

# Abiding Love

Bible Background • John 15:4-17

Printed Text • John 15:4-17 | Devotional Reading • Psalm 80:7-19

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will **COMPREHEND** how the metaphor of the vine and the branches applies to Jesus and those who follow Him; **YEARN** for a more intimate, life-giving relationship with Jesus; and **COMMIT** to keeping Christ's commandments and abiding in his love.

## In Focus

Jordan met Mr. Mason at Shady Acres Retirement Home. He thought about Pastor Thomas' words to them on Sunday about service and sacrificial love. And yet, he wondered if he had made the right choice when he had agreed to lead worship at Shady Acres. Mr. Mason vigorously shook Jordan's hand. "I am so happy that you are here. Come this way, we have been waiting for you! My mother has been asking for a church service for so long." "Well, Mr. Mason, I've never done anything like this before. But when I heard Pastor Thomas talk about the needs here, I decided to try to help." Mr. Mason led Jordan to the recreation room. Seated inside were ten elderly residents, waiting for them. With a calming breath, Jordan moved to the room's piano and pulled out his music, some sermon notes, and his Bible. "Hi, my name is Jordan. I'm here to worship the Lord with you. I thought that we could begin with a word of prayer." As he prayed, he felt his uneasiness melt away. Forty-five minutes later, Jordan, Mr. Mason, and the residents were singing and clapping. As he led them in a closing hymn, Jordan knew he made the right choice.

*How has Christ blessed you to see the fruit of your labor when you trusted His love and followed Him?*

## Keep in Mind

"I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you." (Luke 10:36-37, NLT)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Abide** (v. 4ff) meno (Gk.) — Remain; continue, dwell in one place.

**B. Branch** (v. 5) klema (Gk.) — A young, tender branch that needs a steady supply of nourishment.

## Say It Correctly

**Caspian.** CASS-pee-in.

**Shiloh.** SHY-low.

## KJV

**John 15:4** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

## NLT

**John 15:4** Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.

7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!

8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

9 "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.

10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!

12 This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.

13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

15 I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.

16 You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.

17 This is my command: Love each other.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Commandment.** This term is used in the English Bible to translate a number of Hebrew and Greek words including law, ordinance, statute, word, judgment, precept, saying, and charge. The idea of authority conveyed by these words comes from the fact that God as the sovereign Lord has a right to be obeyed. The instruction of Jesus is full of ethical teachings that have the force of divine commandments. That is true even when He does not use the word "commandment" or its equivalents as He often does. The Bible is clear that God is not satisfied with mere external compliance with His commandments but expects willing and joyful obedience.

**Vine.** The grapevine was common to western Asia south of the Caspian Sea. Grape vineyards flourished in Palestine, especially in the central highlands near Hebron, Shiloh, and Shechem. The vine is often used in the Bible literally and figuratively. The vine is a symbol of prosperity and a sedentary life (1 Kings 4:25), which was the ideal for the once-nomadic nation of Israel. The vine is also a picture of God's people (John 15:2; Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:2). Since every vine will produce sterile branches, the gardener must trim away unproductive and old branches, lest the vitality of the vine is diverted from its function of bearing fruit.

## Background

In John chapters 13 through 17, Jesus privately teaches His disciples. This is their last time together before His crucifixion. Jesus spends His last hours in His final preparation of them, explaining how to know and practice intimate fellowship with God. He taught first by example; He humbled Himself and washed their dirty feet (John 13:4-10). He told them about His departure, their future in heaven, the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and how to experience real peace. Jesus gives the secrets of successful Christian living. He tells how we can have peace, joy, and answered prayer by abiding in Him. As we begin today's study, Jesus teaches His disciples about the relationship they must have with the Father, with Him, and with one another. Unless they abide in the Father and in Him, the disciples would not be able to bear fruit or love one another, which would show the world they belong to Him. As Jesus and the disciples get up from the table to walk to the Garden of Gethsemane, He continues to speak words of encouragement. He instructs His disciples about the needed connection between Him and the Father, and Jesus and His followers. As we abide in Jesus, we can "bear fruit" (John 15:8) and love others as He commands us.

### At-A-Glance

1. The Father's Provision (Luke 15:4-8)
2. Abiding in Love (vv. 9–11)
3. Abiding as Jesus' Friends (vv. 12-17)

## In Depth

### 1. The Father's Provision (Luke 15:4-8)

The picture of the vine and the branches was a beautiful and natural illustration of how Jesus' disciples would be able to do His work. It is only by remaining in close, vital contact with the vine that the branch can bring forth any fruit at all. Such a vital connection with Jesus is necessary for disciples to bring forth deeds of obedience for God's glory. To abide in Christ (v. 4), recognizing Christ as our true source of spiritual life, is how we allow the love of Jesus to flow into our lives. Our fellowship with Christ through the Word of God, daily prayer, and obedient worship and service will result in close, fruitful living with Him. Every fruit-bearing branch gets pruned so that more fruit will be produced (15:2). God expects us to bear fruit in obedience to Him. The metaphor works not only to show what happens to a good vine, but also what happens to an unfruitful vine. Those who refuse to abide in Christ are branches that have withered and been set aside. Apart from Christ, we are helpless to do God's work or to please Him. If we act in our own power, our actions cannot bear fruit for God. We cannot glory in our own actions or become proud of our own achievements, because all we have and are depends on Him.

*When have you experienced the importance of being attached to Christ?*

### 2. Abiding in Love (vv. 9–11)

We learn that the basis for "abiding" with Jesus is the love that God and Jesus share with each other. Jesus, then, likens His love for the disciples to the type of love His Father has for Him. It is this relationship of love that we must remain faithful to. In verse 10, Jesus comes to the essence of His message to the disciples: The only way the disciples (or any believer) will continue to abide in God's love is if they, like Him, practice obedience and keep His Father's commandments. Obedience is essential to an abiding relationship with Jesus, whose relationship with the Father was also one of obedience (Hebrews 5:8). Our obedience makes us one with God the Father and we, therefore, share in the fellowship that Jesus shares with the Father. By heeding Jesus' words, we also receive His joy.

*What would need to happen in our lives so we can abide in the Father's love?*

### **3. Abiding as Jesus' Friends (vv. 12-17)**

Jesus called the disciples His friends because He shared the divine plans with them. So it is with us. God wants us to know His divine plan for our lives so that we may walk victoriously in Him. In abiding in Christ, we have the privilege of asking God's favor and grace upon our lives (v. 18) and experiencing the fullness of His love so that we may glorify the Father. Jesus reminded His disciples that His commandment was: "that you love one another as I have loved you" (v. 12). If we are to be His disciples and abide in His love, we must love one another. True friendship with Jesus is not based on keeping a set of rules, going to church every day, or even serving on boards and committees. Jesus says the test of real friendship is that we "do" whatsoever He has commanded us, which is to love one another as He has loved us.

*How deeply do you yearn to be known as a friend of Jesus? How do you portray this level of love and friendship in your life?*

#### **Search the Scriptures**

1. What does it mean to remain in Christ and why is this important (John 15:5-7)?
2. What proves our love to Jesus (v. 10)?
3. Jesus gives the disciples a direct command in verse 12. Explain how Christ loved people during His time on Earth. What are some ways in which we can love as Christ loved?

#### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. How can a Christian tell they are really producing fruit? Should all Christians produce the same amount and in the same way?
2. If all our prayers aren't answered, does that mean we are not abiding in Christ or in the will of God? How does a Christian understand unanswered prayers in the light of verses 7 and 16?

#### **Liberating Lesson**

In today's society, many Christians believe that obeying God begins and ends with going to church once a week. While God commands us to meet with the "body," He expects us to continue to walk in His light daily. A part of that walk should include spreading the Gospel so that nonbelievers may be saved and weak Christians may be strengthened. We must be actively sharing, reaching out, and building godly relationships that glorify our Father and bear fruit for God's kingdom. People today depend on all kinds of resources for their power and strength. Some say that strength comes from human perseverance. Others say it is education and mental stimulation. Still others say it comes from social action groups. These are worthy endeavors and have their place in our lives. However, the love of Christ enacted through our lives will always prove to be the most productive change agent and strengthening power we can have. When these endeavors of seeking education, social action, and perseverance are enacted with love, Christ is glorified in all we do.

#### **Application for Activation**

This week think of areas in your life that need pruning. Ask God to show you how to bear more fruit in service and love toward Him. Be prepared to share what you learned about yourself with others next week. Think about your own fruitfulness. Pray that God would fill you with the Holy Spirit and enable you to do His will. Then act on sharing God's command to love others. Make a plan to share the love of Christ by helping, listening, encouraging, and giving to someone who may not usually hear about Christ. Next week, be prepared to share your efforts with the class.

#### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### John 15:4-17

**4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.**

To “abide” (Gk. meno, MEN-oh, to remain” or “to not depart”) is the heart of the entire metaphor and the main point of the entire passage. While it seems obvious, Christians struggle with abiding versus not abiding in Christ when they fail to see how critical it is to their very survival. Even when Christ draws an explicit parallel with a physical branch and repeats Himself numerous times on the importance of abiding, how many have yet to transfer the meaning of the metaphor to their lives? A branch on a fruit vine doesn’t exist just to be a branch but to produce fruit, so we exist not for ourselves, but to produce God’s fruit. This is possible only with His nourishment, which we receive only when we abide in Him.

**5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.**

Jesus points over and over to the reality of nourishment from the True Vine, which alone produces true branches, which in turn produce true fruit. This word for branch comes from the Greek word klema (KLAY-mah), which specifically refers to a young, tender branch, especially the flexible branch of a vine or a vine sprout. This young branch needs a steady supply of nourishment. As Christians, we have no other source for true fruit and no other chain of supply outside of God. It is this vital connection to the True Vine to which every believer must attend and that he or she must continually monitor and strengthen. It is also this vital connection that we share with all other believers. No vine produces only one branch. Each produces many branches. Thus, our relationship to other branches is communal or familial, representative of our community of faith.

**6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.**

The context informs us that a branch becomes fruitless only when it is no longer connected to the vine; branches that abide continue to receive nourishment and effortlessly produce fruit because that is their sole purpose and design. If a branch cannot be pruned, cleansed, and restored so it will become fruitful again, it will be cut off and destroyed. Therefore, any fruitless branch is a disconnected branch. The Master Gardener sees to it that every genuinely born-again Christian receives nourishment and produces fruit for his or her entire life. That is also why the Master Gardener prunes our lives so that we may be fruitful and not viewed as useless. What is unmistakable is that abiding in Christ should not be seen as an “option” by Christians.

**7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.**

A vine shares a genuinely symbiotic relationship with its branches. The vine can’t produce its own fruit without branches, and the branches can’t provide their own nourishment in order to produce fruit. When we abide in Christ, when we are attached to the Vine, His nourishment flows into us, just as in reality His Spirit indwells us

(John 14:7; Romans 8:11), we receive His Word into our hearts, and we are predictably fruitful (Luke 8:15). Only in this context—as connected, fruitful believers infused with the Spirit and the Word—will we be able to pray in faith and receive that for which we ask. We receive because our will is conformed to Christ's. We are warned in James 4:2–3 not to “ask amiss,” but we are also admonished that we have not because we ask not. The qualifications are steep, but the rewards, freedom, and resulting power are immeasurable. In their connection with Christ, the believer will find the greatest fulfillment, the most exceptional joy, and the answer to prayer (v. 7). Verse 7 should be taken literally. Jesus will honor His promise. But we must see it in the light of the conditions that Jesus made and in connection with the will of God. Praying in Jesus' name is not some magical tag tacked onto the end of prayers. We must assume that “abiding” in Christ includes being in the will of God. Our prayer desires must be in the will of God before they can be fulfilled. When likemindedness in Christ grows within us, all of our working and willing become transformed into harmony with His.

**8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. 9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.**

While the primary meaning of “fruit” is that of the vine or tree, the word also refers to works (Gk. karpos, kar-POS). Just as a grape does the branch no personal good, our fruit is not for ourselves but for others, for the continuance of the vine, and for the glory of God. Jesus zeroes in on what has been called the ultimate fruit—love. Repeatedly, we are told of God's love for His Son, such as in 2 Peter 1:17, which recalls the pronouncement at Jesus' baptism: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus loved His disciples with His Father's love, even though, unlike them (and us), He alone was worthy of such great love. While “continue” (meno, MEN-o) is a valid translation of the Greek verb used here, it obscures the repetition present in the original language. It is more akin to the phrase “keep abiding.” In fact, it is translated as “abide” in the other verses of the passage.

**10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.**

We are never asked to do what Christ would not do. In the book of John, it is well established that Christ proved His love for His Father by His obedience to Him (John 8:29, 12:49, 14:31, 17:4). Following suit, the disciples proved their love by their obedience, and we, in turn, prove our love for Christ by our obedience to Him, and receive His promise of abiding in Him. It was only because of the joy that lay ahead of Him that Jesus was able to endure the Cross (Hebrews 12:2). James writes that we should consider trials as pure joy (James 1:2), and Nehemiah tells the believers that the joy of the Lord is their strength (Nehemiah 8:10). When we do all that Jesus commands (especially love others), our reward both on earth and in heaven is His great joy, a gift truly beyond compare and priceless above all precious things.

**12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.**

At first, Jesus' discourse must have seemed more an exhortation, until the point when it changed to a commandment. Commandments were familiar to Jesus' disciples, and it must have given them pause to hear Him talk about loving one another as a commandment. At the same time, a commandment coming from Jesus couldn't be compared to the commandments they had grown up with under Mosaic Law. While Jesus had taught this previously (Matthew 22:39), considering the many other things the disciples had failed to grasp at first, one wonders if He sensed their lack of understanding and thus felt the need to repeat Himself three times in a single teaching. To obey Jesus' command to love one another is to love as He Himself loved us in obedience to His Father. Indeed, it is the greatest commandment.

**13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

Teachers and coaches understand that when a bar is set too low, there is no challenge and consequently no improvement. When the bar is set higher, we have to work to reach the goal, and the challenge makes us grow.

The higher the bar, the greater the required effort, so Jesus here sets the bar at the highest point possible: that of actually sacrificing one's life in order to attain the highest imitation of His love. Many through the ages have been put to this very test, and it makes us question whether we would have what it takes if that terrible choice would ever present itself to us. In essence, this verse shows the ultimate sacrifice paid for our salvation.

**14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.**

In Christ, we are much more than servants; we are sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18). Here, we are called friends (for whom He would lay down His life). This speaks volumes to us about all that Christ means as a friend and brother, but it also speaks eloquently of His perfect love—He who offers so much to those who once were enemies. In fact, Christ laid down His life while we were still enemies (Romans 5:8, 10; Colossians 1:21). When Jesus told us to love our enemies, He spoke from personal experience (Matthew 5:44). Jesus called the disciples “friends” because of the revelation He disclosed to them. It made them close to Jesus. It wasn't the Father's will that everything that could be known should be made known, but everything that God wanted to be known was communicated through Christ (Matthew 11:27, 24:36).

**16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.**

Christ reminds His disciples (His friends) that He chose them and has given them a task. As with them, when we abide in Christ, we receive His nourishment, we are fruitful, we fulfill our purpose as branches, we please the Gardener, we feed and nourish others, we produce seeds for planting, and we become eligible for pruning (cleansing) so that we will become even more productive. This is fruit and work that endures (John 6:27), and such a believer has fulfilled the qualifications for prayers being answered, just as God answered His people's prayers in times past: “he was intreated of them; because they put their trust in him” (1 Chronicles 5:20).

**17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.**

According to 2 Peter 1:5–7, we start with faith and add the various fruit of the Spirit, finally adding love, as if it were the highest attainment of the faith that the Master intended from the beginning. The New Testament places emphasis on exhorting believers to love, to learn to love, to seek love, to become love. Because it is the highest, it is the hardest; because it most closely resembles Christ, it requires greater surrender and sacrifice. We are virtually surrounded with Scriptures that exhort us to make love our highest priority, to pursue love, and to let love transform us into the very image of Christ, who is love (Romans 12:2; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

# Daily Bible Readings

## MONDAY

Laban Arranges to Wash Servant's Feet  
(Genesis 24:24-33)

## TUESDAY

Brothers Provided Water to Wash Feet  
(Genesis 43:20-25)

## WEDNESDAY

Servants and Masters, but Same Lord  
(Ephesians 4:6-9)

## THURSDAY

Peter Denies Jesus Three Times  
(John 13:36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27)

## FRIDAY

Jesus Betrayed by a Trusted Disciple  
(Psalm 41:8-10; John 13:21-30)

## SATURDAY

Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet with Perfume  
(John 12:1-7)

## SUNDAY

Jesus Loved Disciples; Washed Their Feet  
(John 13:1-15, 34-35)