll really be alive, and will do a lot of good with your life. Live without paying careful attention to me, and your connection to me, Jesus says, and you’ll die from the inside out.

Today, Nathan Ryan is going to make his confirmation. It’s a milestone day. But let’s be very clear about what’s going on here. This is not graduation from church. It’s just the opposite. I want you to look in the bulletin, and look at what Nathan is saying ‘yes’ to today. Please, really look at what he is saying. He is confirming that the faith that was passed to him when he was baptized is his own. He’s saying that he believes the Bible tells the truth. He’s saying, “I believe Jesus is my Savior from sin, death, and hell.” And—make sure you don’t miss this—he’s saying, I would rather die than fall away from Jesus. Nothing is more important to me than Him. Could you say the same? That is confirmation.

Today, Nathan is going to stand before God and his Church and say, “I want to abide in the vine. I want to remain in Jesus. I’m going to live my life in connection to Him.” That’s a wonderful confession of faith and confirmation of God’s working in his life. But it’s only going

to mean something if he knows how to maintain that connection and why to maintain that connection. The same is true for you, if this is your confession of faith.

First of all: the how. How do you remain in Jesus? How do you abide in Jesus? You stay plugged in. Here's a little story about a man who had made a bit of a mess in the living room, and went and got the vacuum to clean things up. Well, he flipped the switch and nothing happened. He flipped the vacuum over and fiddled with some of the belts. He checked some of the inner connections. He flipped the switch again; nothing. Finally he called out to his wife, "Honey, is there something wrong with the vacuum? It's not working!" His wife replied, "Did you plug it in?" Turns out he had forgotten that step.

How do you abide in Jesus? You stay plugged in to Him. It's so simple, and yet so hard for us to master. Sometimes when I talk to people, and they tell me that they feel so far away from God, and when you listen to their story, it becomes clear that the reason they feel that way is they stopped plugging in to Jesus long ago. So again, how do you do that?

You remain in Jesus by plugging into His Word, the Bible. There's no substitute for this. God's Word is the outlet that you must attach to, and you can attach to it here in church, in Sunday School, in youth group, in Adult Bible Study, at home, in your room, in your smartphone, wherever. God's Word reminds you again and again that God loves you so much that it killed Him, and that He rose to new life to be with you always. When you make the time to plug into the Bible, the energy and power of God will flow through you. If you don't, it won't. You remain in Jesus by going to the Lord's Supper; by eating and drinking the heavenly food that Jesus gives you there. Again, there's no substitute for this. By Jesus' own promise, He gives himself to you here in bread and wine. When you eat and drink Jesus, the forgiveness and love of God flow through you. If you don't, it won't.

How do you abide in Jesus? By remembering your baptism, for it was baptism that created a connection between you and the Son of God. You abide in Jesus by talking to God regularly in prayer, by letting Him in to your everyday life. If you think you're a Christian, but you stay away from these things, you're trying to run a vacuum that's not plugged in. You're a branch that's torn itself from the tree. It doesn't work.

Secondly: the why. Why should I remain in Jesus? Why maintain my connection with Him? Of course it benefits you to remain in Jesus, but that's not where Jesus goes here. Instead He says, "[The person who] abides in me bears much fruit." Jesus wants us to live fruitful lives. Do you understand that? An apple tree that produces apples is doing what it was made to do. A Christian who lives in connection to Jesus produces fruit as well, in the form of loving actions done for others. We were made for this. If you abide in Jesus, you will find yourself doing good things for people, and you will be happy doing them, it will be deeply satisfying, even if there's a sacrifice involved; even if it's inconvenient. When you abide in Jesus, the desire and willingness and the availability to do this will just start to grow, because that's what Jesus is like. He's pushing His love through the vine into your branch. He's touching the world through the fruit you bear.