

Abiding

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[0:00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, thank you so much for tuning in to this broadcast. And we just pray today as we get into the Word of God that most of all that Word will get into us and that it will change these hearts to truly beat for Jesus.

Now, how many of you that are listening to this broadcast, how many of you know what a Bradford pear tree looks like? Now, how many of you groaned internally when I said Bradford pear tree? See, this tree is beautiful for about one to three weeks every spring. But as quick as those beautiful blooms come, it seems like they're gone just as fast.

And no, they don't produce pears. And yes, these trees do have a stink to them. But that's not the main problem that most people have with this particular tree. See, I've owned probably 12, 13 Bradford pears between a couple properties I've had.

[1:07] And do you know how many I've lost due to storms? I think it's seven. See, these trees grow rapidly and they become very top heavy. They don't have the widest base to them.

So if you don't keep them trimmed up, they'll snap at the bottom. Over the last four years that we've lived in our house and we kind of live out in the country, we've lost at least six of them.

They line our property on one side, kind of coming up the driveway, and there's cornfields next to us. So when that wind comes across those fields very viciously, it's almost becoming a regular occurrence when we have strong winds to hear my wife just let out a scream because another tree has gone down.

But there was one that just ate the dust here recently that was only about a third to a half of a tree. See, for a couple years now, about every big storm we had, we'd lose another chunk of the tree, another large branch of the tree.

But let's say that my dad and I went down to it, we lifted it up, probably with help from the tractor, and we tried to plant that large branch back in the ground.

[2:18] Let me ask you this. Would it live? No. Would it bear fruit? Absolutely not. For that tree to bear fruit, those beautiful white blooms, the branch must stay connected to the larger tree.

It must abide. Now, welcome back to the second week of our series where we're looking at the secrets, in quotations, of living for Jesus.

Now, if you want to follow along, grab your Bible, turn to John chapter 15. Last week, Pastor Tyler did a good job of explaining this series like an atlas, where we each week will zoom in just a little bit more, kind of like a map of the United States that zooms then into Indiana.

And then from Indiana, you go to Greensburg. From Greensburg, you zoom in on Broadway Street, and then to our physical church address at 425 North Broadway.

And there's no question that last week was the big picture. The secret to living is fruit bearing. In other words, you were created to have a life that exhibits Jesus, that makes a difference in this world for his kingdom.

[3:28] And you can't fake fruit bearing, especially with those you are around every day. So what does that fruit look like? Well, Tyler showed us from John 15 that godly fruit is winning others to Christ, helping them to grow in their faith walk.

It's also a pursuit of holiness, growing into that person of Christ-like character one day at a time. True followers of Jesus are also generous with everything they have, while displaying an attitude of gratitude and an attitude of praise towards the Lord.

And then today, I want us to zoom in a little bit more to that Indiana level and say, okay, if the secret of living for Jesus is to bear fruit in this world, then the secret to fruit bearing is abiding in Christ. And just like those limbs can't be reattached to the tree, we must abide in Christ if we're going to live a life that makes a difference for the kingdom. Now, I'm guessing that the word abide probably isn't a regular part of our vocabulary.

So let's do this. Let's define this word. And according to dictionary.com, the word abide means to remain, continue, stay, or even dwell.

[4 : 44] And the picture we see here in John 15 is the vine. That is Jesus. He's the vine. Or if you picture a tree, he's the tree, okay? And we are the branches.

And if we're going to truly bear fruit in this life, we have to stay connected. We must, as the NIV translation says, remain in Christ.

We must abide in a relationship with Jesus. So let's look here at John 15, verse 4. And here's what Jesus says. He says, remain in me.

So the NIV mentions, uses the word remain instead of abide. It says, 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. So four times in this one verse, and then 12 times in the larger passage, we see this Greek root word minnow, abide, remain.

[5 : 47] It's not just a good idea to stay connected to Christ, but listen, it is vital to living an impactful, fruit-bearing life for the kingdom. So here's what I want to do today.

Let's answer two questions. And the first one's this. How do I abide? How do I abide in Christ? And to best answer this, we need to understand that Jesus is talking to his disciples here. They were flawed human beings like us, but they were also very committed, all-in followers walking in his salvation.

And yes, Judas, the one phony among the group, had already left at this point. So he's not even in this conversation. And honestly, this is something that we talked about a lot in our previous series on spiritual warfare.

So I'm not going to abide on this for long, pun intended, but I'm going to talk to believers here. But please know this. If you've not surrendered your heart to Christ, that's where it has to start.

[6 : 50] And I hope that you and I can have that conversation soon if that's you. But look with me here, again, in John 15, but this time verse 7. Jesus says, If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

So real quick, you abide in Christ through the word of God. Through the word of God. See, there's an organization called Center for Bible Engagement.

They did a study where they surveyed 40,000 people from ages 8 to 80. And they discovered that for those who read their Bible one to three times a week, there's little to no lasting change evident in their lives.

Probably those who just take their Bible to church and they read it with the pastor and then they never see it again the rest of the week. There's no lasting change or very little. But here's what they discovered.

This is amazing. Those who read their Bible at least four times a week, probably every day, they discovered some real life-changing results among them.

[8 : 02] Real fruit. So here's some of the findings. And listen, this is not someone's opinion. This is just the data. Feeling lonely dropped 30%. Anger issues dropped 32%.

Bitterness in relationships was down 40%. Alcoholism down 57%. Sex outside of marriage dropped 68%.

Feeling spiritually stagnant, which is an epidemic in the church, dropped 60%. Viewing pornography went down 61%. But now watch this.

Look what goes up. Sharing your faith jumped up 200%. Taking the initiative to help others grow in their walk with Jesus, we call that discipleship, that went up 230%.

See, this isn't some mechanical, I read a chapter a day to keep God's wrath away type of mentality. This is you and me who've been set free from eternal destruction.

[9 : 03] Us being so grateful to our gracious God that we want to come before him. We want to be transformed by these God-breathed words of life and hope.

This is us abiding in Christ, letting his word do what 2 Timothy 3 says. Teaching us, rebuking us, correcting us, training us in righteousness.

Why? So that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Now does that sound like what we've been talking about in this series? Absolutely. He's saying so that we may bear fruit in this life. And this happens only when we abide in Christ. And one powerful way that we do this is by getting into the word. See, Psalm 1, starting in verse 1, says, Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord.

That's the word of God. And who meditates on his law day and night. So abide by getting into his God-breathed words.

[10:15] Here's the second thing. That's prayer. We went deeper on this just a few weeks ago, but it's simply that lifeline of communication between me and God.

That's what prayer is. And just like John 15, 7 said, you stay connected through prayer, aligning yourself with the will of God and the word of God.

And then he promises to answer those prayers in his perfect way and timing. And we'll come back to that here in a few minutes. And then third is confession. Now, many of us may be picturing a confession booth right now.

Some 70s looking confession booth where I bare my soul to a man behind a small window. That's not what we're talking about. Okay. This is simply confession to the Lord.

For those who've been married for a little while, you know, you know how important it is to be able to say those words and mean them. Those words, I'm sorry. Some people really struggle with this.

[11:14] Some people just will not apologize. And this is a major flaw and it can hurt every relationship you have. But when you learn how to humble yourself and sincerely ask for forgiveness, it changes that relationship.

The same is true in our walk with Christ. My prayer is that our greatest desire is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And yet, I can guarantee that you and I both will still have our struggles.

We will fall short of this. Growth or sanctification is a daily process. And when I sin against the Lord, man, am I so thankful that I can approach his throne room and sincerely ask for forgiveness from a grace-filled God.

And just like in a marriage, forgiveness keeps a couple connected as one in Christ. Also, in our walk with Jesus, we ask forgiveness to stay connected to the vine, to keep our hearts where they need to be.

See, David put it like this in Psalm 32 5. He said, Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

[12:34] Listen, this is not an exhaustive list. You could add fasting to prayer. You could talk about the desire, the heart motives to do his will. But listen, our number one priority in life should always be to abide in Christ, to stay connected, to remain in the vine, discovering true life in Jesus.

But here's the second question I have for you today. How do I know I'm abiding? How do I know that I'm abiding? Well, like usual, God's Word makes this clear.

First, there's fruit. There's fruit. You can write out to the side there, even the fruits of the Spirit. Now, grab your Bibles for me. Flip forward.

So if you're in the book of John, go through Acts and Romans and 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and then you arrive at Galatians. Okay? Fifth book after John. Turn to Galatians 5, starting in verse 19. And I know that I've been focusing on this a lot this year, but for good reason. And God has been bringing us back here over and over. So let's do this again.

[13:44] Okay? Let's go even deeper than we have. So Galatians 5, 19. And stick with me. We're going to read a few verses here. But it says, The acts of the flesh are obvious.

So we're talking about when you are controlled by your fleshly desires, not by the Holy Spirit. Here's what that looks like. Sexual immorality. Impurity and debauchery.

Idolatry. Putting other things on the throne of your heart. You can usually tell by your bank statement and your schedule book. Okay? That usually shows what you truly worship.

So idolatry and witchcraft. Hatred. Discord. Jealousy. Fits of rage. Selfish ambition. Dissensions. Factions and envy. Drunkenness.

Orgies and the like. I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

[14 : 51] Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Now we've talked about how you can fool people for a season, but eventually the fruit, the real fruit, will show. So let's do a little Holy Spirit-led self-evaluation here.

The fruits of the Spirit. So first is love. Do people see love in you? I'm not saying a worldly definition where you are just okay with anything goes because that's not true love.

Or that I'm not even saying that you have no backbone. But a godly love for others inspired by Jesus. Do people see that in you? Is that your first inclination toward people?

Or is it superiority, bitterness, judgment? How about joy? Does your life, does my life exhibit true joy because I'm a child of God? Or am I just as grumpy as the rest of the world around me?

[15 : 55] What about peace? If I can be very real here for a second, I struggle with contentment and peace. A lot of people do. I've had times where I've preached on a Sunday morning.

I've seen the Holy Spirit move in incredible ways. I've sang praises with all my heart. And then Monday morning, I'm on my knees saying, Lord, why do I have no peace right now?

Help me. And usually it comes back to this question. Am I really abiding in Christ all the time? Not just Sunday. See, you don't brush your teeth just on Sundays, do you?

You don't fight gingivitis just one day a week. And you can't expect to bear fruit when you only abide in Christ one day a week. What about forbearance or another word for that, patience?

Is that fruit showing in your life or are we an outburst waiting to happen? What about kindness? Is there a kind-hearted nature that you approach everything with?

[16 : 56] I know and absolutely believe that there's a time and a place to take a stand for things. Don't get me wrong. But we as believers, are we a balance of love and truth and a heart of kindness?

Listen, you can stand up for everything that is right and you can still do it in such an ungodly way. How about goodness? Is the goodness of God guiding your every move?

Or faithfulness? Are you staying true to Christ and His church? The commitments that you've made in your marriage, with your children, at your workplace? The list just keeps going.

But are you faithful to Christ and to others? Gentleness. Am I just stomping over everyone? Or do I display that gentleness in my care for others?

And then last, self-control. Am I controlled by food, sexual desires, power, greed, being right? Or am I disciplined in Christ?

[17 : 57] Am I making Him the only thing on the throne of my heart? And then I know when I do that, everything else will fall into place. Now, I don't know about you, but man, that list was tough for me.

There's a lot of conviction as I surrender this back to Christ. But when I abide in Him, He starts to crucify the flesh. And I and you start to change and grow more like Him every day.

Your life bears fruit. Here's the second thing. Pruning. Pruning. Now, I am not a green thumb, but my wife is.

She really enjoys flowers, putting out a nice garden, flower baskets, or not baskets, boxes underneath our windows. And just like I annoy her by sharing about sports, sometimes she returns the favor talking too much about flowers and plants.

But one thing I've seen her do, usually with our hanging baskets or our flower boxes, is she will prune. When the flowers start to droop a little, you know, not looking so vibrant, she'll pull off the dead so that more life can come.

[19 : 09] And that's a good picture from John chapter 15 of what Jesus wants to do in us. See, in John 15 too, talking about God the Father, the Word says, He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit.

And He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. Another way we see this described comes from Hebrews 12.6. I'll read this from the New Living Translation.

It says, Now, our youngest, Lila, will turn four next month.

And I'm telling you, her terrible twos have extended into the threes with no sign of letting up in the fours, okay? She is as cute as could be, but she is an ornery, headstrong bruiser of a little girl that

we love dearly.

Honestly, according to all the stories that I hear about me at her age, she behaves a lot like daddy, probably better. But when it comes to discipline, we are definitely a spare the rod, spoil the child type of family, while also realizing that every child may have certain discipline methods that are more effective for them.

[20 : 21] With Lila, we've done the spankings and the timeouts. We've done the sit-down explanations. We've taken things away that she enjoys. And we're still trying to kind of figure out if anything works.

But in all of it, our heart is not to crush her little spirit. It's simply to help shape this little girl into the image of Christ, to cut away those things that aren't good, so she can grow and mature into a God-fearing and God-following young lady who then blossoms even further into a Proverbs 31 woman who knows and lives out her identity in Christ.

And anyone who's ever been a parent, you know the process is painful at times. It can be hard. It can be frustrating. They don't always understand why they need to be pruned, why they need discipline, why you're putting rules and parameters in place, why you're constantly reminding them of the truth and calling out bad behavior.

And we didn't understand it either when we were young. And yet it's so worth it when you start to see the Holy Spirit do incredible things in your children. You know, the same is true for you and me. God loves us so much that while He receives us as we are, He can't leave us there. He sees the fruit He wants to bear in your life. He knows the purpose He designed you for.

[21 : 43] And it takes pruning to get there. And pruning is painful. That pride, bitterness, unforgiveness.

What about that jealousy, that lust, that insecurity, or that secret sin, or that addiction, lying, that self-righteousness, all that has to be laid at the foot of the cross, allowing my life to be pruned into the image of Jesus.

And while all that sounds good, man, this can be a painful process. But remember, it's also proof. It's also evidence that you are abiding in Christ. So the next time the Holy Spirit's convicting you and picking off the dead and allowing you to go through some things that help to do that, the next time you're feeling the pain of the pruning, the next time you have to swallow your pride and admit your fault, the next time you come to the realization that my life is a mess because I'm doing it my way and not God's way, realize you are being pruned because you are loved.

And that is evidence that you're abiding. Maybe we need to draw closer to Christ. That's fair. But we're still abiding in Him. Okay, so third thing.

How do I know I'm abiding? Last thing I want you to see, answered prayer. Answered prayer. A fisherman was at sea surrounded by a very ungodly crew.

[23 : 12] And although he had strayed from Christ, he still wasn't quite like the rest of them. That foundation from childhood was still embedded in him. And on this particular trip, they encountered a storm like they'd never seen before.

They thought they were going to sink. I mean, they thought this was it. So when all else had failed, they begged this man to pray. But he said, you know, it's been a long time since I've prayed or even entered a church.

But they continued to insist. So he bowed his head. And here's what he prayed. Oh, Lord, I haven't asked anything of you in 15 years. And if you help us now and bring us safely to land, I promise I won't bother you again for another 15.

While I enjoyed that joke, the sad reality is that so many people see prayer in that way, as just a mechanical escape hatch when life's falling to pieces.

And while our Lord is there in those traumatic moments, praise God for that, his desire is to abide with us every day through prayer. So look back at John 15, 7 with me again.

[24 : 15] Jesus says, if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. So let's break that down because passages like this can often get ignored by more conservative Christians.

And then you have the other extreme where people manipulate these passages, making God into some genie in a bottle who's there to serve my every selfish desire.

So let's talk about a balance of this passage that is healthy, that's accurate. So as we abide or we remain in him through prayer, as the word of God molds my mind and it becomes my worldview,

what happens to my heart?

It starts to beat for Christ. His purposes slowly become mine. His passion to seek and save the lost becomes my greatest desire as I strive to be his hands and his feet.

I start to care about the most vulnerable among us. My selfishness starts to die. And the things of this world that really don't matter, that don't fill me anyways, that everybody's chasing after, those things start to fade.

[25 : 23] And I begin to align myself with his will. I truly begin to abide in him. And our awesome God, full of power and compassion, does what he says.

He answers prayer. And you can know that you're abiding in Christ because you are seeing your prayers answered in his perfect timing according to his perfect will.

And I don't know about you, but I'm thankful he doesn't always answer them the way that I wanted. Now, the well-known theologian, John Piper, he sums up our talk today this way.

He said, Abiding in Christ is hour by hour trusting Jesus to meet all your needs and be all your treasure. So let's zoom back out for a second, okay?

The secret to living is to bear fruit for the kingdom of God. And the secret to fruit bearing is immersing yourself in your relationship with Christ.

[26 : 20] Allowing the Holy Spirit to have all of you, like we just read, walking in step with the Holy Spirit. Staying connected to your life source, Jesus, and walking in the fruits of that life-changing relationship.

So church, it's really that simple. Abide. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, we just thank you so much for your words of hope, your words of life, your words that transform these hearts into the image of Christ.

So we just give you permission today to prune, to do what you need to do so that we can draw near to you, so that we can remain in you, so that we can abide as a follower of Christ.

So Father, help us. Discipline our hearts. Give us that self-control. Teach us how to seek your face every day, how to get in your word, how to bow before you in prayer, how to confess our sins, and just to seek your heart.

And Lord, thank you that we're going to see fruit. We're going to see that fruit in our lives. We're going to see that. We're going to feel the pruning, unfortunately, but we're also going to see answered prayer.

[27 : 41] So Lord, we just give you permission. Have your way in us, among us, through us, and make us more like Jesus. We pray all this in his precious name. Amen.

Hey, I want to give you this invitation this morning. If you are listening and you have some faith questions, maybe you want to talk about what it is to give your life to Jesus, or maybe there's something about the church you have a question about, please reach out.

Here's a couple ways you can do that. Our phone number is 812-663-8488. That's 812-663-8488. You can give us a call Monday through Thursday from 8 to 430.

Also, you could email me at ray at FCCgreensburg.com. Hey, God bless you, and have a great week abiding in Christ.