

Part Three

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# THE ABIDING LIFE







## CHAPTER 7

# The Great 2 for 1

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the important connection between being *filled with the Holy Spirit*, which we explored in the previous chapter, and *abiding in Jesus*, which we will consider in the next two chapters.

To find a significant portion of Jesus' teaching on the abiding, Spirit-filled life, we can look at the end of his ministry on the night before he went to the cross. This Bible passage includes what is commonly known as the Last Supper. The apostle John tells us about it in his gospel, the book of John, in chapters 13 through 17. For the first time, Jesus laid out both how the Holy Spirit was about to be given to his disciples, as well as a new way to live—abiding in him.

As the evening begins, the disciples and Jesus are about to sit down for the Last Supper, and the disciples are talking among themselves. After three years of Jesus teaching them they should be humble, meek, and servant-hearted rather than promoting themselves, what are the disciples doing? Arguing about who among them is the greatest (Luke 22:24–30).

Jesus starts their time together with a new command, “Love one another.”

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34–35 NIV)

He then shows them an example of what love looks like by washing their feet.

Maybe we should give the disciples a little credit. At least they *believed* Jesus was the Messiah sent by God the Father, and they *knew* they were onto something big. That's why they had left everything to follow Jesus—to be part of the next big thing. That's why they were arguing over who was going to be at the top of this movement they believed was about to take off—they were gripped by selfish ambition.

Actually, they were underestimating the impact Jesus was about to have on time, heaven, earth, and eternity. They were still thinking in terms of merely an earthly kingdom. They didn't understand they were part of the biggest events in human history—Jesus going to the cross to die for the sin of humanity, rising from the dead, and sending the Holy Spirit to indwell them. They didn't understand this was to be the birth of the church.

### **The Foreshadowing of the Abiding, Spirit-Filled Life**

It is very likely Jesus didn't tell his guys about the abiding, Spirit-filled life until the last night at dinner because they wouldn't be able to grasp it until they experienced it. And that wouldn't happen for another fifty-three days, when the Holy Spirit came in fullness within them at Pentecost.

But even though the disciples were unable to comprehend what was coming, Jesus gave them a sneak peek at the Last Supper. Previewing the coming of the abiding, Spirit-filled life at Pentecost, Jesus said:

“I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe.” (John 14:29 NIV)

Both then and now, the abiding, Spirit-filled life must be experienced to be believed!

### **Love, Joy, and Peace**

As we examine Jesus' last night before the cross, we'll see abiding in Jesus (remaining in constant fellowship with him) is what *also* brings about the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Chapters 13 through 17 comprise only 25 percent of the book of John. But by my count, 75 percent of the time John uses the words “love,” “joy,” and “peace” in his gospel is within these five chapters. Why are these

chapters so packed with these three words? Because love, joy, and peace are fruit of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus began foreshadowing the abiding, Spirit-filled life to his guys on that last night, he naturally talked about part of its blessing—love, joy, and peace. These fruit of the Spirit are evidence of the presence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Jesus' followers, both then and today.

## **The Great 2 for 1**

In upcoming chapters, we'll explore in greater depth the reality that two very important commands regarding the abiding, Spirit-filled life are wonderfully connected. These two commands are Jesus saying, "Abide in me" (John 15:4), and the apostle Paul instructing us to "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

What is seldom understood is that when we are obedient to the first command to abide, Jesus completes our obedience to the second command to be filled as well. And he does this without any effort on our part! This means we are doubly blessed. The promise of the blessings of both abiding in Jesus and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit flows from simply remaining connected to Jesus. As we abide in Jesus, we are also being filled with the Holy Spirit.

In his book, *The Holy Spirit: Activating God's Power in Your Life*, the late, world-famous, evangelist Billy Graham wrote, "We are being filled as we abide in Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Abiding in Jesus and being filled with the Spirit are like different sides of the same coin. Just as a coin always has both "heads" and "tails," when you abide in Jesus, you always get filled with the Spirit.

Therefore, abiding in Jesus and being filled with the Spirit are linked, essentially forming a two for one spiritual reality available to us at all times. We will call this The Great 2 for 1.

## **Further Evidence of The Great 2 for 1**

Let's take a further look at the relationship between abiding in Jesus and being filled with the Spirit from two perspectives: (1) continuous nature, and (2) active versus passive nature.

*Continuous Nature:* Abiding in Jesus and being filled with the Spirit are similar in that both are continuous. Abiding means remaining in constant fellowship with Jesus. It is not permanent but rather an ongoing obedience.

Likewise, as we have already seen, being filled with the Spirit is not permanent, but also the result of ongoing obedience. So, both abiding in Jesus and being filled with the Spirit are to be maintained through our ongoing, moment-to-moment obedience.

*Active versus Passive Nature:* Abiding in Jesus and being filled with the Spirit are different in that abiding is active while being filled is passive. Abiding is the active part we do. When Jesus says, “*Abide in me,*” he’s instructing us to take action. It’s our choice to engage in ongoing fellowship with Jesus.

On the other hand, being filled with the Spirit is passive. It is done for us by God as a result of our obedience to abide in Jesus. Being filled with the Spirit occurs quietly and effortlessly as we abide in Jesus. As we abide in him, the life of Jesus (the vine) flows into us (the branches) through his Holy Spirit. We will consider this further in the next two chapters on abiding in Jesus.

The command, “Be filled,” gives us a hint of its passive nature by what it does *not* say. It does not say “Fill yourself with the Spirit.” The instructions to be filled with the Spirit imply you are to do something, but you do not directly fill yourself with the Spirit. Instead, you *receive* the filling from God. It is not *accomplished* by you. Similar to how Jesus told the disciples they would *receive* power when they received the Holy Spirit, you, too, *receive* the filling again and again from God, but not of your own independent works.

We know, however, that since we are instructed to be filled, some type of action on our part is required that both precedes and results in our receiving the filling of the Spirit.

Abiding is the continuous action we do, while the filling of the Holy Spirit is the resulting continuous action God does as we abide. As we continuously choose to remain in fellowship with Jesus, we are continuously being filled with the Spirit.

Again, this is The Great 2 for 1.

## Internal Fruit of Abiding—Love, Joy, and Peace

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:9–11)

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Note the internal fruit and blessings of abiding are also the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, and peace. That’s why chapters 13 through 17 of the book of John, where Jesus introduces both abiding in him and the Holy Spirit, are packed full of words such as “love,” “joy,” and “peace.” This again confirms The Great 2 for 1.

As we abide in Jesus, we are being filled with the Spirit, as evidenced by our love, joy, and peace. We’re living Level III lives. We’re in the Abiding Room.

In the next two chapters, we’ll explore what Jesus means when he says, *“Abide in me.”*



### ABIDING TRUTH

The Great 2 for 1:  
As you abide in Jesus,  
you are being filled with the Holy Spirit.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

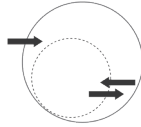
1. How would you describe The Great 2 for 1 in your own words? What evidence is there that these two spiritual truths are linked? Why is this significant?
2. Do you agree if you are not abiding in Jesus, you cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?
3. Having just studied the spiritual realities of walking in the Spirit, how does the connection between the Holy Spirit and abiding in Jesus impact your thinking as you prepare to examine the topic of abiding in Jesus in the next chapter?



## SONG SUGGESTIONS

“In This Room” by We Are Compass Worship

“By Your Side” by Tenth Avenue North

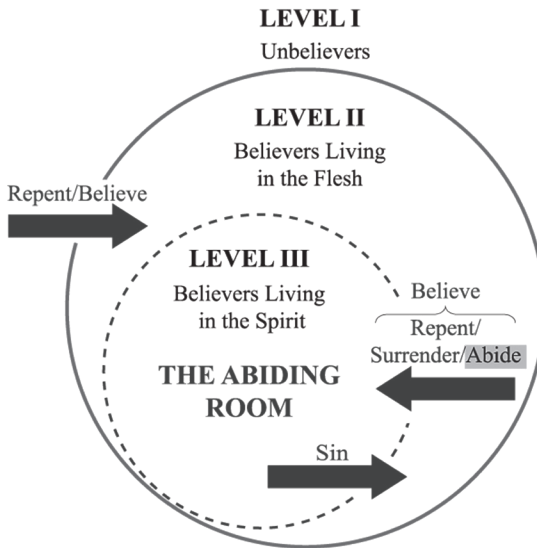






## CHAPTER 8

# The Vine and the Branches



The diagram above is the primary Abiding Room diagram, with one small addition—the word “Abide” is shaded. As we continue to revisit this diagram, the subject of the discussion will be shaded for additional focus.

What does it mean to abide? First, let’s look at what Jesus said about the significance of abiding in him.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 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. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” (John 15:1–8)

## Overview of Abiding

In John 15, Jesus introduces the metaphor of the vine and the branches. His description consists of only seventeen verses, and this word picture of abiding in Jesus is found only in the Gospel of John. Jesus gave it at the very end of his ministry, just before he went to the cross.

Although this passage is relatively short, numerous people have credited Jesus’ brief teaching revolving around the simple words, “Abide in me,” as the source of the joy in their lives and the power to impact the lives of others. So don’t think less of these seventeen verses because of their brevity or simplicity. It’s exciting that so much treasure is found in such a small package! It takes only a minute or two to open, but it takes a lifetime to unpack.

We will divide Jesus’ lesson on abiding into two parts. In this chapter, we’ll look at verses 1–8, where he describes the metaphor of the vine and branches. In chapter 9, we’ll delve into verses 9–17 where he explains the abiding friendship.

If you live most of each day in a close, abiding relationship with Jesus, you know the serenity of having the King of kings, who calls you friend, walking by your side through the uncertainty and challenges of each day. You know the excitement of being an instrument God uses to impact the lives of others in significant ways.

Let’s explore Jesus’ intimate words to his disciples and us and learn

how we can have a deeper friendship with him.

### **Roles—Verses 1 and 5**

The first few verses of John 15 record how Jesus laid out the roles involved in our abiding relationship with him. Notice four key words continue to show up throughout the passage: “abide,” “vine,” “branches,” and “fruit.”

“I am the **true vine**, and my Father is the vinedresser.” (John 15:1)

“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.” (John 15:5)

In verse 1, Jesus tells us he is the vine, God the Father is the gardener or the vinedresser, and we are the branches.

The Father is the caretaker. He cares for those whom he has chosen—you and me. Jesus is the vine. He is the source of life. His life is flowing into us. We are the branches. The branch itself has no life. The vine has the life, and when the branch is attached to the vine, the life of the vine flows into and through the branch, and grapes are produced from the connection.

Note that Jesus did not choose a large tree with strong branches that can grow tall and impressive, independent of a caretaker. To describe our relationship with him, he chose a vine whose branches are scrawny and feeble. The branches of a vine need a great deal of care to reach their peak fruitfulness. When cared for properly, a vineyard can be both beautiful and productive.

On our tenth wedding anniversary, Juli and I traveled to Napa Valley, California. If you’ve ever been there, you know it’s a valley filled with large, lovely vineyards. While a lot of fruit bearing is occurring, there’s very little noise. In effect, Napa Valley is a production facility for wine. But one distinction that makes this wine region stand out from so many other production facilities in the world is that the vineyards are peaceful,

calm, and restful.

In the midst of the peaceful environment, under the watchful eyes of their caretakers, the vines are going about their moment-by-moment purpose of flowing their life into the branches and producing a staggering amount of some of the best grapes in the world. As the vinedressers go about their work, no grunting and groaning is going on among the vines and branches. They are quietly and peacefully bearing much fruit.

While Jesus names the Father, the Son, and us (the branches), he doesn't specifically name the Holy Spirit. But just as the hidden, life-giving sap flows from the vine into the branches, so does the Holy Spirit flow into us as we remain connected to (abide in) Jesus, the vine. The result in both the vineyard and our spiritual lives is bearing fruit.

As the fruit in the vineyard bears witness to the connection of the vine to the branch, so does the fruit in our lives bear witness to Jesus' life flowing into us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the vine is the evidence that the life of the vine is flowing through the branch. As you abide in Jesus and receive the flow of the Spirit into your life, the fruit you bear gives evidence to the life of Jesus in you.

### **Relationship—Verses 4 and 5**

“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. 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.” (John 15:4–5)

Another word for abide is “remain.” In this context, abide means to remain in constant relationship with Jesus. Abiding describes an ongoing, intimate fellowship with Jesus. As the branches, we are to remain in continuous fellowship with our friend, Savior, and source of life—Jesus the vine.

It's interesting to note the word “nothing” at the end of verse 5. In many Bible passages, it is not uncommon for English-language versions of the Bible to translate or interpret words differently. But when you look

at John 15:5 in some of the more commonly used versions of the Bible, here's what you find:

New American Standard version: "apart from me, you can do **nothing.**"

New International Version: "apart from me, you can do **nothing.**"

English Standard Version: "apart from me, you can do **nothing.**"

New King James Version: "for without Me you can do **nothing.**"

Different scholars looked at the meaning of this verse, and in each case chose the word "nothing" to describe what Jesus said we could do on our own. In other words, there's consensus among these scholars that "nothing" is how Jesus described what we can accomplish without him.

As we are about to see, however, even our non-abiding moments can be fruitful. Jesus is making it clear: even when we are not fully engaged with him, the fruit we see in our lives is still a result of his life flowing through us, not a result of our own fleshly efforts.

## Level II—Modest Fruit Bearing

"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.**" (John 15:2)

Our lives display different degrees of fruit bearing, based on our relationship with Jesus. In John 15:2, Jesus describes the fruit we bear when we are abiding in him in three ways: no fruit, fruit, and more fruit. We are not completely useless to God if we are operating in the flesh. He is able to work through anyone at any time if he chooses. It is still possible to be used by God when we are operating in our no-good flesh and living in Level II.

There's no need to become discouraged when your obedience is less than perfect. Thankfully, by his grace, God can use us even when we are

not abiding in Jesus! However, God's plan for you is greater than these modest results described in verse 2. God's plan is for your abiding life to bear *much fruit!*

### Level III—Abundant Fruit Bearing

“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.” (John 15:5)

In verse 5, Jesus lays out a new level of fruit bearing. He says, “Whoever abides in me and I in him ... bears much fruit.” Previously, in verse 2, which describes non-abiding living, Jesus described the lesser fruit bearing as either no fruit, fruit, or more fruit. Now, in this new way of living, as you are abiding in Jesus, he says you will become a bearer of *much* fruit.

As you abide in Jesus, your fruitfulness increases dramatically. You bring greater glory to God by the impact your life has on your world. A different level of relationship results in a greater magnitude of fruit bearing.

When you abide in Jesus, you *will* bear much fruit. You cannot abide in Jesus and not bear *much* fruit. This is another of one of Jesus' exciting conditional promises. He didn't say, “If you abide in me, you *might* bear fruit.” He said, “You *will* bear *much* fruit.”

When describing abiding in him, Jesus explains that this is a new and more fruitful way of living, and it's only experienced by staying connected to him. Only by having intimate fellowship with Jesus do you experience the fullness of him living his life in and through yours. Abiding means intimate fellowship with Jesus. When you're abiding, you're dwelling in a rich relationship with Jesus.

### The Great 2 for 1

In the previous chapter, we said The Great 2 for 1 means that as you abide in Jesus, you're being filled with the Holy Spirit. We can now see the evidence of the abiding, Spirit-filled life is seen in its fruit. The sign you are filled with the Spirit is *internal fruit*—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The sign



you are abiding in Jesus is the *external fruit*—bearing *much fruit*. As you abide, you experience both the internal fruit of the Spirit and the external impact through your life. To summarize: one obedience (abide), two blessings (internal and external fruit). The Great 2 for 1!

As you abide in Jesus, you also get to know him better. And since abiding in Jesus fills you with the Holy Spirit, abiding results in you getting to know the person of the Holy Spirit better as well. Staying connected to Jesus moment-by-moment throughout the day will better acquaint you with the ways of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

### **Experiencing the Desires of Your Heart**

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you **the desires of your heart**. (Psalm 37:4)

When we abide, we are in the Abiding Room. We experience all the blessings of Level III living. This is the abundant life Jesus promised. The answer to the desires of our hearts is to abide in Jesus.

Jesus tells us another blessing of abiding in him is answered prayer.

**“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”** (John 15:7)

Long before God revealed to me how to walk in the Spirit, Juli was living it. In the midst of my harsh, critical behavior, she was filled with gentleness, patience, and kindness. Though I saw her living it daily and heard it taught in our church, I wouldn’t listen. Juli had tried everything to get through to me, and we had been to marriage counselors on multiple occasions. But despite the fact that I refused to change, Juli trusted God and kept praying.

I needed a jolt to my attitude, and God heard Juli’s prayers and gave me that jolt when I saw my young son in hysterics after my dish-smashing incident. God did a miracle in my heart and our marriage.

Jesus said, “For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this **mountain**, ‘**Move** from here to there,’ and

it will **move**, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

While there is no guarantee that it will play out in everyone’s life exactly as it did in ours, Juli and I can testify that the promise of a mountain being moved was true in our marriage. Juli is a faithful abider. She persisted in prayer and God moved our mountain—my harsh and critical spirit—and we give him praise.

What is the desire of your heart to see God do? Jesus says first to abide in him, and then to pray.

## Your Purpose on Earth

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” (John 15:8)

Did you notice when you got saved, you didn’t immediately get promoted to heaven? Why is that? If God is love and wants the best for you, why didn’t you go directly to heaven when you were first saved? As a loving Father, why didn’t he remove you from this troubled, fallen world?

The reason is he still has work for you to do! Work that will bring him glory. In his sovereign wisdom, God has chosen to use ordinary people like us to glorify himself as we live out our lives here on earth. The glory isn’t for us, it’s for God. When Jesus uses the phrase “bear fruit,” he is saying he wants our lives to bless others wherever he places us.

Whatever kind of work he might have you doing right now is intended to bless others for his glory. When people see you living the abiding, Spirit-filled life, God will draw others to you and to Jesus because of what you are doing by his power.

Like the actual physical vineyards, the spiritual work of the branches is done by the vinedresser and the vine. The branches are effortlessly filled with the life of the vine, and the harvest of fruit appears as the result for all to see. Observers look at the feeble branches and know they couldn’t have possibly done it on their own, so it must have been the work of the vinedresser and the vine. When others are impacted, they don’t admire the scrawny branch; they admire the Vinedresser—God.

The apostle Paul described it this way: “For we are his workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). God saved you for a *relationship* with him, but he kept you on earth for *good works*.

Your one-on-one relationship with Jesus is not just so you can have joy and peace *internally* but so you’ll have a great impact *externally* as well. The abiding branch is connected to Jesus on one end, but bearing much fruit on the other—fruit that is for the benefit of others.

Fruit bearing is not meant to be a solo act. The vine has many branches. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus said “you,” he wasn’t just talking to the apostle John, whose writing we read in John 15. He meant “you” as in “all you guys”—all eleven disciples who were in the room. And when we read it today, it is still plural. Jesus is speaking to all of us collectively in the church. Jesus, the vine, intends for us all, as his branches, to be big-time fruit bearers together in our own vineyards—the local church.

Imagine the dynamic impact of a local church filled with people abiding in Jesus and continuously filled with the Holy Spirit. This is what turned the world upside down 2,000 years ago, and it can turn the world upside down again!

When you abide in Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit, God will use your life in exciting and substantial ways you could never have imagined. You’ll gain a greater understanding that the way God made you divinely fits into the way he uses you. Perhaps for the first time, you will have confidence in knowing why you exist!



## ABIDING TRUTH

When you abide in Jesus,  
you will bear much fruit.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. The essence of the vine and the branches is about our dependence on Jesus. How does depending on him make you feel? What might it look like to be more dependent on him than you are now?
2. What are the key differences between someone who is not bearing fruit, someone who is bearing some fruit, and someone who is bearing much fruit?

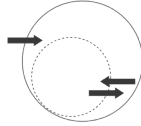


**SONG SUGGESTIONS**

“New Wine” by Hillsong Worship

“Abide With Me” by The Worship Initiative, featuring Bethany  
Barnard and John Marc Kohl

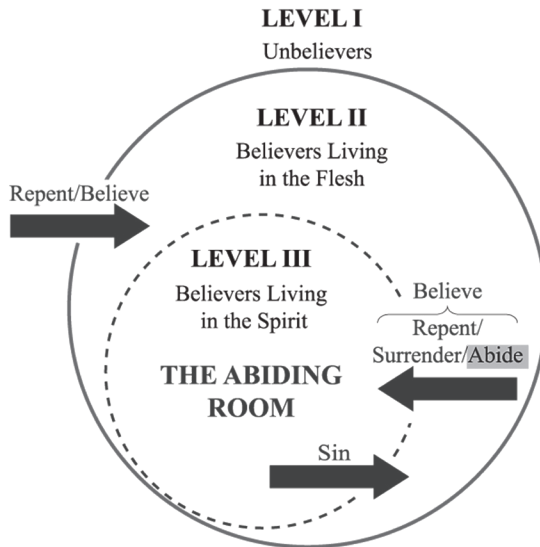
“Tend” by Bethel Music, and Emmy Rose





## CHAPTER 9

# The Abiding Friendship



“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. 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. 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. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.” (John 15:9–17)

In chapter 8, we studied the first eight verses of John 15 in which Jesus illustrated that the bearing of much fruit is fulfilled by our abiding relationship with him. Now in verses 9–17, he describes this relationship in very personal and relational terms. In these verses, Jesus applies the vine and branch metaphor to his abiding friendship with his disciples, which includes us.

Hopefully the term “friendship” describes your existing relationship with Jesus. But regardless of how you may currently describe your relationship with Jesus, in this chapter we’ll learn how you can deepen that relationship.

### Your Friendship with Jesus

In John 15:15, Jesus describes to his disciples (and us) what the abiding friendship looks like: “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.”

When you think of the people you call your close friends, what comes to mind? What do you do with a good friend? You spend time with them. You enjoy each other’s company. You laugh. You tell each other your hopes, dreams, and fears. You enjoy and trust them.

Well, that’s exactly how Jesus thinks of you—*as his friend!* Jesus doesn’t just love you—*he likes you!* That’s why these are the same things Jesus wants to do with you on a daily basis. He not only loves you enough to save you, he enjoys you and longs to be with you every minute of every day.

### The Joy of Abiding

On his last night before the cross, after telling his disciples about abiding for the first time, Jesus said, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11 NIV). He was telling them they would be joyful regardless of their circumstances if they remained in relationship with him.



The same is true for you today. The good news is Jesus has given you the key to your own joy! Even in times of turmoil—health problems, financial issues, a job loss, others’ antagonism toward your faith—we can still have joy. Joy is spiritual because it comes from God. God and his Holy Spirit never change, so you can be joyful regardless of your situation. Unlike happiness, which is dependent on the unpredictable circumstances of the world, joy is available at any time to you when you’re abiding in Jesus.

## **What Does Abiding Look Like in Your Life?**

**Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27 NIV)**

What is abiding? Earlier, I talked about how calm, quiet, and peaceful the vineyards of Napa Valley are. Abiding is a restful, obedient activity. It’s not lazy or inactive. It is peace in the midst of obediently carrying out your work. Abiding in Jesus is letting Christ live out his life in and through you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Abiding means you’re in tune with the amazing reality that Jesus is right beside you. Regardless of the circumstances, you are with Jesus. He’s always with you in all things. He’s right here, right now. Having Jesus alongside you in an abiding relationship makes any of life’s experiences better.

Abiding means staying in harmony, in fellowship, and in union with Jesus. As you walk through your day with him, the truths you read in the Bible about him are no longer just words on a page; they come alive through your life. For instance, the patience of Jesus you read about becomes reality in your life as Jesus lives out his patience through you. The peace of Jesus is lived out in your heart and mind, even in the surprises and setbacks of the day. Just as Jesus was never truly alone because he and the Father were one, you, too, are never alone because you are one with him.

It’s often easy to turn our faith into an expectation of performance. But practicing the presence of Jesus as we go through our day turns what can become religion into a loving relationship with him. It’s not a checklist to constrain you or a restrictive set of rules to follow, but rather a restful relationship that actually frees you from slavery to them.

You can confidently rest on Jesus' promises in each area of your life as you acknowledge and understand he is always available to you, and you make yourself available to him. When you mess up or drift away from him, don't ignore it or agonize over it. Quickly acknowledge it (that is called confession), ask him for help, then simply and confidently move on.

Acknowledging our mistakes with Jesus is much easier than addressing our mistakes with other people. Since we often have trouble getting over our mistakes, we incorrectly assume it's the same with him. But Jesus is loving, caring, kind, and gentle. He loves you and is eager to forgive, instruct, reconnect, and move forward with you.

Be reassured by this promise God made to Israel, which is also a promise to us: "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12). Should you stumble, Jesus' grace, mercy, love, kindness, and gentleness that you experienced when you first began a relationship with him is always available to you. Go to him quickly and be refreshed. Jesus loves you.

And let's say it again—*Jesus likes you!* He calls you *friend!* There is nothing he wants more than to hang out with you. That's why he made you his—to walk alongside you all day, every day. He wants to talk about what you are going through today and guide you through it.

Over the years, when Juli has seen my driven nature take over and found me having trouble slowing down and relaxing, she's often reminded me, "Resting *is* accomplishing something." Perhaps we can borrow from Juli's wisdom, apply it to the counterintuitive nature of abiding, and say, "Simply abiding *is* accomplishing something."

I'm still learning to not approach Jesus just to receive something from him. Instead, we are to go to Jesus to just enjoy Jesus. Just resting in Jesus. Just Jesus. Take heart in knowing there is nothing better than simply resting in him. Nothing we accomplish in our feeble strength compares to simply enjoying staying connected to him.

God wants us to become receivers, not achievers. The trying and the striving in our limited strength, even if the intentions are good, is not God's way. He wants us to be fruit bearers, not fruit producers or

achievers. Jesus didn't say, "I want you to go out and *produce* fruit." He said, "*Bear* much fruit."

As we discussed in the previous chapter, bearing much fruit is a certainty as we abide in Jesus. Remaining connected to him is the first and foremost thing. Abiding not only takes priority ahead of even doing the ministry God has called us to, but is actually how Jesus intends for ministry itself to be done. By our staying joined to him, Jesus actually does the ministry in and through us, rather than our attempting to do it through our own self-effort.

### **Obedience Maintains the Abiding Connection**

Once begun, how do you keep abiding? Jesus explained it to his disciples this way: "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**" (John 15:10). And earlier in the evening he had said similarly, "If you **love me**, you will **keep my commandments**" (John 14:15).

In these verses, Jesus says the way you *continue* to abide is by obeying what God instructs you to do through his Word and his Spirit. These words are firm instruction regarding your friendship with Jesus, describing how to *maintain* the special, intimate, abiding friendship with him. Jesus is explaining that you can continue enjoying the fullness of your moment-by-moment abiding relationship with him through moment-by-moment obedience.

How do you know if you are abiding in Jesus? Since abiding in Jesus causes you to be filled with the Holy Spirit, the confirmation that you are abiding is the *same* as the confirmation that you are filled with the Spirit—do a fruit inspection. If you sense the fruit of the Spirit at work in you—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—then you know you are abiding in Jesus. At any moment, a fruit inspection can reveal whether you are *a part of the vine*, or *apart from the vine*.

But regardless of where you are at any given moment, remember Jesus is always waiting and available to regain full connection and fellowship with you. He loves you, enjoys being with you, and is always lovingly waiting to be asked to guide you.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” (Revelation 3:20 NIV)

### **A Biblical Example: Mary the Abider of Bethany**

The Bible has an encouraging story for all of us ordinary people. Some people might say, “Well, you know, I’ve never had lots of blessings, I’m not sure I’m that kind of person.” Let’s look at someone in the Bible who was an *ordinary, common person* who had a *wonderful, intimate friendship* with Jesus and was commended by him for it. Her name was Mary of Bethany. I like to call her, Mary the Abider of Bethany.

Mary of Bethany was the sister of Lazarus and Martha, and perhaps as much as anyone in the Bible, Mary understood what it meant to abide in Jesus. Luke 10:38–42 tells the story:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha” the Lord answered, “You are worried and upset about many things. But few things are needed—or indeed **only one**. Mary has **chosen** what is better and **it will not be taken away from her**.” (NIV)

In the last part of his response to Martha, Jesus makes three statements that contain significant truths for us to embrace today:

1. *Only one thing is needed.* Though there was much to do, Mary did only one thing—stay near Jesus and listen to him.
2. *Doing the one thing is a choice.* Mary made a choice—to remain and rest in Jesus’ presence. She chose to be with him over all the other things she could have chosen.

3. *It will not be taken away.* Mary's experience of being close to Jesus and learning from him would always be available to her. Similarly, its impact on her would be permanent. The same is true for you today. That's so reassuring, isn't it? In a world where friends, family, finances, health, etc., can be taken away, this one thing (the better thing) cannot be taken away—your abiding relationship with Jesus.

### **Jesus' Comforting Presence During Difficulties**

Though the abiding, Spirit-filled life comes with the promise of the love, joy, and peace of Jesus, and the bearing of much fruit, it does *not* come with the promise of a life without difficulty. Jesus' promise and provision is that he will be right next to you as you go through hardship. As others have said, Jesus doesn't keep you from the fire; he's with you in the fire. Jesus doesn't keep you from the valley; he's with you in the valley. Your problems aren't extinguished, but they stay in proper perspective.

In fact, God may allow hardships in your life in order to put your faith in him on display to others. What is better evidence of Jesus' life being lived in and through you than when you handle trials and difficulties with joy and peace?

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit despite hardships, others—even those who may have never set foot in a church—may begin to ask themselves or ask you directly how you're able to cope with these challenges. They may begin to wonder how you're able to approach each day with such calmness when others are anxious or angry. Often, that's the beginning of God using your abiding life to bear much fruit!

When you're living the abiding, Spirit-filled life, your life will impact those around you as they see you living above your circumstances. Your spouse, family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors cannot help being attracted to your joy and peace in the midst of life's uncertainties. Godly character itself bears fruit that remains.

Here are some encouraging words from the Bible reminding us that God is with us during trials:

***God will guide you in the midst of your trial:***

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (Isaiah 30:21 NIV)

"I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them." (Isaiah 42:16 NIV)

***God will comfort you in the midst of your trial:***

The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. (Nahum 1:7 NIV)

Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken. (Psalm 55:22 NIV)

***God will help you in the midst of your trial:***

Though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand. (Psalm 37:24 NIV)

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a strong hold in times of trouble. (Psalm 9:9 NIV)

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. (Psalm 46:1–3 NIV)

***God will restore you after the trial:***

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)

## Journaling

Consider journaling. Journaling will allow you to capture what is going on in your life and what God seems to be saying to you, and will connect the two. Use any type of journal. It doesn't need to be fancy. I use inexpensive spiral-bound notebooks. Keep your journal beside you when you do any type of Bible study. If something is impressed on your heart, jot it down. You could even start by using one of the verses listed above and thank God for how he was with you in the midst of a trial.

Don't be concerned about the quality of your writing. Just get it on paper. Write the private thoughts of your heart to Jesus, not to others. Every few days, go back and see what's been happening and ask God to reveal to you what he's showing you from the events and thoughts of your life.

I dislike writing but am very glad I have kept a journal for many years. My journals are pretty much a scribbly mess, and much of it shows my confusion, frustration, and so on. There is no attempt to be profound. Some days nothing is written, some days a little is written, and some days a lot is written. Each time I write, I start a new page, even if the previous entry was very short. There's no particular pattern, other than many start with *Lord, you are showing me ...* or *Lord, thank you for ...* But strung together, they show the blessings of God's leading in my life.

You can journal in any style that fits you. The important point is you're in consistent communication with God and are creating a record of his work in your life. As you look back, you can thank him and praise him for his loving provision.

## Abide in Jesus and Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Jesus instructs you to abide in him and promises he will abide in you. Rest in him, and he will rest in you. He's always there for you. He's always waiting for you. He won't turn you down. But it's your choice. Abiding in Jesus is choosing Level III living in the Abiding Room.

Spend a few minutes in prayer, resting in Jesus' presence and sensing what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.



**ABIDING TRUTH**

Jesus calls you friend  
and enjoys spending time with you.







## SONG SUGGESTIONS

“I Am” by Jill Phillips

“Christ In Me” by Jeremy Camp

“Just Give Me Jesus” by Unspoken

