



Remain in Me

Jesus is the source of life and spiritual growth.

JOHN 15:1-17

Many people have interest in researching their family history. Websites, articles, heirlooms, books, genetic tests, and repeated family stories add to our understanding of our family history. Piecing together our family stories can help us understand why our family does some of the things it does, help us connect as a family, and give us identity. Jesus called on His disciples to connect to Him and His purposes. In doing so, they would find their identity.

**What is one interesting thing you know about your family heritage?
How does that fact impact your family's identity?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 15:1-25

As Jesus continued His discourse after the Passover supper, He taught the disciples the importance of remaining in Him. Using the picture of a grapevine, Jesus employed a common experience from Jewish life. The disciples understood the processes related to raising and harvesting grapes. Clusters of grapes grew on small branches connected to the larger vine. If a branch withered and failed to produce fruit, the gardener removed it, so it did not hinder the rest of the grapevine. He then pruned the vine so new growth would produce even more grapes. With this analogy, Jesus emphasized the necessity for the disciples not only to set up their lives within Him, but also for them to be fruitful spiritually as a result. Doing so glorifies the Father.

One aspect of abiding in Christ involves love for Him and for one another. When believers abide in Christ, His love naturally produces reciprocal love for Him. We demonstrate our love for Him by loving one another. Another characteristic of remaining in Christ is to abide in His word. Genuine love for Jesus can be observed by obedience to His commands. Knowing He loves us, we follow His words because they are good and are intended for our good. Joy results from a loving obedience to Christ. We cannot keep Jesus's commands if we do not know or understand them.

People who abide in Christ should be ready for opposition. Those who reject Jesus not only resist Him, but also hate everyone associated with Him. They do not accept His words or acknowledge His works. Refusing God's love in the gift of His Son, these adversaries turn their animosity toward those who follow Christ. Believers should count themselves blessed to suffer with their Lord so the Father may be glorified in them.

Read John 15:1-17 in your Bible and chart how Jesus is connected to the Father and the disciples to Jesus. How do these connections instill confidence in the disciples?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PRUNED (JOHN 15:1-8)

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² 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.

³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.”

VERSES 1-3

The Old Testament referred to Israel as a vine God planted: “I planted you, a choice vine from the very best seed” (Jer. 2:21). Best known for this analogy in the Old Testament are probably the “songs of the vineyard” in Isaiah 5:1-7 and 27:2-6. These speak of God’s love for His vineyard (Israel) and His judgment when the vineyard fails to produce good fruit. The Isaiah 5 passage is the backdrop for today’s study.

Jesus referred to Himself as the **true vine**, which stood in stark contrast to the fruitlessness of Old Testament Israel. The Father was the **gardener** or the vinedresser. Everything that was produced thus depended on God.

Verse 2 outlines the Father’s role as gardener. Removing unfruitful portions of the vine and pruning it were essential tasks in vineyard husbandry—the entire purpose of the vine is to produce fruit. Left untended, the vine will produce a lot of unfruitful growth, which the Master Gardener prunes. We should be careful not to misinterpret what Jesus was saying. He was not talking about a true believer being cut off from the kingdom. The emphasis is on God performing the work necessary to **produce more fruit**.

The disciples were *clean*, meaning the pruning had already been done in them. This cleaning occurred as they had absorbed what Jesus taught in their years together.

How does the Father prune us so that we can be more fruitful?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare uses of the same word.*

Use a Bible concordance to identify other instances of the use of the word translated “abide” or “remain” (Greek word *meno*) in John’s Gospel (such as John 1:38-39; 8:31; 11:6; 14:10,17). How does the use of this word in these other passages help you gain a clearer understanding of what Jesus was teaching in John 15?

VERSES 4-5

At this point, Jesus introduced the focus of His teaching, the necessity of remaining, or as some translations have it, “abiding,” in Him. The verb *remain* in verse 4 is an imperative and emphasizes being constantly present.

Having identified His role and the Father’s as the vine and the gardener, Jesus clarified the disciples’ role—they were the branches. He also spoke of a reciprocal relationship; He remains in His disciples and His disciples remain in Him. The outcome of this relationship is that the *branch* will *produce fruit*. Apart from that shared connection, disciples *can do nothing*, meaning they can produce no fruit.

The opposite is also true. Not abiding, not remaining in Him, or not staying connected results in a nonproductive vine. Without the

connection and steady supply of nourishment, the vine produces no fruit and eventually withers (v. 6). For believers, this is a reminder of the necessity of regular Bible study, prayer, and discipleship. Without these a follower of Christ cannot thrive spiritually.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Sanctification*

Sanctification is enabling of the believer to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. (See Romans 8:15-18; 1 Corinthians 2:12.)

VERSES 6-8

These three verses contrast those who remain or abide in Christ with those who do not. Those who do not abide, those not connected, face judgment. The external evidence of their being disconnected is fruitlessness. Jesus described the judgment; they are ***thrown aside . . . into the fire*** and ***burned***. Although verse 6 does not say so specifically, these tasks fall to the gardener or vinedresser.

In speaking of the unfruitful, Jesus was not talking about believers who have periods of unfruitfulness in their Christian walk; this can happen to any believer. Instead, Jesus was referring to persons who have never been believers but who still appear among the faithful. These are, as Jesus said in another parable, tares that sprout up alongside the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30). Among the Twelve, Judas would serve as an example of someone with all the outward appearances of being faithful; yet Jesus referred to him as “lost” and “the son of destruction” (John 17:12).

Verse 7 provides the contrast to verse 6. Those who abide in Christ and adhere to His teaching ultimately grow in their Christlikeness. These faithful believers experience answered prayers as their requests are in keeping with God’s will and in accordance with the character of Christ (see 14:14).

Believers are being pruned by God so we can be more fruitful. God’s love for us involves not only producing spiritual fruit as we abide in Christ, but sometimes it also requires cutting away to enhance future growth.

JOY (JOHN 15:9-11)

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

VERSES 9-11

Jesus gave His disciples an example of what abiding or remaining was to look like. He Himself had modeled the ultimate pattern for abiding. To highlight this, Jesus reminded the disciples of His relationship with His Father, a relationship marked by love and obedience.

Remaining in Jesus and His love is lived out by being obedient to what Jesus taught. This obedience is the external evidence of the internal love relationship we have with Christ. Jesus modeled this obedience by keeping His ***Father’s commands***. We don’t obey so He will love us. We obey Him because we love Him who first loved us (1 John 4:19).

The reward and capstone of living in this loving and intimate fellowship with Jesus is joy—His joy. For Jesus to speak of ***my joy*** when He was just hours from the cross may seem illogical. Having joy at such a moment emphasizes that such joy is possible only when one is being obedient to God—not because one is having blissful experiences. The joy Jesus experienced and that He offers is unquenchable, even in the face of pain. Disobedience, though, blocks this joy, as David found out (see Ps. 51:12).

The word ***complete*** carries the idea of being fulfilled and satisfied to the maximum amount. Jesus later prayed His disciples would “have my joy completed in them” (John 17:13). Simon Peter described this as “inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Pet. 1:8). Such joy is the crowing reward for living in loving obedience to Christ.

How does a person’s obedience to Jesus produce joy? What substitutes does the world offer and how do they compare to the joy produced by obedience to Jesus?

LOVE (JOHN 15:12-17)

¹² **“This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you.**

¹³ **No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ 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.**

¹⁶ **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. ¹⁷ This is what I command you: Love one another.”**

VERSE 12

Jesus again turned His focus to the disciples loving one another (13:34). This command, ***love one another***, is stated in verses 12 and 17, thus framing the teaching of Jesus in these verses. The repetition underscored how essential this loving relationship was for the disciples in this moment and how crucial it was going to be as they faced future challenges and persecution. Jesus had modeled for the disciples the type of love they were to have for one another, love characterized by steadfast devotion and self-sacrifice.

VERSES 13-16

Jesus had earlier said no one would take His life from Him; He would lay it down on His own (10:18). The time was near for that to happen. He would soon endure the ultimate expression of self-sacrifice; He would ***lay down his life for his friends***.

Looking to the Old Testament, many uphold David and Jonathan’s relationship as the epitome of friendship. Three times Scripture defines Jonathan’s affection for David: Jonathan “loved him as much as he loved himself” (1 Sam. 18:1,3; 20:17); David referred to Jonathan as “my brother,” although the two were not biologically related (2 Sam. 1:26); and Jonathan risked his life to defend David (1 Sam. 20:24-42).

Concerning His friends, Jesus said they were to love selflessly. John later wrote: “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16).

Second, they were to obey what Jesus commanded. Obedience is the natural outcome of a genuine salvation experience with Christ (John 8:31). His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (10:27).

Third, friends of Jesus receive what He teaches—truth He **heard from His Father**. This knowledge is part of what separates friends from servants. Whereas servants in the first century were obligated to do strictly what they had been told, friends shared a different relationship. Jesus wanted His friends to be “in the know” about what God is like, what He was doing, and what He wanted the disciples to do. This understanding is not available to nonbelievers (see Matt. 13:10-11). The Spirit would continue to teach the disciples after Jesus returned to the Father (John 14:25-26).

Fourth, Jesus’s friends have heard Him call, “Come, follow me.” He has commissioned them to **produce fruit**. His saying **you did not choose me** spotlights the fact that salvation is God’s initiative (Eph. 2:8-9).

Jesus did not make the statement **I chose you** while Judas was still present. Before Judas exited, Jesus had said, “I’m not speaking about all of you; I know those I have chosen” (John 13:18). Now, speaking to the Eleven, Jesus said He had **appointed** them to **go** and produce fruit that would **remain**. To **go** carried the idea of fulfilling the Great Commission—to go into all the world and make disciples. **Remain** is the same Greek verb used in verses 4-7. Christ’s disciples remain in Him, His words remain in them, and they produce fruit that remains. Producing fruit that remains comes because Christ’s followers **ask the Father in His name**. This establishes the vital link between prayer, evangelism, and disciple-making.

VERSE 17

Jesus again repeated His new **command**. The connection that begins with the Father progresses to the Son, continues from the Son to the disciples, and concludes with the disciples being linked to one another. Although we are not related genetically, we are family because of the blood of Jesus.

How does a friendship with Jesus lead to abiding fruit in a person’s life?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are being pruned by God so they can be more fruitful.
- Believers find joy through obedience.
- Believers love others because they are friends of Jesus.

Discuss how the group helps one another remain connected to Jesus. How can the group encourage each other to joyfully obey even in the seasons of pruning? What can be done to improve in this area as a group?

Examine your life for evidence of abiding fruit, joy in obedience, and answered prayer. What keeps you from experiencing these things to a greater level? How can you abide with Jesus to a greater degree?

PRAYER NEEDS

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