

ABIDE

IPHC Women 2023

INTRODUCTION:

Our progression of faith is positional. Knowing Jesus occurs from a distance.

As we know “about” Jesus, we are brought closer to Him. As we move closer to the source and direction of our faith, we begin to love “on,” trust “in,” and obey Jesus.

Moving closer to Jesus brings blessings to our lives. Of course, blessings do occur on a scale. Paul reminds us that “though we were afar off” (away from Jesus), Christ has brought us close through His blood (Ephesians 2:13). This blessing is available to every person. Life itself is another example of this kind of blessing. However, the closer we move to Jesus and the more connected we are to the life of God’s kingdom, we will experience deeper blessings that only come from our closeness to Him: i.e., contentment, joy, and peace. But blessing is not the goal or the end. Our faith’s end goal is “Abiding”: a deep-rooted one-ness, or connection, with Jesus where His life becomes our life. We decrease so that He can increase. We learn to draw on His strength, not our own. We find power in our weakness and dependence. As we learn to abide in Jesus and draw life from Him, we will find ourselves producing fruit, serving others, and fulfilling the call to spread the Gospel. Any attempt to do these things on our own will lead to burnout, frustration, and emptiness. Imagine, eager to serve Jesus, we try to use our power to bring about the kingdom of God, and we end up farther away from Him. We might even produce our own fruit, but any action on our part that does not start from the strength of Jesus will end up failing us and producing fruit that does not last. “Then, why do we keep doing that?” you ask; because our default setting is to save ourselves. Our broken humanity response is seeking the answer within, finding strength inside, and relying on ourselves. To Abide in Jesus is counter to every fallen human impulse we possess, but abiding is the way. It is maturing. It is deepening. It is becoming less like myself and more like Jesus. Is that what you want in your life? Jesus gives us a powerful illustration of Abiding in John 15.

I. WHO IS THE VINE?

READ ALOUD: Exodus 3:12-15: So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God

on this mountain.” Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’” John 15:1-6: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What does this image of Jesus as the Vine in John 15 mean to you? Why do you think Jesus chose this image to illustrate the spiritual truth of abiding?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): John 15:1 is the last of Jesus’ “I am” statements in John’s Gospel, and it is a powerful image of Jesus as the True Vine. Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus uses the phrase “I am” to capture the attention of His audience, as well as the readers. “I Am” was the name God gave Himself in Exodus at the burning bush. By invoking this language, Jesus is calling Himself by the name of God, establishing His divinity. The “I Am” statements in John are also powerful statements of who Jesus is and how we relate to Him (John 6:35-51; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11-14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1-5). In this last “I Am” statement, Jesus uses a metaphor from the Old Testament. The imagery of Israel as a vineyard is used in Isaiah 5:1-7 and 27:2-6, but Israel, unlike Jesus, was faithless. Even though God, the Vinedresser, did everything correctly, Israel produced bad fruit. Jesus contrasts Himself with Israel by saying He is the True Vine. He is the Messiah: the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and all Old Testament hopes. He is faithful and true and produces good fruit.

So, we see that Jesus is the Vine, God the Father is the vinedresser (or caretaker), and we are the branches. The most dependent part in this picture is the branch. Why? A branch on its own cannot bear fruit. The branch is dependent on the Vine for its life and nourishment. It is also dependent on the caretaker to trim out rotten sections and create the space for healthy growth. We will discuss this in more detail in the next lesson.

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ABIDE?

READ ALOUD: John 15: 7-11: If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear

much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have 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 remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): Talk about a time when you found yourself relying on Christ's strength in a greater way. What did you learn in that season?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Central to our act of abiding is resting in Christ's love (v. 9). This takes us back to one of the first lessons in The Journey: "What Does Jesus Call Me?" "The foundational truth of your life is that you are loved. Before you could do anything, own anything, or offer anything, you were and are loved by God." As the Beloved, we do not carry the burden of earning Christ's love for us. It is a gift freely given. Our understanding of this truth is the first step towards abiding in the Vine.

Think about this image of resting in Christ's love. As the branch, our priority is to stay connected to the Vine for our existence. Resting means letting go of the responsibility of self-management and self-care. We trust in the love of the Vine to take care of us. Abiding is letting go. We must trust outside of ourselves. This is contrary to the call of the world that says to look inward for life.

This calls us back to Unit 3 of The Journey: To Trust Him. When we trust Jesus, we believe He is who He says He is (the divine Son of God) and has done what He says He has done (completed the work of salvation and restoration). His finished work is enough. I am not expected to earn my way into abiding. I believe, and I am connected to the Vine.

An essential part of this abiding life is discovering the meaning of Sabbath living. Learning to abide is to learn to let go of striving: striving for our goals, striving for our dreams, running ourselves worn and ragged. That is not an abundant life, and it is not a healthy life. Sabbath living is learning to savor our life with Jesus, and this extends beyond Sunday. The Sabbath is more than one day a week. We must find the role of the Sabbath in every day. Sabbath is saying, "I have limits. I am insufficient for the task. I need rest." As we learn to reimagine and reorient our lives around that truth, we will learn to abide and rest in Jesus.

III. HOW DO WE ABIDE?

READ ALOUD: John 15:5: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

DISCUSSION (TALK ABOUT IT): What stands between you and the abiding life?

CONTENT (THINK ABOUT IT): Jesus could not have been any clearer about our need for

abiding in Him than His statement in John 15:5: “Without Me, you can do nothing.” Remember back to His teaching on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in Spirit.” We are dependent beings, but there is great hope here. With Jesus, all things are possible. We can live an abiding life. God is faithful to complete the work He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6).

So how do we do this? We cannot abide by trying harder or by force of will. We must learn to depend on the Holy Spirit to help us. In John 14, Jesus promised the disciples that He would send a Comforter after He was gone. Jesus sent the Comforter to remind us of everything He taught and to be the indwelling presence of God in our lives. When we are pursuing a life of abiding in Jesus, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we enter this life and are sustained. Look for more about the role of the Holy Spirit in a later lesson. Abiding in Jesus is not reserved for the most faithful, nor is it optional. John 15 is clear: without abiding, we will not produce the fruit of Christ, nor will we create anything of lasting importance. We might create our own fruit from our own strength, but without the sustaining life of the Vine, this fruit will be empty and our efforts in vain. One writer said, “There may be plenty of activity and yet barrenness. Works are not fruit.”

We must also consider the warning in John 15:2. Every branch that does not bear fruit will be cut off. Remember, to not bear fruit, the branch has cut itself off from the Vine first. But we must not become obsessed with fruit production. We will go through seasons when we may feel empty and barren, but remember, our purpose is not to produce fruit. It is to be connected to the Vine. The Vine will produce the fruit in us. Let us draw nearer to Jesus, and He will see to the fruit. John 15:8 shows us the goal of abiding in Christ. The goal is to bring glory to God. We begin to see the full story of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, come together here. The goal of Scripture, the goal of Christ’s coming, and our life’s purpose is to glorify God. When we are connected to Jesus, obey His words, and submit ourselves to Him, He will produce His fruit in us.

Finally, when we think about abiding, it is important to control what we can control. We cannot produce fruit on our own, but we can stay connected to the Vine. We cannot try harder to be more faithful, but we can control our schedule. We can control our time. Abiding in Jesus is placing Him in the center. When we construct our lives around Him, we are bringing God glory. This is why Bible reading, prayer, worship, and so many other daily disciplines and habits are essential to our health. They are not in themselves life-giving, but they do create the space for us to connect to the Life-giver. Yes, and amen!

