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7. The Vine and the Branches

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7. The Vine and the Branches

This Bible study lesson is based on Chapter 8 of *The Abiding Room*, a book by Kevin Seacat.

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The diagram above is the primary Abiding Room diagram, with one small addition—the word “Abide” is shaded. As we continue to revisit this diagram, the subject of the discussion will be shaded for additional focus.

What does it mean to abide? First, let’s look at what Jesus said about the significance of abiding in Him.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 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. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:1-8 NIV).

Overview of Abiding

In John 15, Jesus introduces the metaphor of the vine and the branches. His description consists of only seventeen verses, and this word picture of abiding in Jesus is found only in the Gospel of John. Jesus gave it at the very end of His ministry, just before He went to the cross.

Although this passage is relatively short, numerous people have credited Jesus’ brief teaching revolving around the simple words, “Abide in me,” as the source of the joy in their lives and the power to impact the lives of others. So don’t think less of these seventeen verses because of their brevity or simplicity. It’s exciting that so much treasure is found in such a small package! It takes only a minute or two to open, but it takes a lifetime to unpack.

We will divide Jesus’ lesson on abiding into two parts. In this lesson, we’ll look at verses 1-8, where He describes the metaphor of the vine and branches. In the next lesson, we’ll delve into verses 9-17 where He explains the abiding friendship.

If you live most of each day in a close, abiding relationship with Jesus, you know the serenity of having the King of kings, who calls you friend, walking by your side through the uncertainty and challenges of each day. You know the excitement of being an instrument God uses to impact the lives of others in significant ways.

Let’s explore Jesus’ intimate words to His disciples and us and learn how we can have a deeper friendship with Him.

Roles—Verses 1 and 5

The first few verses of John 15 record how Jesus laid out the roles involved in our abiding relationship with Him. Notice four key words continue to show up throughout the passage: “abide,” “vine,” “branches,” and “fruit.”

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1 NIV).

“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 15:5 NIV).

In verse 1, Jesus tells us He is the vine, God the Father is the gardener or the vinedresser, and we are the branches.

The Father is the caretaker. He cares for those whom He has chosen—you and me. Jesus is the vine. He is the source of life. His life is flowing into us. We are the branches. The branch itself has no life. The vine has the life, and when the branch is attached to the vine, the life of the vine flows into and through the branch, and grapes are produced from the connection.

Note that Jesus did not choose a large tree with strong branches that can grow tall and impressive, independent of a caretaker. To describe our relationship with Him, He chose a vine whose branches are scrawny and feeble. The branches of a vine need a great deal of care to reach their peak fruitfulness. When cared for properly, a vineyard can be both beautiful and productive.

Napa Valley in California is a production facility for wine. But one distinction that makes this wine region stand out from so many other production facilities in the world is that the vineyards are peaceful, calm, and restful.

In the midst of the peaceful environment, under the watchful eyes of their caretakers, the vines are going about their moment-by-moment purpose of flowing their life into the branches and producing a staggering amount of some of the best grapes in the world. As the vinedressers go about their work, no grunting and groaning is going on among the vines and branches. They are quietly and peacefully bearing much fruit.

While Jesus names the Father, the Son, and us (the branches), He doesn't specifically name the Holy Spirit. But just as the hidden, life-giving sap flows from the vine into the branches, so does the Holy Spirit flow into us as we remain connected to (abide in) Jesus, the vine. The result in both the vineyard and our spiritual lives is bearing fruit.

As the fruit in the vineyard bears witness to the connection of the vine to the branch, so does the fruit in our lives bear witness to Jesus' life flowing into us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the vine is the evidence that the life of the vine is flowing through the branch. As you abide in Jesus and receive the flow of the Spirit into your life, the fruit you bear gives evidence to the life of Jesus in you.

Relationship—Verses 4 and 5

“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 NIV).

Another word for abide is “remain.” In this context, abide means to remain in constant relationship with Jesus. Abiding describes an ongoing, intimate fellowship with Jesus. As the branches, we are to remain in continuous fellowship with our friend, Savior, and source of life—Jesus the vine.

It’s interesting to note the word “nothing” at the end of verse 5. In many Bible passages, it is not uncommon for English-language versions of the Bible to translate or interpret words differently. But when you look at John 15:5 in some of the more commonly used versions of the Bible, here’s what you find:

- New American Standard version: “apart from me, you can do nothing.”
- New International Version: “apart from me, you can do nothing.”
- English Standard Version: “apart from me, you can do nothing.”
- New King James Version: “for without Me you can do nothing.”

Different scholars looked at the meaning of this verse, and in each case chose the word “nothing” to describe what Jesus said we could do on our own. In other words, there’s consensus among these scholars that “nothing” is how Jesus described what we can accomplish without Him.

As we are about to see, however, even our non-abiding moments can be fruitful. Jesus is making it clear: even when we are not fully engaged with Him, the fruit we see in our lives is still a result of His life flowing through us, not a result of our own fleshly efforts.

Level II—Modest Fruit Bearing

“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” (John 15:2 NIV).

Our lives display different degrees of fruit bearing, based on our relationship with Jesus. In John 15:2, Jesus describes the fruit we bear when we are abiding in Him in three ways: no fruit, fruit, and more fruit. We are not completely useless to God if

we are operating in the flesh. He is able to work through anyone at any time if He chooses. It is still possible to be used by God when we are operating in our no-good flesh and living in Level II.

There's no need to become discouraged when your obedience is less than perfect. Thankfully, by His grace, God can use us even when we are not abiding in Jesus! However, God's plan for you is greater than these modest results described in verse 2. God's plan is for your abiding life to bear much fruit!

Level III—Abundant Fruit Bearing

“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 15:5 NIV).

In verse 5, Jesus lays out a new level of fruit bearing. He says, “Whoever abides in me and I in him ... bears much fruit.” Previously, in verse 2, which describes non-abiding living, Jesus described the lesser fruit bearing as either no fruit, fruit, or more fruit. Now, in this new way of living, as you are abiding in Jesus, He says you will become a bearer of much fruit.

As you abide in Jesus, your fruitfulness increases dramatically. You bring greater glory to God by the impact your life has on your world. A different level of relationship results in a greater magnitude of fruit bearing.

When you abide in Jesus, you will bear much fruit. You cannot abide in Jesus and not bear much fruit. This is another of one of Jesus' exciting conditional promises. He didn't say, “If you abide in me, you might bear fruit.” He said, “You will bear much fruit.”

When describing abiding in Him, Jesus explains that this is a new and more fruitful way of living, and it's only experienced by staying connected to Him. Only by having intimate fellowship with Jesus do you experience the fullness of Him living His life in and through yours. Abiding means intimate fellowship with Jesus. When you're abiding, you're dwelling in a rich relationship with Jesus.

The Great 2 for 1

As we explained previously, “The Great 2 for 1” means that as you abide in Jesus, you're being filled with the Holy Spirit. We can now see the evidence of the abiding, Spirit-filled life is seen in its fruit. The sign you are filled with the Spirit is internal fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and

self-control. The sign you are abiding in Jesus is the external fruit—bearing much fruit. As you abide, you experience both the internal fruit of the Spirit and the external impact through your life. To summarize: one obedience (abide), two blessings (internal and external fruit).

As you abide in Jesus, you also get to know Him better. And since abiding in Jesus fills you with the Holy Spirit, abiding results in you getting to know the person of the Holy Spirit better as well. Staying connected to Jesus moment-by-moment throughout the day will better acquaint you with the ways of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Experiencing the Desires of Your Heart

“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4 NIV).

When we abide, we are in the Abiding Room. We experience all the blessings of Level III living. This is the abundant life Jesus promised. The answer to the desires of our hearts is to abide in Jesus.

Jesus tells us another blessing of abiding in Him is answered prayer. “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7 NIV).

Jesus said, “For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20 NIV).

What is the desire of your heart to see God do? Jesus says first to abide in Him, and then to pray.

Your Purpose on Earth

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:8 NIV).

Did you notice when you got saved, you didn’t immediately get promoted to heaven? Why is that? If God is love and wants the best for you, why didn’t you go directly to heaven when you were first saved? As a loving Father, why didn’t He remove you from this troubled, fallen world?

The reason is He still has work for you to do! Work that will bring Him glory. In His sovereign wisdom, God has chosen to use ordinary people like us to glorify Himself as we live out our lives here on earth. The glory isn't for us, it's for God. When Jesus uses the phrase "bear fruit," He is saying He wants our lives to bless others wherever He places us.

Whatever kind of work He might have you doing right now is intended to bless others for His glory. When people see you living the abiding, Spirit-filled life, God will draw others to you and to Jesus because of what you are doing by His power.

Like the actual physical vineyards, the spiritual work of the branches is done by the vinedresser and the vine. The branches are effortlessly filled with the life of the vine, and the harvest of fruit appears as the result for all to see. Observers look at the feeble branches and know they couldn't have possibly done it on their own, so it must have been the work of the vinedresser and the vine. When others are impacted, they don't admire the scrawny branch; they admire the Vinedresser—God.

The apostle Paul described it this way: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10 NIV).

God saved you for a relationship with Him, but He kept you on earth for good works. Your one-on-one relationship with Jesus is not just so you can have joy and peace internally but so you'll have a great impact externally as well. The abiding branch is connected to Jesus on one end, but bearing much fruit on the other—fruit that is for the benefit of others.

Fruit bearing is not meant to be a solo act. The vine has many branches. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus said "you," He wasn't just talking to the apostle John, whose writing we read in John 15. He meant "you" as in "all you guys"—all eleven disciples who were in the room. And when we read it today, it is still plural. Jesus is speaking to all of us collectively in the church. Jesus, the vine, intends for us all, as His branches, to be big-time fruit bearers together in our own vineyards—the local church.

Imagine the dynamic impact of a local church filled with people abiding in Jesus and continuously filled with the Holy Spirit. This is what turned the world upside down 2,000 years ago, and it can turn the world upside down again!

When you abide in Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit, God will use your life in exciting and substantial ways you could never have imagined. You'll gain a greater understanding that the way God made you divinely fits into the way He uses you. Perhaps for the first time, you will have confidence in knowing why you exist!

ABIDING TRUTH: When you abide in Jesus, you will bear much fruit.

Reflection Question

When you consider the idea of abiding in Jesus, what does that look like? (Think about others you know who have a great relationship with Jesus. What are they doing?)

Write down your answer to the box below ("Your Response or Question") and send it to us. It will appear in Messages.