Wednesday Class

Notes

Wednesday, 9 September 2026

Abide in Me

John 15:1–11, ESV

John is not another synoptic gospel. Matthew, Mark, and Luke look at the life of Jesus together. John takes a different path. After the prologue he moves through about three years in chapters 1 through 11. Then, from chapter 12 through chapter 20, he gives most of his space to less than a week. Chapters 13 through 17, into 18, cover only a few hours. In that narrow space Jesus is talking with the men who will become the apostles. John 14 through 17 is the heart of that conversation. Chapter 15 is at the heart of this section and this is what Jesus told them.

The First Disciples' Difficult Future

John 14–17 names a hard future. Judas is betraying Jesus, and Peter will deny Him. Jesus will suffer, die, and depart. The disciples are called to radical love, service, and unity. They must continue in total faith and trust. They will go into world ministry through the Holy Spirit. Unbelievers will hate them and persecute them.

Modern Disciples' Difficult Life

The same list still describes the church. There is still betrayal and denial. Jesus is still absent from sight. His people are still called to radical love, service, and unity, and to continued total faith and trust. Ministry to the world still runs through the Holy Spirit. Persecution and hatred have not gone away.

The Key to Facing Difficulty

John 15:1–11 sits in the exact middle of John 14–17. It is the answer to every disciple's question: how can I possibly remain faithful amid all that?

"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. 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 15:1–11

Jesus Introduces the Picture

Verses 1–2 introduce the picture. The Father is the vinedresser. Jesus is the vine. The believer is the branch. The Christian life is the fruit. The vinedresser owns the vineyard. He decides what is planted, how it is watered and fed, and how it is cut. Vines have to be trimmed if they are going to bear next year. The vinedresser is planning and managing and grooming.

Jesus is the vine. The Father has set Him in place as the life-giver. The vine's work toward the branch is to nourish, feed, supply, energize, and empower. Connected to Him, the branch lives and bears. That is the Christian life in this picture.

The branches are His people. The fruit is not one narrow virtue. It is every living part of a life joined to Christ: righteousness, good works, the fruit of the Spirit, love, patience, thoughts, words, actions, relationships. All of it comes from God. It grows as we remain. Work apart from that connection yields nothing.

How Spiritual Fruit Is Produced

When we read Scripture we have to hear how Jesus is speaking. Some lines are commands. Some are statements of fact. Verse 4 opens with an imperative: "Abide in me." That is the job He assigns. Then comes the promise: "and I in you." The branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine. Neither can you, unless you abide in Him. Apart from Him you can do nothing.

The common misconception starts in the same place Jesus does, then turns the wrong way. Cleansed by Jesus, work hard to produce fruit, and that work ensures the ongoing relationship. Jesus' true teaching keeps the cleansing and changes the assignment. Cleansed by Jesus, pursue an ongoing relationship with Jesus, and fruit is naturally produced. "Already you are clean

because of the word that I have spoken to you.” The job of a clean branch is not to manufacture apples so it can stay on the tree. The job is to abide. Fruit follows the connection. It is not the price of the connection.

An apple branch does not hold a strategy meeting about apples. Attached to the tree, it bears fruit because that is what a living connection does. Detached, it can work as hard as it wants. It will not grow one apple. So the Christian’s first work is not to strain for produce. It is to remain connected to Jesus. The fruit comes because the life is flowing.

Three Spiritual Options

John 15:2–3, 6, and 18 leave three spiritual options, not two. “You are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” The world has hated Him. Every branch in Him that bears fruit He prunes. Every branch that does not bear fruit He takes away. They gather them and cast them into the fire. First comes the divide: lost or saved. Then, among the saved, two roads: fruitful and pruned, or barren and removed. What makes the difference is whether the branch abides.

Abide and bear fruit, and the Father prunes. Pruning is the reward of fruitfulness, and it does not feel like a reward. It is not pampering, a recliner, or junk food. They cut what is living so that it will live more. If you are productive, God will put you through difficulty in order to make you more productive. Pain is how a vinedresser loves a good branch.

Refuse to abide, bear nothing, and the branch is taken away, thrown into the fire, and burned. The end of that road is spiritual death. So the choices in front of a believer are not “comfort or effort.” They are: remain and be cut for more fruit, or drift into barrenness and, if that is not remedied, be lost. Each person has to decide which way the branch will go.

What Passes for Abiding, and Is Not

Plenty of habits make people feel as if they are remaining in Christ when they are nowhere near it. The American church is fluent in these substitutes.

Occasional or passive church attendance. Showing up, sitting down, and tuning out. Being in the room because it is expected, without engaging. Or simply not coming when it does not feel convenient, as if presence were optional.

Box-checking worship. Five acts completed, conscience cleared, week released. The forms were touched. The Lord was not.

Occasional or surplus-level Bible reading. A page at bedtime so the day can be closed, or a thin devotional that never goes into the text. Surface contact with Scripture is not the word abiding in you.

Occasional or shallow prayer. Not prayer without ceasing, and not prayer that goes deep. A few sentences at the edge of the day.

Decision-making mostly solo. Living as if God were not interested in ordinary plans, then wondering why the ordinary plans do not hold.

"God's money" limited to the Sunday contribution. Treating only the collection as spiritual, and the rest of the wallet as private.

Acquaintance-level church relationships. Names known, greetings exchanged, no real depth.

Easy, pain-free "discipleship" that never costs and never cuts.

Personally agreeable obedience only. Obedience in the things already comfortable, and silence everywhere else.

That last one can be very close to home. A person can want to make a point, to make sure someone feels exactly how we feel about their behavior, and then keep meeting the Word that says that is not how God wants us to act. The choice is to obey the parts we like, or to obey all of it. Selective obedience is not abiding.

What Abiding Is

Jesus does not leave the word undefined. "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."

It is total dependence. "Apart from me you can do nothing." Pull the branch off the vine and ask how much fruit it will grow. Not one bit. There is no Christian work that has power apart from Him.

It is continuous connection. A cut connection cannot produce. In the room, during a class, attachment can feel obvious. How quickly after the building empties does the mind stop talking to Him, stop dwelling on Him, stop taking Him through the rest of the day? Abiding is not a meeting. It is a connection that is not severed when the meeting ends.

It is unhindered reception. The branch stays joined because that is how it is fed. All the power comes from the vine. Stay connected because that is the only place the life is.

It is shared nature. A branch of this vine produces this vine's fruit. We are not attached in order to grow our own crop. We are attached in order to bear what Jesus bears.

How to Abide in Christ

When a word or a concept needs more light, start close and widen. Immediate context, then the book, then the rest of that writer, then the Testament, then the whole Bible. Do not begin with a

concordance dump of a thousand uses. John 15 is the center. John's other lines on abiding fill it out.

"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." John 6:56

That is not the Lord's Supper in disguise. The Supper is not in that context. Jesus is talking about staying close and taking Him in, continually receiving what He gives.

"If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father." 1 John 2:24

What they heard from the beginning is in the Word. Taking Scripture in is one way we abide in Jesus. He takes it further than reading.

"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

The word has to be kept, not only heard.

"So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." 1 John 4:16

Abiding in God requires a life that loves other people. That is not extra credit.

"By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." 1 John 4:13

This is something a Christian ought to be able to say without hedging. Does the Spirit live in you? Does He dwell in you as His temple? Is His presence a fact of your life? If that is iffy, the question of abiding is still open.

The Life That Flows from Abiding

Relationship: mutual abiding. “Abide in me, and I in you” (John 15:4).

Restoration: to the Father, the way the Son lives with the Father (John 15:8–10).

Reassurance: 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).

Result: fruitfulness (John 15:4–5, 8).

Reward: full joy. “That my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

Removal: condemnation. The branch that will not remain is thrown away, gathered, and burned (John 15:6).

Questions to Take Home

- Do you fully accept your total dependence on Jesus?
- Are you staying constantly connected to Him?
- How much time do you spend in the Word and prayer?
- Do you trust that God hears and answers your prayers?
- Are you a fruitful Christian, or do you feel barren?
- Is your fruitfulness increasing?
- Are you constantly trying to produce your own fruit?
- Do you have areas of deliberate disobedience?
- Do you love and are you intimately connected to your spiritual family?
- Do you know that you are filled with the Holy Spirit?
- Are you joyful?

Next Class

This class will reconvene and conclude September 23 in Romans 8. To be ready, read Romans 8.