**Abide in the Kingdom**

John 15:1-11

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. 9As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

Today I want to focus on that archaic word used in this passage: abide’.

It came up in our Leadership Retreat seeking of God. It sits under the theme of being in relationship with God.

It is such a rich word that we have no real modern equivalent for.

We often translate the word as dwelling, inhabiting or sitting but it has far more depth than that

In a biblical sense, it represents a continuous connection with God, signifying loyalty, commitment, and faithfulness. The idea of abiding was not merely about physical presence but also encompassed emotional and spiritual dimensions.

Psalm 91:1 *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”*

This verse for example highlights the safety and peace found in a close relationship with God, suggesting that to abide is to find refuge in His presence.

The biblical meaning of "abide" invites believers into a dynamic relationship with God characterized by faithfulness, trust, and active engagement with His Word. Embracing the call to abide leads to spiritual growth, peace, and a deeper understanding of God’s purpose in our lives. [[1]](#footnote-1)

The metaphor of a vine and branch represents a relationship unlike any other. Though they are two separate entities, they are joined together. The branch relies on the vine for food and life—connection and sustenance. And the vine nourishes the branch so that it can bear fruit.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Fijian born NZer Rasik Ranchord describes abiding as the living union or connection, interpersonal relationship between Christ and us.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is that deeper meaning that I want to focus on today.

This little 5 letter word is one of the hardest to actually achieve.

I am activist, I am wired to do things for God. In my busyness and activity, the hardest thing for me to do in this world is just to be, to just dwell, to just sit, to just inhabit, to just abide.  I think to be meaningful I have to do and do and do and do until I die.

The great commission focuses on doing: Go into all the world, preaching and teaching and baptising

Our mission statement in this church is about doing: “to follow Jesus, grow in wholeness, and bring others to Him”

Our outworking of the vision statement was all about doing.

Yet before we can do anything, we must abide.

There is a warning about any lack of abiding and having a focus on doing. Richard and Henry Blackaby in their book *Spiritual Leadership: moving people on to God’s agenda* write:

If every time God's people need direction, they turn to their core values, then they have inadvertently found a substitute for God. The greatest dangers for apostasy are not departing from God to a distant shore but moving half a degree away from where God wants you to be. In Scripture, an idol was anything you turned to or trusted in that God asked you to go to him for. When a purpose drives what you do, you no longer need to abide in an intimate relationship with Christ or hear his voice. You simply need a list of core values. [[4]](#footnote-4)

[Repeat 2nd to last sentence.]

The challenge for me, and perhaps you, is that before we can do, we need to listen and to abide with God, we need to be grounded in God. We cannot do anything before we do the listening and abiding.

Abiding does not depend on OUR strength, growth, feelings, failures, or success, but on HIS ability to place us in the vine and keep us there. [[5]](#footnote-5) Note: the role difference in this quote– not our ability or strength but God’s.

Now let’s re-read the abide passages from John 15:

*4Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5… Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers…7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you… 9As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.*

The whole passage is about connection.

I find that abiding is best illustrated by horticultural analogies.

We have fruit trees on our property and in autumn every year I cut out the unruly branches, which are heading in the wrong direction (either crossing others or cutting out the light for others); I cut out the branches which did not fruit last year; I cut out the spindly weak branches; I cut out the diseased branches before they infect the whole tree.

And then I have a pile of cut off branches lying on the ground. Can I expect fruit from those cut off branches? The answer is clearly no, because they are detached from the tree and detached from the roots which provide nourishment and life. Only those still connected have a chance to fruit next season.

When I had a grapevine at one of our places, I would cut the branches back to the main stem every year to promote strong vigorous growth and then when the new branches grew, I would nip off that branch 2 leaves past the baby grape cluster, so the goodness went into the fruit and not into unproductive leaves. And I would cut off any branches that did not produce a cluster at all (the rogue leaders).

And if I was my poppa (grandfather), I would take a stool and sit down by the vine with nail scissors and cut out the small grapes in the cluster so that the larger stronger grapes would get fat and juicy.

The spiritual analogy is obvious.

Branches that will not submit to the purpose of the tree, the dead branches, the diseased branches, the non-fruiting leafy branches and the rogue leaders are removed, not by me or the church leadership but by the orchardist – God.

God wants us to be fruitful and he will do all in his purposes to achieve that in us.

But first, we need to abide.

The old hymn by Henry F. Lyte, called Abide with me

3rd verse

I need Thy presence every passing hour;

What but Thy grace can foil the tempter’s pow’r?

Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?

Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me

I had a vision picture after I had finished my Carey College pastoral training, and in the months afterwards, when no call to a church came. It was that I was a fruit tree, taken from the ground, with my roots wrapped in hessian to keep them from drying out, and I had been placed behind the potting shed. It was a time of waiting, a time of abiding in God. It was a time of doing nothing but trust God. The picture told me I had not been abandoned by God – he had not thrown me on the burn pile – and I needed to be still and wait on him and his timing to place me where I was to flourish and bear fruit.

It is God who produces the fruit in us.  He is the one who orchestrates when and where and how we will bear fruit.

Abiding cannot be faked. One author tells us that there is contrast between the Christian who imitates and the one who abides: Those who work are noisy and feverish; their efforts do not produce a sweet-smelling aroma to the Lord. Their fruit, which often will fool others at first glance, will be found merely to be counterfeit. But the believer who has learned the secret of abiding is quiet, refreshing, and full of real life - Christ's life![[6]](#footnote-6)

The fragrant, revitalising fruit that is produced by the abiding Christian is the fruit produced not for himself/herself but for others to enjoy, so that others may be renewed and live.

The abiding Christian’s eyes do not stray from the precious vine. “Seek first the kingdom of God and all things will be added to you”. Focus on the Kingdom of God.

The abiding Christian trusts the orchardist and the tree to take care of everything. Again, we are reminded that we do not add a day to our lives by worrying. Worry is actually a sign of distrust that God can provide for us. It is a sign that we think we have to do it all ourselves.

The abiding Christian submits to pruning readily, for each pruning has brought greater closeness to God and more abundant life. If we could ask a tree if it likes being pruned, the answer would probably be “no”. Similarly, it does not seem pleasant when we or the ministry we love or the church we love is pruned, but it is in our best interest as followers of Jesus and the church to be pruned by God, in order to better produce his fruit.

The branch does not try to produce fruit by its own will, or by its own agenda, or its own annual plan. It produces fruit because it is attached to the vine (Jesus), tended by the vine keeper (God).

The fruit is not our fruit.  This apple is not the fruit of branch A or B. It is the fruit of the apple tree. The same with us. The fruit is not ours; it is God’s.

It is the life-giving sap of the Holy Spirit that brings the nutrients from its source that produces the fruit.  Straining to produce anything does not produce anything, it is only abiding in the vine or in the tree that allows fruit to be produced.

This concept of abiding is so foreign to our way of life. In the times of abiding, we imagine ourselves to be idle and doing nothing. There is a sense that we should be doing something.

The 16th century Spanish Christian mystic John of the Cross says we must learn to abide in quietude with a loving attentiveness to God and pay no attention to the imagination and its work.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This is both easy and difficult. Easy, because the pray-er is drawn to be still before the Lord. But difficult too, because of that nagging sense (fostered by the devil) that we should be doing something, that our ‘idleness’ may be an insult to God.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Let me give you some tips on how we get to that place of being able to abide. (courtesy of the author Michael Wells)

The first step is to know ourselves and carry the attitude of absolute dependence that comes from this knowledge throughout the day. We are nothing – a dead stick – if we do not realise that we need to be attached to the tree, totally dependent on the tree for our survival.

Supernatural action of God comes only when we have our eyes off the problem and on him through abiding.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The second: Faith is about waiting in quiet confidence on God to provide. Faith in God to do everything in his timing, not ours. The branch does not fret and worry about the fruit, it waits for the right season and the right time, trusting in the vine and vine tender. Trust God with all our heart and soul and mind! Trust that the tree has our back, that it is providing all that we need, that even when the tree is dormant over winter and there are no leaves on the branches that the tree is not dead and will produce fruit in summer.

Third, we are to be aware that the abiding life is not a feeling, but an awareness. When we are filled with the spirit, we generally feel nothing, since it is a natural and normal way of life. The ones who flit from spiritual experience to spiritual experience, constantly chasing the next ‘move of the spirit’ are more like the bees raiding the flowers rather than the flower which will in turn produce the fruit. Be the flower, rather than the bee!

Fourth, we take our place as the creatures and give up our tendency and desire to play the role of the Creator. We are not God, and we have to relinquish our thoughts that we are.

Lastly, we resolve to live only one moment at a time.[[10]](#footnote-10)

This ties in with Scripture that says today had enough things to think about without worrying about tomorrow.

Matthew 6:25-34*do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Abide in the love of God

Matthew 6:33 *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

I leave the final question to Hudson Taylor, missionary to China: Are we willing to abide in him, and so to ‘bear much fruit?’[[11]](#footnote-11)

I am offering a chance to experience or practice this concept on abiding. On Saturday 8 March, I am offering a day long spiritual retreat called Spending time with the Everyday God. Let me know it you want to come.

1. https://bibledictionarytoday.com/words/abide/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Zabel, E. (2014). Abiding in the Vine. In J. D. Barry & R. Van Noord (Eds.), *Moment with God: A Devotional on Every Biblical Book.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rasik Ranchord *Dare to be a disciple* 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Richard and Henry Blackaby *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* 102 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Michael Wells *Sidetracked in the wilderness* 169 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Wells 158 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Thomas H Green 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Wells 157 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid 166-168 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Taylor, Mrs Howard *Behind the Ranges: Fraser of Lisuland*, 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)