

# ABIDE In Me

Part 3



John 15:1-17

## ABIDE IN ME, Part 3

By Rev. Will Nelken

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*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, July 24, 2022*

Please read John 15:1-17 again (if you can find it, use God's Word Translation).

You might plant an apple tree in your yard because you love its blossoms, but most likely it is because you love its fruit. Generally, we plant fruit trees because we want their fruit. If they don't produce fruit—good fruit—we will likely cut them down and replace them, in the hope of raising a fruitful tree.

Similarly, when you open your life to Jesus Christ, God plants His Spirit and Word in your heart, because He seeks fruitfulness from your life. Fruit is of paramount importance. So much so, that fruitless branches will eventually be removed and fruitful branches will be regularly pruned back so they can produce MORE fruit. This, and only this, glorifies God the Gardener.

Thus, we have established the need for an ongoing, vital connection (or relationship) with Jesus Christ (the Real Vine) in order to be spiritually fruitful—in terms of Christian character development and a character-driven lifestyle.

So, we have discovered in our Bible text three elements of the Christian life:

- Abiding
- Fruitfulness
- Life-flow

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I admit, I have a thing for apples. I met Jesus for the first time while picking apples on a Central Washington orchard. When it was harvest-time, we picked apples for nine hours a day, seven days a week, until all of them were in. You might think I would hate apples after that, but instead I love them—fresh, fried, baked, grilled, sauced, juiced, in cakes, in pies, in cookies, in breads, in drinks. I can't think of a way I *wouldn't* like a good apple!

Unfortunately, after more than a decade, one of the grafted branches on our tree produces nothing but leaves. No fruit at all. I have worked with it for years, carefully pruning it back, hoping to stimulate its productivity. But no joy.

Perhaps I will cut the whole branch off in order to give more nutrients to the remaining branches. Yet, somehow, it's difficult to pull the trigger on that plan. I think of a story Jesus told about a fruitless fig tree : *"Let me dig around it for another year and put fertilizer on it..."* and I wonder if I've done enough.

You see, there is a life-flow—a cycle of nature and nurture—that develops productivity (in plants and in people). Let's learn about that today. What can be done to favor our fruitfulness? What can be done to minimize our fruitlessness?

John 15:7-12 (God's Word Translation)

<sup>7</sup> *If you live in Me and what I say lives in you, then ask for anything you want, and it will be yours.* <sup>8</sup> *You give glory to My Father when you produce a lot of fruit and therefore show that you are My disciples.*

<sup>9</sup> *"I have loved you the same way the Father has loved Me. So live in My love.* <sup>10</sup> *If you obey My commandments, you will live in My love. I have obeyed My Father's commandments, and in that way I live in His love.* <sup>11</sup> *I have told you this so that you will be as joyful as I am, and your joy will be complete.* <sup>12</sup> *Love each other as I have loved you. This is what I'm commanding you to do.*

We first looked at this passage from the perspective of "abiding"—remaining vitally connected to Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday, we explored the same theme from another angle: "at home in Jesus"—a relationship more personal, and designed for family and fruitfulness.

Today, for a third time, we'll look at this topic from yet another point of view: "live in Me." The union that is vital to our fruitfulness is more than proximate, more than close. *"You live in Me and what I say lives in you."*

It is nothing less than an *exchange* of life ( a life-flow)—of energy, of purpose, of character, and of love.

Within the vine, the flow of life that stimulates growth and, ultimately, fruitfulness is conducted by the sap that flows from root to fruit. The leaves exchange carbon dioxide and oxygen with the air, and receive solar energy, which is transmitted as glucose through the sap, along with water and mineral salts absorbed from the soil through its roots. Ultimately, it is this exchange of life-giving nutrients that produces fruitfulness.

So, also, in Christ, there is a flow of life from Heaven to earth, and back again, conducted by the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to all who offer their lives to Jesus Christ.

*“People who don’t have the Spirit (having only physical life) can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:14)*

*“Those who don’t have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to Christ at all.” (Romans 8:9)*

The Holy Spirit is our earthly connection to the Kingdom of Heaven—exchanging confession of sin for forgiveness, transforming divine wisdom into understanding and right behavior, converting divine authority into courageous acts of grace, and turning our experiences of joy and pain into acts of love and worship.

Your fruitfulness depends on a consistent flow of God’s grace—the sap of the Vine—through your submission to and dependence on the Holy Spirit. He is the life-flow that produces fruit among us.

This same Spirit was active in Creation, hovering above the formless waters. This same Spirit was active in forming the People of God (through the exodus).

This same Holy Spirit was active in the virgin-birth of Jesus. This same Spirit encouraged Jesus through His crucifixion. This same Spirit raised Christ from the dead.

This same Spirit was present for Christ’s Glorification and was given to us in the Pentecost that followed. And this same Spirit is active today in the conviction, conversion, and formation of the Church around the world.

## **Roles and Relationships**

*“If you live in Me, and what I say lives in you...”*

Before His departure, Jesus told His followers, *“No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.”* (John 14:18)

*“All who love Me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and We will come and make Our home with each of them.”* (John 14:23)

*“But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.”* (John 14:26)

How have the Father and the Son come to make Their home in each of us? In the person of the Holy Spirit, whom we have received. He perfectly represents both the Father and the Son. He is God-with-you and God-in-you and God-on-you!

This is the design of roles and relationships which Jesus outlined in today's text:

- *You live in Me*
- *What I say lives in you*
- *You live in My love (as I live in Father's love)*

And also:

- *Father has loved Me*
- *I have loved you*
- *You love each other.*

## **Divine Objective**

*"You give glory to My Father when you produce a lot of fruit."*

Think of the words of the Bible as the seed... good seed... life-producing seed. Each seed needs good soil... (Are you that good soil?) And the seed must "die" and be buried, in order to reproduce... (At which point God will infuse it with life, producing a transformation.) Then, it must be well-tended during all its stages of growth... (That's the Gardener's job.) Finally, it brings a harvest—some thirty-, some sixty-, some a hundredfold.

*"When you produce a lot of fruit."*

## **Condition**

God is not looking for fruit because He's hungry... It's because of what fruit-bearing *means* for us, and what bearing fruit *does in* us.

You see, the core of the human problem is in the condition of our hearts.

Jesus taught: *"What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come— sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."* (Mark 7:20-23)

As a result, a NEW covenant was required, as Moses predicted: *"God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, in order that you may love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, so that you may live."* (Deuteronomy 30:6)

This, Jeremiah confirmed: *"I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor, and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord, for they will all know Me, from the least*

*of them to the greatest of them, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:33-34)*

Our text says, *“If you obey My commandments, you will live in My love.”*

The Spirit and the Word, in tandem, working together, become the perpetual Resource and Sustainer of our lives in Christ.

## **Result**

The result being, COMPLETE JOY!

*“I have told you this so that you will be as joyful as I am, and your joy will be complete. Love each other as I have loved you. This is what I’m commanding you to do.”*

Complete joy—loving each other, as Jesus has loved you.

Many believe that God primarily wants them to be happy, so they practice choosing whatever in life seems likely to make them happy, only to be disappointed time and after time.

It is true, that God wants your happiness, in an ultimate sense, for the Heavenly life has no regret, no sorrow, no sickness, and no dying, but that cannot be perpetuated in this fallen, broken world.

Yet, complete joy is out there, and you can taste it here in this life.

You know you want it. Others know you need it. Jesus knows how to gain it. And this is what His ultimate command aims at: YOUR JOY!

*“Love each other as I have loved you. This is what I’m commanding you to do.”*

Why do we resist? Why do we grumble and complain? Because it’s not an easy task. It sounds simple, but its also hard.

Because we don’t have it in ourselves. Our capacity to consistently love, even the nicest people in our lives, is small; we’re distracted and misled by our own desires and fears.

And even the nicest people are fallen sinners, like us.

So, their good day may be met by our bad day.

Or our good day may be met by their bad day.

And, God forbid that we are BOTH having a bad day!

Love is not in our nature; that is, our fallen nature.

Our fallen nature is all about self-preservation, self-protection, self-actualization, and self-aggrandizement. The power of God is required to overcome those leanings, to take greater interest in the benefit of someone else.

Of course, at the same time, love is in our nature; that is, our original design, for we were first created in the image of God, and what He loves, we all have the capacity to love (originally). But it's exactly that which has been broken by sin and buried by generations of systemic selfishness.

There is no *natural* remedy for this condition. Supernatural transformation is necessary. No wonder Jesus said, *"Don't be surprised when I tell you that you must be born again."* (John 3:7)

And to that He added, *"You will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes on you."* (Acts 1:8)

But that power must be deployed.

*"If by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, let us go forward walking in line, our conduct controlled by the Spirit."* (Galatians 5:25)

This is the key to spiritual fruitfulness. This is the path that leads to complete joy.

## **Conclusion**

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While I have been faithful to her as a partner in life, I have not always been faithful to put her ahead of myself. While I have never beaten her, I have not always been gracious to her. Our interests and motivations, while not incompatible, are not alike, in many areas.

So, each year, it's an amazing celebration! God has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. We are not barely getting through, we are thriving! Our love for God, and our love for each other, grows deeper and stronger with each passing year, and, I have no doubt, it shows.

A girl from the Sierra Mountains and a boy from the Bay Area have partnered together, out of our faith in Jesus Christ. And the Spirit of God has helped us to taste His complete joy.

Not the "complete joy" that is imagined to be the fullest individual human experience possible, but the actual full-circle completion of joy, experienced in community, when godly love is exchanged and sustained.

Impossible for people, but possible with God!

Set your sights on a fruitful life. A life of godly love. Life in the power of the Spirit. A life that truly glorifies God.

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Before His departure, Jesus told His followers, *“No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.”* (John 14:18)

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How have the Father and the Son come to make Their home in each of us? In the person of the Holy Spirit, whom we have received. He perfectly represents both the Father and the Son. He is God-with-you and God-in-you and God-on-you!

This is the design of roles and relationships which Jesus outlined in today's text:

- *You live in Me*
- *What I say lives in you*
- *You live in My love (as I live in Father's love)*

And also:

- *Father has loved Me*
- *I have loved you*
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## **Divine Objective**

*"You give glory to My Father when you produce a lot of fruit."*

Think of the words of the Bible as the seed... good seed... life-producing seed. Each seed needs good soil... (Are you that good soil?) And the seed must "die" and be buried, in order to reproduce... (At which point God will infuse it with life, producing a transformation.) Then, it must be well-tended during all its stages of growth... (That's the Gardener's job.) Finally, it brings a harvest—some thirty-, some sixty-, some a hundredfold.

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## **Condition**

God is not looking for fruit because He's hungry... It's because of what fruit-bearing *means* for us, and what bearing fruit *does in* us.

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Jesus taught: *"What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come— sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person."* (Mark 7:20-23)

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The Spirit and the Word, in tandem, working together, become the perpetual Resource and Sustainer of our lives in Christ.

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The result being, COMPLETE JOY!

*“I have told you this so that you will be as joyful as I am, and your joy will be complete. Love each other as I have loved you. This is what I’m commanding you to do.”*

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Why do we resist? Why do we grumble and complain? Because it’s not an easy task. It sounds simple, but its also hard.

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Love is not in our nature; that is, our fallen nature.

Our fallen nature is all about self-preservation, self-protection, self-actualization, and self-aggrandizement. The power of God is required to overcome those leanings, to take greater interest in the benefit of someone else.

Of course, at the same time, love is in our nature; that is, our original design, for we were first created in the image of God, and what He loves, we all have the capacity to love (originally). But it's exactly that which has been broken by sin and buried by generations of systemic selfishness.

There is no *natural* remedy for this condition. Supernatural transformation is necessary. No wonder Jesus said, *"Don't be surprised when I tell you that you must be born again."* (John 3:7)

And to that He added, *"You will receive power after the Holy Spirit comes on you."* (Acts 1:8)

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## **Conclusion**

Last week, Martha and I celebrated 48 years of married life together. It has not been easy. I have disappointed her and discouraged her in more ways than I can count, or would like to remember.

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# ABIDE In Me

Part 3



John 15:1-17

## ABIDE IN ME, Part 3

By Rev. Will Nelken

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*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, July 24, 2022*

Please read John 15:1-17 again (if you can find it, use God's Word Translation).

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Similarly, when you open your life to Jesus Christ, God plants His Spirit and Word in your heart, because He seeks fruitfulness from your life. Fruit is of paramount importance. So much so, that fruitless branches will eventually be removed and fruitful branches will be regularly pruned back so they can produce MORE fruit. This, and only this, glorifies God the Gardener.

Thus, we have established the need for an ongoing, vital connection (or relationship) with Jesus Christ (the Real Vine) in order to be spiritually fruitful—in terms of Christian character development and a character-driven lifestyle.

So, we have discovered in our Bible text three elements of the Christian life:

- Abiding
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- Life-flow

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Perhaps I will cut the whole branch off in order to give more nutrients to the remaining branches. Yet, somehow, it's difficult to pull the trigger on that plan. I think of a story Jesus told about a fruitless fig tree : *"Let me dig around it for another year and put fertilizer on it..."* and I wonder if I've done enough.

You see, there is a life-flow—a cycle of nature and nurture—that develops productivity (in plants and in people). Let's learn about that today. What can be done to favor our fruitfulness? What can be done to minimize our fruitlessness?

John 15:7-12 (God's Word Translation)

<sup>7</sup> *If you live in Me and what I say lives in you, then ask for anything you want, and it will be yours.* <sup>8</sup> *You give glory to My Father when you produce a lot of fruit and therefore show that you are My disciples.*

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We first looked at this passage from the perspective of "abiding"—remaining vitally connected to Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday, we explored the same theme from another angle: "at home in Jesus"—a relationship more personal, and designed for family and fruitfulness.

Today, for a third time, we'll look at this topic from yet another point of view: "live in Me." The union that is vital to our fruitfulness is more than proximate, more than close. *"You live in Me and what I say lives in you."*

It is nothing less than an *exchange* of life ( a life-flow)—of energy, of purpose, of character, and of love.

Within the vine, the flow of life that stimulates growth and, ultimately, fruitfulness is conducted by the sap that flows from root to fruit. The leaves exchange carbon dioxide and oxygen with the air, and receive solar energy, which is transmitted as glucose through the sap, along with water and mineral salts absorbed from the soil through its roots. Ultimately, it is this exchange of life-giving nutrients that produces fruitfulness.

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Your fruitfulness depends on a consistent flow of God’s grace—the sap of the Vine—through your submission to and dependence on the Holy Spirit. He is the life-flow that produces fruit among us.

This same Spirit was active in Creation, hovering above the formless waters. This same Spirit was active in forming the People of God (through the exodus).

This same Holy Spirit was active in the virgin-birth of Jesus. This same Spirit encouraged Jesus through His crucifixion. This same Spirit raised Christ from the dead.

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This is the key to spiritual fruitfulness. This is the path that leads to complete joy.

## **Conclusion**

Last week, Martha and I celebrated 48 years of married life together. It has not been easy. I have disappointed her and discouraged her in more ways than I can count, or would like to remember.

While I have been faithful to her as a partner in life, I have not always been faithful to put her ahead of myself. While I have never beaten her, I have not always been gracious to her. Our interests and motivations, while not incompatible, are not alike, in many areas.

So, each year, it's an amazing celebration! God has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. We are not barely getting through, we are thriving! Our love for God, and our love for each other, grows deeper and stronger with each passing year, and, I have no doubt, it shows.

A girl from the Sierra Mountains and a boy from the Bay Area have partnered together, out of our faith in Jesus Christ. And the Spirit of God has helped us to taste His complete joy.

Not the "complete joy" that is imagined to be the fullest individual human experience possible, but the actual full-circle completion of joy, experienced in community, when godly love is exchanged and sustained.

Impossible for people, but possible with God!

Set your sights on a fruitful life. A life of godly love. Life in the power of the Spirit. A life that truly glorifies God.

Won't you commit your life to follow Jesus Christ today? Won't you invite the Holy Spirit to come on you with power to live in His supernatural ways?