

HIS STORY. YOUR STORY.

WEEK 4: ABIDING

STAYING CONNECTED TO GOD



BIG IDEA: Learning to abide is the secret to living out the Christian life.

DATE: Wednesday, January 21 & Sunday, January 25

SCRIPTURE: John 15:1-10

ANNOUNCEMENTS & WELCOME GUESTS

PRAYER REQUESTS/PRAISES: Pass around the prayer notebook and include any answers to prayer.

OPENING QUESTION

Who in here has a green thumb? What are some characteristics of a good gardener?

[[WATCH VIDEO](#)]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Describe a time you found yourself in a season of waiting. How did God, our Vinedresser, use this time for your spiritual growth?

What is the difference between abiding and obeying? Why is this distinction important?

SCRIPTURE READING

John 15:1-10 (NIV)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ 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."

SCRIPTURE RESPONSE

What does this passage teach us about God? (*Possible answers: God is our gardener who lovingly takes care of us and disciplines us through pruning; He gives us commands for our own good, etc.*)

What does this passage teach us about humanity? (*Possible answers: we are to remain in Him to bear fruit; we can do nothing apart from God, when we bear fruit, we bring God glory, etc.*)

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Complete the "Abide Time" worksheet using John 15:1-10 printed above. Leaders say: "Today we are going to learn a practical method for abiding." Read through the worksheet and be prepared to explain it to the class. Pass them out and give them time to complete it. Once they are finished have them share their "one word" and why they chose it – either around their tables or circle up in groups of 3. You will be amazed at how many different words people chose and why.

CHALLENGE: Use this 10:1:1 tool this week as you read your Bible. Read 10 verses, focus in on 1 verse or phrase, circle 1 word and then meditate on that word throughout your day to stay connected to God. *10 verses: 1 verse: 1 word.*

READING PLAN

2/25: Day 22 **2/26:** Day 23 **2/27:** Day 24 **2/28:** Day 25 **2/29:** Day 26 **3/1:** Day 27 **3/2:** Day 28

COMMENTARY

This is the seventh and last of the "I AM" statements of Christ recorded in the Gospel of John. However, Jesus did not stop with this image, but went on to use the picture of "the friend." These two pictures of the believer – branches and friends – reveal both our privileges and our responsibilities. As *branches*, we have the privilege of sharing His life, and the responsibility of abiding. As *friends*, we have the privilege of knowing His will, and the responsibility of obeying.

The cultivation of vineyards was important to the life and economy of Israel. A golden vine adorned Herod's temple. When our Lord used this image, He was not introducing something new; it was familiar to every Jewish person. There are four elements in this allegory that we must understand to benefit from its teaching.

The vine. There are three different vines found in Scripture. The *past vine* was the nation of Israel.

But the vine produced wild grapes! Instead of practicing justice, it practiced oppression; instead of producing righteousness, it produces unrighteousness and cries of distress from the victims. God had to deal with the nation Israel and chasten it, but even that did not produce lasting results. There is also a **future vine**, the vine of the earth described in Revelation 14:14-20. Believers are the branches in "the vine of heaven," but the unsaved are branches in "the vine of the earth." The "vine of the earth" will be cut down and destroyed when Jesus Christ returns. The **present vine** is our Lord Jesus Christ, and of course, the vine includes the branches. He is the "true Vine", that is "the original of which all other vines are a copy."

The branches. Of itself, a branch is weak and useless. It is good for either bearing or burning, but not for building. That branch cannot produce its own life: it must draw that life from the vine. It is our communion with Christ through the Spirit that makes the possible the bearing of the fruit. The sooner we as believers discover that we are but branches, the better we will relate to the Lord; for we will know our own weaknesses.

The key word is *abide*; it is used eleven times in John 15:1-11 ("continue" in John 15:9 and "remain" in John 15:11). **What does it mean to abide?** It means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to produce fruit. This certainly involves the Word of God and the confession of sin so that nothing hinders our communion with Him. It also involves obeying Him because we love Him.

How can we tell when we are abiding in Christ? Is there a special feeling? No, but there are special evidences that appear, and they are unmistakably clear. For one thing, when you are abiding in Christ you produce fruit. You also experience the Father's pruning so that you will bear more fruit. The believer who is abiding in Christ has his prayers answered (John 15:7) and experiences a deepening love for Christ and for other believers. He also experiences joy.

This abiding relationship is natural to the branch and the vine, but it must be cultivated in the Christian life. It is not automatic. Abiding in Christ demands worship, meditation on God's Word, prayer, sacrifice, and service – but what a joyful experience it is! Once you have begun to cultivate this deeper communion with Christ, you have no desire to return to the shallow life of the careless Christian.

The vinedresser. The vinedresser is in charge of caring for the vines, and Jesus said that this is the work of His Father. It is He who "purges" or prunes the branches so they will produce more fruit. The greatest judgment God could bring to a believer would be to let him alone. Because God loves us, He prunes us and encourages us to bear more fruit for His glory. **Your Heavenly Father is never nearer to you than when He is pruning you.** The more we abide in Christ, the more fruit we bear; and the more fruit we bear, the more the Father has to prune us so that the quality keeps up with the quantity. Left to itself, the branch might produce many clusters, but they will be inferior in quality. God is glorified by a bigger crop that is also a better crop.

The fruit. The word *results* is often used in Christian circles, but this is not actually a Bible concept. A machine can produce results, and so can a robot, but it takes a *living organism* to produce fruit. It takes time and cultivation to produce fruit; a good crop does not come overnight. Several different types of spiritual fruit are named in the Bible. They include – winning others to Christ, growing in holiness and obedience; giving; displaying the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit; praising God for His glory.