

THE GOSPEL OF

JOHN

Abide in the
True Vine

INTRODUCTION

John 15:1-17

Hudson Taylor was the founder of the China Inland Mission, and under God was responsible in the mid-19th century for leading hundreds of missionaries into China's interior for the first time. In 1869, when he was 37 years old, he entered a new phase of life. He began to drink more deeply at the experiential fountain of John 15:1-11. He was given a deeper, and more constant, more satisfying experience of abiding in Christ.

His son Fredrick Howard Taylor wrote in 1932,

Here was a man almost sixty years of age, bearing tremendous burdens, yet absolutely calm and untroubled. Oh, the pile of letters! any one of which might contain news of death, of lack of funds, of riots or serious trouble. Yet all were opened, read and answered with the same tranquility — Christ his reason for peace, his power for calm. Dwelling in Christ, he drew upon His very being and resources. ... And this he did by an attitude of faith as simple as it was continuous. Yet he was delightfully free and natural. I can find no words to describe it save the Scriptural expression "in God." He was in God all the time and God in him. It was that true "abiding" of John fifteen.

Jesus says, in John 15:1, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." This is a picture, a metaphor, of what he has just said. "As I complete my work in the next hours, I become the source of all life and fruitfulness — the vine. And my Father is tending this vine. He is seeing to it that the vine will bear all the living fruit he intends. And that includes his attention to me, the vine, and to you, my branches."¹

OPEN IT

1. What makes your home feel like home?

¹ Piper, John. Glorifying God by Bearing Fruit in Union with Christ. February 3, 2014. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/glorifying-god-by-bearing-fruit-in-union-with-christ>

Abiding in Christ

As much as the call to the church is to “go” (the Great Commission of Matt 28:18-20 or even John 20:21), there is just as much a call to the Christian to “stay,” “abide,” and “remain” in Christ. To “remain” is to find one's existence and meaning by means of the provision of Christ. It is to be aware of our dependence and insufficiency, which is a state that the world tries to reverse and deny.

This command to “remain” is not a burden but a gift, an opportunity to really live and, ironically, to truly be free it is to have life as it was designed, in harmony with the Creator. It is in a real sense to dwell in the house of God, to “tabernacle” with God through Christ and by the Spirit, even if a more perfect dwelling is still to come (cf. 14:2). And this command is matched by a promise that if we remain in Christ, he pledges to “remain” with us. To remain, then, is to exist in the grace and love of God.³

10. Why is it sometimes hard for us to draw our strength from God? Where do you often look for strength instead?

11. What does Galatians 2:20 tell us about this amazing new life we get to live since our old identities were crucified with Christ?

12. Verse 6 tells us of the dire consequences of not abiding in Christ. How can believers more fully live out and enjoy their relationship with God?

³ Klink, Edward W. III. *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John*. 2016. 659.

13. Verse 7 sounds like a blank-check promise, but what do you think Jesus is telling us about our prayer life when we abide in Him?

True Christian Friendship

The love of God *for* Christians becomes the love of God *between* Christians. This participation in the love of God creates a Christian relationship, a Christian friendship. Such “friends” are not casual acquaintances but are in a life-sharing and life-giving relationship that finds expression in a cumulative life together. In a Christian friendship one life might even be exchanged for another, promoting this cumulative “life” by means of a cumulative love - life and love that begin and end with God and therefore give unity and meaning to everything in between.⁴

14. It’s an absolute wonder that God would elevate His disciples to become His friends. What is better about life because we’re friends of God?

15. At times, we experience loneliness and isolation. What are some core features of Christian friendship that have made you feel close and accepted around other Believers?

⁴ Klink, Edward W. III. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John. 2016. 660.

16. Read Hebrews 10:24-25. What aspects of Christian community from this verse show up in your life?

This is the biblical vision of the life of the church. Unfortunately, compared to most of our local churches, it is more of a dream than a reality. Can the church recover this kind of community life, where friendship is defined not by one's Facebook status but by our corporate status as sons and daughters who are friends of God - in communion with the Father through the Son and by the Spirit? We must pray to that end! For this vision is the extension of God's love that begins in the sending of his Son (3:16). It is to find its embodiment and expression within the church and is to enable the church's mission in the world. God's love is not an option; it is a necessity, a foundation to the very existence of the church and also therefore to its life together.⁵

17. As a discipleship church, we seek to become more like Jesus. Who is one person in our church to whom you can be like Jesus and extend Christian friendship this week?

18. Write a one or two sentence prayer, asking God to make true Christian friendship a reality in your small group.

⁵ Ibid.