

John 15:1-8 "At Home with Jesus"

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Jesus, draw us close and teach us to abide. Help us, Holy Spirit.
- We're not very good at this. Thank you, our good Father. Even now for your word, we give you thanks in Jesus' name.
- Amen. Remember, we are with Jesus in the upper room as he gives his final marching orders to his disciples that he's sending out into the world.
- And on that final night before the cross, Jesus gives his followers one final I am statement. A revelation of his unique identity.
- [1 : 0 7] For the first time in all of these series of statements, it's followed by an explanation of someone else's identity. The Father has a role in this image, and we do too.
- It's an image that they were just singing about. It's at the absolute heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.
- It's so crucial. We're going to spend a couple weeks here seeking to understand and apply what Jesus tells us. But for now, we'll pick up Jesus' commissioning words.
- At verse 1 of John 15, we're going to read the first eight verses. I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.
- Every branch of mine 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.
- [2 : 1 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.
- 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. Thus far, God's holy word.
- Perhaps, like me, you're not super familiar with vines, and vine dressers, and branches, and so forth. But Jesus and his friends would have been very familiar around them all the time.
- [3 : 2 4] In fact, at the entrance of the temple in Jerusalem was a golden vine with clusters of grapes the size of a man right there at the front of the temple.
- A vine was an image that God had often used with his people Israel. The Old Testament repeatedly tells us Yahweh planted Israel to be his vine, except that over and over again, Israel does not bear the fruit as it should.

So the image of Israel as the vine of God is one where judgment and exile for their unfruitfulness are in view.

Just one of many examples from the prophet Isaiah. The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. The men of Judah, his pleasant planting.

And so God, the Lord, the vine dresser, he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed. For righteousness, but behold, an outcry. God's the vine dresser, and he doesn't like what he sees in his vineyard, does he?

[4 : 35] Its own character, its relationship with him, its impact on others, it's not what it should be. The first thing Jesus is saying here then is that he is the true vine, the true Israel, the one planted again by the Father, the vine dresser still.

So the vine will be tended and produce the fruit that the Father desires. Jesus will be faithful, obedient, just, and merciful, the righteous king, a light to the nations in a way Israel never was.

That's what he's saying. These are astounding claims, actually, as there was when Jesus explained that he himself was the true temple where God truly dwelled with his people.

So that now as Jesus starts talking about branches, we realize that to be a part of the beloved people tended by the divine vine dresser, we have to be connected to whom?

To Jesus. Grafted in, as it were, to the covenant people of God by being united to and led by the true vine. Do you hear what he's saying about himself?

[5 : 58] Think of what life must be pulsing through the vine to be the source of life for all of God's children. Think of the goodness that he must have to please the perfectly righteous vine dresser.

Think of the power that he must have to hold together all the many and diverse branches of God's family from every tribe and tongue and nation, all held together by him.

Well, the second time he identifies himself as the vine here, Jesus adds something, that we are the branches, that as such we must stay connected to him.

We're going to come back to the heart of that with the word abide and what that means. But notice briefly before we do that, the promise and the warning to the branches, because that's us.

The promise for branches connected to Jesus divine is fruitfulness and life. Notice Jesus talks all through here about bearing fruit. Six times in eight verses, he is sending his disciples in the world to bear fruit.

[7 : 16] There's no question. We're going to talk more next week, but fruit at least for now in terms of personal growth. How hopeful this is for all of us that we can change, that others will grow.

You don't have to give up. There will be much patience, lots of peace, bunches of gentleness, even when we don't feel strong. There's fruit here of powerful prayer and the joy of seeing God answer and work.

Fruit of certainly hear others coming to know and trust Jesus to be grafted into him. This fruit is such a priority that the father himself tends the vineyard and even is willing to prune the fruitful branches, through suffering, through cutbacks.

For what purpose? So that even more fruit will come and so that verse eight, all of this fruit produced actually brings glory to the father.

That's how important it is. It shows him to be such a wise and gracious gardener. Maybe you're feeling some of that pruning right now.

[8 : 35] It hurts. But regardless, even in the painful seasons, there is life and vitality from the vine, the one who is the life himself.

It's coursing into the branches connected to him. So no matter how you feel right now, fruit will come. He promises that. On the other hand, there's a warning.

What's the warning? The warning is that disconnected from Jesus, apart from me, we can do what?

Nothing. Nothing. Not a few small good things every once in a while. Not just some tiny grapes here and there. Nothing. In the Greek, it says nothing.

Nothing. Of lasting value at all. In fact, verse six says, 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.

[9 : 44] The warning is that unfruitfulness also leads to death. Branches are a perfect picture of this, aren't they?

I brought one of the prettiest ones I could find. Have you ever piled up some branches after a storm? You know, you had to collect them from the yard. They may, when you first find them on the ground, have some green leaves on them.

This one did. It's just been in my yard a few days. Picked it up and, huh, there's not a lot green left here. They get dry really fast, don't they?

Not good for a whole lot. Unless you need some dry wood for a fire. Right? Might work for that. When you break them off from the vine, from the trunk, and the fruit dries up, the branches die.

It's not hypothetical here. Judas has just left the room, hasn't he? Cut off from the vine, headed to his own death, we'll see.

[10 : 57] The only one there not clean, pruned, and ready to bear fruit for Jesus. It's a stark distinction between fruitfulness in life, the promise, and unfruitfulness in death, the warning.

We better understand what distinguishes such branches. Because see, as important as fruit bearing is here, Jesus actually never commands us to go bear fruit.

I mean, try telling a random branch to start bearing fruit. How's it gonna do? Come on, maybe this afternoon, if we all just look at it long enough, there will be some green leaves that will sprout up.

Is that what you expect to happen with this branch? You think if we wait here long enough, we'll see some fruit? It lacks the resources, doesn't it? It can't provide the nutrients.

What's the one thing that Jesus does command us so that we will know this life, bear this fruit, glorify God the way that He made us to?

[12 : 07] It's in verse four. The command is, abide in me. It's the only command here in the whole passage.

I checked. Abide. Your Bible may translate it, remain. It means the idea of the word is not just come and visit, but come and stay, even to be at home in, to make your home with Christ.

I want us to linger here and think about abiding from several angles. It's not a word we use a lot, is it? Abide in me.

What would that mean? Being at home with Jesus. See, home, I think this helps us. It's our default setting, isn't it? It orients us.

Home is where we know we're accepted, we're welcomed, perhaps by people, maybe by a pet, by a favorite seat where I'm gonna feel just right.

[13 : 19] so that when we are there with that person or in that place, we can really find rest. Right? That's home. Home is where we draw strength.

Think of the actual nutrients flowing from vine to branch. See, home is what we actually depend on for growth that actually shapes the shape that our lives take.

Think of that vine. Whether we want to admit it or not, that's what's shaping us. That's home. That is where you're abiding. Who or what is home for you?

Where do you rest? Like, when your brain is not on a specific task, where does it go? Where do you draw strength when you know you got a hard day and you don't have enough strength on your own?

Where do you draw it from? What do you find your life shaped by when you're not even aware of it? If you look back at the end of the day, you'd say, what shaped the way I spent my time and invested my energy? Is it really Jesus?

[14 : 30] Jesus? Let's play a game to help you think about that a little bit more. I like games, you know that. This is a great game to play with your grace group, by the way.

I'm telling you, you will all have a blast. When you play Pastor Will's games, he's always got the best games and everybody wants to be a part of the party. Stop laughing at me. Here's the game.

Think of one word. A verb. Not English class, but it needs to be a verb for how you relate to Jesus.

What best describes how you relate with him? I want you to write it down. If you're writing down abide in, you're cheating, you wouldn't have written that yesterday, don't write that word.

I want you to come up with another word. I played this game this week. That's how much fun I have. And I wrote, serve. I serve Jesus.

[15 : 32] That's biblical. It's a good one. There are a lot of good words in the Bible. I'm not trying to play a gotcha game right here. Follow. Learn from.

Worship. Know about. Find hope in Jesus. Maybe extra points if you write love or rest in.

I want to share some of my story with you because God has really been teaching me about abiding in Christ. And even though I know your story will be different from mine, perhaps we can learn together how to abide or maybe how we sometimes miss out on what's so important about it.

I picked serve for my relating to Jesus word because it really fits for me all the way back to childhood. I grew up in the church like many of you.

I loved being in church. As long as I can remember, I wanted to learn about Jesus. I wanted to know things about him. And I wanted to live for Jesus. To serve him.

[16 : 47] Right? That's the way our relationship worked. But when I was a child, I was at home when I was performing and achieving.

Sometimes that was on the baseball field. Sometimes it was in the classroom. Sometimes it was at youth group. But I found rest in being an all-star that others could count on.

I loved it. I drew strength from the praise of people who thought I was smart or nice or whatever. That is what shaped my life.

I wanted that so much. So I visited Jesus pretty often. Right? I needed to know from him how to answer my friends' questions so they would think I was smart and spiritual.

I needed to know from him how he wanted me to perform. I needed to find out from Jesus how to impress the other Jesus people so they'd think I was great. And then I would go out from Jesus to do all of my performing.

[17 : 56] I'd visit him but then I needed to leave because I had stuff to do and people to impress. And what happened was sometimes over here where I was performing I got really worn out performing for Jesus.

Maybe you've felt that before. Other times I actually didn't achieve the standard that others expected of me and I was deeply insecure about that.

In fact sometimes I bore really bad fruit that smelled of rotten pride self-importance of self-indulgence I could make an excuse to do anything I wanted as long as it got me the approval of others.

Because sometimes home was somewhere other than Jesus. Another season of life I went to seminary for three years reading and talking and writing about Jesus every day.

I visited Jesus very often for those three years okay. So I likely know more things about Jesus than many of you in this room. I visited him all the time and I remember hearing people while I was around him saying how important it was for me actually to rest in Jesus as my home.

[19 : 19] But sometimes I thought I had a little better idea wouldn't it be even more godly if I actually just went to class and to church and visited him to learn about him not because I needed it but because other people would need it for their benefit wouldn't that be unselfish and loving of me?

Wouldn't I be so wonderful if that's how I related to Jesus? When you're used to performing being home that makes sense.

I've experienced that same struggle in a more recent season as a husband and a father wanting to love my family and wanting them to love me and wanting to point them to Jesus so it's easy to feel that what Jesus primarily wants in my relationship with him what really matters to him is the example I set for my kids right?

It's the wise counsel that I'm able to give to my wife when she asks for it. It's the consistency of family worship together and hear me those are such good things I'm not criticizing them but do you see how easy it is to lose sight of home?

Home's over here but I've visited often enough I can leave him I think I'll bear such good fruit on my own I've got so many good ideas now Jesus I'm going to exhaust myself with all these good activities and think that that's loving my family because they seem to like being busy too and Jesus tells me to focus on one thing to find rest in one place to draw strength from one relationship and then I actually will love them well it's what he says it is easy to be busy with many good things and be busy missing the best thing we are prone to wander aren't we even when we know where home is we're prone to leave the God we love to think we've seen him enough lately that we're probably okay in our own strength that we can probably do a lot of good things and it will see relationship with Jesus is not first about serving him following his example even teaching about him those are all good verbs if you wrote them down

[21 : 45] I'm not mad at you they're just not first first it's about abiding in him being with Jesus resting at home in Jesus myself or he says none of the rest of our verbs all of the good ones that we think none of them will bear fruit if we are not constantly connected to the vine yes listen remember Jesus is sending all of us out to bear fruit oh we we don't want to be dead branches but he doesn't say because what you need is to bear fruit go be busy go work hard what does he say stay in me rest abide never leave me it's really for me just been the past couple years that God's been showing me that pattern that I have of visiting Jesus and then going to life of coming and going with him that's often kept me from abiding from finding my home with him he's shown me how much I need to be at home with Jesus how in fact most of the real fruit that I've seen in my life like moments of patience with others that offers them actually rest in Jesus that they so need rather than offering them a busy performance treadmill to join me on that kind of fruit has grown from from actually resting in and drawing strength from Jesus myself maybe you too have had seasons of your life where you realize

Jesus is at best someone you've visited while home was really the opinion of others the security of your money the success that you're making of yourself maybe you feel like you're living that way today maybe you feel like that's exactly what you're doing this morning is you're you're visiting Jesus and you've established a quite normal pattern in your life the same way I did you visit Jesus nearly every week that's the pattern a weekly visit and then leaving him to busy yourself with all sorts of good things you're you're very busy all week you even hope along the way that you'll follow some of his commands that you'll serve his kingdom here and there hopefully do some really good stuff right you probably do but if we trust the words of

Jesus here that kind of coming and going pattern of life it is as silly as ridiculous as a branch leaving the vine breaking off to go do some good fruit bearing over here and then coming back to present the fruit to the vine no way y'all have you have you ever done that have you stood there by the side of the road while the branches are all piled up and thought I bet the leaves will be greener next week I bet that's what I wonder if I took this one back and taped it to a tree if there would be green fruit next time I come no that will never work no matter how much we think it makes sense to us Jesus says it won't work have you ever wondered why there's not more revival in 21st century America why are there not more deeply content Christians why are there not more sacrificial marriages why is there not more passionate prayer from a human perspective

I tell you that's because in general we only visit Jesus but we live with the world we're at home with ourselves with whatever makes us feel good and as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine neither can you unless you abide in me unless your home is Jesus but remember if you long for those things there's great reason here for hope where is it the vine the vine is still strong and full of life even if you're not look whoever abides in me and I in him bears much fruit in fact sees miraculous answers to prayer in fact even glorifies

God himself with all this fruit lifelong insecure people connected to Jesus become joyful and hopeful the fearful become courageous and many are drawn into the mutual love of the vines community that is finally offering the life that it was called to offer the nations all the way back since the Garden of Eden that'll happen what's the most amazing home you've ever been in can you think of one maybe you've toured a palace or an old mansion can you imagine you're there with a bunch of tourists and you're just checking out this amazing place can you imagine if you were invited to live there to dine at that grand table behind the ropes to sleep in the luxurious bedroom to spend all day talking with the wonderful home owner that's what

[27 : 58] Jesus is doing for us here he's saying abide in me be at home with me don't just visit come and stay pastor Andrew Murray who would after seeking the king's palace be content to stand in the door just to visit when he is invited to dwell in the king's presence and share with him in all the glory of his royal life oh let us enter in and abide and enjoy to the full all the rich supply his wondrous love hath prepared for us imagine if you were living there 24 7 if all you did was feast at the royal table and constantly think about how well fed you were and discuss with the others sitting there the wonders of the last dish don't you think a deep contentment a real satisfaction in Christ a delight in Jesus would start growing in your heart if that was all you did all day every day beautiful fruit that would be wouldn't it what if instead of that your your default your resting place your your life shaping time what you were most focused on was scrolling through the tour of homes on social media and contemplating all that you're missing out on envy would grow discontent jealousy rotten fruit yes

I mean imagine the difference in your reaction when you hear about an election not going your way or a school shooting or rumored layoffs at your company if you have been at home recently constantly in your own fears in media messages in investment strategies thinking that's what's going to get you through or if when you hit that moment you have been actually at home every day in the promise of Jesus to hold you and never let you go and promises that God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus which version of you bears the fruit of anxiety which version of you the fruit of more peace I suspect today some of you are here investigating

Jesus and it's possible that all this talk of abiding feels like it's setting a really high bar like I will never reach that I mean I'm just interested I'll never be that spiritual never be that committed I'm barely managing life already Will listen it's true that Jesus changes everything it can feel like it's life changing but it's not because it's a really high bar of performance for you Jesus is actually inviting you to abide not demanding that you bear enough fruit I want to make sure you hear that see his father grafts you into him and then the way he works is that he tends the weakest branches especially tenderly if you think that you listen again to South African pastor of the last century

Andrew Murray in his little book abide in Christ if you can remember that difficult title you should read it and I have extras in my office I'll give you one abiding in Christ is just meant for the weak and so beautifully suited to their feebleness it is not the doing of some great thing and does not demand that we first lead a very holy and devoted life no it is simply weakness entrusting itself to a mighty one to be kept the unfaithful one that can be you casting self on one who is altogether trustworthy and true see you you can abide you can abide today because he is still mighty and trustworthy and true the clear command for us in this passage is to abide but the focus of the whole passage is clearly the vine right that's where he starts

I am the vine Jesus says nothing helps weak branches like us abide like delighting in the glorious strength of the vine y'all the one calling you to make your home with him is the one who just last week promised us if anyone loves me he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him he abides with us by his holy spirit that's your home friends the vine this god is the keeper of his people he never slumbers nor sleeps he is the bread of life who fully satisfies eyes if you're afraid things are out of control he is in omnipotent control of everything in the whole world his love for you is an everlasting love that started before you were born and will not stop till after you die it goes on and on he will never stop loving you in fact he came to give his life in your place so that you can have a home with him now and forever he is in

[34 : 07] Andrew Murray's words the infinite Emmanuel I love that take that with you this week okay the infinite Emmanuel God with us without end no limits beyond comprehension God with us is he one worthy of finding rest for your soul then is he capable of providing the strength that you need or are you going to need to go looking somewhere else is he trustworthy to hold you no matter the storm no matter the pain of the pruning no matter the distance that you have broken off and blown away before being grafted back in dear ones he is he is so worthy he is so powerful he is so good he is so trustworthy abide in

Christ you can start that fresh now if you need to just by coming to find rest at the family dinner table being at home right here with him don't start thinking of all the reasons you deserve to be here all the things you've done that will impress him just right where you are without any record to bring you can be home here he invites you to rest he invites you to draw your strength not from yourself but from him he invites you in these next few minutes to have your week shaped by this and not any other priority that's what he's inviting you into right now he did that for his disciples on that night that he spoke these words to them that he would eventually be betrayed he took bread and he broke it and he gave it to them as I ministering in his name give this bread to you and he said take eat this is my body given for you do this in remembrance of me and then after supper he took the cup and he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the

Lord's death until he comes you say I'm home in Jesus and nowhere else there's no place I can go where I'm always welcome always accepted always safe but there's a person that I can live with today and I will always always be at home with him if that's your joy this is not Southwood's table the Presbyterian church's table this is Jesus's table he sets it for you so that if you find your home in him if you are actively abiding in Jesus and drawing your life from him you should come and eat and be strengthened for living with him again this week if you're not there with Jesus today maybe because you have never been there with Jesus or maybe just because you have been but lately you've honestly you're finding home somewhere else then don't come take these elements this morning but please hear the invitation of Jesus to you to come and abide and find life forever with him we would love to talk or pray with you about that this morning we're so glad you're here to celebrate with us where we find life let's pray and we'll do that together

Jesus the one who is the way the truth and the life the one who brings us to the father the one who has sent his spirit to abide in us help us even through very normal bread wine to have something really unusual happen in our hearts that we might actually value someone else more than ourselves that we might find you to be sweeter than anything else that we might find life with you to be where true life is found do that in our hearts by your spirit we ask in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org you