

See the Son. Believe for Life.

How to Abide in the Vine – John 15:9-17

Nearly every fall our family will go apple picking at a local orchard. I don't know a lot about plants or about growing things, but I am honestly amazed every time we go that those apple trees take sunlight and water and turn it into apples. If you really stop and think about what's happening, it's pretty wild. The abundance of apples on those branches is shocking. So many apples and all the different varieties, each with a different taste and color.

But here's the thing, in one sense it's amazing that sweet apples are able to grow in abundance on trees, but in another sense, it's the most natural thing in the world. God designed it this way and even in our fallen world, apples tree do what apple trees do. Those who manage the orchard know exactly what to expect and how to produce a huge amount of apples and they would have a different sort of amazement if the trees didn't produce apples as they are supposed to.

Last week we began John 15 and Jesus used the metaphor of a vine and it's branches to describe the relationship we now have with Him. Listen to verse 5. To abide in Him should be the nearly automatic posture that you and I hold in relationship to Christ and fruit should be the normal reality for believers. But it's not quite that easy with us, is it? We battle our sinful nature. We harbor doubts. We live with a constant sense of guilt and shame over our sin, and we view God as frustrated with us and distant from us. It's hard to abide when God is a disconnected Deity somewhere out in space.

In verses 1-8 Jesus has laid out the nature of our relationship and the necessity of abiding in Him for fruit. Now, in verses 9-17, he's going to help us know how to abide. You won't see the language of the vine and branches in these verses, but just understand that these verses are working out how we can abide in the vine. So, in John 15:9-17 we will see **4 Practices to Help Us Abide in the Vine**.

### **1. Settle into Christ's Love (v. 9)**

Look with me at verse 9. You can see the command at the end of this verse, abide in my love. Jesus says that in order to remain in Him and stay connected to Him as verse 4 instructs us to do, we must specifically settle into His love.

It's often hard for us to get a grasp on the love that Christ has for us so He tells us what to consider in order to begin to understand His love for us. Look back at the beginning of verse 9. For us to begin to understand Christ's love for us we need to go back and take a look at the Father's love for the Son.

This love has always existed and was there before anything else came into existence. John 17:24. This is a love that delights and shares all good things. John 5:20. Christ's love for us is like a cascading waterfall that begins in eternity past with the Father and the Son through the Spirit. It's a love that never fails and always seeks what is best. It's perfect and complete. Listen, you do not rightly understand the God of the Bible if you do not understand the reality of this love.

*"But just as there is no vanilla-flavored generic god, so also there is no blank relationship. Relationships can be distant or intimate, explosive or cool, complex or formulaic. What sort of relationship, then, characterizes the persons of the Trinity? If we cast an eye over the verses in the Bible referring to God's activity before creation, we see that intra-trinitarian relations are characterized consistently not by discord, competition, or rivalry, much less by apathy or a functional focus on just 'getting things done,' but by love. This means that we live in a universe in which love, as the Bible understands it, is fundamental and original." - Christopher Watkin*

I think this is one of the greatest challenges that Christians face and that you will face this week, to really believe, deep down in your gut, that the Lord Jesus Christ loves you. We doubt this. We don't quite believe it. It's just too good to be true. But if you were to cut into your Bible this morning it would bleed out Christ's love for you. It's everywhere and it's the life giving, joy producing focus of the whole story. 1 John 4:10-11. Ephesians 5:2. Romans 5:8.

Here's the thing. You can't really abide in Christ and bear good fruit if you don't accept and live in light of this most basic reality of who God is and of Christ's disposition toward you.

*"At the end of the day, if we wish to enter into experiencing genuine communion with God and consent to being transformed, we too will need to set down our armament and trust that the triune God regards us not with indifference or calculation, as if we were a servant, slave, or thing. Rather, against all odds, we are to him one who is beloved. This is the leap of faith we all must take. This is the*

*point at which we blindly jump across the yawning chasm of our fears - our fears of being found naked, inadequate, and even disgusting - in trust that God will have us, in trust that when we yield to God, we might come to experience the joy of knowing and being known. It is easy to imagine being loved after we have proven ourselves to exhibit excellence and purity. But to be loved in all of our states of disgrace? It is the stuff of tears that burn on the edges of our eyes." - Felicia Wu Song*

What's the connection between abiding in Christ's love and bearing fruit? To settle into His love and rest there is what changes your heart. It's what puts sin to death and motivates self-sacrifice. To know you are loved by Christ is what the Spirit aims to convince you of and it's when the fruit of the Spirit begin to grow. Let me ask you, what keeps you from the consistent awareness of God's love for you? Guilt? Shame? A pet sin? Anxiety? Fear? Bring any and all of it to His work on the cross and learn to settle yourself into His love for you.

## **2. Obey His Commands (v. 10)**

Look at verse 10 with me. Once again we see the connection to Jesus' example of human submission to the Father's will. This should form our obedience to Christ. Now, notice how this is phrased, "If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love." This is almost the exact opposite way that Jesus said this in John 14:15.

So, which comes first? Both and. Keep in mind that this whole passage is in the context of a real relationship and not some mechanical and procedural requirement. Does our love motivate our obedience? Yes. Does our obedience keep us aware of Christ's love for us? Yes, and our responsibility to obey is real here.

Jesus is not saying that if you mess up one time you are cut off from God's love for you. But He is saying that the experience and recognition of God's love for you can ebb and flow with your obedience. But this obedience includes our recognition of failure when it happens and our repentance and trust in God's forgiveness of our sins. (1 John 1:9).

John explains this in more depth in 1 John 3:4-10. As we study these chapters and Jesus' words to his disciples on his final night before the crucifixion you cannot

get away from the expectation of obedience. The ongoing relationship of Christ's disciples to Him will involve submission to His Word and obedience to His commands. It's how we abide in the vine.

### **3. Maximize Your Joy (v. 11)**

But obedience to His authority is never meant to be a life of drudgery and dreariness. Look at verse 11. All of the words of Jesus, including the expectation of obedience are meant to produce joy in His disciples. And not just a little bit of joy in a moment or two here and there. It's supposed to be Christ's joy and He wants us to have it to the maximum level.

Let's think about the joy of Christ for a second because the Bible does speak of Jesus as having real and deep joy. In fact, listen to Hebrews 12:1-2. Jesus was enabled to endure suffering because of the joy that was in front of Him. This tells us that joy comes from a proper perspective. And a proper perspective is exactly what Jesus is giving His disciples in these chapters. He's telling them how things are. He's framing their view of reality with His words. And when they can accept Christ's view of reality and live into it, His joy will be in them and their joy will be maximized.

So, what does this mean for you and I? Real, deep joy is not only possible for you but right there for you and I as followers of Christ. To abide in the vine we must maximize our joy through the reshaping of our perspective to match Christ's.

### **4. Love One Another (vv. 12-17)**

Jesus just mentioned in verse 10 that in order to abide in His love we must keep His commandments. Now he spells out a significant one of His commands. He's already mentioned this command in 13:34-35 and He returns to it again. This command bookends verses 12-17, so this tells us that everything in the middle is meant to help us work out this command. How so?

Verses 13-16 tell us two things. They tell us what Christ's love for us looks like and because of that, they provide motivation and direction for our love. You can see right in verse 12 Jesus mentions His love for His disciples again. Verse 13 begins to explain this love to us. Look there.

Of course, we've seen this idea of self-sacrifice done out of love in 13:14-15 when Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. Now listen to 1 John 3:16. There's a clear connection in all of these verses to our own sacrificial love for others reflecting Christ's love for us in His laying down His life for us. Most of us will not be put in a spot where we must actually die for a loved one or a fellow believer. And I don't just want to ask you if you are willing to die for those you love because I suspect the answer is yes.

But in order to properly apply this to our relationships with others, I think we need to ask ourselves if we regularly sacrifice our time, energy, resources, and attention for the good of others. These are the things that make up our lives and we are trained to keep them all for ourselves. To abide in the vine requires careful attention to the ways in which you are living out sacrificial love for others.

Notice that Jesus says in verse 13 that He gives His life for His friends. This also helps us understand Christ's love for us. He calls them friends because of the way in which His relationship with them has changed. Look at verses 14-15. Christ loves us by revealing the character of God to us and the plans of God. His love for us means He brings us in on all of this.

And of course, they did not earn this, which is the point verse 16 makes and it further explains Christ's love for His disciples. Look there. And we have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world in order to produce good fruit.

One author summarized verses 12-17 like this: *"In the flow of thought of verses 12-17, it would appear that the statements Jesus has made - concerning how they are to love as he has loved (v. 12), how he loves (v. 13), how they are his friends (vv. 14-15), and how he chose them to bear fruit (v. 16) - have all been made to free the disciples to love one another."* – Jim Hamilton

Notice that last line. The disciples are now free to love one another because they can be confident in Christ's love for them. Our love for one another flows from our confidence in Christ's love for us. To truly live in a loving and sacrificial way you need to be sure that you rest in Christ's love, that you have a home in heaven, and that this life isn't "all you get."

So, let these practices give you guidance as you seek to abide in the vine. The fruit that is produced in our lives is both amazing by God's grace, and should be a regular and normal occurrence. But the fruit will only happen as we are connected to the vine through His love, our obedience, His Joy, and our sacrificial love for others. Let's Pray.

## Sermon Reflection Questions

11/20/22

- What in your life is the biggest hindrance to bearing fruit?
- How would you describe the love between the Father and the Son? In what ways is Jesus' love for us similar?
- Do you think that many Christians struggle to actually believe God loves them? Is this a struggle for you?
- What is the connection between bearing fruit and believing Christ loves you? In other words, how does a confident belief in Christ's love for you enable fruit?
- How can we reconcile John 14:15 and 15:10?
- How do the words of Christ in these chapters produce joy in the disciples?
- What is the relationship between one's perspective and true joy?
- What are some practical ways you can demonstrate love for others this holiday season?
- What are the most common challenges to our love for others?

- Since the command to love one another is mentioned in verses 12 and 17 as the bookends of this section, how do verses 13-16 relate to the command to love one another as Christ has loved us?
- How do verses 13-16 free us to love one another?