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Remain in Me

Are you a Christian? The term "Christian" was initially used in Christian history as a way to mock followers of Jesus. The word "Christian" literally means "Little Christ" or "Mini Messiah," which is quite beautiful. However, over time our spiritual ancestors embraced the term and used it to identify themselves as individuals devoted to emulating Christ. In modern times, the word no longer carries the same meaning as it did in the early days.

In our modern world, 67% of people who identify as Christian (a number which is declining) often believe that following Jesus requires simply being a member of a church, attending worship services occasionally as a minimum requirement to enter heaven. However, their lifestyles are often far from reflecting the values and actions of Jesus. This has led to statistics showing that 85% of young people view Christians as hypocrites, causing many millions of millennials to abandon their faith. Only 10% of Christians could be considered, so called, true disciples of Jesus, though not in the same league as Martin Luther King Jr. or Mother Theresa. Why is this the case?

Many groups of people view the gospel as a dangerously oversimplified logic: "You are a sinner destined for hell. If you accept that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, you can go to heaven when you die." This is a partial truth, not the complete truth of salvation. There is something missing. This logic only addresses the truth of salvation in the past tense (justifying grace), which is merely the beginning of salvation. There are also truths about salvation in the present and future tense when we examine Jesus' teachings.

Our scripture for today discusses salvation in the present tense, shaping and transforming us constantly. Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches." He also says, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you!" This does not mean that we can occasionally connect to the vine and then separate from Jesus for the rest of our lives. No, when Jesus says, "Remain in me", he means that we should be connected to the vine constantly. This signifies a continual union with the Lord.

From a slightly different perspective, spiritually, we are created as vessels, whether male or female. The purpose of a vessel is to contain something. Humans are designed to contain the one true God within us. When we turn away from God, instead of the Holy Spirit, other spirits take His place. The decision is ours to make because God has given us the freedom to choose whether to follow Him or not. If you do not make a conscious effort to choose the Holy Spirit, you will naturally be filled with harmful spirits that can harm you and ultimately lead you to destruction. With the power of your free will, you should seek out God. Intentionally, you should strive to keep God in your hearts. Otherwise, malevolent spirits will take hold of your soul.

Today's scripture is from the night before Jesus' death. Jesus made a promise to his disciples, saying, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever." Jesus clarified that the advocate is the Holy Spirit, who is one person of the triune God. Therefore, being with the Holy Spirit is being with Jesus, and being with Jesus is being with the Father. It is to enter the flow of love within the inner community of God himself.

And he gave an instruction, **"Abide in me, and I in you."** The word for abide is **meno** in Greek, and it can be translated as **remain, stay, dwell, or make your home in**. In this short teaching, Jesus helps us understand that we should "Make our home in his presence by the Spirit, and NEVER leave." As I mentioned before, we are like containers. If we do not choose the Holy Spirit, then we revert to our default setting where we abide by what we want, leading to harm, ruin, and a distance from healing.

Instead, Jesus invites us to be a temple, a place where heaven and earth meet at every moment. How is this possible? By inviting God into our hearts continuously, by communing with God without pausing as mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." This state of soul can be described in various ways by different spiritual teachers in Christianity, such as "Remain in loving attention to God", "continuous inner act of abiding", "Centering down", "the sacrament of the present moment", "Habitual, conscious communion", etc. The central message from faithful ancestors is that God Himself awaits his children to become consciously aware of his presence. How can we make this a reality in every moment? How are these mental habits established? There is a story of a pilgrim that discusses this transformation. The title is *The Way of the Pilgrim*, about a Russian peasant searching for unceasing prayer.

The Way of a Pilgrim is one of the most widely circulated prayer manuals in the Western world. In the book, [Jesus Prayer](#) is introduced, which is possibly the most widely practiced Christian prayer after the [Lord's Prayer](#). You can earn this practice only a few weeks of practice, but you will experience something very powerful and miraculous. Russian Orthodox church think this prayer is not only the goal, and the one thing worth living for, but is "life itself." Still there is a monastery where the Russian priests stay in the Jesus Prayer until their life's breath finishes.

In the book, a pilgrim left for a journey to learn the prayer without ceasing after his house was burnt down by his brother. He was heading toward Jerusalem. He wanted to learn how he could pray without ceasing. He met hermits, and many spiritual teachers. But he could not learn the way of the prayer. Eventually, he met a person who could teach him. I remember the story as follows. It might not be the exact story, but the gist is as follows.

The teacher let him to make a necklace out of round hard fruits and brought it to him. When he brought it, the teacher had him repeat the prayer **"Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me"** 2000 times. The number 2000 times seemed like a lot, but he followed the instructions. Two weeks later, the teacher had him pray the prayer 4000 times. During this time, the pilgrim started to experience remarkable things that had never happened before in his life. He was able to understand

the scripture more clearly, be in touch with the Holy Spirit more vividly, and experience greater peace than ever before. When the pilgrim visited the teacher again, he was instructed to pray the double number of times. As this process continued, the prayer became more natural and effortless for him. He was able to pray the short prayer without stopping. The peasant began to experience miracles from God.

I used to practice a similar type of focused prayer when I was in college. It wasn't long before I began having visions and dreams from God. Of course, not all visions and dreams come from God. We need to discern their source. But without a doubt, I started receiving visions and dreams from God. My body would relax, my breathing would calm, and a very sweet, comforting energy would surround me. I wished I could stay in that moment forever."

If you practice in this way, a very special and solid peace will reign over your heart similar to what I experienced, and anxiety and fear will disappear. It is the state embraced by the presence of God. You can begin to experience the spiritual world that is very close to the heart of God. Your spirit will be cleansed, your soul will be lifted up, your inner man will be awakened, and vibrant. You will desire more of God. You will want to read the Bible more. You will want to pray more. When you read the Bible, the Holy Spirit will guide your reading like a tutor. You will have a zealous heart for the Lord.

I want to emphasize one important principle when you enter the practice: FOCUS on God. This simple practice of the Jesus prayer can help lead you to focus. **This FOCUS means the moment when your heart is fully and solely open to God.** It is not the only way; focus can occur when you quietly meditate on God, sincerely pray to God, or praise God, and when you are connected to God, this focused heart becomes a channel towards God. Through this connection, God's presence, peace, rest, and power flow to you. Focused connection can only occur when you pour all your heart into it.

In that state, you could receive revelation from God, spiritual truth, and truly enjoy deep communion with the Lord. Your soul is at peace and finds rest. In that state of rest, you become powerful because you are covered under the wing of God. It is not a abstract power, it is love. From a place of rest, God reveals exactly what you need to do or what you don't need to do. In that intimate relationship with God, you will not experience any anxiety or fear.

Aimee and I are preparing wooden beads for you to create your own prayer bracelets to use in your prayer life. Next Sunday, you will find a bowl filled with wooden beads, string, and a cross in the fellowship lounge. After the worship service, please go to the lounge and make one for yourself. I will provide instructions on how to use the bracelet. May this prayer be deeply rooted in your heart. Understand the significance of focus. Get to know God through your heart, for that is salvation.