

Abiding in Christ

By Debbie Ericksen

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser...Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15: 1, 4-5 NASB)

Each year, God faithfully provides an area of spiritual growth that He wants us to focus on. This year, we are taking a deep dive into what it means to **abide in Christ**. God's timing is so perfect. He is leading our entire church to pursue what it means to be a disciple of Christ and abiding in Him is a large part of that journey of faith.

For all the years I've read the above Scripture verses, I had to take a step back and ask the most basic of questions: What does it mean to abide in Christ? I could define the word but put into the full context of that question, I was not certain I could explain it. As I prayerfully pursued God's heart on this question and did some research, I discovered that I am not the only one asking that question and I have determined that the pursuit of what it truly involves will take the rest of my earthly life. It should be noted that the ESV and NASB translations use the word "remain" but the original Greek and Hebrew and the King James Translation use "abide".

As I explored the whole concept of "abiding", I learned that it's both an existing reality for followers of Christ AND a continuous pursuit to which we are called. Abiding is both a statement of fact AND an action.

Warren Wiersbe, a renowned Bible teacher, pastor, and author wrote: "To 'abide'...means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in us and through us to produce fruit."

R. A. Torrey, a renowned American Bible scholar, evangelist, pastor, and author wrote: "To abide in Christ...is to renounce all life independent of Christ, and constantly to look to Him for the inflow of His life into us, and the outworking of His life through us. When we do this, and in so far as we do this, our prayers will obtain that which we seek from God." *(Note: the last sentence does NOT mean that when we abide, we will get all the answers we want from God. Instead, it means that when we abide, our hearts and minds are more and more closely aligned to the heart of God and what He wants. Therefore, our prayers become the desire for what God already wants.)*

I love how Jesus uses creation to bring home the idea of abiding. **The Creator uses what He created to help us learn.** He chose vines and branches to communicate a much deeper message than appears on the surface. So, of course, the science teacher (who spent years teaching students all about plant structures and their functions that enable plants to survive) came out in me and I just HAD to take a closer look at this metaphor.

A vine (like many plants) has three main parts that are highly efficient and function together in a well-integrated system. The **roots** provide stability by anchoring the plant to the soil while also being able to absorb water and minerals from the ground. They are necessary for storing nutrients for the plant which is especially important during winter and/or in drought conditions.

The **vine** is the main stem of the plant. It contains a vascular system that is necessary to transport water and minerals up the stem from the roots and also provides the mechanism for sugars (created during photosynthesis) to be transported throughout the plant.

The **branches** grow from the main stem of the plant. Their leaves catch the sunlight needed for photosynthesis (which transforms sunlight into energy for the plant). Vines and many trees then produce fruit. A fascinating detail about this process is that the fruit produced shares the same DNA and nutrients as the main vine.

The entire plant has a two-way exchange system for water and nutrient transport. The roots send water up to the plant. Leaves also catch water and sunlight to provide energy and nutrition and transport that throughout the plant which then allows the plant to produce fruit. **A healthy plant produces much fruit.**

When Jesus used parables and metaphors to teach us, it always came with an invitation to dig beneath the surface for the deeper and eternal meaning. The metaphor of the vine and the branches is no different. When I apply it to my relationship with Christ and what it means to abide in Him, I have a few takeaways:

- As believers in Christ Messiah, we are called to be anchored in Him. He is the foundation of our life in Him and provides the stability we need for survival.
*“Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly **rooted** and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.”* (Colossians 2: 6-7, Emphasis mine)

He’s the Living Water that our root system needs to survive. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He revealed to her that He was the source of living water.

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life.” (John 4: 13-14)

- Christ declares Himself the vine and we are the branches. Not the other way around. Therefore, we need to remember that He is the provider of everything we need. ALL of our needs (physical, spiritual, and emotional) can only be met through Him.
- As branches that grow from the vine, we grow through staying anchored to the vine so that we can produce the fruit that God has purposed through us. As believers in Christ, we have been adopted as God’s children and, hence, members of His family and royal lineage (our spiritual DNA).

What are some practices and disciplines we can pursue this year to abide more closely in Christ?

- Communicate with Him more in **prayer**. He wants us to talk to Him but He also wants to help us settle our spirits so that we can listen and receive what He has for us.
- Spend more time **studying and applying His Word**. The Holy Spirit will provide the understanding and necessary corrections for our understanding.
- **Spending time in fellowship** with other believers and **sharing our faith** with those who are searching.

“Lord, thank you for the privilege of being your children through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. I am so grateful that You take the majesty of creation and use it to teach me important lessons about You and my relationship with You. Help me to settle my spirit so that I am not distracted by the noise and demands of life and so that I can receive what You have for me. Help me to live as a fruitful branch who is always depending on You for my sustenance and growth. To You be the glory. Amen.”