

Stay Connected

Sunday, January 25th, 2026 - 10:00 a.m.

There have been seasons in my life—even in ministry—where following Jesus feels more heavy than life-giving. Not because I stopped believing. Not because I doubted God's goodness. Not because I walked away. But because, slowly and quietly... I started carrying things Jesus never asked me to carry. I started measuring my faith by how consistent I was, how disciplined I was, how useful I was. And before I knew it, my relationship with Jesus started to feel less like walking with a Shepherd and more like trying to meet expectations. Maybe some of you know exactly what I mean. You love Jesus. You believe the gospel. You're trying to live faithfully. But somewhere along the way... faith started to feel heavy. You still pray. You still show up. You still serve. But underneath it all there's this quiet pressure: "Am I doing enough?" "Is God disappointed in me?" "Why does this feel harder than it used to?" We don't usually say that out loud in church. We get dressed up. We sing the songs. We smile. We say we're fine. But inside, many of us are tired. And I think part of the reason is this: we slowly drift from living with Christ to living for Christ in our own strength. We know, theologically, that Jesus saves us by grace. But functionally, we live like: "He saved me... but now it's my job to keep everything together." So faith becomes effort. Obedience becomes pressure. And joy quietly disappears.

When I've been in that place... the verses I want to look at together from John 15 have helped me. Because Jesus does not come to His disciples and say, "Try harder." "Fix yourself." "Be stronger." He says, "Remain in Me." Or, "Abide in Me." His instruction is: "Stay connected to Me." That word "abide" isn't religious language. It's relational language. It means to stay, to dwell, to live from. Jesus is not inviting us into a better "schedule." He is inviting us into a different way of living. A life that is not powered by guilt, or fear, or pressure, but by connection. You'll see, as we read the verses, that there is passion in the words Jesus uses. These words don't come from the beginning of His ministry. Here, His words are not aimed at brand-new believers. The verses we're going to be reading are from hours before the cross. He is speaking to people who already believe, people who already follow Him, people who already love Him. And He is saying: "You can believe in Me... and still live disconnected from Me." "You can follow Me... and still try to live in your own strength." "You can love Me... and still forget where life actually comes from."

So this passage isn't primarily about how to become a Christian. We'll talk about that later on, if that's what you're here for. But these verses are more so about how to live as one. And here's the truth I keep having to relearn: Christian maturity is not about becoming more independent. It is becoming more deeply dependent. That goes against everything in us. In every other area of life, maturity means standing on your own. But spiritually, maturity means realizing, "I cannot do this without Jesus." And not in a defeated way. In a freeing way. Because when Christ becomes your source... the pressure shifts. It's no longer, "What do I have to produce?" It becomes, "What does Christ want to produce through me?" That's what John 15 is about. So here's the big idea I want us to work through this morning: You don't live the Christian life for Christ. You live the Christian life from Christ. And that one shift changes everything.

John 15:1–17 - [1] "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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. [3] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. [4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [5] I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

[6] If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and 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] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. [9] As the Father has loved me, so have I 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, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

[12] "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command you. [15] No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. [16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. [17] These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

When Jesus repeats something this many times, He's not filling space. He's inviting us into a different kind of life. Abide. Abide. Abide. Abide means remain, stay, hold on. That's not pressure. That's an invitation to rest... in the right place.

The Vine, the Gardener, and the Branches

Let's go back to verse 1. Jesus says,

John 15:1 - I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

That sentence alone is packed with meaning. First, Jesus says, "I am the true vine." That word "true" is important. He doesn't just say, "I am a vine," or even, "I am the vine." He says, "I am the true vine." For the Jewish people listening to Him, this would have landed deeply. In the Old Testament, Israel was often described as God's vine. Psalm 80, Isaiah 5, and Jeremiah 2 all use that picture. Israel was meant to be the people through whom God's life and blessing flowed into the world. But again and again, Israel failed. They became religious without being fruitful. They had structure without surrender. They had tradition without transformation. So when Jesus says, "I am the true vine," He is saying that life doesn't flow through a nation anymore, life doesn't flow through a system, life doesn't flow through religion, life flows through Me. In other words, Jesus is not pointing to a "method." He is pointing to Himself. If you want spiritual life, you don't start with rules. You start with relationship.

Then He says, "My Father is the vinedresser," or, "My Father is the gardener." That tells us something important about God. God is not distant, and God is not uninvolved. A gardener is intentional. A gardener is patient. A gardener is always working toward one thing, and that's growth. Which means that what is happening in your life right now is not random. It may be painful. It may be confusing. The rain and wind from the storm might be tossing you around. But the gardener hasn't forgotten about you. God is actively shaping His people.

Later in verse 5 Jesus explicitly says, "You are the branches." That's humbling, because branches don't produce life. They don't generate power. Branches can't decide what kind of fruit they'll bear. What we need to remember is that branches just receive. Everything a branch needs comes from its connection to the vine: its strength, its nourishment, its growth, its fruitfulness. And Jesus is saying, "That's you." We don't power the relationship. Christ does. At home, or at work, the harder you work, the more you usually get. But in our spiritual lives, it doesn't work that way. Our role is not to manufacture spiritual life. Our role is to stay connected to the One who gives it. Many of us live like the Christian life is a partnership. Jesus does His part, and then we do ours. But in this mental image that Jesus is painting, the branch doesn't do "its part" by producing life. The branch does its part by staying connected. Connection is obedience, and dependence is faith.

Then verse 2

John 15:2 - Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

This is where people start to get uncomfortable. Because we like talking about, and thinking about, and dreaming about growth. We like fruit. But we don't like pruning. Pruning feels like loss. It feels like God is taking something away. But pruning is not punishment. Pruning is preparation. The gardener doesn't "prune" dead branches. He prunes the living ones. Pruning is proof that there is life there. God removes things that compete with our growth so that what matters can deepen. Sometimes that's sin. Sometimes it's distraction. Sometimes it's comfort. Sometimes it's self-reliance. Sometimes God prunes things that aren't even bad; they're just in the way. And that can be confusing, because we tend to think, "If God loved me, and He knew how much I enjoy this, He wouldn't take it away." But Jesus says the opposite: "Because He loves you, He shapes you." If God were uninterested in your growth, He would leave you alone. Pruning is not rejection. It's attention.

Then look at verse 3:

John 15:3 - Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

This is huge. Jesus is reminding His disciples, "You are not being pruned to become clean. You are being pruned because you already are." They are not earning acceptance. They are growing from acceptance. We don't obey to become loved. We obey because we are loved. We don't grow to be accepted. We grow because we are accepted. That's what makes abiding possible. If your relationship with God is built on fear, you will never rest. If it is built on grace, you can stay connected even when you fail.

So already we've seen that Jesus is the source of life, the Father is actively shaping us, we are dependent branches, growth involves pruning, and everything is rooted in grace, not performance. Before He ever talks about fruit, He talks about connection. Before He ever talks about obedience, He talks about relationship. And that sets the foundation for everything that comes next.

Abiding is Essential

Now look at verse 4. Jesus says,

John 15:4 - Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

Notice that Jesus does not give this as a suggestion. He gives it as a reality. A branch cannot produce fruit on its own. It doesn't matter how healthy it once was. It doesn't matter how long it was connected. It doesn't matter how good it looks on the outside. If it is not connected, it is not alive. And Jesus is saying the same thing about us spiritually. We do not drift "into" fruitfulness. We drift into independence. We drift into trying to handle things ourselves. We drift into doing life with God as an accessory instead of a source. That's why He says, "Abide in me, and I in you." This is not about visiting Jesus. It's about living with Jesus. Not, "Jesus, I'll check in with You when I need help." But, "Jesus, I need You for everything."

Then verse 5:

John 15:5 - I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

That phrase, "you can do nothing," has got to be one of the most humbling statements Jesus ever made. He doesn't say, "You can do very little," or, "You can do some things," or, "You can do less than you think." He says, "Nothing." Now that doesn't mean we can't be busy. It doesn't mean we can't be productive. It doesn't mean we can't be successful by the world's standards. It means we can do nothing of eternal value, nothing that produces lasting spiritual fruit, nothing that reflects the life of Christ. For most of us, especially those who have been following Christ for a while, we know how to look connected, talk connected, and act connected. But inwardly, we are trying to carry a life that only Christ can supply. And that's exhausting, because we were never meant to be the source. We were never meant to manufacture joy. We were never meant to sustain faith on our own. We were meant to receive life.

A branch does not wake up in the morning and say, "Today I will try harder to produce grapes." It simply stays connected, and then life flows. But that's not what we do. We wake up and say, "Today I need to be more patient." "Today I need to be more loving." "Today I need to be a better Christian." Those aren't bad desires. But if they are disconnected from abiding, they become pressure. Abiding shifts the question. The question is not, "What do I need to produce?" It should be, "Am I staying connected to Christ?" Because connection always comes before fruit.

Now earlier I said this passage isn't primarily about how to become a Christian. It's about how to live as one. For most of us here, this verse is about dependence. It's about how we live as believers. But there may be someone here who hears Jesus say, "Apart from me you can do nothing," and you've realized, "I'm not even connected yet." You can't remain in a vine you've never been joined to. Abiding only makes sense after belonging. Before Jesus is your source, He has to be your Saviour. Christianity doesn't begin with trying harder. It begins with admitting, "I cannot save myself. My sin separates me from God. I need grace, not effort." And the gospel is this: Jesus lived the life we could not live. He died the death we deserved. And He rose again to bring us back to God, so we could be forgiven, so we could be made clean, so we could be connected to Him.

For followers of Christ, this is about dependence. But if this is all brand-new to you, then this is about the invitation. The same Christ who says, "Abide in Me," first said, "Come to Me." And if that's you, after we're done this morning, people will be waiting in Room 105 to pray with you. Go to the welcome desk, and someone will show you how to get there. They just want to pray with you and help you take your next step.

Now for everyone in the room, I want you to answer these questions for yourself: Where am I trying to live the Christian life without Christ? Where have I replaced dependence with discipline? Where have I replaced prayer with pressure? Where have I replaced trust with control? Because Jesus is not calling us to "try harder." He is calling us to stay closer. And the closer we stay, the more His life flows, and the more His life flows through us, the fruit naturally grows.

The Evidence of Abiding

Now look at verses 7 and 8. Jesus says,

John 15:7-8 - [7] If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

This is where Jesus starts to talk about evidence, about what abiding actually looks like when it's real. The problem is that abiding is invisible. You can't see connection. You can't measure dependence. You can't always tell from the outside how deeply someone is walking with Christ. But what you can see is fruit. Fruit is the visible result of an invisible connection.

Here's what we tend to do over time. We start treating fruit like the entrance exam. We think, "If I produce enough, God will accept me," or, "If I'm growing enough, God will stay close." But Jesus flips it. Fruit is not the requirement for connection. Fruit is the result of connection. You don't produce fruit to prove you belong. You produce fruit because you belong. The question isn't, "Am I doing enough?" The question is, "Am I staying connected to Christ?" And that raises the next question: what does fruit actually look like?

Fruit is not church attendance, being busy, or having a good reputation. Fruit is Christ's life becoming visible in your life. It's patience where you used to snap, forgiveness where you used to hold grudges, peace where you used to spiral, gentleness where you used to bulldoze people. Paul calls it the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. That is Christ's life showing up in you. And notice Jesus says,

John 15:8 - ...my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit...

Not some fruit. Not occasional fruit. Much fruit. God is glorified when His life is visible in His people, not when we look impressive, not when we look religious, but when we look like Christ.

Let's go back to verse 7 again:

John 15:7 - If you abide in me, and my words abide in you...

This tells us how abiding actually works. Abiding isn't just a feeling. It's a relationship where His voice stays with you. When His words remain in you, they reshape what you want and they realign what you ask for. That's why Jesus connects abiding with prayer. When your life is shaped by His Word, your prayers change. You stop asking God to bless your plans and start asking God to shape your heart. Prayer becomes less about control and more about communion.

And then Jesus says something wild:

John 15:7b - ...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

That verse is so misunderstood. You can twist that verse to make it say something it's not actually saying. It is not a blank cheque. Prayer is not a way to get God to support your agenda. It's how God reshapes your heart to love His plans. So your prayers stop sounding like, "God, give me what I want," and start sounding like, "God, make me want what You want." That's what real connection produces.

If someone looked at your life over the past year, what would they see growing? Not perfection. Not flawless obedience. But growth. Would they see more patience, more humility, more forgiveness, more trust, more love? Because fruit grows slowly, but it always becomes visible. You usually don't notice it day to day, but over time others do. And if there is no fruit at all, the problem is not effort. The issue is a poor connection. We don't fix fruitlessness by trying harder. We fix fruitlessness by staying closer. Abide first. Fruit follows. That is how God designed spiritual life to work.

The Joy of Abiding

Now let's move to verse 9. Jesus says,

John 15:9 - As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

Let that sink in for a moment. Jesus is saying that the same love the Father has for the Son is the love the Son has for us. Not a weaker love. Not a lesser love. Not a conditional love. The same love. That means abiding is not first about obedience. It's about staying in the reality of being loved. So many of us think, "If I obey better, God will love me more," or, "Once I get my life together, God will be closer." Jesus says the opposite. You don't obey to earn love. You obey because you are loved. You don't work toward love. You live from love.

And then He says in verse 10,

John 10:10 - 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.

This is another verse people can misunderstand. This is not, "Obey, and then I will love you." This is, "Because I love you, you are now able to obey." Obedience is not the price of love. It is the pathway of love. Obedience is how love expresses itself. Think about any healthy relationship. When you love someone, you want to honour them. You want to protect the relationship. You want to live in a way that reflects trust. That's what Jesus is describing. Obedience is not pressure. It comes as the result of an intimate relationship.

Then look at verse 11:

John 15:11 - These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Jesus does not say, "So that your life will be easier," or, "So that everything will work out," or, "So that you'll avoid hardship." He says, "So that my joy may be in you." Not your joy for Him. His joy in you. That means joy is not something you generate. It is something you receive. If your Christian life feels constantly heavy, if it feels controlled by guilt, fear, and exhaustion, that's not what Jesus intends. Because abiding will lead to joy. Not a shallow happiness. Not an emotional high. But a deep, steady confidence that you are held, loved, and secure in Christ. That kind of joy is not based on circumstances. It is based on connection.

Are you recognizing a pattern? Joy flows from knowing, "That I am loved. I am accepted. I am held by Christ. I'm not expected to carry this alone." When you think about your relationship with God, is joy even part of the picture? Or has faith slowly become duty, obligation, pressure, and performance? Because when abiding fades, the joy that comes with it fades away too. And when joy fades, Christianity becomes a religion. We start doing the right things but for the wrong reasons. We obey out of fear instead of love. We serve out of pressure instead of gratitude. We pray out of obligation instead of desire.

Jesus says, "I want my joy in you." And so, if joy is missing, it's not a personality issue. It's a connection issue. Joy doesn't come from trying harder. It comes from staying closer. And that joy becomes the strength that carries us forward.

The Expression of Abiding

In verse 12, Jesus shifts from what abiding does inside of us to what abiding looks like through us.

John 15:12 - This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

This is where abiding stops just being an abstract thought. It stops being about your quiet time. It stops being about your Bible reading plan. It stops being about how spiritual you feel. And it becomes about how you treat people. Because abiding always moves outward. If Christ's life is flowing into you, Christ's love will flow out of you. You cannot remain deeply connected to Jesus and stay unchanged in how you love others.

Look at the standard Jesus sets: "Love one another as I have loved you." Not love when it's convenient. Not love when it's easy. Not even love when they deserve it. Jesus says we must love the way He loves. And how does Christ love?

John 15:13 - Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Lay down their life for their friends. That is sacrificial love. That is love that gives, not just feels. And Jesus is saying, "This is what abiding looks like in real life."

Abiding is not proven by how spiritual you sound. It is proven by how sacrificially you love others. It shows up in how you forgive, in how you listen, in how patient you are, in how you choose humility over being right. Abiding shows up in your marriage, your parenting, your friendships, and your workplace, in the places where love is hardest to live out. This is where Christianity becomes visible.

Then Jesus says in verse 14,

John 15:14 - You are my friends if you do what I command you.

That can sound harsh at first, but listen carefully. Jesus is not saying, "Obey me so that you can be my friend." He is saying, "Because you are my friend, you will care about what I care about." Then in verse 15 He says,

John 15:15 - No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

At work, as an employee, you usually have little to no say in your boss's decisions. You follow instructions, but you don't share the vision. It's their company, you just work for them. Jesus is saying His relationship with us is not like that. He's not our boss. He's our friend. This isn't, "Do what I say because I'm in charge." This is, "Come walk with me, I want you to know my heart." That's what abiding is.

Love is not a separate command. Love is the evidence of connection. If we say we abide in Christ but we are harsh, unforgiving, defensive, impatient, and self-protective, then something is broken in the connection. Because Christ is gentle. Christ is patient. Christ is sacrificial. And Christ is forgiving.

Here is something to think about. Who is hard for you to love right now? Who drains you? Who frustrates you? Who have you quietly written off? That relationship may be the very place where Jesus is inviting you to practice abiding. Because love is not something we generate. It is something that Christ produces. You don't love like Jesus by trying harder. You love like Jesus by staying closer. The more His life flows in you, the more His love flows through you. Abiding shows up in how you treat the people closest to you, and that's how the world knows this is real. Not by our knowledge. Not by our activity. But by our love.

The Identity of Abiding

Jesus says in verse 16,

John 15:16 - You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you

That one sentence takes so much pressure off our shoulders. Because we live like our relationship with God is held together by our consistency, our discipline, and our spiritual performance. But Jesus says the foundation is not us choosing Him. It is Him choosing us.

You are not connected because you were smart enough. You are not connected because you were spiritual enough. You are not connected because you tried hard enough. You are connected because Christ chose you. That means your failures do not surprise Him. Your weaknesses do not scare Him. Abiding is not fragile, because it's not built on you.

Then Jesus continues,

John 15:16b - ...I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...

There's your purpose. You were not chosen just to be forgiven. You were chosen to be fruitful. Your identity comes before your activity. You don't work to become chosen. You work because you are chosen. It is not striving for identity. It is responding to identity.

And that changes how you deal with failure. When you fail—and you will—you don't hide. You return. You reconnect. When you struggle, you don't give up. You reconnect. When you drift, you don't pretend you're still connected. You reconnect.

If you're watching a video on your phone and the wifi cuts out, what do you do? You reconnect and keep watching the video you started. Reconnecting is how you abide long-term. It's not based on willpower or discipline. It flows from confidence that we are chosen, seen, held, and loved by Jesus.

Jesus says in verse 17,

John 15:17 - These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

That's it. After all the imagery, after all the teaching, after all the depth, He circles back to love. Not more information. Not more activity. Not more religion. Love.

That tells us something important. Abiding is not measured by how spiritual you feel. It is measured by how sacrificially you love. Jesus doesn't say, "This is how you'll know you're abiding... you'll feel more emotional," or, "You'll have better theology," or, "You'll be more impressive Christians." He says, "This is how you'll know you're abiding... you will love one another." Because love is the clearest evidence that Christ's life is flowing through you.

You can fake religious activity. You can fake Christian language. You can fake attendance. But you can't fake Christlike love long-term. Not love that is convenient, but love that forgives and stays even when it costs something. That kind of love only comes from connection. And notice how simple Jesus keeps it. He doesn't give them a checklist. He doesn't give them a program. He gives them a relationship that expresses itself through love.

Abide in Me, and love will follow. If love is missing, then abiding is shallow or absent, not because you're a bad person, but because the connection has weakened. Jesus is always calling us back to connection, not condemnation.

Jesus has shown us that life comes from Him alone, that we are completely dependent on Him, that fruit is evidence and not the requirement, that joy flows from living in His love, and that love is the visible proof of abiding. Which means the Christian life is not about trying harder; it is about staying closer.

Where have you been trying to be the vine instead of the branch? Where have you been carrying pressure that Jesus never gave you? Where have you been measuring your faith by your performance instead of resting in His presence?

Because abiding is not complicated. It looks like beginning each day by acknowledging your need for Him, opening His Word and letting it shape your thinking, praying honestly, obeying quickly when He convicts, trusting Him when He prunes, and returning to Him when you drift.

Abiding is not something you master. It's something you return to, every day. And I want to end where Jesus began. He did not say, "Prove yourself to Me." "Impress Me." "Fix yourself first." Jesus said, "Abide in Me." "Remain in Me." "Live with Me."

Stay close. Stay connected. Because when you stay connected to Christ, His life flows through you, His joy grows in you, and His love shows through you.