

# 1 - “Abide in Me”

## OPEN IN PRAYER *1-2 min*

## BIG PICTURE *10 min*

Have you ever wanted to go “deeper” with Jesus? If we’re being honest, most of us quietly feel a deep yearning from somewhere inside us for a more profound and transformative relationship with Jesus than what we’re currently experiencing. But the reality is, it’s not always easy to know exactly what we mean by “deeper,” let alone how to get there. The good news is the Bible teaches that deep, personal, and authentic spiritual growth is possible for anyone who abides in Jesus.

As we journey together through the sessions ahead, we’ll see this isn’t *only* another Bible study (though we’ll read the Bible together each session). These times together are also designed to invite our group into honest sharing and discussion about what it looks like for each of us to grow deeper with Jesus through learning to abide in Him.

Because each session will be designed to maximize discussion, you will be encouraged to share with the group at whatever level you feel comfortable. Here are a couple of “ground rules” for making the most of our discussion times:

- **Share authentically and often, but no pressure.** Feel the freedom to share often. But there should also be no pressure to share unless you feel you want to.
- **Be present.** Do your best to stay focused on the present moment during each session. While the past and future are important (and we’ll talk a lot about them), try to stay with what you are “noticing” in your body and soul throughout each discussion.
- **Be patient with yourself on the journey.** Don’t worry about mastering everything we discuss. Simply take the next step you believe God is “inviting” you to take.
- **Be patient with one another.** Some people will want to share. Some people won’t. And that’s ok. No, seriously... that’s ok! What really matters is that God is working on each of our hearts, whether we’re ready to talk about it or not.
- **Refrain from giving unsolicited advice; it can feel like criticism.** If you share something and would like advice or help from the group when you finish, please ask for it. Otherwise, let each person share what’s on their heart, and simply thank them for sharing when they’re done.
- **Please participate, but don’t dominate.** Leave space for everyone who needs to speak to have the chance.



- **Commit to confidentiality.** Confidentiality is essential for honest sharing and building trust within the group.

In addition to our discussions, there will also be two primary types of application tools we will ask you to use along the way:

**Audits** - these are a set of questions to help guide you into a deeper understanding of where you are on the road with Jesus and/or where you are in the process of repentance (we will cover these topics more in the next session)

**Practices** - these are spiritual or abiding practices designed to help you practically “Repent” and “Follow” Jesus every day (again, we’ll cover this more in the coming sessions)

The road ahead won’t always be easy, but there is hope. In John 15, Jesus said that if we abide in Him, we will know Him at a depth we never could imagine, and our joy will soar beyond anything we ever dreamed possible! So here’s our first discussion. Are you ready?

1. *We are going to spend one minute in silence. Close your eyes, and invite the Holy Spirit to give you a picture or image of what it looks like for you to go “deeper” with God? (In one of the final sessions, we’ll ask you to do the same exercise to see how/if this image has changed.) Someone keep a 60-second timer. Ready. Set. Go!*
2. *After the minute is up, take some time to discuss it. Would anyone like to share what picture or image they saw? Was this difficult? Encouraging? Confusing? Awkward? Exciting? Etc.*



## READ THE WORD *10-15 min*

Understanding what the Bible teaches about deepening in our spiritual lives is crucial for our growth. Each week, we will take time to read out loud various passages that help us reflect on and discuss our relationship with Jesus and our journey of abiding in Him. These times are not meant to be comprehensive studies of the passages. We will talk more about the practice of deeper Bible study in some of the sessions ahead. But for the next few minutes, try to stay focused on the following.

As the passages are read, consider these questions:

1. *Be present. What word or phrase are you “noticing” as this passage is being read? If you want, write them down or underline them in your own Bible.*
2. *Be patient. What do you sense God is “inviting” you into as you hear these passages read out loud?*

### **John 15:4-5**

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.

### **1 John 2:5b-6**

5b By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

### **John 15:9-11**

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 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. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. *What words or phrases did you “notice”?*
2. *What do you sense you’re being “invited” into today?*



## CONSIDER THE TRUTH 20-25 min

Read the following article out loud and then discuss the questions that follow.

When the Bible talks about deep, personal, spiritual growth it often places you in two different locations. First, you find yourself in a vineyard (or a garden), surrounded by vines or branches or trees. Some of them are brown and dry and have no flowers or fruit growing on them. They're basically dead or overgrown with weeds, and they're clearly not showing any signs of life. But there are others that are thriving. They're full of fruit and flowers and beauty. They're bursting with life and growing stronger and stronger day after day and season after season. This vineyard or garden is one of the primary pictures the Bible uses to help us understand spiritual growth.

The second picture is that of a road or a "way" you are walking down. It's long. It's winding. At times, the views it gives you are breathtaking. At other times, it's scary and dark and full of danger. But the road ends inside a kingdom so beautiful and so glorious that your soul longs to find its home inside its gates.

Along the way, some people veer off the road. They go their own way because they either believe there is something better away from the road, or they're so distracted by the everyday stuff of life that they blindly wander off the road. One way or another, they rarely realize that by veering off the road, they've actually wandered into a fog so thick that they're lost and heading toward a pit they never saw coming.

Yet others stay on the road. They stay because they've not only seen that the road is leading them toward the Kingdom their souls long for, but they've also found the King of that Kingdom. He is actually already present on the road, inviting them to remain with Him every step of the way. This road, like the garden, is also a primary picture the Bible uses to help us understand spiritual growth.

A garden and a road. It isn't an either-or kind of thing. To grow deep in your relationship with Jesus is to be a thriving branch or tree in the garden *and* to be the person who remains on the road with Jesus no matter where that road takes you. These two images are foundational to any understanding of what it means to go "deeper" with Jesus.

Where in the Bible do we get these ideas? It all stems from the word "abide." Consider the image of a vineyard or a garden for a moment. In John 15:4, Jesus says, "*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." Jesus is clearly saying that for you to thrive, you must learn to "abide" in him like a branch abides in a vine.

What does "abide" mean? Some have come to believe that Jesus is simply saying abide means to obey Him. And while we'll see in the sessions ahead the essential importance of obedience, something more is happening in this passage that cuts straight to the heart of what it means to go "deeper" in our walk with Jesus.

The word “abide” in John 15 means “to remain” in or with something or someone. Consider the New International Version (the “NIV”) of John 15:5. It says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you *remain* in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Jesus is basically saying, “If you learn to remain with me all the time, no matter what, I will remain with you, and you will experience a deep, healing, and life-transforming relationship with me that results in you flourishing like the healthiest vine in the finest vineyard in the world.” In other words, to grow deep, we must learn to “abide” or “remain” with Jesus at all times.

Which brings us back to the road image. How do we know how to go about abiding or remaining with Jesus at all times? In 1 John 2:6 we see a clear answer. There John says, “whoever says he abides in him (i.e. Jesus) ought to *walk in the same way* in which he walked.” In other words, to abide or remain with Jesus, we must learn to follow Him no matter where His “way” or His road takes us. Jesus is telling us, “If you remain with me on my road no matter where I take you, your life will be transformed by my presence with you.”

To abide in Jesus is the key to spiritual depth. To abide in Jesus is to remain with Him as we follow Him in every step we take on the road of our lives. And as we remain with Him, we will actually begin to grow and thrive in ways we never thought possible. This is the promise Jesus makes to us.

So, in the sessions ahead, we will explore spiritual depth by asking, “What does it look like to remain connected to Jesus every step of the way, no matter where His road takes us?” After all. The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus is the vine; we are the branches. As we heard in John 15:9-11, when we remain connected to Him, we remain connected to the joy-inducing love of God, and we will bear the fruit of a deep, authentic, passionate relationship with Him. What more depth could we ask for than that!?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. *What stood out to you as we read? What sounded true? What sounded less true or confusing?*
2. *Which of the two images stood out to you the most as we read? The Garden/Vineyard or The Road? Any particular reason why it stood out to you?*
3. *What does “abiding/remaining” with Jesus look like for you right now?*



## APPLICATION 10-15 min

The natural first response to hearing what Jesus says about “abiding/remaining” with Him is to say, “Ok, but now what?” In the sessions ahead, we will be seeking to answer that question in specific and practical ways. For now, it’s critical to remember that the key to spiritual growth is to simply be with Jesus. To “remain” with Him as much as possible. So this week, here are two ways you can begin to practice abiding in Jesus.

### 1. AUDIT: An Invitation to “Abide”

Take some time one day this week to sit with and complete the following audit. We won’t read the questions out loud right now. Instead, open this up again and complete it this week. Let’s skip forward to the “Practice” part below.

*This week, we saw in John 15:4-5 that God invites us to a life of “abiding” or “remaining” in Jesus. Apart from this, we can do nothing (verse 5). Take a moment to read the rest of the passage in John 15:1-17.*

*While we’ll get to more of this passage in the weeks ahead, for now, notice that when it comes to abiding in Christ, we are being invited to “make our home” in the love of Jesus right now (verse 9). He isn’t waiting for us to clean up our lives before extending the invitation to remain with Him. Instead, through His Gospel (literally his “Word”), He has already made us clean (verse 3).*

*So, the invitation to abide in Jesus is being extended to you right now! Take a moment and conduct a spiritual audit of how/if you are abiding in Christ. Try to write down your answers in a journal or on your device.*

1. *Does your relationship with Jesus primarily revolve around doing something for/obeying him or resting/being with him?*
2. *If you’re honest, what do you “abide” in the most? If you’re also being honest, how do you typically view yourself? Are there any connections between those two answers that you are noticing?*
3. *Close your eyes for a moment. Ask yourself at the deepest level, what does “Home” look like to you?*
4. *At this moment, what is God’s default posture towards you?*
5. *If there was a universe in which you didn’t have to do anything for God, what (if anything) would you want to do with God?*

Once you have completed this audit, ask yourself:



1. *What did I notice when answering these questions? What was easy? What was hard? Convicting? Confusing? Encouraging? Etc.*
2. *What am I being led to share with my group the next time we get together?*

## **2. PRACTICE: No Agenda “Remaining” with Jesus**

Take 10 *intentional* minutes each day this week to just simply “be with Jesus.” Maybe you could take the time during your normal prayer and/or Bible study each day (if you are doing these things). As you pray or as you read the Bible, intentionally think about and talk to Jesus as if He is there with you. However you choose to be intentional, the main thing to focus on is simply “remaining” with Jesus with no agenda except to be with Him.

Ask “noticing” and “inviting” questions:

1. *What am I noticing during these intentional times of being with Jesus?*

*Some examples might be: What am I feeling? Joy? Fear? Shame? Peace? A sense of his presence? A sense of emptiness? Something else? What is hard about this practice? What is exciting about it? Is it easy to do? Hard to do? Etc.*

2. *What am I being invited to share with the group the next time we get together?*

## **FINAL QUESTIONS AND PRAYER** *5-10 min*

Does anyone have any final questions or anything they feel they would like to share?