

# What Happens When We Separate Ourselves from Christ?

Abide Series, March 9 & 10, 2024 (World Outreach Week Two) | John 15:1-8

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## Why are we studying John 15?

### **John 15 is part of a larger and important part of the Bible.**

John 15 is part of a message Jesus gave to his disciples at the Last Supper, right before his betrayal and eventual crucifixion and death. These are important words from Jesus!

This message stretches from the beginning of John chapter 13 to the end of chapter 17.

I am covering John chapters 13-17 one chapter at a time, one year at a time.

I started in the weeks leading up to Easter in 2022 with John chapter 13.

Last year, we covered John chapter 14.

This year, we will be looking at John chapter 15 between now and Easter.

### **In John chapter 13, Jesus announced that he was leaving.**

During his ministry, Jesus said multiple times that he would be leaving his disciples.

But then he came back to the subject in John chapter 13.

In **John 13:33** Jesus said,

***"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'"***

Despite hearing this news before, the disciples were shocked and worried.

### **Then in John chapter 14 Jesus announced that even though he was leaving, he would be with them.**

In **John 14:16** Jesus said that God would send the Holy Spirit,

***"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever ..."***

Then in **John 14:23** he promised that he and his Father would come and make their home with us,

***... "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."***

So, Jesus promised his fearful, worried disciples that even though he would not be with them any longer face to face, he would still be with them. He would be more with them than ever.

This same promise applies to us.

### **However, what Jesus said raises questions.**

How will God be with us even though we can't see him face to face?

That's the question Jesus is addressing in John 15. In some ways, it comes down to the word "abide." Jesus promises to abide with us and in us, and he calls us to abide with and in him.

So, what does it look like for God to be with us?

## The Presence

**In John 15:1-3, Jesus describes God's presence with us as caring for us:**

***"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."***

**Jesus describes himself as the true vine.**

Vines, particularly grapevines, were pretty commonplace in that day and in that place.

Jesus describes himself as the vine—the root and source of grounding and nutrients—for his disciples whom he describes as "branches."

When Jesus says that he is the true vine, he is contrasting himself with other things that may claim to be vines. He is saying that they are wrong or false vines and that he is the right vine.

Jesus is claiming to be God; he is the ultimate source of everything (including life) for us.

**Jesus describes his Father as the vinedresser.**

What does the farmer or the vinedresser do?

The vinedresser removes branches that do not bear fruit and prunes those that do bear fruit.

There's cutting involved.

If you've ever pruned a grape vine, you know that the process is pretty extreme. Grape vines are pruned multiple times during a season to make sure that they stay healthy and bear the maximum fruit possible. At the end of the season, not much is left.

Jesus almost makes the vinedresser sound ominous. Is that the point?

**There is a play on words that shows us the real point.**

There are three words involved here.

God, the Fatherly vinedresser, "takes away" or cuts and removes branches that don't bear fruit.

The vinedresser also prunes branches that are fruit-bearing.

Plus, Jesus himself talks about his followers being clean. They have been pruned.

It sounds like three separate processes and a lot of cutting.

But the three words are closely related in Greek. They sound alike. It's a word play.

What does that mean? It means it is all one movement.

Removing, pruning, and cleaning are all one great movement by the vinedresser.

So, the point is not harm but health!

What is Jesus saying? God the Father is present to care for us!

But Jesus offers us more ...

## The Possibility

**In John 15:4, Jesus offers us the possibility of abiding in Christ:**

***"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."***

### **Jesus calls his disciples to abide in him. What does that mean?**

Jesus has already painted a picture through the image of the vine and its branches.

The image of a vine and its branches portrays a shockingly intimate relationship between Jesus (God himself) and his disciples.

The branches are "in" the vine, meaning that they stay, they are connected, and they draw life and nourishment from the vine.

On top of that, though, the vine is "in" the branches, meaning that the vine too remains, it is connected, and sends life and nourishment to the branches.

Jesus is describing a mutual indwelling between himself and his disciples, between himself and us! We are "in" him, and he is "in" us.

That means we remain in and with each other; we are connected to one another.

What could be more intimate? What could we want more than God in us and with us?

### **The call to "abide" is a deep call.**

We will get into it in more detail next week.

For this week, it is a call to remain, not leave.

It is a call to connect, not disconnect.

And it is a call to draw our life from Jesus, not from the world.

Jesus offers us the possibility to abide in and with him and he in and with us.

## The Problem

### **In John 15:5-6, Jesus addresses the problem of not abiding in him. What happens then?**

***"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."***

### **We learn that apart from Jesus, we can do nothing.**

Jesus reminds us that he is like a vine, and we are like branches.

As branches, we are meant to bear fruit, much fruit.

However, without him, we can't do any of the fruit-bearing we are supposed to do. In fact, we can't really do anything!

It's a matter of spiritual nutrient and life. The branches draw their life and nourishment from the vine.

Jesus says that, spiritually speaking, we are like that. We can only draw spiritual life and power from him. Understand this: without Jesus, spiritually speaking, we are dead.

We can draw death and decay from the world, but when we do, we yield death and decay.

If we want spiritual life and power, which only come from our connection with God.

### **This naturally leads Jesus to address those who are apart from him.**

Some scholars attempt to identify clearly whom exactly Jesus means here. Don't overthink it.

Jesus is saying that those who do not belong to him are like branches that have been cut off and removed from the vine. He's talking about everyone who doesn't belong to him.

And Jesus asks us to think about what happens to the branches that are cut off from the vine. They wither up and die. What are you to do with them? You burn them.

Jesus is making a powerfully important point.

### **Those who are apart from Christ will face eternity in hell.**

This is a critical point for us to wrap our minds around today.

We all have life after death ahead of us. However, we do not all have the same life after death ahead of us.

God is the sovereign creator of the universe. He is King of Kings!

We have disobeyed God. We have sinned against him. That means we have rebelled against God Almighty, and that comes with a penalty: death. We have worked really hard to earn for ourselves an eternity apart from God in hell.

And the Bible repeatedly describes hell in terms of fire.

So, when Jesus says here that those who are apart from him will be burned, he is speaking about hell. Those who belong to Jesus will be with him forever, and those who do not will suffer eternally in the fire of hell.

Jesus spoke about this sorting in **John 5:27-29**:

***"And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."***

### **I met someone in North Africa who understood the importance of what Jesus was saying.**

This picture shows Pastor Asher and me praying over a man.

We can't show you his face because he lives in a country where Christianity is not legal.

He didn't grow up in a Christian home. He grew up a Muslim. Then he went to work in Saudi Arabia as an adult. He got a job in Saudi Arabia and sent money back to his wife and children.

But the Saudis don't usually like foreign workers, so they were not friendly to him. They refused to even eat with him. The only people who showed him love were Christians.

For more than two decades, he was befriended by Christians who showed him God's love.

Part of him wanted to become a Christian, but he was afraid of what the government would do. He knew that if he converted to Christianity, he would be executed.

Then he came back to his home country to be with his family. There he explored faith in Christ. He got connected with some believers in his home country and became a disciple of Jesus.

His family rejected him. His wife divorced him.

He connected with this house church, and he was with us for worship that day.

He asked us to pray for him because he was going back to Saudi Arabia because he had run out of money and needed to go back to work.

He had two prayer requests. He was praying that he would be able to find a church to connect with in Saudi Arabia and that he would not be executed when he arrived.

So, that's what we are praying for him. Have you ever prayed over someone, "God, please don't allow this man to be executed in two weeks when he goes to work?"

He was concerned about being executed, but he wasn't rethinking his choice.

He knew and he knows that his faith in Christ means that he will be with God forever, that he will get eternal life instead of eternal death. And that is more valuable than living a peaceful life here and spending eternity in hell.

That man understood what Jesus was saying. Do we?

If we understand that eternal life and eternal death hang in the balance, then how can we not share the Gospel of Jesus across the street and around the world? We have a mandate!

## The Mandate

**In John 15:7-8, Jesus gives us a clear mandate to bear much fruit.**

***"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."***

**Jesus is challenging us to multiply.**

Jesus says that if we abide in him and he in us, then we will bear much fruit.

Fruit is a frequent image in the Bible, and it can mean lots of things.

Sometimes fruit means spiritual qualities. Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit, for instance.

Sometimes fruit means good deeds. Jesus himself in places talks about bearing good fruit instead of bad fruit.

But here Jesus uses quantitative language. This is the language of numbers.

In John 15, Jesus talks about bearing "more" fruit and "much" fruit. That's not about character or good deeds. This is the language of nature and reproduction.

Jesus draws on the same idea in **John 12:24**:

***"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."***

Jesus points to grain. A single grain of wheat goes into the ground and comes up a plant with many grains.

It's the same here. If the life of God is flowing through us, then we bear much fruit.

We who are few become many.

You who are a disciple are to make more disciples, many more disciples.

There is a mandate.

**Jesus is challenging us to do what God commanded humanity to do in the beginning.**

Let's go right back to the passage Pastor Afeef read to us last week.

In Genesis 1 as God created all things, he created them to multiply. He created plants to make more plants and fill the earth. He made birds and fish and elephants and told them to go and make more birds, fish, and elephants and fill the earth.

It's a principle baked into creation, and it is baked into us.

In **Genesis 1:27-28** we read:

***So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.***

***And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth ..."***

Plants make plants. Birds make birds. Fish make fish. Elephants make elephants. Humans make humans. It's baked into creation, and it is baked into us. Bear much fruit.

This principle is baked into creation, and it's what Jesus is talking about right here.

### **Jesus is challenging us to join him on mission!**

Jesus is already across the street, working in unseen ways through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people around us.

Jesus is already around the world, working in unseen but significant ways through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people, calling them to himself.

And he is calling us to join him!

He is calling us to abide in him and bear much fruit.

He is calling disciples to make disciples across the street and around the world.

He is calling churches to make churches across the street and around the world.

### **Will you join us?**

Will you pray with us for the lost, for our local-outreach partners who are across the street, and for our world-outreach partners who are around the world?

Will you give so that we as a church can reach the lost, so that we can help our local-outreach partners go across the street, and so that our world-outreach partners can go around the world in Jesus' name?

Will you go yourself? Will you BLESS the people across the street from you? Will you go across the street with our local outreach partners? Will you go around the world on short-term mission trips? Will you go yourself on mission for a longer period of time?

Bear much fruit. That's Jesus' mandate to you and me.