



The Gospel of John

Session 31: Jesus's Teachings at the Last Supper, Part 3.

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

This week we examine a large portion of Jesus's final pastoral discourse with the disciples. In it, Jesus reminded them of the importance of abiding—or remaining—in Him. In fact, He said believers can accomplish nothing of spiritual value apart from abiding in Him.

Jesus went on to highlight three important relationships in the text: Our relationship with God through Christ, our relationship with other believers, and our relationship with the world.

These relationships are strengthened by two key verses in today's text: Jesus's final "I am" statement in verse 1, and His final command in verse 12. Spend time exploring these two important truths and how they impact the three kinds of relationships we have. Reflect on how abiding in Christ (the Vine) enables us to fulfill His command to love others as He loves us.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 15:1-25

THE MAIN IDEA

Spiritual fruitfulness flows from an abiding connection with Christ.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can you prioritize "remaining" or "abiding" in Christ this week?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 15:1-8 Jesus began this passage with His seventh, and final "I am" statement: "I am the true vine." The vine is a source of nutrients, water, and growth. Followers of Jesus are branches—bearing fruit as we remain connected to the vine. Just as a branch in a vineyard cannot produce grapes if it is cut off from the vine, we cannot bear spiritual fruit if we are disconnected from Christ.

John 15:9-17 On the evening of His arrest, Jesus gave the disciples a final command: "This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you" (v. 12). Jesus is the model of perfect sacrificial love. He gave His life for us so we might freely have life with God, overflowing in sacrificial love and belonging poured out on others.

John 15:18-25 While Jesus prepared for His arrest, He reminded the disciples they would also face opposition in His name. The world would hate them because they hated Christ, and they hated Christ because they hated God. Persecution should not surprise us, but neither should it deter us. Christ is uniquely present with those who suffer in His name—and may use our suffering to draw people to Himself that they might be saved.



START HERE

Ancient viticulture (grape cultivation) and oliviculture (olive growing) required meticulous, ongoing care. Vines were not left to grow freely but pruned aggressively to remove dead and unproductive branches so that energy could be redirected toward fruit-bearing growth. Even in modern vineyards, pruning can look severe, even destructive to the untrained eye, but it is essential for long-term vitality and yield.

Similarly, olive trees require careful cultivation. Without pruning, they become dense and unproductive, diverting nutrients into unnecessary growth rather than fruit. The health of the plant depends not only on its roots, but on the intentional work of the gardener.

In today's lesson, listen for Jesus's instructions on what it means to abide in Him. He gave final instructions to the disciples, and to us, as He prepared for His departure and the birth of His church.

DISCUSS

Why is disciplined growth over time better than fast growth? How could this relate to our personal discipleship process?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Spiritual fruit grows from abiding in Christ.

John 15:1-8: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples."*

Unpacking John 15:1-8

In a vineyard, winter pruning prepares the vines for spring growth, and ultimately, grape production. It involves two distinct kinds of cuts—removing dead, unproductive branches to prevent disease and decay, and cutting back healthy branches, selectively removing shoots of new growth to divert energy and sunlight to the most productive branches. A careful gardener knows the unique qualities of each branch and carefully prunes to increase the harvest. Pruning



away what is dead preserves and protects life—pruning what is healthy disciplines the branches to bear more fruit.

In this seventh and final “*I am*” statement, Jesus introduced Himself as the “*true vine*” and His Father as the gardener, or vinedresser. Throughout the Old Testament, God referred to the Israelites as a vine (Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21), but one that often produced worthless grapes and degenerate branches. God repeatedly warned them that unless they repented, He would remove the vine, and they would be made waste and consumed by their enemies (Isaiah 5:4-7).

In John 15, Jesus declared He is the “*true vine*” of God, nourishing the branches that remain in Him. The worthless vines would be cut off, and in this new covenant, only those who abide in Christ would bear spiritual growth. Those who refuse Christ will be cut off and discarded. The vine of Israel failed to produce the fruit of repentance John the Baptist called for (Matthew 3:2). Jesus did not come to be a “*new*” vine, but the “*true*” one. People would come to God through grace as they trusted in Christ.

In Christ, fruitful branches are not pruned for disposal but for discipline. Cutting the branch back allows the branch to concentrate its energy into a few select buds to encourage the most growth. This type of pruning is not punitive, but purposeful. Many believers can testify to a season of feeling “*cut back*” from ministries, initiatives, or even leadership roles only to find that this kind of pruning made space for something better God was growing in its place. As Hebrews 12:11 says, “*No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*”

“*You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you*” (John 15:3). Despite the way this reads in English, Jesus was not changing the subject but expounding on the idea of pruning. In verse 2, Jesus said that the gardener prunes (*kathairō* in Greek) the fruitful branches so they will produce even more fruit. In verse 3, the word “clean” in Greek is *katharos*, from the same root word. This means not only to clean but also refers to a vine being cleansed by pruning, and the verb tense suggests an ongoing action. In other words, Jesus was saying that the disciples were already being pruned, or cleaned, by the words that He had spoken to them throughout His ministry. He called them to remain in Him so the work that was begun could continue in their lives.

Paul prayed something similar for all believers in Colossians 2:6-7: “*So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude.*” God, the ultimate gardener, begins a pruning process in us at our salvation, and continues that work as we abide in Christ. Thus we have been made clean and will continue to be made clean throughout our lives.

“*Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the*



branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:4-5). Not only is the pruning process about cutting away decay and disease, but also encouraging new growth and fruit. The production of fruit is what demonstrates a vine’s health.

The branch’s job is not to produce fruit on its own—that is impossible. The branch can only produce fruit as it remains (abides) in the vine, receiving the water and nutrients it needs. It is the connection to the vine that allows the branch to flourish—without that connection it would wither up. Jesus said that the one who remains in Him, because of careful pruning, will not just produce some fruit, but much fruit. The fruit of the Spirit will either be born in a person’s life through ongoing connection to Christ, or it will be absent altogether. There is no middle ground.

But abiding is not about effort, it is about connection. Jesus wasn’t calling the disciples to a new discipline—He was calling them to continue in what they had been practicing for the last three years—living life with Him. Jennie Allen, in her 2020 book, *Get Out of Your Head*, said, “*Staying connected to Jesus is not about striving harder; it’s about staying close enough to hear His voice and respond.*” When we abide closely with Christ, we can discern His will and joyfully obey, bearing “*much fruit.*”

“*If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned*” (v. 6). Jesus warned against those who have an appearance of growth but lack fruit. Like the fig tree in Matthew 21:18-22, Jesus rebuked those who have foliage of spirituality but lack production of spiritual fruit. This verse does not imply that true believers can lose their salvation. Rather, this verse is reminiscent of the parable of the sower, and the seed on rocky soil that sprang up quickly but then faded away (Matthew 13:1-23). Eventually, their initial response to the gospel shrivels up and proves an ultimate lack of connection to the true vine. By contrast, the one who abides produces a harvest “*yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*” (Matthew 13:23).

Finally, Jesus told the disciples how to pray in response to their connection with Him. “*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.*” (vv. 7-8). Jesus was not saying that believers can pray for and claim whatever spiritual blessings they may desire. God is not a genie to whom we make demands. Rather, it is in the abiding with Christ that we increasingly want the things God wants. Our prayers become about our fruitfulness in the kingdom more than our own personal desires. Prayers offered from a posture of belonging to Christ and desiring to remain in Him are the requests God loves to answer and that result in long-term fruitfulness.



DISCUSS

- What roles did Jesus assign to Himself, the Father, and the disciples in this passage?
- Where in your life might God be “pruning” you right now, and how do you tend to respond to that process?
- What is one specific way you could intentionally “remain” in Christ this week?

2. Abiding in Christ produces sacrificial love for others.

John 15:9-17 *“As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.*

“I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

“This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

“This is what I command you: Love one another.”

Unpacking John 15:9-17

Olive trees, a staple crop in the Mediterranean world, are known for their resilience, but not for complete independence. Unlike grape vines that generally self-pollinate, olive trees fare better in groves. Farmers know that planting multiple trees together increases the wind’s ability to carry pollen between the trees, significantly increasing their quality as well as their yield.

In other words, a single tree could survive on its own, but it would not flourish in isolation. Fruitfulness is amplified through proximity and connection. Likewise, Jesus reminded the disciples of their need to be in community with and love one another (John 13:34-35). If abiding in Christ is the source of spiritual fruit, love is the visible expression of that life.

The imagery of the olive grove echoes something Jesus previously taught. In His conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, He explained that the Spirit is like the wind—moving freely, unseen, and powerful, bring new life wherever He wills. In the same way, the Holy Spirit works in ways we cannot control, drawing people to Christ and producing fruit (John 3:8).

Just like wind carries the pollen between trees, people participate in the spreading of the gospel through which the Spirit brings new life. Like pollinators moving from place to place, believers play a vital part in encouraging growth, connection, and maturation among believers.



The life of Christ flows into believers individually, but that new life in Christ is expressed corporately. Love becomes evidence of new life. As love moves from person to person, the gospel message is shared, growth in the church continues, and believers are strengthened in Christ collectively.

“As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love” (John 15:9). Jesus used the word *agape* to describe the love between He and the Father—a self-sacrificing, perfected, abiding love. Neither should it surprise us that this love, as opposed to *phileo* love (brotherly love) is what Jesus commands believers sincerely have for one another.

What should surprise and amaze us is not that the Father and Son share in this perfected, self-sacrificing, abiding love for one another, but that Jesus loves us in the same way! In verse four Jesus told the disciples to remain in Him, and in verse nine He told them to remain in His love. Abiding in the love of Christ is the only way we can live out His radical command to love one another as He loved us (v. 12). Love received becomes loves overflowing.

In 1875, British merchant and hymn writer S. Trevor Francis wrote a hymn that beautifully expressed God’s love for us overflowing to our love for others. In the first two stanzas he wrote,

*“Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus—
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free—
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me!
Underneath me, all around me
Is the current of His love—
Leading onward, leading homeward
To His glorious rest above.*

*Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus—
Spread His praise from shore to shore!
Praise His mercy, praise His goodness;
Praise His love forevermore.
How He watcheth o’er His loved ones,
Died to call them all His own;
How for them He intercedeth,
Watcheth o’er them from His throne.”*

Loving Christ means following His commands. *“If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love”* (v. 10). *“I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete”* (v. 11). Jesus’s chief command is to remain in Him, resulting in a life filled with joy.

Jesus didn’t primarily instruct His followers to build churches after His departure, start orphanages, or fight injustice, although those are all noble and worthy callings. Instead, He



commanded them to love one another. *“No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends”* (v. 13). Jesus’s perfect love for them would be demonstrated on the cross, when He would lay down His life for them—His friends. These other noble purposes of the church have naturally developed as Jesus’s followers have loved as He loves them.

“You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father” (vv. 14-15). Friendship with Jesus means we have access to the heart of the Father. Christ invites believers into His mission, and He has revealed to us the Father’s ultimate plan for the world.

It should never cease to amaze us that we are called friends of Jesus. Lisa Harper, in her teaching series on the book of Hebrews said, *“My hope and prayer is that people would recognize the accessibility of Jesus . . . He is not some faraway dictator but is an up-close, empathetic Redeemer who longs to be in a real relationship with us.”* Jesus could have called us servants, and we certainly do want to serve God with our lives. However, this invitation to friendship is an invitation to know Him intimately so we might serve Him faithfully. He has called us into loving friendship, expressed by our modeling that same kind of sacrificial love and relationship to others.

“You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you” (v. 16). We do not belong to God based on anything we bring to the relationship; rather based on His grace. As we remain in Christ, and follow His command to love others, an enduring spiritual harvest remains. As Jesus told the disciples in verse 7, those deeply connected in a loving relationship with Him will pray in accordance with His will—the very kinds of prayers Christ loves to answer.

As if He wanted to make sure the disciples got the point, Jesus restated His point: *“This is what I command you: Love one another”* (v. 17). We simply cannot separate loving God from loving others. They go hand-in-hand. A few short hours before the long, painful journey to the cross, Jesus served the disciples (John 13:10), reminded them of His love for them, and commanded they love one another. In this way, at the hour of His death, Jesus lived out His teaching on the Greatest Commandment, and reminded us to do the same: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands”* (Matthew 22:37-40).

DISCUSS

- How did Jesus define love in this passage?
- In Timothy Keller’s book, *The Meaning of Marriage*, he said, *“The measure of our love for others is the measure of our understanding of Christ’s love for us.”* How do you respond to this statement?



- Which is harder—to fully believe Christ's unconditional love and acceptance for you, or to practice unconditional love and acceptance for others? What would it look like to move toward one or both of those expressions of love this week?

3. Faithfulness to Christ invites opposition from the world.

John 15:18-25: *"If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they don't know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin. The one who hates me also hates my Father. If I had not done the works among them that no one else has done, they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But this happened so that the statement written in their law might be fulfilled: They hated me for no reason."*

Unpacking John 15:18-25

Even the healthiest vineyard faces constant threats: disease, pests, drought, and environmental stress. Gardeners must remain vigilant against fungi like powdery mildew or destructive insects wreaking havoc on a tender harvest.

No matter how cultivated a field, it cannot avoid exposure to a hostile environment. Its health depends on the gardener's careful watch, as well as the deep roots of the vines. These roots, cultivated through careful pruning over years, keep the vines grounded and deliver vital nutrients even in the harshest of conditions.

In this last section, Jesus warned the disciples that the world would hate them because it hated Him first. While the disciples would show their connection with God through their love, others would show hostility toward God through violence toward believers. Jesus made clear that this kind of rejection was not merely personal; it was rooted in the world's rejection of God Himself.

The disciples would soon make up a distinct community—separate from the Jews and separate from those who worshiped pagan gods. He also knew that the hostility and persecution He was about to face at the cross would not end after His death. His crucifixion, and the testimony of the disciples of His resurrection would set off a tsunami of persecution that continues in the world to this day. How would they stand firm?

Jesus had reminded them of His commandment to love God and love others. Any expression of faith that disregards either loving obedience to God or sacrificial love of others is a watered-down gospel that will not stand over time. In Matthew 24:12-13, Jesus warned the disciples about persecution, *"Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold. But the*



one who endures to the end will be saved." The mark of a true disciple is their enduring faith in the face of changing circumstances.

"If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you" (John 15:18-19). When believers stand with Jesus, obediently loving Him and sacrificially love others, the world will notice—and persecute them for it. Obedience to God and others means taking a stand against unrighteousness, calling out injustice, and rejecting sin. These kinds of bold positions incite all manner of hatred and persecution, and believers should be aware of that reality.

Jesus said if the disciples belonged to the world there would be no persecution. It would be their allegiance to Christ over the world that would draw condemnation (vv. 20). This type of opposition took place in the Old Testament with the prophets killed by Jezebel in 1 Kings (1 Kings 18:4,13; 19:10) or the stoning of the prophet Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). The same thing happened to John the Baptist when he spoke out against Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:1-12). If the Old Testament prophets and the forerunner to Christ faced persecution for standing for righteousness in pointing toward a coming Savior, how much more would the world condemn those who proclaimed a Savior crucified, risen, and coming again!

"But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they don't know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin" (vv. 21-22). There are two reasons for the obstinate attitude of the world. The first is ignorance: The world does not have a proper view of God and thus rejects those who make claims about Him. The second is pride: those who stubbornly and willfully choose their sinful ways over God's truth. Jesus said because He had come, performing miracles and teaching truth, those who reject Him are no longer able to make a claim of ignorance. Jesus made a similar claim to the Pharisees in John 9 when he proclaimed, *"If you were blind . . . you wouldn't have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains"* (John 9:41). Those who have received the gospel message are without excuse.

Jesus was not suggesting, as some might argue, that believers should withhold sharing the gospel so that people have a pardon for not coming to faith. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) makes clear we are commanded to tell the entire world about Christ. Neither was He saying people who have not heard the gospel yet are free from the penalty of sin. In Romans 1:18-20, Paul said that the evidence of God is apparent in nature in such a way that all people are without an excuse for acknowledging God. His point was simple: Those who have heard the gospel are required to act upon it.

"The one who hates me also hates my Father. If I had not done the works among them that no one else has done, they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But this happened so that the statement written in their law might be fulfilled: They hated me for no reason" (vv. 23-25). The Pharisees and religious leaders of the day, in their



hatred of Christ, demonstrated their hatred of God as well. They had witnessed Christ's miracles and heard His teaching, yet they rejected the One God sent.

Jesus told the disciples that the world would hate them because they hated Christ (v. 18). Then, He said that the world hated Him because they hated God. A sincere love of God should result in loving Christ, His Son, and loving other believers. Just as hatred is the sign of disbelief, love is the sign of belonging.

As believers, we may face times of persecution for Christ. Friends or family may reject us, people may misunderstand us, and some may even face violence for identifying with Christ. We can have hope in those moments because Jesus experienced them as well.

Jesus understands our struggles and draws near in our suffering. Furthermore, He taught us that God uniquely draws near and blesses those who face persecution in His name. Matthew 5:11-12 says, *"You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* The promise of eternity with Christ fuels our hope and motivates endurance when we suffer in His name.

DISCUSS

- *Why did Jesus say the world would hate His followers?*
- *Where do you feel tension between your faith and the culture around you?*
- *Where do you need to remain faithful to Christ even if it costs you something relationally or socially?*

DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *Which of the three relationships (with Christ, others, or the world) feels most challenging for you right now? Why?*
- *What does "abiding" look like in your daily rhythms?*
- *Where might God be calling you to trust Him more deeply—through pruning, loving, or enduring?*



RESPOND TO THE TEXT

Our faithfulness is evidence of connectedness to the Vine. How can you prioritize remaining in Christ in the coming days and weeks

APPLY

What is one practical step you can take in your prayer life or time in God's Word as you seek to abide in Christ?

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