



**Living the Fruitful Life – A Study of John 15**

*Week 3: Hanging in there - the discipline of abiding*

There is a great emphasis in our culture these days on “self”. We seek to build a child’s self-esteem. We shower words of praise on men who we see as “self-made men”. We are encouraged to be self-reliant and many motivational speakers want to help us find the “giant” within ourselves. This is the emphasis of the world in which we live.

But God’s emphasis is different. We are told to have no confidence in our sinful selves (Philippians 3:3). Rather than looking for the giant within, we are to die to self (2 Corinthians 4:11) for apart from Christ nothing good lives in us (Romans 7:18).

This does not mean that we are to live in a vacuum. No. Instead of self-dependence, we Christians are to have a Christ-dependence. It is as we depend on Christ and His life in us that we are able to live the Christian life.

Of course, we know we are to depend on Him for forgiveness of sins and eternal life. But we also need to depend on Him to produce His character in us. We are to depend on Him so we can live the Christian life here and now. This is the call of Jesus to each of us when He says, “Abide in me.” (John 15:4) He is calling us to die to self and depend on Him to produce His fruitful life within us.

Charles Price writes, “The whole point of the Christian life is that only Jesus Christ can live it. It is not a technique or a discipline but a relationship where you allow Jesus Christ to make His home in your heart and allow Him to live in you the life you could never live by yourself. If you could live it by yourself then why bother becoming a Christian, just go and do it! But of course you can’t, which is why Jesus Christ is indispensable, not just as the One who forgives you of your past, but as the One who comes to live within you and replaces your life with His.”<sup>1</sup>

As we think about abiding in him this week may we learn what it means to die to self and live for Him.

- B. I surrendered my life to Christ at one time, but I don’t know whether I am surrendered to Him today.
- C. I have never fully surrendered my life to Christ.
- D. Other \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup>

Pray: Reflect on what God has said to you today through the study. Write out your prayer to God.

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**Endnotes**

1. Charles Price *Alive in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1995), 87.
2. Charles Price, *Ibid.*, 31.
3. Bo Stevens, *Abide In Christ*, (Nashville, Tennessee: LifeWay Press, 2007), 43.
4. Bo Stevens, *Ibid.*, 43.
5. Charles Price, *Christ for Real* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1995), 39-40.
6. Charles Price, *Christ for Real* , 115.
7. Bo Stevens, *Ibid.*, 63.

Here’s a problem – is Jesus now contradicting everything he has just said? Is there something that we must do after all? No. We have discovered that we are to trust Jesus. Now Jesus tells us what trusting Him looks like. It’s not simply sitting in our easy

chair and uttering a nice prayer. Trusting Jesus is active obedience. We must do both, trust Him and obey Him. The obedience flows out of an attitude of trust. Obedience demonstrates that we are trusting Him. The two do not contradict one another. They complement one another.

1. To what degree do you think Jesus kept his Father's commands?

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2. Remember Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Where will our ability come from to obey Jesus Christ?

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Reflection and Prayer:

“Obedience and trust must never be detached from one another. Obedience to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ without a corresponding trust in Him for the strength and ability those commands require will lead only to frustration and temptations to hypocrisy. If we take the teaching and commands of Jesus seriously without an understanding of His own role in their fulfillment, we can only be discouraged. His commands are humanly impossible. This is why Christendom is such a fertile field for hypocrisy and pretense, as people try desperately hard to obey, but without drawing on the resources of God's strength to fulfill what he commands.”<sup>6</sup>

Which statement best describes your surrender to Christ?

A. I completely surrender my life to the Lord each day as best I know, and He helps me to obey Him.

*Monday January 23*

In Christ alone

Pray: Dear God, I want to reflect You to the world in which I live. Help me to die to self and yield myself to Your life in me. Lord, show me if there is any area of my life that I am holding back from You. May I have the courage and the faith to give it to You

Read: Mark 10:17-22; John 15:4-5

1. In Mark 10:17-22 what does the man ask of Jesus? (verse 17)

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Let's be clear. It is not a sin to be rich. To be sure, we need to be aware of the dangers of wealth and avoid them. We also need to be careful about our aspirations. But being wealthy is not a sin. The problem with this man is that he is worshipping two gods and is unwilling to relinquish one (wealth) in order to worship the true God.

2. What is the one thing he lacks? Write verse 21 in your own words.

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3. What was the man good at doing? (verse 20)

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Christ loves me:

4. In light of this story, how would you define the word "abiding"? What does abiding look like to you? (see also 2 Corinthians 5:15)

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- intimately
- personally
- sacrificially
- impartially
- infinitely
- perfectly
- immeasurably

Reflection and Prayer:

One of the dangers with the whole idea of abiding in Christ is that we spend a lot of time and effort trying to abide! Don't be preoccupied with abiding – be preoccupied with Christ and you'll discover that you are abiding!

Jesus essentially says to us in John 15:4-5, "Stop trusting in anything or anyone except me. Stop trusting self. Trust me. Be preoccupied with me and rest in what I will do in you and through you. You need no more than me."

How would you describe your abiding in Christ?

- A. I've never thought of it before.
- B. I've done all I can to abide in Christ.
- C. I focus my attention on a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Pray: Using Psalm 37:7 as your foundation write out a prayer to God. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." (Psalm 37:7)

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1. Consider Jesus' love for you. Using Galatians 2:20 as a guide circle the qualities of Christ's love that are true for you and your experience.

Reflection and Prayer:

Jesus said, "Abide in my love." The question is how? Like all relationships it takes time. We need to spend time with Jesus, believing Him to be our heavenly vine, and bask in His love. Turn your back on yourself, your efforts to produce the Christian life. Walk away from everything but the love of Christ. Let your mind be preoccupied with that love, worship the God of that love and wait for that love.

Pray: Spend some time basking in the love of Christ for you.

*Friday January 27*

Obey and abide

Pray: Dear God, teach me the connection between obedience and abiding in You. May my will be ever submissive to You. May my thoughts be obedient to You. May my feet be ever willing to follow where You lead.

Read: John 15:10

1. What does Jesus say is the condition for abiding in His love?

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Christ died and returned to life so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9). Paul also wrote, "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:15). Do you see the basic problem with the rich young ruler? He wanted Christ as his servant, not as his master.

He wanted Christ to meet his need, not to tell him what to do. There is no experience of God on those terms. If someone comes to Christ and says in effect, "I want to experience you as my Saviour, but I do not want you to be Lord of my life to tell me what to do and how to live," that person will receive from the Lord Jesus Christ precisely nothing."<sup>8</sup>

Pray: Write out a prayer to God.

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**Thursday January 26**

Abide in my love

Pray: Lord, today may I have the power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for me. May I know this love that surpasses knowledge. And may I be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Read: John 15:7-9; Galatians 2:20

2. Jesus said we are to abide in His love. What do you think this means?

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**Tuesday January 24**

Apart from Me you can do nothing

Pray: Dear God, there are times when I feel that I can do it all myself. There are times when I feel I don't need you. I have my gifts, talents and abilities. Lord forgive me. I can't be what you want me to be on my own. Help me to recognize that I can't even do a little bit on my own and a little bit with you. Help me to see that you must do all in me and through me.

Read: Philippians 4:10-13; John 15:5

1. What does Jesus mean when He says, "apart from me you can do nothing"? What is Jesus referring to?

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2. How is Paul able to say, "I can do all things"?

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3. Consider:

"When Paul says he can do 'everything' he does not mean he can jump over the moon, but that all God has planned and intends for him is possible in the strength of Jesus Christ. Outside of Christ, nothing is inevitable. At the end of time, we will stand before God with empty hands. In Christ, nothing is impossible. At the end of time we will stand full of gratitude for all that God has chosen to do. Are you living a life where nothing is inevitable, or are you enjoying the life where nothing is impossible?"<sup>2</sup>

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- 4. Which best describes how you are trusting and abiding in Christ?
  - A. Moment by moment – constantly trusting Him for everything.
  - B. More and more – growing to trust Him every moment.
  - C. Periodically – trusting Him but not all the time.
  - D. Other \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup>

Reflection and Prayer:

“The one lesson of the parable [John 15] is: as surely, as naturally as the branch abides in the vine, you can abide in Christ. You are a branch. We must cry to God to deliver us forever from the “without Me” and to make the “abide in Me” an unceasing reality! Focus your heart on what Christ is and can do and on his divine power and his tender love to each of his branches, and you will confidently declare, “Lord! I am abiding; I will bear much fruit. My weakness is my strength. Without you, nothing. In You, much fruit.”<sup>4</sup>

Pray: Lord Jesus, apart from You I can do nothing. I accept the conditions Lord: Me nothing, You all. Lord, thank You for the blessing of ‘nothingness’ because You are the Vine who gives and works all things in me. Let it be so, Lord. Reveal the wonder of this wonderful life to me.

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Pray: Lord, the Psalmist tells me that the one who delights in Your Word is blessed. They will be like a tree planted by the streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Lord, may my life be like that tree.

Read: John 15:6

- 1. How would you describe a withered branch? What has caused it to wither? What fruit can it bear? What is it good for?

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- 2. How would you describe a person who has become like a withered branch? What would cause a person to wither? (see Luke 14:33)

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- 3. We need to examine our own lives. How would you describe your relationship with Jesus Christ?
  - A. Fresh, green, vigorous, bearing fruit in its season
  - B. Brittle, hard, little fruit
  - C. Wanting to grow, willing to bear fruit

Reflection and Prayer:

“The Christian life begins with surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. His coming into the world, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead were in order to establish a relationship with man in which the surrender of man and the Lordship of Christ would be fundamental. “For this reason,