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8. The Abiding Friendship

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8. The Abiding Friendship

This Bible study lesson is based on Chapter 9 of *The Abiding Room*, a book by Kevin Seacat.

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“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another” (John 15:9-17 NIV).

In the last lesson, we studied the first eight verses of John 15 in which Jesus illustrated that the bearing of much fruit is fulfilled by our abiding relationship with Him. Now in verses 9-17, He describes this relationship in very personal and relational terms. In these verses, Jesus applies the vine and branch metaphor to His abiding friendship with His disciples, which includes us.

Hopefully the term “friendship” describes your existing relationship with Jesus. But regardless of how you may currently describe your relationship with Jesus, in this chapter we’ll learn how you can deepen that relationship.

Your Friendship with Jesus

In John 15:15, Jesus describes to His disciples (and us) what the abiding friendship looks like: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15 NIV).

When you think of the people you call your close friends, what comes to mind? What do you do with a good friend? You spend time with them. You enjoy each other's company. You laugh. You tell each other your hopes, dreams, and fears. You enjoy and trust them.

Well, that's exactly how Jesus thinks of you—as His friend! Jesus doesn't just love you—He likes you! That's why these are the same things Jesus wants to do with you on a daily basis. He not only loves you enough to save you, He enjoys you and longs to be with you every minute of every day.

The Joy of Abiding

On His last night before the cross, after telling His disciples about abiding for the first time, Jesus said, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11 NIV). He was telling them they would be joyful regardless of their circumstances if they remained in relationship with Him.

The same is true for you today. The good news is Jesus has given you the key to your own joy! Even in times of turmoil—health problems, financial issues, a job loss, others' antagonism toward your faith—we can still have joy. Joy is spiritual because it comes from God. God and His Holy Spirit never change, so you can be joyful regardless of your situation. Unlike happiness, which is dependent on the unpredictable circumstances of the world, joy is available at any time to you when you're abiding in Jesus.

What Does Abiding Look Like in Your Life?

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27 NIV).

What is abiding? Abiding is a restful, obedient activity. It's not lazy or inactive. It is peace in the midst of obediently carrying out your work. Abiding in Jesus is letting Christ live out His life in and through you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Abiding means you're in tune with the amazing reality that Jesus is right beside you. Regardless of the circumstances, you are with Jesus. He's always with you in all things. He's right here, right now. Having Jesus alongside you in an abiding relationship makes any of life's experiences better.

Abiding means staying in harmony, in fellowship, and in union with Jesus. As you walk through your day with Him, the truths you read in the Bible about Him are no longer just words on a page; they come alive through your life. For instance, the patience of Jesus you read about becomes reality in your life as Jesus lives out His patience through you. The peace of Jesus is lived out in your heart and mind, even in the surprises and setbacks of the day. Just as Jesus was never truly alone because He and the Father were one, you, too, are never alone because you are one with Him.

It's often easy to turn our faith into an expectation of performance. But practicing the presence of Jesus as we go through our day turns what can become religion into a loving relationship with Him. It's not a checklist to constrain you or a restrictive set of rules to follow, but rather a restful relationship that actually frees you from slavery to them.

You can confidently rest on Jesus' promises in each area of your life as you acknowledge and understand He is always available to you, and you make yourself available to Him. When you mess up or drift away from Him, don't ignore it or agonize over it. Quickly acknowledge it (that is called confession), ask Him for help, then simply and confidently move on.

Acknowledging our mistakes with Jesus is much easier than addressing our mistakes with other people. Since we often have trouble getting over our mistakes, we incorrectly assume it's the same with Him. But Jesus is loving, caring, kind, and gentle. He loves you and is eager to forgive, instruct, reconnect, and move forward with you.

Be reassured by this promise God made to Israel, which is also a promise to us: "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12 NIV). Should you stumble, Jesus' grace, mercy, love, kindness, and gentleness that you experienced when you first began a relationship with Him is always available to you. Go to Him quickly and be refreshed. Jesus loves you.

And let's say it again—Jesus likes you! He calls you friend! There is nothing He wants more than to hang out with you. That's why He made you His—to walk alongside you all day, every day. He wants to talk about what you are going through today and guide you through it.

We should not approach Jesus just to receive something from Him. Instead, we are to go to Jesus to just enjoy Jesus. Just resting in Jesus. Just Jesus. Take heart in knowing there is nothing better than simply resting in Him. Nothing we accomplish in our feeble strength compares to simply enjoying staying connected to Him.

God wants us to become receivers, not achievers. The trying and the striving in our limited strength, even if the intentions are good, is not God's way. He wants us to be fruit bearers, not fruit producers or achievers. Jesus didn't say, "I want you to go out and produce fruit." He said, "Bear much fruit."

As we discussed in the previously, bearing much fruit is a certainty as we abide in Jesus. Remaining connected to Him is the first and foremost thing. Abiding not only takes priority ahead of even doing the ministry God has called us to, but is actually how Jesus intends for ministry itself to be done. By our staying joined to Him, Jesus actually does the ministry in and through us, rather than our attempting to do it through our own self-effort.

Obedience Maintains the Abiding Connection

Once begun, how do you keep abiding? Jesus explained it to His disciples this way: "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" (John 15:10 NIV). And earlier in the evening He had said similarly, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15 NIV).

In these verses, Jesus says the way you continue to abide is by obeying what God instructs you to do through His Word and His Spirit. These words are firm instruction regarding your friendship with Jesus, describing how to maintain the special, intimate, abiding friendship with Him. Jesus is explaining that you can continue enjoying the fullness of your moment-by-moment abiding relationship with Him through moment-by-moment obedience.

How do you know if you are abiding in Jesus? Since abiding in Jesus causes you to be filled with the Holy Spirit, the confirmation that you are abiding is the same as the confirmation that you are filled with the Spirit—do a fruit inspection. If you sense the fruit of the Spirit at work in you—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—then you know you are abiding in Jesus. At any moment, a fruit inspection can reveal whether you are a part of the vine, or apart from the vine.

But regardless of where you are at any given moment, remember Jesus is always waiting and available to regain full connection and fellowship with you. He loves you, enjoys being with you, and is always lovingly waiting to be asked to guide you.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (Revelation 3:20 NIV).

A Biblical Example: Mary the Abider of Bethany

The Bible has an encouraging story for all of us ordinary people. Some people might say, “Well, you know, I’ve never had lots of blessings, I’m not sure I’m that kind of person.” Let’s look at someone in the Bible who was an ordinary, common person who had a wonderful, intimate friendship with Jesus and was commended by Him for it. Her name was Mary of Bethany. I like to call her, Mary the Abider of Bethany.

Mary of Bethany was the sister of Lazarus and Martha, and perhaps as much as anyone in the Bible, Mary understood what it meant to abide in Jesus. Luke 10:38-42 tells the story:

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’ ‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:38-42 NIV).

In the last part of His response to Martha, Jesus makes three statements that contain significant truths for us to embrace today:

1. Only one thing is needed. Though there was much to do, Mary did only one thing—stay near Jesus and listen to Him.
2. Doing the one thing is a choice. Mary made a choice—to remain and rest in Jesus’ presence. She chose to be with Him over all the other things she could have chosen.
3. It will not be taken away. Mary’s experience of being close to Jesus and learning from Him would always be available to her. Similarly, its impact on her would be

permanent. The same is true for you today. That's so reassuring, isn't it? In a world where friends, family, finances, health, etc., can be taken away, this one thing (the better thing) cannot be taken away—your abiding relationship with Jesus.

Jesus' Comforting Presence During Difficulties

Though the abiding, Spirit-filled life comes with the promise of the love, joy, and peace of Jesus, and the bearing of much fruit, it does not come with the promise of a life without difficulty. Jesus' promise and provision is that He will be right next to you as you go through hardship. As others have said, Jesus doesn't keep you from the fire; He's with you in the fire. Jesus doesn't keep you from the valley; He's with you in the valley. Your problems aren't extinguished, but they stay in proper perspective.

In fact, God may allow hardships in your life in order to put your faith in Him on display to others. What is better evidence of Jesus' life being lived in and through you than when you handle trials and difficulties with joy and peace?

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit despite hardships, others—even those who may have never set foot in a church—may begin to ask themselves or ask you directly how you're able to cope with these challenges. They may begin to wonder how you're able to approach each day with such calmness when others are anxious or angry. Often, that's the beginning of God using your abiding life to bear much fruit!

When you're living the abiding, Spirit-filled life, your life will impact those around you as they see you living above your circumstances. Your spouse, family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors cannot help being attracted to your joy and peace in the midst of life's uncertainties. Godly character itself bears fruit that remains.

Here are some encouraging words from the Bible reminding us that God is with us during trials:

God will guide you in the midst of your trial.

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21 NIV).

“I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16 NIV).

God will comfort you in the midst of your trial.

“The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him” (Nahum 1:7 NIV).

“Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken” (Psalm 55:22 NIV).

God will help you in the midst of your trial.

“Though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand” (Psalm 37:24 NIV).

“The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:9 NIV).

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging” (Psalm 46:1-3 NIV).

God will restore you after the trial.

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10 NIV).

Journaling

Consider journaling. Journaling will allow you to capture what is going on in your life and what God seems to be saying to you, and will connect the two. Use any type of journal. It doesn't need to be fancy. It can be inexpensive spiral-bound notebooks. Keep your journal beside you when you do any type of Bible study. If something is impressed on your heart, jot it down. You could even start by using one of the verses listed above and thank God for how He was with you in the midst of a trial.

Don't be concerned about the quality of your writing. Just get it on paper. Write the private thoughts of your heart to Jesus, not to others. Every few days, go back and see what's been happening and ask God to reveal to you what He's showing you from the events and thoughts of your life.

Your entries do not need to be profound. Some days nothing is written, some days a little is written, and some days a lot is written. Each day start a new page, even if the previous entry was very short. There's no particular pattern, other than perhaps start with *Lord, you are showing me ...* or *Lord, thank you for ...* But strung together, they will show the blessings of God's leading in your life.

You can journal in any style that fits you. The important point is you're in consistent communication with God and are creating a record of His work in your life. As you look back, you can thank Him and praise Him for His loving provision.

Abide in Jesus and Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Jesus instructs you to abide in Him and promises He will abide in you. Rest in Him, and He will rest in you. He's always there for you. He's always waiting for you. He won't turn you down. But it's your choice. Abiding in Jesus is choosing Level III living in the Abiding Room.

Spend a few minutes in prayer, resting in Jesus' presence and sensing what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.

ABIDING TRUTH: Jesus calls you friend and enjoys spending time with you.

Reflection Question

As you start each day in the coming week, ask yourself, "What is one blessing of being friends with Jesus?" Write each one down in your journal and review it each morning before adding to this list.