

Abiding in Christ

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Air Dates: December 8 – 12, 2025

Day One

We don't use the word abide very often today. Yet Jesus uses it eleven times in John 15. The scene is the Last Supper. He has just washed his disciples' feet, and now he is teaching and praying for them—sharing his final words with them before the crucifixion. Because Jesus emphasizes this word so strongly, it's worth pausing to understand what he meant. He says:

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. 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 15:4–5, ESV).

The Greek word *menō*, translated “abide,” means to remain, stay, or dwell. It's an active word—not passive—implying an ongoing, intentional relationship. Some Bible translations even use the word remain.

Matthew Henry, in his commentary, highlights the context well: Jesus was about to leave his disciples after being with them for three years. The disciples would soon face the temptation to drift from him, from each other, and from his teaching—perhaps even to return to the old patterns of the law. Jesus impresses on them the urgent importance of remaining in him and in community with one another. And he assures them that the helper, the Holy Spirit, would come to strengthen and sustain them.¹

In this passage, Jesus uses the image of the vine and the branches. Believers in Christ are the branches; he is the vine. A life of fruitfulness depends on staying connected to him.

To abide in Christ starts with a relationship. The first step is to come to him as Lord and Savior, recognizing your need for forgiveness and grace. But that's only the beginning. As you follow him, the relationship grows deeper. You learn who he is, what he teaches, and how he calls each of us to live in obedience to him. *To love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39).* Abiding is a lifelong journey of growing, obeying, and staying connected.

Day Two

Abiding in Jesus—remaining with him—is an active daily practice. The Apostle John writes: *By this we know we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked (1 John 2:5b-6).*

How do you and I walk the way Jesus walked? Reading the Gospels, we see how often he withdrew to spend time alone with the Father—on a mountain, in a quiet place, away from the crowds—to pray, listen, and discern God's will.

¹ Matthew Henry, “John 15,” Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, BibleGateway, n.d., <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.

We are called to do the same. Staying connected to the vine is essential for our life. Just as branches receive a continuous flow of nutrients from the vine, we receive strength, wisdom, love, and joy from Christ. The connection is vital: severed from the vine, branches wither and cannot bear fruit. Likewise, apart from Jesus, we cannot thrive or produce lasting fruit.

Jesus promises those who remain in him will bear much fruit. This fruit shows up in our character—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It shows up in our relationships, in our work, in our ability to forgive, in our desire to serve, and in the joy and strength we receive from Christ himself. Abiding produces a life that reflects Jesus.

Jesus also promises joy. Not a surface happiness that depends on circumstances, but his own joy, placed within us—a steady, settled gladness that cannot be shaken by what happens around us.

But Jesus also speaks honestly about the consequences of not remaining in him. He says if anyone does not abide in him, that person is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned (John 15:6). Branches disconnected from the vine cannot produce fruit. They wither. They dry up. They lose the life and nourishment that comes only from staying connected to the vine. Jesus isn't threatening his disciples; he's warning them with love. He knows the pressures they will face. He knows how easy it is to drift, to try to live the Christian life in our own strength, to rely on our own wisdom, or to become spiritually stagnant. Apart from him, he says, you can do nothing.

This is not meant to discourage us—but to draw us nearer to the source of life. Jesus wants his disciples, and us today, to understand that staying close to him is not optional for a fruitful life; it is essential.

Day Three

Do you like to work in the garden? I love to see the results of all the work—planting, watering, weeding and pruning. In John 15, Jesus teaches the Father is the gardener who lovingly tends the vine. Part of that tending is pruning. Pruning is essential to the life of a vine, and Scripture uses that imagery to help us understand our own life with Christ.

In a vineyard, pruning renews the vine and shapes it. Without pruning, a vine grows wild. It will produce many shoots and leaves but far fewer grapes. The gardener cuts back healthy branches—not to harm the vine, but to help it focus its energy so it can thrive. Pruning makes room for new growth and greater fruitfulness.

Pruning happens when the vine is dormant, after the harvest season. Even in dormancy, the vine is still alive and still supplying what the branches need. This resting period isn't wasted time; it's preparation. The vine is strengthening its core, preserving its energy, and getting ready for the next season of growth and fruitfulness.

In the same way, God prunes us. Seasons of pruning might feel like cutting back, slowing down, or letting go. God may remove distractions, attitudes, habits, or commitments that keep us from bearing fruit. Sometimes he even prunes good things so better things can grow. These seasons can feel quiet—almost dormant—but God is still at work, nourishing, shaping, and preparing us.

Pruning is so important because it leads to even greater fruit. Jesus says, *every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit* (John 15:2). Pruning isn't punishment—it's intentional care from a Father who wants our lives to flourish. When we remain connected to Christ, the true Vine, we can trust his pruning is purposeful. It clears away what hinders us, renews us, and positions us for greater growth in the seasons to come.

For the Christian, pruning is a mark of God's love and his desire to make our lives fruitful, meaningful, and deeply rooted in him. When we stay connected to Christ, every season—even the dormant ones—becomes part of his transforming work in us.

Joseph's life in the Old Testament is a powerful picture of pruning before fruitfulness. He endured deep hardship—sold into slavery by his own brothers, then falsely accused and imprisoned. Yet through every season of suffering, God was shaping his character and preparing him for a greater purpose. In time, Joseph was elevated to second-in-command under Pharaoh, where he used his God-given wisdom to save Egypt and ultimately rescue the very family who had betrayed him. His story reminds us seasons of pruning often precede seasons of remarkable fruit.

May you and I remain faithful—connected to the true Vine—even during the dormant times. Even when we are being pruned. Because God is a loving Gardener and is doing this for even greater fruit in our lives.

Day Four

The topic has been abiding—remaining in Christ—and why it's important and what the blessings and consequences are for us. How do you continue to remain in Christ?

Gem Fadling shared a beautiful picture in one of our Zoom gatherings about what it means to remain—or abide—in Christ. She said to imagine a teacup or mug, and then a pitcher. And the pitcher is over the teacup pouring into the cup continuously. You and I are the teacup. Jesus—through the Holy Spirit—is the pitcher.

When we are abiding in Jesus, his Spirit is continually pouring into us and filling us. But the way I often operate is this: once I feel “full”—after spending time reading Scripture, praying, studying, or memorizing—I go about my day and pour myself out into my work, church, and family. Before long, I find myself exhausted and empty again. Then I rush back to reset and refill from his Word.

But that's not what abiding is meant to look like.

The teacup isn't supposed to move away from the pitcher and come back only when it runs dry. It needs to stay under the steady pour—remaining, receiving, staying connected. When we live that way, we don't pour out from our limited strength. Instead, our cup overflows with Christ's love, and that overflow is what pours into our work and relationships.

Abiding is not about exhausting ourselves or trying to do everything on our own. Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” We need to stay connected—letting God's Word, his love, and communion with him continually pour into us. When we remain in him, we are filled, strengthened, and able to bear much fruit without becoming depleted.

We abide. We remain. And he fills. Don't forget to keep your cup positioned under the pitcher. When you remain filled, it's the overflow that naturally blesses others.

Day Five

I've been reflecting on John 15—on what Jesus told his disciples during his final moments with them before everything in their world changed. Before the crucifixion. Before the resurrection. They had walked with him for three years, watching his ministry unfold. It must have been an intense, exciting, and bewildering time for them. They believed he was the Messiah, yet so much was happening in ways they did not expect.

Jesus understood this. And in these last hours, he offered them words of encouragement and life—words meant for us as well. He spoke about abiding in him, remaining with him through every up and down, through every season. Relationship with him isn't passive; like any meaningful relationship, it requires time, attention, and intention. But it is also our source of life, and he promises so much to those who stay close to him.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you (John 15:9–12)

To abide is to remain in his love. Jesus followed his Father's will—even to the cross—and he invites us to follow him by obeying his commandments: to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength, and to love others as he has loved us. When we live in that kind of love, our desires become aligned with his, and Scripture says we can ask for anything, and it will be done.

I love the way St. Augustine puts it: "Love God and do whatever you please."²

When we truly love God, obedience flows naturally and our hearts become aligned with his.

December is here, and the holiday hustle is already competing for our time and attention. My prayer is that during this busy season, you and I will still find ways to make our relationship with Christ our highest priority. It's so easy to be pulled in a hundred directions—gifts, food, shopping, gatherings, events—all good things. But the best thing we can do is spend time with the one who laid down his life for us, the one who humbled himself and came as a baby so he could bring us salvation.

As you reflect on this truth, may your love for him deepen and your heart overflow—so much so that your family, friends, and coworkers experience his love through you.

² "What is the scriptural basis for 'Love God and do whatever you please'?" Christianity StackExchange, 2013, <https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/15242/what-is-the-scriptural-basis-for-love-god-and-do-whatever-you-please>.