

What is a disciple? There are the twelve disciples. Jesus personally hand-picked all twelve from among many followers, yet one was a betrayer and Son of Satan. Some so-called disciples are betrayers.

In John chapter six, Jesus miraculously fed five thousand men, which we know was more like feeding fifteen to twenty thousand people. Each of them not only witnessed the miracle but their stomach were filled with the fruit of the miracle. Despite their close proximity to Jesus and his power over nature, we read this at the end of the chapter. "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him" (John 6:66). Some so-called disciples are quitters.

The parable of the wheat and the tares is a terrifying story when you realize its implication. The farmer sows wheat in his field but the enemy sowed weeds among the wheat. The problem is that the wheat and the weeds are indistinguishable until they are full grown. That means that unbelievers and believers can serve side by side and no one could tell them apart. Some so-called disciples are imposters.

These three brief examples demonstrate that it is possible to look like a disciple but not actually be a disciple. So what is a disciple? As I explained last Sunday, this is the question that we have been asking at LEAD all year. We wanted to go back to the very basics so we make sure to get it right. You really can't ask a more important question because you are asking first of all to determine if you are a disciple or not. But you are also asking it to know what God requires of you in every area of life. Being a disciple of Jesus will impact how you think and what you do. It has immense relevance to every area of life. For this reason we are seeking answers from John 15.

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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 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. 6 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. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 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. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

What is a disciple? Many of you have sat through at least one of our inductive studies. If you were doing an inductive study of this passage, what is the first thing that would stick out to you?

→ ABIDE

The word abide appears nine times in eleven verses. Yes, that means it is important. It's not the only thing that is important, but I believe it is the key to the passage.

1. A disciple abides in Christ.

OK, that much seems incredibly obvious, doesn't it? But what does it mean to "abide in Christ"? What does that look like? I used to think that it is something that we need to do—that we need to actively abide. In other words, if I stopped doing something to make me abide I would cease to abide in Christ; like abiding in Christ was an up and down kind of thing. I was right but only partly right.

2. Abiding in Christ is who you are.

Abiding is something that you do, and we'll get to that. But abiding is also who you are. By definition, every believer abides in Christ. If you were not abiding, you would not be a believer. We can see this truth from verse 2 and verse 6.

2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away...

6 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.

I have an enormous pile of branches that need to be burned next summer. It will just be one huge bonfire. But what would you guess is the source of this fire? It's not just a bonfire, is it? It is no doubt the same fire where the weeds meet their end in the parable of the wheat and tares.

Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:40-41).

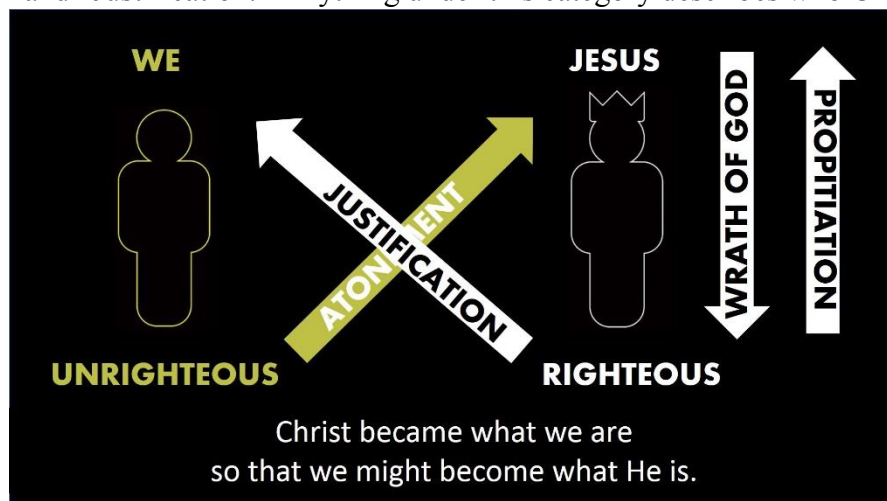
So anyone who is not fruitful, anyone who is not abiding in Christ is cut off and thrown into the fire. This is the final judgment. Therefore, all true believers abide in Christ by virtue of being a believer. But someone might say, "But what if a believer was abiding and then stopped abiding at some point"? The only way that could happen is if a believer could lose his or her salvation. And you know that Jesus clearly eliminates this possibility when he said, *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has*

given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand (John 10:28-29).

Therefore, since a believer cannot lose their salvation, this means that all believers abide in Christ by virtue of being saved. Those who are cut off may have looked like disciples, but they were not. They were imposters.



In our brochure you can see two columns of ABIDE. The one on the left is the one to which I am referring. If I zoom in you can see that this category of abide has two descriptions: “Who we are” and “Justification.” Anything under this category describes who Christ has made us as a result of



our salvation. These are often called “positional truths.” This means that they are true regardless of what we do. If a person is justified, that will never change. Let me remind you of the Great Exchange. In our sinful nature, we are unrighteous and Christ is perfectly righteous. Atonement is when Jesus takes our sins

upon himself. Because he bore our sins he also bore the wrath of His Father. Justification is the perfect righteousness of Christ being credited to our account. This entire process is called The Great Exchange: Christ became what we were so that we might become what he is.

Once these wonderful aspects of salvation are accomplished, they cannot be undone. There is a handout on the back table called 33 Things That Happen at the Moment of Salvation. (And there are actually more than 33!) Take one with you and read one every day for a month. These are all part of what is called “Our Identity in Christ.” If I sin today—and of course I will—my sin does not change my position in Christ. That’s why they are called positional truths.

What I find is often missed is the fact that abiding in Christ is also a positional truth. Abiding in Christ is what happens to you at the moment of salvation. Because as we have already seen, if you are not abiding in the vine, you are not a believer. You will be cut off and thrown into the fire. If you are a true disciple—a true believer—you are abiding in Christ. It is who you are. You are securely connected to the life-giving power of the “True Vine.” So abiding in Christ is a positional truth, but it is also an experiential truth.

3. Abiding in Christ is who you are becoming.

What I mean is that we can experience more or less of Jesus’ power and his presence. That’s the right side of the brochure—Who We are Becoming, which is also the process of sanctification. You abide because you are a believer. By definition, all believers abide in Christ, yet we are also commanded to abide in Christ.

We can move forward into a deeper relationship with Christ because we already stand on firm ground. We already abide in Christ but to further abide in Him requires us to do something. We need to take action. I really like how Don Carson expresses this. “However much God’s love for us is gracious and undeserved, continued enjoyment of that love turns, at least in part, on our response to it.”¹

There are commands to obey and promises to believe. But they are not leaps of faith into utter darkness. They are steps traversed on firm ground. For example, if I asked you to take three-foot jump from here to there, it would not be a problem at all for most of us. But if I asked you to take a three-foot jump while standing on the glaring ice we experienced this past week, we are almost doomed to failure. It would be like one of those crazy cat videos where the cat attempts an easy jump but starts from a slippery surface. It’s funny every time we see it. The command to abide is like jumping. But we are jumping off from the firm ground of our justification.

Do you see what I am saying here? The difference between positional truths and experiential truths is a foundation of the Christian life. Here’s the problem. If you try to only live in the experiential realm, you will feel like you are failing. If you try to abide in Christ, you will often feel like you are failing. But if you know that you are already abiding in Christ, if you know you are secure in Christ, then you can strive to further abide in Christ.

Another way of saying this is that without justification, sanctification is not possible. But because we have been justified, we can be sanctified. We can grow in our relationship with the Lord because we are secure in our relationship with the Lord. This is hard for us to grasp because

our human relationships bear little resemblance to it. Do you have any relationship in your life where you could do almost anything to that relationship and it would still be secure? There are some good marriages in the world but precious few could endure year after year of wild swings.

You could probably say that in the sense of a relationship, sometimes we are abusive to the Lord. We largely ignore him. Every sin we commit is truly a slap in God's face because we are communicating that we don't care what he thinks. It's like a toddler who is reaching for a glass dish on the end table. As he reaches you look at him and firmly say, "No." He continues to reach for it so you shake your head and say "no" a little louder. Finally, while staring you in the face the entire time, he grabs the dish and drags it to the floor. It's hard to imagine that a one year-old child could wage such effective battle strategies against a thirty year old parent, isn't it? But they do. They can barely walk yet they seem to possess the combined political and military strategy of Napoleon and MacArthur. Despite the fact that they wear diapers they can still win more battles against us than they lose. We should be old enough and mature enough to not behave that way with the Lord, but we do. When we knowingly sin, we are asserting our dominance over him and telling him that he has no right over that area of our life. It's like we are reaching for the glass dish while he is shaking his head "No."

But despite all of that, our relationship with him is secure. Now let me be very clear. I am not saying that it doesn't matter what we do in our Christian lives. I would not be a pastor and we would not be talking about discipleship in such detail if I believed that. There is a thing called cheap grace that says no matter what I do, God will forgive me. I have heard it put this way: "God will forgive me. He has to, that's his job." That is cheap grace and I would never condone such an attitude. Someone who did not believe in eternal security of the believer would complain, "See, that's the problem with the teaching about eternal security. You tell Christians that they can live like the devil and still go to Heaven." Unfortunately, some do teach this or at least inadvertently teach this. But that is not a reason to abandon the crystal clear teaching of Scripture in regard to eternal security.

What I am saying is that a genuine believer, a true disciple will always be secure in his or her relationship with Christ. And it's out of that very security that you take the next step in your walk with Christ. If you living close to that realm of cheap grace, then it is possible that you are not actually saved. And I can say this with confidence because Jesus said it first.

4. A disciple bears fruit.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 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.

So it's very clear. If you do not bear fruit, you are not abiding in Christ and you are not saved. Now it doesn't say how much fruit is required, does it. There's no minimum level here but the point is that someone who consistently lives in the arena of cheap grace, someone who, when looks God in the face and says "No," and they constantly stare back at him and do the very opposite, that does not look like bearing fruit to me.

So what does this fruit look like? If you recall, we started with the simple question, “What is a disciple?” We scoured the Scriptures for as much descriptive language as we could find. The list in summary form is on the right side of the brochure.

- Fruits of the Spirit
- Intimacy with Christ
- Dependency on the Holy Spirit
- Humility/Teachability/Authenticity
- Contentment/Gratitude/Generosity
- Holiness, obedience, purity, reverence
- Faith/Trust/Hope
- Wisdom/Discernment

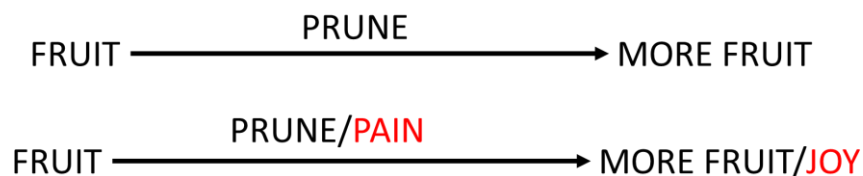
Again, this is not a complete list but is intended to represent broad categories of the fruits of a true disciple. And don’t worry too much if there is not an overabundance of fruit in your life. God has that covered as well, because...

5. A disciple is pruned by the Father in order to bear more fruit.

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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Do you realize how great this is? The Father loves us so much that he is willing to apply his tender loving care to prune us. After all, he is the vinedresser. He has the right to do so. That’s what we would do with our vines, wouldn’t we? If I was the owner of a vineyard and my very livelihood depended on growing lots and lots of the best grapes possible, I would spend as much time as I could. I would squeeze every grape and therefore every dollar out of the vine, because it was mine, I owned.

Jesus owns us, he is the THE Vine and we draw our life from him. But the Father doesn’t prune us just for his benefit but also for his. He knows that if we bear fruit it will bring us more joy. It looks something like this.



More pruning equals more fruit which also equals more joy. But pruning also brings pain. That’s the nature of pruning. So how do we know when the Father is pruning us? We should be ready for it so we can grow from it, right? Let me show you how easy this is. Let’s all breathe in and out together. Ready? That’s how you know. If you just took a breath that means you’re alive and that means the Father will prune you today. It’s that simple. The Father will take advantage of every aspect of life to prune us. Remember that toddler reaching for the glass dish? As a parent, you might be thinking that you are training your child in that scenario but the Father is also pruning you right then. Parenting is continual pruning. Marriage is pruning—all the time.

This is why I love Dave Hart's teaching on triggers. Anyone or anything that triggers a response in you is most likely the Father pruning you, showing you lack fruit so he can grow it in you right there. He does all of this for us out of love.

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¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 520). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.