

Learning to Abide
John 15:5
Reading: Psalm 42

Bethany Baptist Church
July 23, 2017 (p.m. service)

Jesus said: *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*

...he who abides in Me and I in hi, he bears much fruit..."

I want to explore some common questions and situations to help us get a better idea of what abiding means and how you can pursue the abiding life.

To begin with, I want to simply tell you **3** words that are help describe *abiding*. We will see these **3 thoughts** come into play in tonight's discussion of abiding, and I'll come back them as we wrap up.

Awareness

Dependence

Priority

Think about those as we consider some of these typical concerns about abiding:

Someone might admit: *"I'm trying hard to be a fruitful Christian but I'm not doing too well!"*

Listen carefully to a few **NT** thoughts:

Phil4:13 – *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Col 1:27 - *Christ in you, the hope of glory.* **What is the common denominator in these great promises? That Christ is in you & He is the key**

So, is it possible that you are looking to yourself and not depending on Him?

Are you trying to be the Vine, producing your own energy and solutions?

Are you able to be the branch, allowing Christ in you to be Lord and Source?

Are you able to be the branch, receiving from Him in everyday life. This receiving requires awareness & faith. *Awareness* that glory comes thru Christ who lives and works in you, *faith* that it is true and He is working!

I'm afraid to "stretch" (take risks) in fruitfulness because I'm pretty ordinary?

So where did Peter and John get their soul-stirring boldness:

Acts 4 – the Jewish leaders recognized that the ordinary men (apostles) had been with Jesus.

Consider the perceived limitations of Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John Mark. Evaluate yourself in light of the power of the Vine, not your own innate giftedness. Remember Who lives in you and gives you life!

Just when I thought I was getting a handle of the Christian walk, my conscience tells me I've carelessly wandered into something questionable. And backing out will be difficult.

Here is another opportunity to *abide!*

Commit yourself to Christ and then *do the right thing*, leaving the results in His hands.

1 Thess 5:23-24 – *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ²⁴ *Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.* Notice v.23: God preserve you w/o blame, because 24: He is faithful.

I want to be an abiding Christian, and I am pretty busy at church. But I am troubled by the fact I never share my faith.

In other words, can you say you are abiding if you won't say anything about Christ?

Its' simply truth: disciple-making is almost the top of the list of Christ's *priorities*.

Do you remember one of the first things Jesus said to His first disciples, *Simon & Andrew & James & John*:

Mark 1 – *"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*

You are a *branch* pulling your life from the Vine. Can you be *drawing life* from Him if you are not also receiving His *priorities*?

I have a lot of ideas I think would help my church and they sure keep my busy...and tired.

Is your *outgo* exceeding your *input*? Guard against *spending* lots of energy on church projects (good works) but no quality time on personally *receiving* from Christ.

Some people work hard at church work but accept a meagre relationship with the *Lord of the church*.

What this becomes is *relying on self* not *abiding in Christ*, and so again **we** try to be the Vine.

Let's just read the familiar **Luke 10:32** story of Martha & Mary (turn w/me).

If you are burned out and wondering why, remember that you can't receive if you don't abide.

My spiritual failures make me want to give up.

It's true that you are called to be faithful, but remember that you are still in the flesh.

Which means that Christian obedience is a growing process.

So review a little *Theology 101* from time to time:

Realize what *progressive sanctification* means and then depend on Christ both for growth, for repentance (when you wander), and for perseverance to keep growing.

Of course, you can also be too confident: *I've finally figured out the perfect quiet time routine!*

I am a big fan of daily devotions (QT)!

But careful: pretty soon, your satisfaction comes from keeping the routine and *not* from living in the Vine. Your 30 minutes in the morning become a spiritual security blanket.

This might become a form of legalism (earning God's favor by doing works).

You are here to worship God (John 4:24), the *spiritual disciplines* are simply an aid to that end.

Rosscup comments on problems like this: *Don't lose focus on the reality that as a Christian you are a branch in the Vine and should not put your trust in some approach to Christ* (i.e. draw your life from Christ, not your self-disciplined routine).

On the other hand: *I'm spiritually dry.*

Does that mean I'm *backslidden* and *not abiding*? Not necessarily at all!

You can be in fellowship with Christ and still *feel* dry. All of us tend to depend *too much* on our feelings!

Maybe today's drought is a trial to refine & harden your faith (by increasing your dependence, your holy desperation).

Speaking of *feelings*, which are wonderful, remember what God really love – *faith!*
So *walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Cor 5:7)

I'm feeling like it's all *passed me by*: ***What happened to the blessing of my glory days?***

Well, perhaps you need to review the notes you just took on *feelings vs. faith!*

And then bring to mind this NT promise (Heb 13:8) - *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*. He hasn't changed; His love for you hasn't either.

And perhaps you are learning *humility & contentment*: He is sovereign over our *experiences and fruitfulness* (some **30**, some **60**, some **100X**)

Keep on *consciously abiding*: Do not make your past (or present) experiences your Vine → your source of satisfaction.

I'm trying to balance abiding with my insane schedule. And when things don't go as planned...it feels like I can't abide.

It's certainly *true*; we live in a *busy society!*

When your *schedule* is interrupted, don't let your *abiding* be interrupted!

More *Theology 101!*

Remember *God's Providence*: He is at work in *everyday events*, including your *interruptions and problems*.

Don't forget your real goal every day is not necessarily the items on your "to-do list," but rather to *abide and bear fruit*. The *branch* doesn't get to decide what days it *rains* and what days the *sun is warm*.

When our best laid plans go *astray*, it *does* create problems, but continue to *depend* on the Vine through the interruption and to *receive* from the Vine regardless of how much you get to *cross off your list*.

I don't like being the branch that I am.

This is a common complaint: *I'd rather be **that** branch over there.* → More public gifts, more fruitful ministry, & *seemingly* way less trials!

Before you try to put your *gift* on EBay, remember that God gives every gift intentionally and yours is vital to the body (your church). **1 Cor 12:14-18.**

Spiritual gifts develop with time and with use. Give yours time, and serve actively in your church.

I've read that no two spiritual gifts are exactly alike because now two people, no two churches, and no two contexts are alike. You need to use the gift Christ gave you. In a similar way, no two branches are just alike, and each is intentionally created and needed.

→ You must be the branch God created you to be in order for you to abide.

Consider further the underlying attitudes that are possible here: particularly a self-focused discontent:

Discontent is a lack of faith in God's wisdom and goodness. → "*Why did you make me like this?*"

Discontent is an evidence of jealousy and coveting. → "*Why did you make **me** like this and **him** like that?*"

Back to the point here: *God made you the branch that you are. To abide, you must **be** that branch.*

Do you remember those three abiding ideas:

Awareness – You need to remind yourself often that you are a *branch* and that you are in an *abiding* relationship, moment by moment, with Christ.

Dependence (~ *faith*); *depending* is almost a theological synonym for *abiding*. Is *depending* on Him, *asking* Him for help & wisdom, *seeking* Him a part of your daily *mindset*.

For example: do you see the subtle *difference* in these **two** statements:

Do the right thing.

Depend on Christ and do the right thing.

Which of these characterizes you?

Priority – If *drawing near to Him* and *loving what He loves* are not very important to you, are you really abiding?

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...pray...