

ABIDE IN CHRIST

→ the foundational study



ABIDE IN CHRIST → THE FOUNDATIONAL STUDY

Have you ever visited a vineyard, tasted the sweetness of a cluster of juicy grapes, or enjoyed a glass of delicious wine? Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes to bring “the fruit of the vine” to you? How do the vinedresser, the grape vine, and its branches each contribute to the final result?

A key part of our National Strategy for the next twelve years is to **“Abide Deeper in Christ.”** Our desire is to *“grow deeper in our dependence on Jesus and His Word – as individuals, in community, and on an organizational level – resulting in biblical fruitfulness.”* This study will help us move together toward deeper abiding in Jesus, the foundation of igniting and multiplying.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study is designed for you to journey through slowly. While you could complete it in 2-4 hours, slowing down will invite the life-changing depth of the Lord’s words to soak in. We suggest that you think of it as a stroll, lingering by perhaps taking one section a day or a week (or whatever pace you prefer) to move through this study. You might also enjoy reading the book *Abide in Christ* by Andrew Murray (NavPress, 2019) alongside this study. Days 6 and 19-26 relate specifically to John 15.

Abiding is best experienced in community, and this study is no exception. Consider taking your journey with friends, either section by section or by discussing it with a group when you’ve finished. Suggested discussion questions are included after the final reflection.

One of Jesus’ most vivid illustrations for our abiding relationship with Him is recorded in John 15, the parable of the vine and branches. Each branch only bears fruit if it is continually connected to the vine. Similarly, the only way believers can glorify the Father with fruitful lives is by abiding in Jesus. Let’s begin with a glimpse at some basics of vinedressing before exploring John 15 more deeply.

Keep asking for deeper, fuller revelation. We too often stop looking when we think we’ve gotten a good insight. There is always MORE. Slow down. Ask, “What else do I see?”

JEAN FLEMING

Picture Jesus, even as He calls you to ‘abide in Me,’ pointing to the Father and saying, ‘It is My Father who is the Vinedresser. It is because of Him that you are in Me; it is through Him that you abide in Me; it is to Him and for His glory that you bear fruit.’

ANDREW MURRAY
(ABIDE IN CHRIST,
P. 31)

VINEDRESSING 101

Jesus often used familiar, everyday images to teach deep truths about His kingdom. In His day, vineyards flourished all over the Judean countryside, even in poor soil. Without a vinedresser, vines would spread along the ground, allowing moisture, pests, and thick foliage to ruin the fruit.

Even today, the careful tending of an experienced vinedresser greatly increases the possibility of a large crop of plump grapes. A vinedresser walks among the vines daily, looking at them closely to check for pests and make sure the vines receive the right amount of water. He lifts up and cleans any fruit lying on the ground so that mold and fungus won’t damage the harvest. The vinedresser also cuts most of the leaves off the branches, allowing direct sunlight to ripen the grape clusters. After the harvest, even more extensive pruning occurs. The vinedresser cuts the branches back all the way to the vine so that all the nutrients are directed to deepening the roots. The vinedresser’s careful and timely touch in pruning the branches throughout the growing season and after the harvest helps the vine to be fruitful in the upcoming year.

Want to learn more? Explore this excellent resource:

<https://preservingbibletimes.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Story-II.Chapter-4.pdf>

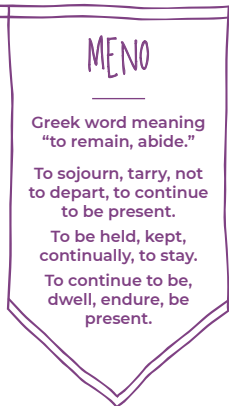
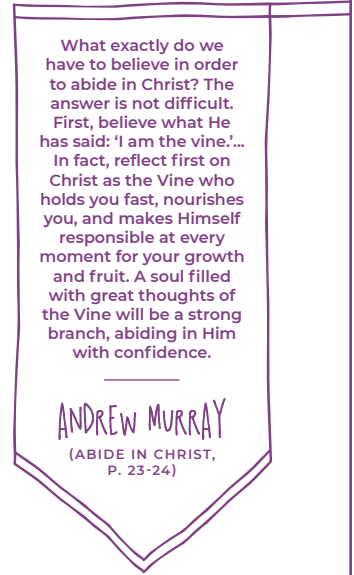
READ

Read John 15 in 2 or 3 different translations. For a deeper look at the context, also read John 13-17, especially John 15:18-31. As you read, notice key and repeated words.

MEDITATE

Focus on John chapter 15, reflect on the meaning of the words, and record your thoughts.

- What 3-4 observations stand out to you from this passage?
- Some versions of the Bible translate *meno* as “abide” (NASB, ESV, Voice). Others say “remain” (NIV) or “make your home in me, join with me” (MSG) or “remain in life-union with me” (Passion). Consider these definitions of the Greek word *meno* (see banner below). How do they shape your understanding of what it means to “abide”? Which definitions touch your heart most, and why?



- What might deeper abiding look like in your daily life?
- How does abiding in Christ bless you? ... impact others? ... glorify God?

- Jesus begins and ends His teaching on the vine by promising the disciples that His Holy Spirit is coming to abide in them forever. Read John 14:7 and John 15:26-27. How is the Holy Spirit living in us at the heart of our abiding in God?

PERSONALIZE

- Make an appointment with God for this week. Plan to spend at least 30 minutes in His presence, primarily listening (not to study, read, or do much talking). Don't let anything or anyone get in the way of keeping your appointment. Ask Him a few questions like these and then listen for His response: “Lord, what fresh thing do You want to say to me about abiding? Lord, do you see anything that's limiting my abiding or my fruitfulness?”
- During your appointment with God, listen to any song that inspires you to abide on YouTube or Spotify, something like “I Am the Vine” by John Michael Talbot, “Psalm 23” by People and Songs, or “New Wine” by Hillsong.

READ

Read John 15:1-17 again. Then focus on verses 1-6, perhaps in several translations.

MEDITATE

As you meditate on John 15:1-6, consider these questions and record your thoughts.

- Why do you think Jesus describes Himself as the Vine? How is He like a vine in relation to us, His branches?
- Mainstream American culture values independence so highly that the idea of being dependent can cause tension. What is so good about living in complete dependence on God ("apart from me you can do nothing")? Consider whether there is something you are trying to do apart from Him.
- How would you describe the opposite of abiding in Jesus?
- Think about your life and ministry. Abiding could be described as "restful union" or a "passionate pursuit" of God. How would you describe your abiding? Explain.
- Linger a little longer on verses 1-6. What else is God saying to you?

PERSONALIZE

- On YouTube or Spotify, listen to a song that inspires you to abide in Jesus. Some options might include "Abide with Me" by GENTRI, "Christ in Me" by The Brilliance, or "Give Us Your Heart" by People and Songs.
- Tell a story about a time when your heart connection with Jesus (or your disconnection from Jesus) impacted you.
- Write a prayer to Jesus expressing your response to His invitation to abide in Him.

READ

After reading John 15:1-17 again, focus on John 15:1-2, 8-10 in two or three translations.

MEDITATE

As you reflect on these verses, consider these questions and record your thoughts:

Pruning is always
an act of love.

ALICIA BROWN

- The Vinedresser loves the Vine (Jesus) and the branches (us). What does this passage reveal about His love? How are others around you blessed when you abide in God's love?

KATHAIRO

Greek word meaning
"prune" and "clean."

To purge or cleanse.

To remove anything
that is undesirable or
unnecessary.

- Think about what the word *prune* means. The Vinedresser also prunes those He loves, which can be painful or confusing. Do you feel God's pruning as restoration, punishment, or something else? Explain.

- How have you experienced God's love and God's pruning working together in your life?

- Jesus made it His habit to abide (or make His home) with the Father at all times. What about their relationship do you think made abiding so central in Jesus' life?

- How has your view of yourself and of your earthly father influenced how you experience your heavenly Father? For example, we might think, "I hesitate to draw closer to God, because all my dad cared about was my obedience..." or "My dad wasn't perfect, but he sure did love me well." If this is an area where you need healing, what are the next steps you could take?

PERSONALIZE

Choose one:

- Tell a story of a time when you personally experienced God as your Vinedresser (as your loving and pruning Father) in a new and deeper way. What happened in your heart? What was the result? (Healing, encouragement, humility, wounding, anger, other...)
- Pruning sometimes means taking "useless" things out of our lives to make space for the "useful." In a time of prayer, ask the Father to show you any useless things that hinder your abiding or that do not produce fruit.
- Listen to Chris Tomlin's song "Good Good Father," "Kind" by Amanda Lindsey Cook, or some other song that your reflection brings to mind.

READ

- Focus on John 15:9-15, (Cf. 1 John 2:5, 4:11-12, 15-16).
- *Optional:* Read *Abide in Christ*, Day 22

MEDITATE

As you meditate on John 15:9-13 and the cross-references, consider these questions and record your thoughts.

- What do you think it means for a believer to abide/remain in Jesus' love?
- What would it look like for you to love others the way Jesus loves you?
- Consider the quote by MacLaren above. What are some words or phrases that describe the love of God? How does your heart respond to being loved in this way?
- What does it mean for your joy to be complete (full, overflowing, wholly mature—John 15:11)? What is the relationship between love and your joy being complete?
- To what extent are you experiencing joy as a fruit of your abiding? Would others in your life agree?

As the Father hath loved Me, so I have loved you"; as deeply, as purely, as fully, as eternally and with all the unnameable perfectness which must belong to the divine affection, does Christ declare that He loves us.

ALEXANDER MACLAREN

(SCOTTISH MINISTER,
c. 1800s)

PERSONALIZE

Choose one:

- Tell a story about when you experienced abiding in love—either the love of Jesus or someone else—or of a time when you failed to experience love.
- Listen to “When the Night Is Falling” by Dennis Jernigan, “Garden” by The Liturgists, or another song of your choice.

READ

- John 15:1-17 again, highlighting whatever you notice about God's Word.
- *Optional:* Read *Abide in Christ*, Day 24

MEDITATE

As you meditate on these verses, consider these questions and record your thoughts.

- What does it mean to have God's Word abiding in you (v.7) or "dwelling in you richly" (Colossians 3:16)?
- What comes to your mind when you read, "Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you"? (v. 7) How far does this promise reach? What are the conditions for this promise?
- How do the conditional "if" statements of verse 7 balance with God's unconditional love?
- Someone has said, "Obedience is God's love language." Why does Jesus say that obedience to Him is loving Him?
- God clearly speaks to us through His written Word, the Scriptures. Have you also heard His spoken words in your heart? Explain. How do they work together?
- Linger a little longer. What touches your heart most from this passage?

PERSONALIZE

Choose one:

- What has abiding in God's Word (or God's Word abiding in you) looked like in your life over the last year or two?
- Write a prayer expressing to the Lord your journey with His Word.
- If you were helping someone else abide more deeply in God's Word, where would you start (favorite passage, parable, another metaphor)?

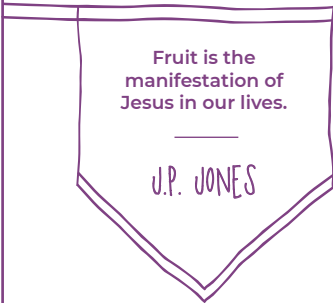
READ

- After reading John 15:1-17 again, focus on John 15:2, 4, 5, 8, and 16, using more than one translation.
- *Optional:* Read *Abide in Christ*, Day 20

**MEDITATE**

As you meditate on these verses, consider these questions and record your thoughts.

- What does it mean to bear fruit? Consider Galatians 5:22-24, too.
- How might fruitfulness look different during changing seasons and life phases? How might fruitfulness look different for various peoples and environments?
- How does fruitfulness glorify God and show that we are His disciples (v. 8)?
- Jesus made it clear that “apart from me you can do nothing” (v. 5). How is this vital dependence demonstrated, both personally and among the people in your ministry? What might your life and your ministry look like if you really believed that apart from Him, you could do nothing?
- Some common obstacles to bearing fruit are (1) a tendency to be self-sufficient, (2) a lukewarm desire to connect deeply with God and His Word, and (3) feeling pressured to perform and succeed in ministry. What obstacles tend to prevent you from abiding and bearing fruit?

**PERSONALIZE**

Choose one:

- Tell a story connecting your experience of abiding in Christ with a particular fruit of the Spirit growing in you, or with the fruit of spiritual generations.
- Tell a story about God “pruning” you that later resulted in fruitfulness and/or in joy.
- Explore what fruitfulness looks like in the lives of those around you by talking to and asking questions of one or two people, especially someone in a different life stage than you are.

MEDITATE

As you sit with John 15 one last time, consider these questions and record your thoughts.

- After studying John 15, what additional questions, feelings, or insights surface in you?

- Consider how your culture or ethnicity impacts your abiding in Christ. How would a friend of yours from another culture answer this? Could you ask someone with a background different from yours?

- What are 1-2 changes God might be inviting you to make in your habit of abiding? For instance, is there one specific thing He wants you to see, know, repent of, or do? Is there a space in your life where you have not welcomed God to live?

- What have you learned about abiding? How does your new understanding compare with what you thought before?

- If someone visited you and your ministry for a week, what would they notice about the ways you are building a culture of abiding—not only as individuals, but also as a community?

- How would you pass the concept of abiding to others? Create your own “Abiding Illustration,” such as [the Word Hand](#), [the Wheel](#), [the Prayer Hand](#), etc. Be creative! Use an illustration from your everyday life.

- From this study, has God revealed anything to you about why He chose you (v. 16)? How might knowing that you are His chosen child help you abide more deeply in Him, as well as be a model in your relationships and ministry going forward?

CLOSING PRAYER

“Dear Father, Beloved Son, and Indwelling Spirit . . . Blessed Triune God, please increase in each one of us a growing desire, deeper understanding, and a heart to practice abiding in Your presence, love, and joy. Amen.”



GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Here are some questions that you may want to use if you decide to discuss the study in a group after you all finish your individual preparation. Notice that all but the first two questions will require some written preparation for you to bring to the group discussion.

1. Jesus Himself is our best example of someone who abided in the presence of His Father. What do you see in His life and example that sheds light on abiding for you?
2. When a believer is regularly abiding in Christ, how will he/she/others know it? What habits, rhythms, heart attitudes, etc. will characterize that person? On the other hand, when a believer is not abiding in Christ, how will he/she/others notice this? What might be present or absent?
3. Choose and circle two or three of these phrases. Try to imagine how they are connected: Loving others Obedience ... Joy Pruning Bearing fruit ... God's glory ... Father's love ... Holy Spirit indwelling ... Word Connected to Jesus Other?
4. Consider Scripture's other metaphors for abiding. What is a favorite verse of yours about God as your dwelling place, your refuge, shelter, home, etc.? How does it complement the vine-branch metaphor?
5. Summarize the most significant things you have learned about abiding by choosing one of the following:
 - Writing a 3-5 paragraph paper
 - Outlining a 3-5 point message
 - Creating a collage of pictures
 - Writing a song or rap
 - Planning a 2-4 hour experience of abiding in Christ's presence.

Share what you created with at least one other person, and come prepared to tell your group about it.

6. If you want to pass on to someone you are discipling both the value and the habit of abiding in Christ, how would you do that? Develop a simple Abiding discipleship tool, including:
 - Key verses with principles
 - Promises
 - Commands
 - Examples
 - Getting started
 - Keeping on
 - Checking up
 - Other? (testimony, quote, image, metaphor, visual illustration, song, etc.)
7. Select your favorite verse on abiding in Christ. Do a verse study and memorize it.
8. Close your group discussion with worship by listening to the song "New Wine" by Hillsong.



SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND GROWTH

1. **Abide in Christ: A Short Study:** This study doesn't require much preparation, and would be great with young believers. ([Navigators.org/abide](https://navigators.org/abide). Be sure to be logged into NavCentral first.)
2. **Abide in Christ: An In-Depth Study:** This verse-by-verse study on John 15, includes word studies and cross-references. ([Navigators.org/abide](https://navigators.org/abide). Be sure to be logged into NavCentral first.)
3. **Reflective Experience in Abiding:** This group experience invites you into the richness of abiding more deeply in Christ with your friends, your family, or your team, in a space that's set aside for meditation and sensory exploration of John 15:1-17. ([Navigators.org/abide](https://navigators.org/abide). Be sure to be logged into NavCentral first.)
4. Read 1 John and look for the word *abiding/remaining*. How do the verses in 1 John expand your understanding of abiding in Christ?
5. Choose a few of these cross-references to meditate on. What do they add to your understanding of abiding in Christ?
 - Psalm 1
 - Psalm 27:4
 - Psalm 42:1-2
 - Psalm 73:25
 - Psalm 80:8-16
 - Psalm 84:1-4
 - Psalm 92:12-15
 - Isaiah 5:1-7
 - Jeremiah 17:7-8
 - Ezekiel 15:1-8
 - John 8:31
 - John 14:1-7
 - Romans 15
 - Galatians 2:20
 - Colossians 2:7
 - Other cross-references that come to mind
6. Visit a vineyard and take a tour. Connect what you experience there with what you've learned from Scripture, and journal about that.
7. Find an image or photograph that captures the concept of abiding for you. Keep it in your Bible or nearby when you're meeting alone with God.
8. Art journal your way through John 15.
9. Find a young friend under 12 and explain the ideas of John 15 in less than five minutes.
10. Read this very helpful article, which makes the history of vinedressing in ancient times more relatable to our everyday lives: <https://work.chron.com/job-description-vinedresser-7358.html>