

ABIDE Study Guide

Action 1.1

If you know Jesus, then knowing the truth Jesus teaches us in John 15 may absolutely revolutionize your walk with Christ – this truth will impact the level of joy in your heart and the level of effectiveness you experience in your daily walk with Jesus

As a pastor for over twenty years, I've witnessed some followers of Jesus serve Him like they're on fire. They can't get enough, they don't stop, their lives are guided by the Holy Spirit and they are effective in the Lord's hand. I've also witnessed some who claim to love Jesus – they say they follow Jesus but they do absolutely nothing, never witness, never pray for others, never serve. Maybe they attend church once in awhile if their schedule allows, but it's clear that Jesus is not the main priority of their lives. So what makes the difference between these two kinds of people? Jesus tells us exactly what the difference is here in John 15:

John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. **2** 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.

Please notice the four elements Jesus describes here.

First, Jesus is the vine – the true vine – the vine supplies the power to produce the fruit.

Second, the Father is the vinedresser – He is in charge of the vine and its fruit production. The Father does whatever it takes to make sure the vine is optimized to produce godly fruit.

Third, there are healthy branches – the branches are used to actually realize the fruit.

Fourth, there are dead branches – they're initially connected to the vine, but they've died. They don't produce godly fruit

So just to make sure the analogy is clear – Jesus is the vine, He provides the power to produce the fruit – the Father optimizes the vineyard for production – and you and I are either healthy branches connected to Jesus that produce godly fruit or we're dead branches that don't produce.

Jesus addresses the dead branches first. He says branches that don't bear fruit are cut off the vine by the Father.

John 15:2 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.

Perhaps Jesus' statement will make more sense to us if we look at the context of the passage. Jesus is speaking to 11 disciples on the night before His arrest and crucifixion. What happened to the 12th disciple? His name is Judas. He has left the gathering to go betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Up until this night, Judas has looked like the rest of the guys. He has seemed connected to Jesus. He's gone to all the meetings, listened to all the messages, and he's seen all the miracles. But on this night, Judas shows his true colors. The fact is that Judas has never really served Jesus from his heart. He's been pretending to serve Jesus with the hope of getting some benefit out of his relationship with Jesus. When Jesus doesn't produce the benefit Judas expects, Judas decides to betray Him for 30 pieces of silver. At least he'll get something out of the last 3 years.

Judas is a dead branch. He's looked good on the outside, but his motivation for following Jesus is selfish. He's not genuine.

Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. **28** So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

We see this a lot in modern Christianity. People follow Jesus to obtain their benefit. They want a bigger bank account or a better house or an easier life or they don't want to go to hell – you name the benefit – but in the end, there is no life in their connection to Jesus. Yes, they may attend church, or sing in the choir or ... whatever ... they may look really good on the outside ... but they have no connection to the life-giving power of Jesus. They've never truly submitted their lives to Him. They only follow Him to realize a benefit.

Jesus warns us of the fate of any person who is not connected to Him. They are cut off from Him by the Father to be cast out and burned.

John 15:6 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.

So let's talk about the healthy branch.

John 15:2 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.

Here's God's process in developing us into mature disciples if we've genuinely repented and are serving Jesus. First, we can expect to bear fruit. What does fruit look like? Righteous living, the fruits of the Spirit, good works, witnessing, discipling others, fruit may show itself both in our character development and in our leading others to Christ and discipling them. The Holy Spirit controls these things as we cooperate with Him and obey.

But notice please as a part of the process, the Father is going to prune us. He's going to cut off those things in our lives that don't honor Him. Ouch. That may hurt. We may experience disappointment or loss or trials of various kinds. While we may think our life is going badly, the best explanation may be that the Father is pruning us. He may be developing our faith; teaching us perseverance; and bringing us to a place where we live holy lives in Him. To be effective as followers of Jesus we must submit to His pruning process and abandon what He hates while embracing what He loves.

1 Peter 1:6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, **7** so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here's our main point today:

John 15:4 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. **5** 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.

Jesus tells us to abide in Him. We are to stay connected to Him. We are to constantly nurture our relationship with Jesus. This is the only way to produce godly fruit. We can't bear fruit unless we abide in Jesus and He abides in us. In fact, Jesus says in verse 5 that if we are apart from Him, we can't do anything when it comes to bearing godly fruit in our lives. He supplies the power. Without direct connection to Jesus, His power will not flow through our lives making it impossible to produce godly fruit.

How do we abide in Jesus? The key for us is to stay connected. And by that I mean two things. First, we have to continue pursuing relationship with Jesus daily – minute by minute – we read His word regularly – we learn how to pray all day – we develop the habit of talking with Him throughout our conscious moments.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing,

Second, we obey. When we realize we're behaving in ways that go against what the Lord has said in His word, we repent and stop those behaviors. That's how Jesus continues to abide in us:

John 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

Or similarly:

John 14:23 Jesus answered him, “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.

If we want to be effective tools in God’s hands we must abide in Jesus. We must read and study His word. We must pray continually. We must obey. He’s leading our lives after all. He’s alive. He’s guiding us. We must stay, remain and abide to experience His producing godly fruit through us.

And if we are willing to do these things do you remember what Jesus said?

John 15:5 Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. Isn’t that fantastic? God will use our lives for His eternal purposes if we will abide in Jesus....

Isn’t that fantastic? The God of the universe is willing to use our lives to accomplish His eternal purposes through His power if we’ll only abide in Him. What greater satisfaction in life could there be? It all comes about as we abide in Jesus by nurturing and pursuing our relationship with Him each day.

Serve Jesus by loving Him with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength. He has promised to produce godly fruit through your life if you’re willing to abide in Him.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS:

- 1) What things distinguish a healthy branch that produces godly fruit from a dead branch that doesn’t?
- 2) What happens to people who aren’t connected to Jesus?
- 3) Name two things every believer can expect to happen in their lives when they abide in Jesus.
- 4) What must we pursue to remain or abide in Jesus?
- 5) Does John 15:5 teach us to do things “*for*” God or “*with*” God? Explain your answer.