

Stay with Jesus

John 15:1-17

In the movie *Knight and Day*, Tom Cruise is his usual super hero / special agent, and he comes to rescue Cameron Diaz from certain death. He tells her “Your chances of survival **with me... without me...**” WITH ME – it’s up here. WITHOUT ME – it’s down here.



In matters of life and death we understand **the importance of being with someone who can protect us**. If you were in a war zone, you would want an Ethan Hunt/ James Bond / Jason Bourne level hero to guide you through and watch over you. You would stay with him very closely, wouldn't you? I know I would!

How much more true is this with Jesus? We are in a spiritual battle and the stakes are not just life and death but spiritual, everlasting joy over against eternal suffering. Only Jesus can protect us and guide us through this battle.

Hear these words from the Lord:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.” John 15:1

Notice that key word “TRUE.” There are plenty of other people and things that present themselves as the source of life and happiness and security and fulfillment. But only Jesus is the TRUE vine.

- Money cannot protect you or provide what you really need.

- Success cannot save you.
- Love, marriage and family is not the “true vine” that, if you get it, your soul will be satisfied and your life made whole.
- Popularity and fame cannot give you what your soul longs for.

There is only one true vine: Jesus. Our lesson today and through this Experiencing God series, is to **stay connected with Jesus**. John 15:5 is the key verse for the whole series.

Stay Connected with Jesus

“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.” John 15:5

Today in John 15 we will see **WHY** we must stay connected with Jesus and **HOW** to stay connected with Him. First – WHY. Three reasons to stay with Jesus.

Why Stay Connected with Jesus?

1. He is the **Source** of all life and power
“I am the true vine.” John 15:1

Jesus is the true vine. He is the true source of all life and power and meaning and fulfillment and happiness and eternal life and salvation and EVERYTHING. John in this gospel account presents **seven “I am” statements** from Jesus to prove His identity as the eternal Word of God who is one with the Father, who has sent the Holy Spirit. Jesus said:

Why Stay Connected with Jesus?

1. He is the **Source** of all life and power

Jn. 6	“I am the bread of life”	“I am the good shepherd” Jn. 10
	“I am the light of the world” Jn. 8	“I am the resurrection and the life” Jn. 11
	“I am the door” Jn. 10	“I am the way, the truth and the life” Jn. 14
“I am the true vine” Jn. 15		

1. “I am the bread of life” after feeding 5,000 people
2. He said, “I am the light of the world” and then healed a man born blind.
3. He said, “I am the door for the sheep” – the only way INTO the family of God
4. He went on to say, “I am the good shepherd” who cares for all of God’s children
5. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life,” right before he called Lazarus out of his tomb after being dead four days.
6. He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life,” to encourage his disciples about his impending departure and then we come to John 15.

This is the last of the 7 “I am” statements of Jesus in John. “I am the true vine.”
Jesus IS the bread of life and Jesus offers the water of life in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus

is the LIGHT who brings light into the world He created by saying, "Let there be light!" Jesus is the door for the sheep to enter His family in which He watches over us as our good shepherd. Jesus is the resurrection – He conquered death Himself and promises to raise all of us to life with Him! For Jesus is the only Way, the fullness of truth and the source of all LIFE!

Life came from Him and still comes from Him. ***If we stay with Him we are connected to the source of life.*** If we grow distant from Him we become detached from the source of life. And this is no surprise in John because the repetition of these "I am" statements is meant to clearly teach that Jesus is the Great "I am," the covenant God of Israel who revealed Himself to Moses as "I am who I am." In the simplest terms, **JESUS IS GOD**. There is another time in John Jesus uses the phrase, "I am." The religious leaders were asking if he was greater than Abraham. To this Jesus answered:

Why Stay Connected with Jesus?

1. He is the **Source** of all life and power

"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!" John 8:58

The Jews rightly interpreted this as Jesus claiming to be GOD. So they picked up stones to stone him – to execute Him – which was the right penalty for claiming to be God if you weren't. But Jesus IS GOD. To be connected with Jesus is to be connected with God. If you're NOT connected with Jesus, you are NOT connected with God. Jesus is the only way. Here is the second reason to stay with Jesus:

Why Stay Connected with Jesus?

2. **Apart from Him you are powerless**

"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." John 15:5

You and I are just branches. **We have no life or strength in ourselves**. The only way to have LIFE is to call on Jesus to give you His life. The only way to have RIGHTEOUSNESS is to call on Jesus to give you His righteousness. The only way to have POWER is to call on Jesus to give you His power. The only way to have WISDOM is to call on Jesus to give you His wisdom. Jesus is the source of life and power and EVERYTHING.

Apart from Him we are not just figuratively powerless, we are literally powerless. And yet – we live so much of our lives on our own – totally disconnected from Jesus – **because we don't really believe this verse**. Here's how we actually live, believing: "Apart from me you can do... A FEW THINGS." "Apart from me you can do... MOST THINGS pretty well."

Oh, ***we give lip service to our need for God and the importance of prayer***, but in reality we trust in OURSELVES with all of our hearts and lean almost ENTIRELY on our own understanding. In all of our ways we acknowledge our own desires and thinking and thereby set the course for our own lives.

- When you have **a big decision** to make how much prayer and Bible study do you put into the decision?

- When you face **a serious setback** who do you call first? Mom? Wife? Son? Daughter? Where is God on that list?
- In your **regular routine** day to day, where does God fall? Do you spend time with Him first? Last? Ever? Does God get a few minutes total?

If we really believed this verse it would dramatically change how we live. We would far more regularly drop everything to call on God in prayer. We would keep a Bible handy throughout the day and pause to read it and memorize passages. We would come to consider our time with the Lord as **our MOST IMPORTANT appointment of the day** – instead of the thing we often find a reason to bump.

“Apart from me you can do NOTHING.” Let me encourage all of us to ***make the most of this Experiencing God Bible Study***. Is it a lot of work? YES. For sure. Each week has 5 lessons and each lesson has 20-30 minutes of Bible study, prayer and application to do. Memorize the weekly verse. The first one is John 15:5 – so we are helping with that one.

Let’s become more prayerful believers and a more prayerful church this year! Prayerless people are POWERLESS people. A prayerless church is a powerless church. We cannot accomplish anything of significance apart from Jesus. But thankfully, with Him we can move mountains!

Why Stay Connected with Jesus?

3. So your life will matter for eternity

“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.” John 15:5

What does it mean to “bear much fruit?” It means to be productive in ways that matter FOREVER. It means to make a difference; to live a life that MATTERS. It means you don’t waste your life but instead invest your life!

Is it possible to waste our lives? Yes. Tragically, yes. The devil wants nothing more than to keep us prayerless, powerless and fruitless. He wants us to spin our wheels with frivolous distractions. He wants us caught up in the rat race and everything the world loves and pursues. Because that keeps us from the things that matter for eternity.

And what are those things? ***What is the fruit that lasts – the productivity that endures forever?*** The clear emphasis in this passage is one word: **LOVE**.

Why Stay Connected with Jesus?

3. So your life will matter for eternity – being increasingly defined by Love

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you... These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” John 15:12,17

The primary fruit that lasts is **love for God and others**. The more we experience God's love for us, the more His love will define us and fill us and overflow through us. And the more we become channels for God's love the more people will be touched by that love.

Jesus commands us to love one another **"AS I HAVE LOVED YOU."** How did Jesus love them? He loved them by laying down His life for them. His love so shaped them it transformed ordinary fishermen into world-changing ambassadors for the love of God.

Think of the people whose lives echo through history:

- Hudson Taylor and his love for the people of China
- William Wilberforce and his love for slaves
- George Muller and his love for orphans
- Billy Graham and his love for lost sinners
- Elizabeth Elliot and her love for the blind and scared natives who killed her husband.
- Geoff Rogers who had a successful career with IBM but six years ago met a teenage girl who had been chained up in an attic and used as a slave. This set him on a journey to learn about human trafficking and how to end it. He started a ministry called USIAHT and releases a movie on January 23 called Blind Eyes Opened.

Do our lives matter for eternity or are we caught up in the wood, hay and straw of this world? ***Are we producing lasting fruit through lives marked by Christ-like, sacrificial love?*** Or are we becoming increasingly self-indulgent, giving ourselves more and more to our own comforts and entertainment?

Why Stay Connected with Jesus?

3. So your life will matter for eternity – being increasingly defined by Love
"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples." John 15:8

Bearing the fruit of love and growing to become more and more like Jesus is the proof of true, saving faith. If we are not growing in love we would be right to wonder if we belong to Jesus at all. Jesus is defined by love. Love is the essence of His being. How could someone be connected to Jesus and NOT be marked by His kind of self-giving, sacrificial love?

Does a grapevine have to work hard to produce grapes? Does it have to really buckle down and focus and labor night and day to squeeze out those green or purple pearls? Have you ever seen a grapevine or any tree branch SWEATING? Of course not!

Grapes are the natural product of a grapevine just as apples are from an apple tree and oranges from an orange tree. What is the fruit YOUR LIFE is producing? Is it the fruit of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness...? Is your life increasingly defined by and shaped by the character of Christ?

If you are connected with Jesus He will naturally produce that fruit in and through you. If you are not connected with Jesus, you will never be able to produce that fruit on your

own. You cannot MAKE yourself more loving or patient or kind any more than you can lift yourself to the moon by your bootstraps. I've tried. It's very awkward.

I've said it nicely. But Jesus says it even more strongly here.

Why Stay Connected with Jesus?

3. So your life will matter for eternity – being increasingly defined by Love
“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.” John 15:6

What do you do with branches that fall off of the trees in your yard? Do you keep them as trophies of seasons past? No. You set them in your burn pile or you gather them in a yard waste bag and throw them away.

Anyone who is not connected with Jesus is in exactly this condition. He or she is USELESS TO GOD. In fact, ***that person who is not bound to Jesus in faith is DISGUSTING to God.*** They are still defined and controlled by their sin – so God has no choice but to condemn them for their sin. This is not God being unfair or unkind – it is God being perfectly just and good. A good and righteous God cannot look the other way with sin. God MUST punish sin. God cannot allow sin into His glorious presence.

So if you are not yet connected with Jesus by faith, settle that issue today! Come to Jesus! Fall on your knees before Him and beg Him to forgive you and accept you. Call on Jesus to forgive your sin and take you into Himself – and, amazingly, He will! Salvation is as simple and as overwhelming as that. Jesus is reaching out to everyone, offering forgiveness, transformation and new birth into a new life that will bear fruit for His never-ending glory. But without that transformation you are a dead branch just waiting to be tossed into the fire.

Jesus will graft you into His own body. He will bind you to Himself and fill you with His own life and love and grace and power. But only if you let Him. Only if you ask Him to. And even after you say “yes” that first time, you have to come to Jesus every day to stay connected with Him. That is the only way to bear fruit that will last.

So **that's WHY we have to stay connected with Jesus** – 1) Because He is the source of all life and power; 2) Because apart from Him we are powerless and 3) so that our lives will matter for eternity as we are increasingly defined by love. **HOW do we stay connected with Jesus?** I'm glad you asked! Three life-giving habits. First:

How to Stay Connected with Jesus:

1. Dwell on Jesus' **Words** – through Bible **Memorization**
“If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit...” John 15:7-8

To “abide” simply means “to remain,” or “to continue.” The opposite of abiding is **DEPARTING**. In 1 John 2 it says “they went out from us because they weren't really ours. If they

had really been ours they would have REMAINED or ABIDED with us.” How can we persevere and remain connected with Jesus?

The first habit we must cultivate is to dwell on His teachings. We abide in Him by letting His words abide in us. This is part of why we are doing the full **Experiencing God Bible Study** – because it is very Scripture intense. There is a memory verse every week along with five detailed lessons. If you do this Bible Study it will help you to DWELL on the teachings of Jesus and the Word of God in general.

Bible memorization is a pretty lost art – but it is a proven way to deepen your relationship with God. I grew up with AWANA clubs, so I started memorizing Scripture as a Cubby and sadly slacked off later in the program so I did not win the Timothy Award – I got the small wooden one that was like their “honorable mention” next to the giant shiny Timothy Award. “Sorry, you weren’t a real Timothy – you’re more like a Matthias who got mentioned once and that was it.” That’s what they should have called it – a Matthias Award...

I’ll admit my motives for memorizing Scripture were not the best – earning candy prizes and trophies. But the result of having a lot of God’s Word in my head was very valuable and I continue to reap the benefits today.

When is the last time you intentionally worked to memorize Scripture? Let’s take advantage of these Experiencing God verses and maybe learn a couple of longer sections, like part of John 15.

In addition to Scripture memory, **MEDITATION** is also a lost but important art.

How to Stay Connected with Jesus:

1. Dwell on Jesus’ **Words** – through Bible **Meditation**

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love... No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from the Father I have made known to you.” John 15:10,15

Christian meditation is not about EMPTYING our minds but about **FILLING them with truth**. Eastern meditation like Buddhism and Yoga is about detachment from this world. Biblical meditation is about **ATTACHMENT TO GOD through His Word**. Let these phrases sink into your heart through your mind:

- “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.”
Consider that. Turn it over. **Let that verse steep in your mind like a tea bag.** “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” How can we remain connected with Jesus? By OBEYING His commandments. Go on to the next phrase:
- “No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends.” Lord, thank you that we are not your hired servants but your adopted CHILDREN! You have brought us into your family – into your household as FRIENDS!

- *“For the servant does not know what his master is doing... but all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”*

ALL THAT I HAVE HEARD. All of it! Lord Jesus, thank you for speaking all of the words the Father gave you! Thank you for making the Father known to us! Thank you for treating us not as servants but as friends – bringing us into YOUR COUNSELS, letting us know your desires and plans!

Brothers and sisters, learn to **PRAY THE BIBLE**. Don’t just READ the Bible, PRAY IT. Go slowly through a passage like this one and pray the phrases back to the Lord. You might keep a journal and copy a verse or two down each day. Just write the words of Scripture in your own journal. If you write the same verses day after day you will find yourself memorizing them and you will begin to appreciate their meaning in deeper ways.

“Let the Word of God dwell in you richly!” Memorize God’s Word. Meditate on it! Take in the Word of God as your FOOD. One more application on this point:

How to Stay Connected with Jesus:

1. Dwell on Jesus’ **Words** – through Bible **Discussion**

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another.” John 15:10,12

Another important way to feed on God’s Word is to be a part of a Community Group. We have a couple of people who are going to share how their involvement in a group has been helpful to them recently.

- Interview #1
- Interview #2

That’s the first habit to stay connected with Jesus. Here is the second one:

How to Stay Connected with Jesus:

2. **Delight** in Jesus’ Love

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” John 15:9

These habits are very connected. The more we dwell on Jesus’ words the more we will understand and experience His love. This is the key to Christian growth – knowing and believing and experiencing the GOSPEL. How has Jesus loved us? “As the Father has loved me.” What does that mean?

How does the Father love the Son? Eternally! Perfectly! Completely! Unconditionally! Trinitarian love is the fullest expression of love. This is the essence of God’s own being – an eternal exchange of love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

That is exactly how Jesus has loved us! With that same perfect, complete and unconditional love! Have you experienced the full reality of God’s grace in Christ? Do you know

what it means not just to BELIEVE IN JESUS but to **DELIGHT IN JESUS?** Is Jesus the true and ultimate JOY of your heart and life?

This is the key to happiness in this life and eternal, everlasting joy! Listen to verse 11.

How to Stay Connected with Jesus:

2. Delight in Jesus' Love

“These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” John 15:11

Do you want the JOY OF JESUS to be IN YOU? Do you want to be filled with the overflowing joy and life of the Godhead? Learn what it means to “delight yourself in the Lord.” Learn to “Rejoice IN THE LORD.” Make the Lord your highest Joy. Delight yourself in Him.

19th Century Scottish preacher Thomas Chalmers talked about **“the expulsive power of a new affection.”** That’s a complicated way of saying, “replace your other loves with a new love for Jesus.” Up north there’s a thing called spring time when the leftover dead leaves from fall finally fall off as they are pushed out by the new growth of spring. Fresh buds begin to emerge and, with no effort, drive out the old, dead leaves from the previous season.

That is how we are to grow in Christ-likeness – by cultivating a new, better, stronger love for Jesus that drives out our other, competing loves.

- Do you have cravings for more **Amazon shopping**? Does that “buy it now” button cry out for your attention? Hide it away in a folder (or better, delete it!) and move your Bible app to the center of your home screen!
- Do you still feel the pull of those **holiday sweets**? Throw out the leftover cookies and candy and learn to enjoy carrots and hummus. Develop a NEW AFFECTION to drive out the old one. It’s the only way.
- Is **your attention** drawn to Netflix or video games or less acceptable things? Discover the expulsive power of a new affection! Instead of Netflix every night, or maybe BEFORE Netflix, make a habit of doing your Experiencing God Bible Study. Develop a NEW AFFECTION for God and His Word.
- Do you love **your work and your schedule** as it is? These are not bad things. But this Bible study will bring us face to face with the question – are we willing to ADJUST when God calls us to do something that DOESN’T FIT with our schedule and plan? That is the Crisis of Belief that results from an encounter with God.

Yes, we should love our jobs and be committed to our schedules – but let’s work on a NEW AFFECTION, a greater love for HEARING GOD’S VOICE AND OBEYING HIS LEADING. There is an excitement to joining that adventure!

God wants our JOY TO BE FULL! And He knows the only way for that to happen is if our joy is IN HIM. If you are seeking happiness in anything but God you will never find it. Only when you realize that real, lasting joy can only be found in a relationship with Jesus will you begin to unlock the secret to life and eternity.

Dwell on Jesus' Words. Delight in Jesus' love. One more habit to stay connected with Jesus:

How to Stay Connected with Jesus:

3. Do what Jesus Commands

"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." John 15:10

Knowing the Bible will not change your life. OBEYING the Bible will. Hearing God's voice will not change your life. Adjusting to respond to His voice is what will change you. That is the pathway to experiencing God – hearing God and responding in faith-filled obedience.

I'm not saying it's easy. But it is SIMPLE. The will of God is not hard to understand. God is VERY GOOD at making His will known to us. It isn't easy but it is clear. And the more we practice obedience – all the way, right away, with a happy heart (just like we teach our kids) – the more natural it will become for us!

And, again, the central command of Jesus is **LOVE**. How do we abide in the love of Christ? By obeying His commands. How did Jesus abide in the Father's love? By obeying the Father's commands.

How to Stay Connected with Jesus:

3. Do what Jesus Commands

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." John 15:12-13

This is Jesus' command – that we love one another; that we lay down our lives in loving service to one another.

An important way we obey this command at Oakwood is through involvement in a Community Group. Can you love one another without being in a group? Sure. But a group is a very helpful way to have regular contact with other believers - and it is hard to love people you don't have regular contact with.

There are endless ways to obey this command. In good times - rejoice w those who rejoice. In bad times, mourn with those who mourn. In sickness, bring food. Help with kids. Share the things you enjoy.

"Beloved - let us love one another! For love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God! Whoever does not love does not know God for God IS love."

Abide with Jesus. Stay connected with Him. Jesus is the overflowing fountain of love and life. Walk with Him. This is your life WITH Jesus... without Him. With Him, without Him.