

Abide – John 15:1-12
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I. INTRODUCTION

Good morning, family! Summer has definitely arrived in a big way, hasn't it? Well, I'm glad you took a break from your fun in the sun to join us today. Today we're going to be in the book of John chapter 15, so if you have a Bible, go ahead and turn there now. We're taking a slight detour today from the armor of God, but one that's definitely related to our most recent study on the shield of faith. And just to forewarn you, we're probably going to spend a little more time in the coming weeks on the topic of faith before we move on to the helmet of salvation. So I hope you're not in too much of a hurry! Faith is so central to what God is calling us to in every aspect of our walk with him that I think it deserves a little extra time.

If you'll remember back to my last message, we ended by focusing on God being our perfect shield as we express our faith in him by calling out to him, finding refuge and security in him, and learning to walk by his strength and power. We spent a fair amount of time in the Old Testament looking at a few of the many passages that speak of God as our shield. And what we saw was that he is our shield when we choose to trust in him rather than relying on ourselves...I cry to him and he answers (Psalm 3:3-6)...I call upon him and I am saved (Psalm 18:2-3)...my heart trusts in him and I am helped (Psalm 28:7)...I take refuge in him and he shields me (2 Samuel 22:31-37)...I trust in him and I am blessed (Psalm 84:11-12).

So today we're going to continue in these truths and look at some of Jesus' final words to his disciples as he prepared them for the battle they would soon be facing as they began fulfilling the Great Commission he was giving them: to go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that he had commended them. And how did he end that commission? He said, "**...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**"

Even though he was about to physically ascend to heaven, he assured them that he would still be tangibly with them always.

As you might imagine, Satan was going to be marshalling all of his forces and power to try and stop the fulfillment of this commission from Christ. They were about to step into a spiritual battle of epic proportions. And in order to prepare the disciples for this, Jesus shared some final life-changing words with them, giving them what they needed for this upcoming battle. This intimate time of final preparation with Jesus is recorded for us in John chapters 14 through 17.

As he shares his heart with the 11 remaining disciples in these chapters, he tells them secrets they need to know in order to walk closely with him, rely on his power, and come out victorious over the spiritual forces of darkness. He tells them about the Holy Spirit who would soon dwell within them, comforting them, empowering them, guiding them into truth, and giving them boldness. And if you'll remember, at Jesus ascension, he instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with the Holy Spirit's power. They were NOT to go out in their own strength and try to do it on their own.

In this conversation, Jesus shared another essential truth they needed to understand if they were ever to be able to fulfill the Great Commission and win the battle with the spiritual forces of darkness. And this truth is what I'd like to focus on today, and it has to do with abiding in Christ, and allowing him to abide in us and with us.

Let's begin our study today by reading John chapter 15, verses 1 through 12. Will you stand with me again for the reading of God's Word?

15 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 "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. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast

them into the fire and they are burned. 7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 "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. 11 "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. 12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word. You may be seated.

Now I brought a little assistant with me today to help us picture what the Lord is telling us today in John chapter 15. This beautiful little specimen is the closest I could come to getting a vine like the one talked about in our passage. Unfortunately this vine doesn't bear fruit, so you'll have to use your imagination for that part. But when we think about how a plant works, we know that it needs certain things in order to survive and grow. A plant has roots in soil from where it gets water and nutrients that it needs to grow and produce branches and leaves and fruit. The water and nutrients are drawn in by the roots and flow from there to the branches and leaves. It also needs light to grow.

II. JESUS THE VINE AND THE FATHER THE VINEDRESSER

So as we look at our passage in John, chapter 15, we see that there is a vine and a vinedresser. So what is a vinedresser and what do vinedressers do? Well, a vinedresser is someone who takes care of a vine by watering it, getting rid of bugs, fertilizing it, cutting out dead branches, and keeping it trimmed and healthy. A vinedresser is charged with caring for all aspects of the vine, ensuring that it stays healthy and grows plump, delicious grapes.

And it's pretty clear in our passage that the vine spoken of here is Jesus Christ, while God the Father is the vinedresser. This means that Jesus is the root and the main vine that provides the water and nutrients for the branches of the vine, while the Father is the one who cares for and maintains the whole plant, including the vine and the branches.

Notice also that it says that Jesus is the true vine. This probably means that there are some false vines out there, don't you think? These could be other things that the branches might be trying to use to fill up their lives and provide them what they need to survive. But there's only one true vine where the branches can always get what they need to be healthy and fruitful. Jesus makes this very clear if you look back a chapter to John 14 verse 6: There he says, "***I am the way, and the truth, and that the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.***" Jesus Christ is not just one of many ways to find true life and get what we need to stay healthy and fruitful; he is THE way, THE truth, and THE life. He is the one true vine.

III. WE ARE THE BRANCHES

So who are you in this illustration of the vine? Well according to verse five, you are the branches of the vine. Remember Jesus was talking to his disciples; the men who had left everything to follow him and put their faith in him as their Lord and Savior. We also are among those who have placed our faith in Christ and are following Him, so we too are branches of the vine.

Now we notice some interesting things about the branches. First there are some branches that bear fruit and some that don't. Both of the branches are in Christ and attached to him, but some of them bear fruit and some of them don't. It's also pretty clear that the vinedresser, God the Father, is going to be working very hard to take care of his vine and make sure it produces lots of fruit...making sure the soil is good, that it has plenty of water, and maintaining the health of the branches by dealing with bugs and pruning regularly.

Something else we can surmise is that there's going to be some pain involved not only for those branches that aren't bearing fruit, but also for those that are. Jesus tells us that even those that are already bearing fruit are going to be pruned. And doesn't it seem like pruning might hurt just a little bit? Cutting parts of my branch off with pruning shears sounds kind of painful to me. Have you ever watched a gardener do some serious pruning of an apple tree? When they're done, it looks like they've destroyed the tree, but in short order the tree is more beautiful than ever and produces amazing fruit. And the goal in all the pruning is to produce more fruit and protect the health of the tree as a whole. The pruning has a purpose.

Now when we think about our own lives, one thing we'll notice is that difficult challenges in our lives tend to bring about a lot of growth in our relationship with the Lord and in our dependence on him. And we also know from Scripture that every person will face trouble in this life. Have any of you not had any trouble in your life yet? We live in a fallen world and have an enemy who is always working against us to try to draw us away from God. We can't stop those difficult things from coming into our lives, but we can choose how we respond to them and whether we let them build up our faith or whether we let them create the bitterness and anger and turning from God that Satan is always trying to draw us into.

At my recent pastoral training, one of the instructors spent some time talking about the "issues" in our lives and the fact that some of them are not taken away when we pray about them and ask God for healing or release. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" is a good example in Scripture of this. And when we face the issues and challenges that confront us in our lives, our tendency is to simply pray that God will remove them...and sometimes he does. Other times, however, they remain, and our challenge is to find a way to continue glorifying God and trusting him in the midst of those issues and struggles that God chooses to leave with us...to allow those issues and struggles and weaknesses to turn our eyes to the One whose strength is made perfect in weakness...whose power shines even more brightly through us when we choose to trust in him through those challenges that just don't go away.

I was recently sharing with a few of you how God used intense elbow pain at my accounting job to accomplish his purposes in my life. I prayed for healing, I asked you all to pray for healing, I visited doctor after doctor, I had X-rays and an MRI, I did rehab therapy, I tried a medical procedure, I took 3 months off from accounting work, but still the pain remained...and it remains to this day. It's become manageable, but it hasn't been removed. But through that pain, God accomplished some amazing things in my life and opened my eyes to a call he had on my life that I probably would never have otherwise considered. At the worst point of the pain, he brought me to my knees and to a desperate seeking of him and his will for my life. He freed me from some idols that I had been wasting time and energy on. And he brought me to the point where all I truly wanted was him. My issue wasn't and isn't removed, but through it he has accomplished great

things in my life...he's done some amazing pruning of my branch and even grown some fruit.

I know many of you out there that have some really tough health, financial, family and other struggles that you're facing right now. Maybe you've wondered why God hasn't removed them or healed them. I came across an article on prayer recently that I shared with the elders and deacons called, *Praying Past Our Preferred Outcomes*. In the article, Nancy Guthrie deals with this question and in it she says:

“If we really believe that God is purposeful in suffering, that our suffering is not meaningless or random, shouldn't that affect how we pray about the suffering in our lives and in the lives of others? As it is, we pretty much only know how to pray for suffering to be removed—for there to be healing, relief, restoration. Praying for anything less seems less than compassionate. But shouldn't the purposes for suffering we find in Scripture guide our prayers more than our predetermined positive outcomes?

We could make a very long list of purposes for which God intends to use suffering according to the Scripture. But here are just a few:

- To put God's glory on display ([John 9:3](#))
- To make the life of Jesus evident ([2 Cor. 4:10-11](#))
- To live out genuine faith ([1 Peter 1:6-7](#))
- To cause us to depend on him more fully ([2 Cor. 1:8-9](#))
- To reveal hidden sin or keep us from sin ([2 Cor. 12:7](#))
- To experience that Christ is enough ([2 Cor. 12:9](#))
- To discipline us for holiness ([Hebrews 12:10-11](#))
- To equip us to comfort others ([1 Cor. 1:3](#))
- To make us spiritually mature ([James 1:2-5](#))
- To make us fruitful ([John 15:2](#))
- To shape us into Christ's likeness ([Romans 8:29](#))
- To share in the suffering of Christ ([Philippians 3:10](#))”

She goes on to say that: “Scripture provides us with a vocabulary for expanding our prayers for hurting people far beyond our predetermined positive outcomes. Instead of praying only for relief, we begin to pray that the glory of God's character would be on display in our lives and the lives of

those for whom we are praying. We pray for the joy of discovering that the faith we have given lip service to over a lifetime is the real deal. We ask God to use the difficulty to make us less self-reliant and more God-reliant. Rather than only begging him to remove the suffering in our loved ones' lives, we ask him to make them spiritually fruitful in the midst of suffering he chooses not to remove.”

These are some profound truths we do well to spend some time thinking about. Now please don't take this to mean that we shouldn't pray for healing. God does still heal and perform amazing miracles in our lives, and we can all testify to that. But our challenge is to see a bigger picture and pray also that in the suffering and issues God chooses not to remove, we will be able to continue glorifying him, reflecting him, and learning what he's trying to teach us through it. What we can always know with certainty, is that our Father, the vinedresser, will always be working aggressively on our behalf, using even the most difficult circumstances to accomplish good in our lives, drawing us into deeper dependence on him and making us even more fruitful.

IV. THE BRANCHES NEED THE VINE

So looking back at John 15, now in verse 4, how badly does the branch need the vine to survive the challenges of life and be fruitful? Let's just say one of the branches on this little vine I have here decided he was going to detach and branch out on his own. He thought to himself, "You know I'm tired of being up front here and I'm going to head out on my own. I'm ready for some fun in the sun on this beautiful day and I wish this preacher would just wrap it up and stop talking. I'm outta here! Soil and water are overrated and I don't really need this vine to give me what I need. I'll just get it myself.”

What do you think would happen to this poor little guy by tomorrow if somebody didn't put him in a glass of water and start being his vinedresser? I think he'd be pretty dry and crispy by tomorrow don't you? Not to mention that he doesn't even have any legs to get around on. Well, that's what Jesus is trying to tell us about ourselves in verses four through five. He says, ***Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so 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, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.***

In order for us to stay healthy and bear fruit in the midst of the battle, we must abide in Jesus Christ, the true vine, and allow him to abide in us. If we don't abide in him, we'll be like this little branch and end up all dried out and useless. In that state we will produce NO fruit. Notice that crystal clear statement at the end of verse five: ***apart from me you can do nothing***. Does that mean we can do most things on our own, but occasionally we need a little help from the Lord? No, I think it's pretty clear that we can do NOTHING apart from abiding in Christ and relying on his strength and power within us.

And when we do abide in Christ we don't just produce a few nice fruits... We produce a lot of fruit. Verse five says: ***he bears MUCH fruit***.

V. HOW DO WE ABIDE?

So we've established that we need to abide in Christ and allow him to abide in us, but how do we actually do that? What does it really mean to abide in him? Well, the Greek word for "abide" means to remain or to dwell. It's the idea of being with Christ always, living in him as our constant dwelling place or house.

Imagine yourself stuck outside on a cold winter's night wandering through the woods when you come upon a beautiful warm cozy house with light shining out the windows and a big fire going in the fireplace. Wouldn't you want to go in, get cozy, and stay there by the warm fire? Or would you rather go in for a while, get warmed up, and then go sleep out in a snow bank? Well that gives us a little bit of an idea of the concept of abiding.

In the illustration Jesus is that warm cozy house where we're safe and protected and loved and given all that we need to be fulfilled and productive and happy. Outside of the house is that worldly invitation to finding excitement and fun and pleasure and endless entertainment in anything but God. Outside of the house is the temptation to push God away in bitterness and anger when tragedy strikes or he doesn't remove the difficulties in our lives. Outside of the house are the false vines that hold out empty but tempting promises to make us happy and give us all we ever wanted, while they will actually leave us freezing to death in a snow bank.

In looking further along in John 15 and at other passages in the Bible that talk about abiding, we can learn more specifics about how we actually abide in Christ. Verse seven of John 15 ties in abiding with Christ with his words abiding in us. So that tells us that part of abiding in Christ is knowing and understanding and living by God's Word as given to us in the Bible. As a godly man once said, "There's no substitute for simple satisfaction in the Word of God, in the presence of God."

Then look at verses 9 through 10 and verses 12 through 13: ***Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love... This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you.***

As we keep his commandments, we will abide in his love. And what is his commandment?...That we love one another in the same way that he loves us. We don't abide in Christ by keeping a list of rules, but we abide in him by living and experiencing his love and allowing that love to flow over to other people.

And here we catch a glimpse of just how much Jesus loves us: in the same way that God the Father loves His Son Jesus, Jesus also loves you. Think about that for a moment. As the Father loves his only Son, Jesus Christ, so also Jesus loves you. And his invitation to each of us is to dwell with him, experiencing the deep love and tender care he has for us. His love is so great for us that he was even willing to lay down his own life for us and take the punishment that we deserved. How many other people you know would be willing to do that for you?

Paul prayed that we would be rooted and established in Jesus' love. In other words, that the source of our branch's fruitfulness would be living in, knowing, and understanding how wide and long and high and deep is his personal love for each of us...and that as we dwell and live in and abide in that love, we are filled to all the fullness of God. What a promise!...to be filled up to all the fullness of Almighty God. Wow! That's where I want to be, don't you?

And as we live in this intimate love relationship with Christ, being filled up with his life and power, he then calls each of us to love other people as he has loved us. His commandment is not to carefully keep a list of rules, but rather to simply love God and love others. We are abiding in Christ when we love other people, putting

their needs above our own, caring for them in practical ways, and sharing the good news of Christ with them.

Now this can seem like a really difficult challenge because we're naturally focused on ourselves and our own needs and wants. Our old nature is in a battle with the new heart God has placed inside of us that longs to please him and abide in him. But the good news is that God has not left us to do this in our own strength and power. He has given each of us his Holy Spirit so that we can have the power we need to love God and other people. Remember: ***Apart from me you can do nothing.***

The challenge for each of us is to know God through his Word and to walk in dependence on him by talking with Him always, being grateful to Him for daily blessings, sharing our fears and weaknesses with him, and asking for His strength and power and wisdom as we walk through our days. Abide in the true vine and find your strength in Him. In that process he will share his love and power with you and transform your mind and desires and teach you how to love as he loves.

VI. WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN WE ABIDE?

And what will be the result: Look at verse 7 of John 15: ***If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*** Now there's another amazing promise. The power to do God's will is ready and available to those who abide. This is not a promise to give you all the toys you ever wanted or make you incredibly wealthy. This is not a "genie in a bottle" promise. But it is a promise that when you abide in Christ and he transforms your mind and desires to be in line with His, he will give you the power to accomplish amazing things for his glory...things you would never have been able to do in your own strength and willpower. And he'll bring you great joy and fulfillment in the process: Verse 11: ***these things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.***

VII. CONCLUSION

My friends, there's no better place to be in life than abiding in Christ and allowing him to abide in us...to go into his warm, cozy house and stay there, finding the joy, strength, protection, refuge, and shield we need to sustain us through the worst of snow storms and torrential rains and hurricanes life can bring our way. We abide by living and breathing God's Word, beholding God as we pray and study, knowing and accepting the personal love of Christ, and learning to walk out our lives in love by the Spirit's power.

How are you doing at abiding in Christ, walking and dwelling with him everywhere you go? The call to each of us today and every day is to find our satisfaction and joy and power in Christ. That's how we come to know who God really is, experience his presence and love, and receive the wisdom and power and love we need to navigate through life's challenges and issues. Abide...remain...stay connected...that's how our branches become healthy and fruitful. And together as members of the body of Christ we begin to look like this beautiful vine, connected securely to Jesus Christ and each other, working together to bring glory to him and share the love and life we've experienced with others.

Father, as we close today, I pray that out of your glorious riches you would strengthen each person here right now with power through your Spirit in their inner being so that Christ may make his home in their hearts through faith. And I pray that they, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that they may be filled up to all the fullness of you, God. I pray that you would teach each of us how to abide in Christ every moment of every day, experiencing his personal love for us and finding everything we need to walk through life with joy and glorify you in the midst of whatever challenges we face. Amen!