

“Abide in Christ”
John 15:1–11
Pastor Eric Reebals
September 3, 2017 • Evening Sermon

Prayer:

Father, we love You and that You would indeed show us Christ and that Christ would be honored, glorified and exalted in the words that are said in this study. May Your Spirit reign and rule. Would You receive honor, glory and praise. Lord, we love You. Show us Christ in Your Word. Show us Christ that we would see Him throughout and that we would bring Him great honor and glory. Father, we thank You for Your Word. I pray that Your Spirit would be our Teacher and that You would open up and illuminate Your Word to us. God, Your Word is so rich and powerful in our lives to teach us, train us, rebuke us and correct us that we may be righteous in Christ. God illuminate John 15 for us that we may worship You. We love You Father and we pray these things in Christ’s Name, Amen.

I’d like to start by looking at John 15 but first I’d like to ask you some simple questions. Do you have joy and is it a full joy? Before we talk about what it means to abide in Christ let’s get some context into John 15 by looking at the couple of chapters before John 15.

John 12 is when Jesus is anointed by Mary six days before the Passover. Jesus then has His triumphal entry into Jerusalem where the crowd worships Him as they are calling for Him to be their King. He challenges them to serve and follow Him, love the life to come and to walk in the light. So that is what happens in John 12. In John 13 the Lord’s Supper takes place and Jesus washes the Disciples feet. Judas betrays Christ. Jesus warns of His crucifixion. He gives the new commandment for them to love one another. Then in John 14 Jesus explains that He has many rooms in His house. He tells them that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and that He and the Father are One. He says we are to keep His commands and by doing so we show Him that we love Him. Also that He will come and live in us by His Holy Spirit. Then Jesus gives us His peace.

Now we are at John 15. In this study I want to attempt to unpack this awesome package and help us to understand a little bit more how we can abide in Christ. Here is the text for our study.

John 15:1–11 says [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.”*

So according to John 15:1 Jesus is the true, genuine, life-giving Vine. The Father is the Vinedresser so He is the Farmer. A point I want to make here is that there is no other for Jesus is the only One, the only Way. So in this section Jesus gives us an 'I Am' statement. This is the last of the seven 'I Am' statements that Jesus gives us. I want to give you the seven metaphorical 'I Am' statements as a refresher. Jesus said 'I Am the Bread of Life.' He said 'I Am the Light of the World.' 'I Am the Door.' 'I Am the Good Shepherd.' 'I Am the Resurrection and the Life.' 'I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life.' Lastly, here He tells us 'I Am the Vine.'

Before this Jesus uses 'I Am' one other time in John 8:58. Here He is using the 'I Am' to absolutely announce His Deity. This is also when they accuse Jesus of having a demon. They ask Him if He has ever seen Abraham and this is what He says to them in John 8:58, [58] *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."* So Jesus is pronouncing His Deity and hence in these other 'I Am' statements He is doing the same thing.

Let's go to the next verse. John 15:2 says [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.* Theologically people tend to struggle with the first part of this verse because it sounds like one could lose their salvation but we know that not to be true. Theologians like Matthew Henry, John Calvin, and J.C. Ryle explain this better than I so take it from them.

Matthew Henry says "It is here intimated that there are many who pass for *branches* in Christ who yet do *not bear fruit*. Were they really united to Christ by faith, they would bear fruit; but being only tied to him by the thread of an outward profession, though they seem to be branches, they will soon be seen to be dry ones. Unfruitful professors are unfaithful professors; professors, and no more." Our own Frank Barker, Jr. says (which I like to quote this often), "If the faith fizzles before the finish, it was faulty from the first." I love how he simply puts it here.

J.C. Ryle says, "There are false Christians as well as true ones. There are branches in the vine which appear to be going to the parent stem and yet bear no fruit. There are men and women who appear to be members of Christ and yet will prove finally to have had no vital union with Him. There are myriads of professing Christians in every church whose union with Christ is only outward and formal. They have no grace in their hearts or faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. Their union with Him is only minimal and not real. Their end, except they repent, will be destruction." That is one of the reasons we so passionately need to share the Gospel in the church as well outside of the church. The Gospel needs to be shared every time someone is preaching from this pulpit so that Christ is exalted for what He did on the cross for us.

The latter part of John 15:2 says [2b], *every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.* Contrary to what the health, wealth and prosperity gospel preachers teach, we need that often painful pruning by God in order to bear more fruit. Pruning isn't an easy thing. God's fruit is produced for His glory so we need that pruning in our lives.

James 1:2-4 says [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* How can we expect to abide in Christ and move through life without pain and trials when the Bible was full of God's children and their fruit and we see it throughout?

Even our Lord Himself suffered through trials. Matthew 4:1 says [1] *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.* Jesus says in Luke 22:28, [28] *"You are those who have stayed with me in my trials."* Then Hebrews 4:15 says [15] *For*

we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. So even our Lord went through trials.

Ryle explains the pruning this way; Trial, to speak plainly, is the instrument by which our Father in heaven makes Christians more holy. By trial He calls out their passive graces, and proves whether they can suffer His will as well as do it. By trial He weans them from the world, draws them to Christ, drives them to the Bible and prayer, shows them their own hearts, and makes them humble. This is the process by which He "prunes" them, and makes them more fruitful. The lives of the saints in every age, are the best and truest comment on the text. Never, hardly, do we find an eminent saint, either in the Old Testament or the New, who was not purified by suffering, and, like His Master, a "man of sorrows," acquainted with grief our trials are not meant to do us harm but good. God chastens us for our profit that we may be partakers of His holiness.

So that pruning in our lives, though very painful is very necessary to conform us more and more into the image of Christ. It's hard to embrace it but like James has told us we need to work at it to consider it all joy. Now let's look at John 15:3-5.

John 15:3-5 says [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.*

So what does it mean to abide? Jesus uses the word 'abide' here ten times. In the Greek the word for abide is *menó*. It means to remain in, to stay, to endure, to wait. I would say that abiding in Christ means to have a permanent, continual and steadfast relationship with Him. It is trusting in Him to be Lord and sovereign over your life. Part of what Christ is talking about here is salvation and that most important union with Christ. Once we are saved and abiding with Christ then this is how we bear much fruit. We bear fruit for His glory and His Kingdom.

Recently I was reading one of the most famous prosperity gospel gentleman and he talked about the more fruit as being the benefit we receive in abundance from God as if it were some material benefit. That is not true. Our fruit is born in our lives from God for His glory and it is meant to be given away or else it hangs on the tree and rots. It is meant to be given away to others. Abiding in Christ means staying connected to our Source of power.

The phones nowadays are pretty amazing. With mine I can make calls, text people, take pictures, use it as my map to get around town, as a calculator, a flashlight and I can even do my banking on it, but it's useless when the power runs out. I guess when the power runs out I could use it as a paperweight to sit on my paper and in the same manner if I am not abiding in Christ, my Source of power, then as the end of John 15:5 says 'apart from Me I can do nothing.' Christian, we must not forget this truth for when we aren't abiding with Christ we are able to do nothing. If you're like me I try to do it apart from Christ many times and it gets me nowhere.

For the Christian there is no alternative source of power. Christ is our only Source of power but in Christ, with Christ, it says we do something versus doing nothing. That something we do is not just something but it says we bear much fruit when we abide in Christ. Do you ever feel like you are working but accomplishing nothing? We must be plugged in and the same goes with our walk with the Lord. We bear fruit when we are abiding in Christ and not trusting in our own efforts.

This abiding with Christ has to do with our salvation. It has to do with our justification for we have to abide in Christ as our Lord and Savior to be saved, justified. It also has to do with

our sanctification, the process that takes place for the rest of our lives in our development. Then in our completion we finally abide in Christ in our glorification. So in all these areas and in everything we do He is our Source of power so we must abide in Him.

So, practically speaking what are some things we can do to abide in Christ and with Christ? What did our Lord do? What does He command us to do? Jesus spent time with the Father. The only way we grow close with someone is by spending time with them. Jesus was always stealing away to spend time with the Father. In fact, there is recorded 15 times in the Gospel where Jesus withdrew to a quiet place to meet with the Lord. We have to spend time with Him, in His Word, reading His Word and through prayer.

This is something we can easily model for others. I had just become a Christian after my freshman year in high school and I had a great opportunity to go a mission trip with Briarwood to London, England. My roommate was a graduating senior and I remember getting up each morning and he would already be up and reading his Bible. That was just a great witness to me as a new believer and that was something that I needed to do in my life, a pattern that I needed to develop. My wife, does an excellent job of this every morning. She gets up, heads downstairs and spends time with the Lord. We also need to encourage one another in the Lord to do this and not just model it for others.

We need to take in God's Word. Joshua 1:8 says *[8] This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

Our obedience causes us to abide in Christ, in God's love. John 15:10 says *[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.* Jesus told us earlier in John 14:21, *[21] Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.* What a great promise! If we keep His commands He loves us.

It is a way that we evidence our faith by being obedient to His commands. John 14:23 says *[23] Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'* He will abide with us. It is an obedience not based out of duty, but an obedience based out of love and we see that all throughout these passages. We can't earn God's favor for that has already been earned on the cross but we obey because we love Him and so we desire to keep His commands. Sinclair Ferguson put it this way; 'In a nutshell, abiding in Christ means allowing His Word to fill our minds, direct our wills, and transform our affections. In other words, our relationship to Christ is intimately connected to what we do with our Bibles!' I thought that was so good!

John 15:6 says *[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 when someone doesn't belong to Christ they stand condemned and it's because of their works of disobedience and there is a hell to pay. We cannot neglect teaching and speaking about hell. That would be the cruelest, meanest thing we could do to those who don't know Christ.

If I was standing at the edge of a bridge and there was a massive hole in it and people would perish if they drove across, how cruel would it be of me to say 'come on through and enjoy your ride'? We can't do that. We wouldn't do that. So we have to tell people about the tragic and terrible hell that awaits them apart from Christ. And that they too can have a relationship with Christ and forgiveness of their sins. We have to warn them. Romans 6:23 says

[23] For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
We need to offer them that free gift of eternal life.

So what happens when we abide in Christ? John 15:7 says *[7] If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* J.C. Ryle says 'This is a distinct promise of power and success in prayer.' So let's clarify here. When we abide in Christ God's will becomes our deepest desire and whatever we ask, which will be what He desires that will be done. So when we abide in Him our desires become His desires and that will, will be done. I want to share a lengthy illustration of this.

In May of 2013 I had the privilege of going to Uganda with a dear friend of mine and his name is Ben Coen. Ben and I had actually just met a few weeks earlier. Ben had been discipled by someone who was leaving town and they connected the two of us so Ben and I began to meet together to pray together on a weekly basis. Our relationship became instantly very deep. We began to pray for our trip and our time together and when we went to Uganda we saw the Lord do some amazing things. As we and our team went to share Christ with people we literally saw hundreds of people come to know the Lord. It was awesome!

I knew I was supposed to go back and Ben and I returned. When Ben got back he shared with me that he really wanted to go back to Africa to have some more extended time. He didn't want to go back to Uganda which is a relatively safe place to share the Gospel but he wanted to go to Sudan which is not a safe place for Christians. It is a very violent and unsafe place for Christians but Ben had learned there were many Christians who lived in Sudan that didn't have a Bible and they desperately wanted them. Ben felt an overwhelming desire to get Bibles and Christian materials to the people in Sudan so we began to pray together for this.

Ben really started asking God to allow him to do this. Since then Ben has been back to the worn torn country of Sudan several times and is currently planning to go back. He has a very successful business here in Birmingham, Alabama in order to pursue serving the people of Sudan in order to pursue serving the Lord in Uganda on a full time basis. He has recently gotten married and has picked up a wonderful partner in ministry which is his wife, Cindy. I want to share with you an email from Ben where he is sharing how the Lord has answered his prayers to take God's Word to Sudan.

Before I share the email, when we went to Uganda they gave real strict instructions that they could only take so much on the plane where luggage and all was concerned. Ben had been asking people for Bibles and clothes for people in Uganda and I thought he is not going to get all this in his bags. We show up at the airport and Ben is about 100 to 150 pounds overweight from what people had donated to him and God was so good. Ben just trusted in the Lord and by God's grace people were very generous and gracious to us where we were able to take those things to the people of Uganda. When Ben thinks about serving the Lord he thinks in big numbers and big ways. I wish I had that kind of faith.

Here is this email from Ben and his wife Cindy. He writes, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Cindy and I greet each of you in the name of our precious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We wanted to provide a quick update. Back in May we sent out plea where we asked you to pray about helping provide our brothers and sisters in south Sudan in the Nuba Mountains with 10,000 Bibles. The Lord has heard our cry and we wanted to report that we just received word the printing of 40,000 Bibles and 100,000 Creation to Christ books has begun. What is even more incredible is the 40 foot seed container that will ship from Bellerose into Kenya and then go into south Sudan is expected to arrive in time for our mission. The story behind all this

is how our God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. We will attempt to share how this has all happened but no human explanation from us is sufficient. Here we go.”

His email continues, “Back in April I started investigating the most economical way to get the best quality hardback Bible we could find into south Sudan. In early May the best price I had gotten with shipping to Africa was going to be around \$3.85 per Bible. Cindy and I began to pray. One of the publishers we spoke with on the phone connected us with someone who knew someone else who connected us with someone else etc. You get the idea. Eventually we were put in touch with a ministry northern Virginia called Equipping the Saints. A few weeks later they then connected us with a printing press in Bellerose. We begin to talk with this printing press in Bellerose about the need for well bound hard back Bibles in Sudan.”

A side note here is that Sudan has multiple rainy seasons and they don’t have good shelter. The Bibles would probably get wet and they have so much humidity that the Bibles would tend to fall apart. Ben has been compelled to send them the highest quality Bible that will stay together and that is one that is leather bound.

His email goes on to say “I could get a 4 by 6 leather copy Bible printed at \$1.40 a copy if we ordered 40,000. 40,000 was the number we needed to fill the seed container the Bibles would be shipped in. As crazy as it sounds it was going to cost the same amount of money to ship 10,000 Bibles as it was 40,000. (Somehow that mathematics works out for Ben and that’s awesome!) But how were we going to get the money for this project. The total cost with shipping was going to be around \$66,000! Cindy and I began to pray. In 2 Chronicles 20:12b King Jehoshaphat prays to the Lord [12b] “*O our God... we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*” Since sending out our letter in May we had received right around \$18,000 in donations. The deadline for starting to print the Bibles was June 26th, if they were going to be printed, shipped and delivered on time for our mission trip. On the night of June 26th I received a call from the printer that he had to order 15 forty foot truckloads of paper by midnight.”

“Cindy and I had no clue how we were going to pay for this. We even thought about doing monthly payments for an extended period if the money did not come in. Since we trust in the fact that God’s work done in God’s timing never lacks God’s provision we do not solicit funds or do any type of fundraising, trusting in God’s promises to provide we decided it would be best to wait on the Lord for His provision. Four weeks went by and then we received a random email from a mission’s agency in Switzerland. You are never going to believe what happened next. Over the next three days we emailed this agency back and forth 67 times. They had heard about the need for Bibles in Sudan and wanted to help. After two weeks of emailing back and forth God worked it all out with the money that was donated as a result of our initial letter plus \$10,000 from Equipping the Saints ministry in Virginia and the Swiss mission agency agreed to pay the difference. \$67, 600 was needed to print 40,000 Bibles plus 50,000 copies of the Creation to Christ books. We share all of this with each of you because we want you to know that where God guides He provides always.”

Then Ben sent a follow up email that said “We received word today of a church that is going to help us send 25,000 study Bibles to the pastors and evangelists in south Sudan approximately \$200,000 worth of Bibles that are 2500 pages each in length.” How awesome is our God!

John 15:8 the Lord says [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* If we abide we bear much fruit and we glorify God. John 15:9–10 says [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.

Obedience equals evidence in fruit and joy. John 14:21 says [21] *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.*

Now John 15:11 says [11] *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* There is joy in bearing fruit for the Lord. R.C. Sproul says this about Christ's joy; "Jesus expresses the desire that our joy should be full and that your joy may be full, isn't that what we want? We do not want a partial cup of the fruit of the Spirit. We do not want just a little bit of joy. We want all the joy that the Father has stored up for His people. That fullness of joy comes from Christ. It is first His joy that He gives to us and as we are plugged into Him this joy that comes from Him grows, increases and become full. There is a fullness that awaits us as the fruit of the Spirit is nurtured by the True Vine."

In conclusion, abide in Christ as we have been called to do. Spend time in His Word, with Him and in prayer. Spend time listening to the Word preached, hearing it taught, memorizing it, meditating on it because it is so rich and valuable to us. God help us to understand what a blessing it is in our lives.

Then we need to be compelled to share the Gospel. The Great Commission has been given to us. There are many Bible studies that you can be involved with here at Briarwood. There are so many opportunities here at Briarwood for us to grow in our faith, learn and be taught, abide in Him and worship Him on Wednesday nights, even around the fellowship of a good meal. One of the things we do on Wednesday nights is our Bridge to Life training and we are praying that 20 new people will engage in this evangelism training. Please join us in praying for this specific request for these 20 new people. There are many opportunities for men, women and children here at Briarwood to grow in their faith, learn and be taught.

So for the believers what does this passage in John 15 tell us and encourage us? It tells us that we should abide to bear much fruit. Now for the non-believer. I hope that you hear the Good News of the message of the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope that He pricks your heart and draws you to Himself. Remember Romans 6:23 that says [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* He offers to you the free gift of the forgiveness of your sins if you will only surrender your life to Him and trust in Him and accept this free offer. Then you can be assured that when you die you will have the most abundant gift of all which is spending eternity with Him in heaven. So please today ask Him to be your Lord and Savior and place your trust in Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for this great passage. Thank You that You love us so much that You desire for us to abide in You to live with You. I think of that goofy illustration of if I wanted to go visit the President in the White House there is no chance but if I were a child of a President I could walk right into his presence, spend time with him and actually live with him. The President of the United States or any King in any country is so insignificant compared to our relationship with You and yet You have called us Your children. You have given us full and complete access to You. Not only do You want us to live with You but You want us to spend time with You and You have opened up the calendar where You desire to be with us whenever and wherever. You have called us to pray without ceasing. You have called us to be in Your Word, study it, memorize it and You have called us to worship You. Lord, You desire for our

presence with You eternally. I am so grateful and thankful for that. Cause us to be compelled by Your great love to keep Your commands and to abide with You. God You are awesome in every way. We love You, praise You and thank You Lord Jesus and we pray these things in His precious, holy and powerful Name, Amen.