

John 15:1-17

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Date: 08 February 2026

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[0:00] Let us pray. Father, may the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen.

! Please take a seat. If you close your Bible, please open it up again to John chapter 15. This can be found on page 901. Page 901, John chapter 15.

In this marvelous little gem of a passage, Jesus describes the miracle of the Christian life and its greatest temptation.

The miracle is abiding. Mutual abiding. Abide in me and I and you. And the temptation is trying to do anything in life without abiding.

So I want to ask you a question or invite you to consider something as we begin. Is there anything in your life that you're trying to do apart from abiding in Jesus right now? Is there any area of life? Is there any decision that you're trying to make?

[1:17] Is there any situation that you're trying to navigate? Is there any area of life that you are trying to do apart from abiding in Jesus? And I would simply invite you to consider maybe that's what the Lord wants you to bring to him this morning.

And would you consider with me as well what it may look like for you to leave this place today saying, Jesus, I'm going to do that now with you and abiding in you.

John chapter 15, verse 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.

Verse 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.

now Jesus unpacks the miracle of the Christian life in three steps here in this passage we're going to take it in three steps verses one to six he gives us the big picture here's what the Christian life is about and then in verses seven to eleven he gives us the on the ground practice here's how you live it out and then in verses 12 to 17 he says at the heart of it all this is the great privilege so the big picture the on the ground practice and the great privilege Jesus tells us the big picture in no uncertain terms he says abide in me not just stay with me not just come alongside me not move toward me or do more for me in abide in me somehow he uses the word in 14 times in 11 verses it's this little word in that describes the miracle of the Christian life more than every other word in the English language or Greek for that matter our number one job in life is to abide in Jesus now abide is language that comes from the world of hospitality it means to dwell in someone's house so abide literally means to make your home abide in me means make your home in me take up residence with me be with me share my life with me abide in me apart from me you can do nothing and one of the amazing things about this image is the way in which the big picture that Jesus gives us in these first six verses is that it's not just about the relationship between the vine and the branches but interestingly it's about the father's attitude towards the vine and the branches did you notice that it's about the father's activity toward the vine and the branches it's about the father's commitment to the fruitfulness of the vine and the branches Jesus teaches us that fruitfulness is not something that we just cultivate ourselves it's something that the father is doing to us it's something that the son is doing in us and it's something that the Holy Spirit is doing for us Jesus is the vine his father is the great vintner and we are the branches and so that's where you get this whole language of pruning showing up right is that the father is committed to the fruitfulness of his vine and branches and so he does pruning now there's an element of warning in that when you look at the beginning of verse 2 or even verse 6 there's an element of warning in this pruning but the image of pruning is also a word of care and hope because God prunes not only the dead stuff that's not bearing fruit but notice

how he also prunes the living stuff that is bearing fruit so that it may bear more fruit in other words there's nothing that's not pruned in this image dead stuff is pruned and so is living stuff pruned and this is a painful thing every every kind of April May when I look at my apple trees in my backyard and they're full of all these blossoms in life the last thing I want to do is prune half of those branches because it looks like it's it's it looks like I'm going to cut out life but the reality is if I don't prune those branches come October I'm going to have half the fruitfulness that I would have had if I do this was another painful thing that my wife and I had to discover in

[5:53] Southern California you know during COVID how people got those weird hobbies one of the things my wife did was propagate avocado plants so we had a whole avocado grove in our backyard practically and one of the things with avocado plants is it takes about a year for them to get 18 inches high and they only have about like two little leaves coming off of them and at that point when they get that point you're supposed to cut them off so that they're only a six inch stem and there's no leaves on them it feels like the most counterintuitive thing to do is to prune it and for the next three months there's no signs of life you're literally watering a stem but underneath the ground it's the hidden stuff that's happening the roots are growing wider the roots are growing deeper the roots are growing stronger and preparatory work is being done under the ground so that when it starts budding again when it starts bearing life again the fruit is going to be so much more than if you hadn't chopped it down and so there's this image here of of not just the image of abiding between the vine and the branches but the fact that the father is committed to the fruitfulness of his vine and his branches and that's the big picture it's the big picture commitment of the father to our fruitfulness but the question is what does abiding actually look like and this is our second point is is Jesus goes on in verses 7 to 11 after giving us the big picture he goes on to say what's the on-ground practice of this experience like in in abiding in the Christian life um and there's lots of things that we could say here I mean Jesus doesn't give us everything there's lots of things we could say but I think Jesus suggested at least three things and the first is this abiding means filling your life with the words of Jesus so look at verse 7 with me just the first half if you abide in me and my words abide in you did you notice that couplet they go together we abide in Jesus as his words abide in us we make our home in Jesus as Jesus words make their home in us every day and many times a day the question is whose voice is shaping my life now saint John's I want to be really clear here Jesus did not say read my words although that's essential to the Christian life isn't it Jesus did not say study my words although that's essential to the Christian life Jesus said if my words abide in you which is why the great the great prayer that we say on the second Sunday of Advent every year is that we may read mark learn and inwardly digest the point is not read mark learn thank you Lord I'm off I know lots of stuff the point is I read mark learn so that I can inwardly digest his holy word because the point isn't about just stuffing our head with more knowledge I mean trust me I love theology and doctrine I have a PhD in it but that's not the point the point is about Jesus words spoken by the living Lord Jesus himself taking up residence in our hearts and minds so that we are not the same people before he spoke them into our lives it's about Jesus words living in us Jesus words stirring us to love him and our others Jesus words gripping us with his grace Jesus words challenging us out of sin Jesus words comforting us when we're discouraged Jesus words purifying us when we're unholy and Jesus words connecting us to him again when we feel disconnected Jesus comes into our lives in and through and by means of his living word and so we must fill our lives with the words of Jesus

because that's one of the ways that on the ground we abide in him but there's a second thing that jesus says and it's again in verse seven he says basically abiding means praying boldly in the name of jesus verse seven if you abide in me and my words abide in you here's the second half ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you jesus doubles down in verse 16 scan your eyes to verse 16 you did not choose me but i chose you and i appointed you that you should go bear fruit there's the father's heart again that we would bear fruit and that your fruit should abide that it would be lasting fruit so that whatever you ask in the father in my name he may give it to you and we looked at this two weeks ago and we said really jesus whatever i ask in your name and remember a couple weeks ago we also discussed how in the name of jesus is not just a magical incantation or formula that we just slap onto any prayer or wish dream we have and expect it to come true that's not what's happening here in the name of jesus means in jesus nature and character in the name of jesus means anything and everything that's aligned with jesus ministry and mission in the name of jesus is praying in accord with jesus heart and purposes for the world and so in other words jesus is wanting his disciples to pray big bold prayers in his name and he says this is a part of abiding in me prayers for faithfulness and prayers for fruitfulness prayers for deliverance and prayers for healing prayers for the softening of hard hearts and prayers for the strengthening of faint hearts prayers for evil kingdoms to crumble and prayers for god's kingdom to come and prayers for his purposes to be fulfilled in people's lives and so on and so forth jesus says pray boldly is part of abiding in me now i think on the one hand if we're honest with ourselves we may have preferred that jesus didn't speak so boldly here do you hear what i'm saying because i think then our unanswered prayers wouldn't be so painful if his promise wasn't so bold and yet i think i think we have to ask would we have dared to continue in prayer if he didn't make the promise would we have dared to continue in prayer had jesus not assured us that he would take our prayers so seriously and this is one of the great mysteries of faith is this promise of jesus and how it stretches us and encourages our faith as jesus says ask the father in my name pray boldly in the name of jesus that's part of what it means to abide in me and the third thing that jesus highlights for us is not just filling our lives with the words of jesus and not just praying boldly in the name of jesus but abiding in the love of jesus is the third thing we see here the christian life at its heart is about experiencing the love of christ this is part of why paul prays in ephesians 3 as he does by the way i'm really tempted to do a sermon series in ephesians 3 in ephesians soon it's just so marvelous but ephesians 3 paul says that i pray that you be strengthened inwardly by the holy spirit so you may know what is all the breadth and the height and the width and the depth and you may know the love of christ that surpasses understanding so paul prays that the spirit would work in our lives so that we would know the love of christ because that is the heart of the christian life experiencing the love of christ and you see this when you go to verse 9 for example in our passage

as the father has loved me jesus says so i have loved you abide in my love abide in my love for you verse 10 if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love okay jesus he goes on just as i have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love okay then what is your commandment lord verse 12 this is my commandment that you love one another and note the key phrase as i have loved you so what's going on here what's the logic of what jesus is talking about i think it's i think it's a bit of a cyclical logic i think it goes something like this as i have loved you i think it's something about it's as we experience the love of god the love of christ for us that that then strengthens us and overflows into love for other people and yet as we seek to love other people we realize that we do not love other people the way that jesus loves us we fall far short we come to the end of ourselves and we recognize our inability to love like jesus loves and yet when we recognize that it makes us all more aware all the more aware of just how great jesus love for us really is and it actually increases our appreciation for jesus love and increases our awareness of our need for jesus love and increases our need to depend on jesus love which enables us to grow in love for other people and so you get this cycle of love it's as we grow in our awareness of jesus love we grow in our ability to love and yet it's as we grow in our awareness of our inability to love we grow in our awareness of the greatness of jesus love and they work together and so jesus highlights for us these three on the ground practices of abiding fill our lives with the words of jesus pray boldly in the name of jesus and then abide in the love of jesus and our final thing that i want to talk with you about this morning is the great privilege the great privilege at the heart of abiding actually before we even go on to that i think it's worth asking ourselves what hinders us from abiding right so we're talking about these practices of abiding but what actually hinders us from abiding is probably a good question to ask ourselves and i just want to give you one word maybe two words the phone there's

this great book i think it's by a guy named justin early called the common rule which are like oh gosh what is it called somebody knows the subtitle i think is something like habits for discipleship in an age of distraction or something like that i might be getting that wrong and he describes four daily practices that shape us as people who abide in christ and he describes four weekly practices that shape us as people that abide in christ and three of those eight total practices have to do with the phone so the first is scripture before phone whose voice is the first voice you hear in the morning and is going to set the tone for the day the second practice is turn your phone off for one hour a day fasting from your phone for an hour a day so you can hear the voice of god and be present to others and then the other thing is curate your media consumption on your phone to four hours a week that sounds like a lot but i think most of us probably go over that and and it's really i think it's a it's a profound book because he's saying in order to fill your life with the words of jesus in order to pray boldly to jesus in order to abide in his love you actually need to put your phone in proper perspective so that you have the space to abide okay let's move on let's move on the great what's the great privilege at the heart of all this and this is what jesus is on about in verses 12 to 17 he wants to end this section by giving us what's the great privilege that we experience above all other things and in all other things and through all other things in abiding friendship we experience friendship with jesus verse 15 no longer do i call you friends 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 know if jesus were just to call us servants that would be enough like i think it's david who says i would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my god than to dwell in the palaces of the wicked if he just called us a servant that would be enough to satisfy us forever if he just called us a disciple i think that would be enough too to know the mind of the teacher to get to follow the teacher to get to learn from the teacher and become like the teacher as a disciple wouldn't that be enough and yet jesus calls us friends he chooses us he tells us to be his friends and he tells us what that means is that everything that the father has shared with him all the secrets of the father's heart and the father's desire for the world and the father's love and joy for him he now shares that with his disciples so being friends means you are entrusted with the secrets that jesus has been entrusted with from the father it's a privilege it's almost too much to describe and every great christian throughout the centuries has ultimately come to the conclusion that words fail us that it's something that you can ultimately only experience in its full richness a couple years ago historian sarah williams wrote a book on a woman named josephine butler she was a political activist a social reformer in victorian england she was considered to be by some to be one of the most politically influential women in western history she fought for equal education for women she wanted women to have equal voting rights didn't quite see that in her lifetime yet she wanted women to be protected against sex slavery and a whole bunch of horrible things and she led and launched a massive reform movement in england for the better part of two or three decades she was in the limelight she was the mover and the shaker and yet this book goes on to describe in the last chapter of the book how the last 10 to 20 years of her life she lived in relative obscurity people in her family died her health was ailing and she no longer was in the limelight and you would think that this would cause an identity crisis for her like what is my life worth anymore and what do i have to contribute to society and what is my purpose but not for her it's amazing and she writes letters to friends at the end of her life where she basically notes you know what nothing really important has actually changed for me she actually argues that her experience of her life and who she was meant to be was much more intense in her final years than in her youthful years and the reason is that her primary sense of her identity her primary sense of who she is was wrapped up in being a friend of Jesus not being a cultural mover and shaker she wrote to a friend in the final years of her life and she said now it seems to me that as we get closer to being with God all prayer merges into communion to the holy of holies face to face with Jesus it's as if in these final years the Lord is coming into my room and sitting down beside me and i don't speak to him all at once i wait for him to speak to me share with me what he has received from the Father and oh it is so sweet when all prayer becomes communion with a friend a friend who already knows my heart a friend who already knows all my circumstances and needs and a friend who is so majestic and so powerful and so compassionate no longer do i call you servants says Jesus but i have called you friends and these things i have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen