

November 8

Lesson 10 (KJV)

## A BIDDING LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING : Psalm 80:7–19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE : John 15:4–17

JOHN 15:4–17

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

### KEY VERSE

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. — John 15:5

L OVE FOR O NE A NOTHER

Unit 3: Godly Love Among Believers

LESSONS 9–13

### **LESSON AIMS**

**After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:**

1. Define how the vine/branches metaphor describes our relationship to Christ.
2. Connect love and obedience as complementary elements in the Christian life.
3. Identify ways to abide in Christ more faithfully.

### **LESSON OUTLINE**

#### **Introduction**

A. Wired for Relationship

B. Lesson Context

I. The Vine and the Branches (John 15:4–8)

A. Connected and Fruitful (vv. 4–5)

Grounded in Prayer

B. Severed or Withered (vv. 6–8)

II. The Lord and His Friends (John 15:9–17)

A. Loving, Joyful Obedience (vv. 9–11)

B. Great, Sacrificial Love (vv. 12–14)

C. Chosen Messengers (vv. 15–17)

Jesus Is a True Friend

Conclusion

A. Unselfish Love

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

Galilee Gal- uh-lee.

Judas Joo- dus.

Judea Joo- dee- uh.

Samaria Suh- mare- ee-uh.

## Introduction

### A. Wired for Relationship

Most of us in the West are highly connected to others. We check our phones constantly for new texts, new posts, and new updates. Our thumbs are flying in response. We have internet news outlets that we check daily, not satisfied to wait for the evening news or the morning newspaper. Though family or friends live far away, their faces come to us instantly in video calls. We live online in many ways.

But these connections can be fragile or even illusory. Think of the lonely woman who connects with a man who lives 500 miles away, only to discover that the “man” is actually a bunch of “borrowed” pictures being used for a teenager’s entertainment. Or consider how easily an online connection can be severed, with just the click of a button. Though we are wired for relationships, we may find that those relationships are not always what we think and definitely not what we need.

Our lesson today speaks of a different type of connectedness, the one between Jesus and His followers. How does this work though? How can we be connected to Him?

### B. Lesson Context

John 15 is at the center of the Farewell Discourse ( John 13–17 ), a series of speeches and a prayer given by Jesus during the last supper. Generally, this section has material unique to John among the Gospels (see lesson 9 Lesson Context ). The content makes up about 17 percent of the total text of John.

Jesus builds His case for mutual love by using common observations from the vineyard. The vineyard was a staple of agriculture in the ancient world. In the Bible, Noah is the first recorded grape grower ( Genesis 9:20 ), and human society has prized the fruit of the vine ever since. The fruit thereby produced became a source of sustenance year-round, with many of the harvested grapes being converted into raisins and wine for later consumption (see 2 Samuel 16:1 ). One of the enticing descriptions of the promised land was its productive vineyards ( Deuteronomy 6:10– 11 ; 8:7–10 ). Indeed, a physical sign brought back by the ill-fated spying expedition into the promised land was a massive cluster of grapes ( Numbers 13:23 ).

Vineyards were a common sight throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judea in Jesus’ day. Besides today’s text, He also used vineyard imagery in His parables of the workers in the vineyard ( Matthew 20:1–16 ), the two sons ( 21:28–32 ), the wicked husbandmen ( 21:33–39 ), and the barren fig tree ( Luke 13:6–9 ). Common experiences regarding vineyards are also assumed in 1 Corinthians 9:7 .

Grapevines would be pruned severely at a certain time of the year, leaving little more than a leafless, branchless stump that would be propped up with a rock or two. All the old branches would be cut off and carried away, providing valuable fuel for home fires.

After new branches had grown, a second pruning would occur to remove the smaller branches. This allowed the larger branches to produce bigger clusters of larger grapes. Such pruning was part of the process known as dressing the vines ( Deuteronomy 28:39 ).

## I. The Vine and the Branches

( J OHN 15:4–8 )

### A. Connected and Fruitful (vv. 4–5 )

**4 . Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.**

The same Greek word translated abide is translated many ways depending on context, including forms of remain (example: John 1:33 ), continue (example: 11:54 ), and dwell (example: 14:10 ). The same word appears in John 8:31 where Jesus proclaimed, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” The word’s wide semantic range suggests many ways of staying connected. We cannot abide in the physical body of Jesus. We abide in Jesus when we follow His word, His teachings, as a result of our relationship with Him ( 6:56 ).

John’s first readers were little different from us when it comes to connecting with Jesus. They believed He rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven, as we do. But that happened 50 or 60 years earlier for John’s readers (see lesson 9 Lesson Context ), making remembered face-to-face contact with their Lord unlikely. Yet John insisted that the command to abide in Christ was also for them. The vineyard metaphor reassures readers even today that we will see the fruit of our relationship with Jesus when we remain faithful to Him (see commentary on John 15:8 , below).

#### **What Do You Think?**

What one extra practice can you adopt to strengthen your connection to the vine?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How would you answer this question in terms of “philosophy and vain deceit” ( Colossians 2:8 ) you should confront?

**5 . I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.**

The vine is the main, above-ground stalk of the plant. Each grape plant will have one vine, but many branches splitting off it. The vine is the source of water and nutrients that come from the roots to nourish the branches and fruit . The branches need to stay connected to the vine if they are to live.

In the same way, disciples will be intimately connected to Jesus for life-giving spiritual nourishment and leadership. If this relationship is strong, the natural result will be the production of fruit.

## GROUNDED IN P RAYER

I recently took a tough job as the head of an organization that had faced many challenges in the previous year: a decrease in revenue, infighting among staff, and low productivity. I knew it would take time to learn about the people, the culture, and the backstory of the current challenge. I also knew that I would have to keep myself grounded in prayer in order to lead well.

As I researched records and met with stakeholders, I discovered that the problems were worse than I had been told. Some days were grueling as I searched through many documents. I was frustrated by the issues I was tasked with fixing. By the end of each work week, I felt exhausted. However, I noticed that the weeks that I experienced the most fatigue were those in which I sacrificed my time with God to keep working.

Jesus said, “Without me ye can do nothing” ( John 15:5 ). Jesus is the very source of our life. Staying connected to Him is not an option; it’s a necessity.

### B. Severed or Withered (vv. 6–8 )

**6 . If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.**

Not all branches coming out of the vine are productive or even survive. Some branches are visibly damaged in various ways or even dead. Others simply have no fruit well into the growing season, thus becoming like parasites that suck life-giving water and nutrients from the vine and its roots. Such branches are removed from the vine to allow the remaining branches more room to flourish.

Fuel for fires was always in demand, but these branches seem to be a bonfire just to dispose of trash. This is an image of judgment (compare Luke 3:9 ). To be thrown into the fire is a negative judgment on the faithless and disobedient (see Ezekiel 19:12 ; Matthew 13:42 ; Revelation 20:15 ).

#### What Do You Think?

What false vine have you seen as most dangerous in drawing people away from Christ?

#### Digging Deeper

Which false vine seen in Matthew 7:15 ; 2 Corinthians 11:12–14 , 26 ; Galatians 2:4 ; 2 Peter 2:1–3 ; and 1 John 4:1–3 most threatens to sever you from the true vine? How will you resist?

**7 . If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.**

Jesus began a more direct description of what it means to abide in Him, tying it to having His words abide in a person. This means to have our ways of thinking and ways of acting guided by the teachings of Jesus. To live in Christ is to live with His commands and teachings as our chief influence (see Colossians 3:16 ).

Understanding this helps us know what Jesus meant when He promised that we can ask whatever we will and expect it will be done, a reference to prayer. This is not some sort of magical formula though.

Praying to find a chest of pirate treasure so we can be rich would not be within the scope of Jesus' promise. Even asking for good things may go against God's will and thus not be given (example: Mark 14:35–36 ). In all cases, such asking and promised answering is only for those who are deep in the mind-set of Jesus ( John 14:14 ). If we are abiding as He asks, we will not ask something that is clearly contrary to the will of our Lord ( 16:23–24 ).

### **8 . Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.**

Jesus summed this up in three ways. First, this faithful abiding and resulting obedience bring glory to the Father. Our actions reflect on our Lord. Faithful, gracious actions bring God glory. Second, faithful abiding will bear much fruit. This might be evidence of a godly life, what Paul described as the “fruit of the Spirit” ( Galatians 5:22–23 ). It is also the reproduction of one's life in the creation of new disciples.

This leads to the third item in Jesus' summary: doing this is the core of being a disciple of Christ. Disciple , though now a churchly word, is similar to the English word student. Jesus is the teacher from whom we learn. He is the teacher we never outgrow. We are Jesus' disciples for life.

#### **What Do You Think?**

In which area of discipleship are Christians weaker: their way of thinking or their way of living? Why?

#### **Digging Deeper**

Considering passages such as Titus 2:11 and Jude 3 , what guardrails can Christians erect to avoid rationalizing in either area?

## **II. The Lord and His Friends**

### **( J OHN 15:9–17 )**

#### **A. Loving, Joyful Obedience (vv. 9–11 )**

### **9 . As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.**

Jesus moved beyond the vine analogy to speak more directly about the relationship between His disciples and himself, and among the disciples themselves. He began with the most fundamental dynamic in the universe: God's love. Jesus testified to the Father's love for Him throughout the book of John. This love is demonstrated by the authority the Father gave the Son ( John 3:35 ) and the Father's revealing His plans to the Son ( 5:20 ). The Father also loves the Son for His willingness to give His life for sinners ( 10:17 ).

The love of the Father for the Son has no starting date ( John 17:24 ). This relationship of love for the Son by the Father is eternal. It is therefore an unchanging quality that we can depend on. God's love never changes and never fails. All these things that describe the Father's incredible love for Jesus describe, in turn, Jesus' incredible love for His disciples. Yet experiencing that love fully requires believers to continue in Jesus' love.

**10 . If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.**

Jesus pushed the connection between command-keeping and love-abiding beyond His relationship with His disciples to the ultimate paradigm: His relationship with His Father. Jesus asked them to consider that He always kept His Father's commands and never departed from His deep, abiding relationship with His Father.

We should remember that in our relationship with God, there is not a progression from command-keeping to being loved. We are not loved because we are obedient; we are loved because we are God's creatures. We cannot earn God's love. The relationship begins with the eternal love of the Father for us, just as the Father's love for the Son has no beginning or end. We are obedient because we are loved and return that love through keeping the Father's commandments. That is how we abide in the Father's love.

**What Do You Think?**

What guardrails or spiritual disciplines can you put in place to ensure that your keeping of Jesus' commandments does not result in pride or a sense of entitlement?

**Digging Deeper**

Going the other way, what kinds of guardrails probably won't work? Why?

**11 . These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.**

Loving God (and therefore being obedient to Him) is not drudgery. It brings joy , a full lifetime of joy. It may seem bizarre for Jesus to speak of great joy on the night of the last supper because of what lay ahead: agony in prayer ( Luke 22:42–44 ), betrayal ( 22:48 ), a sense of abandonment ( Matthew 26:56 ; 27:46 ; compare Psalm 22 ), unjust trials ( Matthew 26:57–68 ; Luke 22:66–23:25 ), brutal beating ( Matthew 27:26 ), and death by crucifixion ( 27:27–50 ). He would truly be the “man of sorrows” in the hours ahead ( Isaiah 53:3 ). Sorrows are temporary, though, and the reward for endurance is eternal ( 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 ). A little later, Jesus promised His disciples that their great sorrow and emotional pain would turn into joy ( John 16:20–22 ), a situation aided by the coming of the Holy Spirit ( 16:12–15 ).

**B. Great, Sacrificial Love (vv. 12–14 )**

**12 . This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.**

This command is found in many places in the New Testament. In John's Gospel, it is first introduced in 13:34 . Paul also taught this command for believers ( Romans 12:10 ; 13:8 ; 1 Thessalonians 4:9 ), as did Peter ( 1 Peter 1:22 ). Neither of these apostles learned this new commandment by reading John. Instead, the command was learned from Jesus himself, just as John records.

Therefore, this command is one of the core elements of being a Christian. A non-Christian may indeed be a loving person, but it is difficult to understand how a Christian could be an unloving person. There are many deep and complex issues to the Christian faith, but this is not one of them. When asked whom

we must love, Jesus told a story of actively loving one's enemies ( Luke 10:25–37 ; see lesson 7 ). If we love our enemies, who are we entitled not to love?

### **13 . Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

Earlier, Jesus taught that this was to be the ultimate sign of discipleship, a demonstration that would mark Christians as different to those outside the fellowship ( John 13:35 ). Now He clarified that this love has no limitations. We should love one another even to the point of dying for one another. This is a tall order indeed!

There is a sense of poignancy here when we consider that John, the author of this book, would be the only disciple present to die of natural causes. According to church history and tradition, all the others in the room would give their lives for Jesus and the church. John remembered that Jesus loved His disciples to the end ( John 13:1 ), but they would love Him to their ends too. There is no greater love than this.

### **14 . Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.**

Again, Jesus circled back to the expression of our love for Him: doing His commands. When we accept that the Father has great love for us, we will love Him in return. We will express our love for Him by obedience, not rebellion or apathy (compare 1 John 4:19–21 ). As this love-and-obey pattern gains strength in our lives, we will find joy that comes from God. This puts us in a new category. We are Jesus' friends , motivated out of love to do what God requires of us.

## **C. Chosen Messengers (vv. 15–17 )**

### **15 . Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.**

A servant ultimately obeys out of fear. A servant could be harshly punished with near impunity for the owner in the legal system of Jesus' day. Servants were not confidantes of their masters. Their job was to obey without knowledge or comment.

Such blind obedience is not what Jesus expects. His disciples are not servants but friends. These are not acquaintances or business associates; a friend is one for whom a person feels deep affection and demonstrates loyalty. Few servants would ever be considered beloved friends of their masters. Jesus disclosed that friendship is the relationship He has been working toward throughout His three-year ministry with the disciples. Their knowledge has grown because of Jesus' many revelations of the nature of the Father and of the plans He and the Father have for the future. The disciples are "insiders," friends considered worthy of receiving all things Jesus has heard from His Father.

#### **What Do You Think?**

What would have to change, if anything, for you to be convinced that Jesus considers you a "friend" instead of a "servant"?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How do Exodus 33:11 ; Isaiah 41:8 ; John 11:11 ; and James 2:23 help you answer this?

## **JESUS IS A TRUE FRIEND**

During my college years, a popular Christian song referred to God as a friend. A classmate protested anytime he heard it. He thought it was blasphemy to refer to God—the holy Creator of the universe—as a friend. He observed people falling in and out of relationship with God just as they did with their other friends. He saw Christians not honoring God with their actions, in the same way they disrespected their friends. He pushed the idea that people need to respect God as God and not treat Him as they treated their friends.

My colleague was partially right, but he missed what Jesus said. Jesus was willing to sacrifice His own life for His friends—friends who would not be as loyal and deeply invested. Jesus, God in the flesh, exemplified what a true friend is. If Christ was willing to lay down His life for the world, then we all owe Him our lives too.

**16 . Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.**

Jesus also revealed that His relationship with His disciples was all part of His plan. To be ordained in this sense does not refer to a ceremony, but to having been chosen for a position of responsibility. They were Jesus' friends-with-purpose, and that purpose is to produce fruit. This is to be fruit that will remain, a reference not to grapes but to new disciples, new friends-with-purpose. This is why they were chosen: Jesus' multigenerational plan for expanding the number and maturity of His followers.

The disciples were reminded that God will give them resources in this work. After Jesus had gone, the Father would continue to be with them, giving what they asked for. These plans and promises are for us also, still the disciples of Jesus two millennia later. We are expected to bring forth fruit . The vine of Jesus continues to produce the fruit of new disciples and spiritual growth even today and will do so in the future.

**17 . These things I command you, that ye love one another.**

Jesus ended this section by restating the great command. Within a few hours, the disciples would witness the greatest act of love in history: Jesus' willing, sacrificial death for the sin of the world ( John 19:16–30 ). There is no greater love.

There is no expiration date on this directive. It overrides all things that confront us in the Christian life. Jesus' disciples will have disagreements. Conflicts will be inevitable. But there is never an excuse for not loving our brothers and sisters in the Lord ( 1 John 4:7–12 ).

### **Conclusion**

#### **A. Unselfish Love**

Abiding, obeying, and loving—these are the central elements of discipleship. The love of Jesus exemplifies all of these. He abides with the Father in a relationship so intimate, it is beyond our understanding. He always obeys the Father. And His great love for the Father overflows to His chosen disciples.

In this we understand what biblical love is all about. It is conditioned by a lasting, faithful relationship and expressed by obedience. It is unselfish love, given without condition or expectation of return. In the Gospel of John, the last supper finds Jesus teaching about these things. The arrest, trials, and crucifixion find Him acting out these things. The resurrection shows the Father approving of these things for Jesus: His teachings and His actions. Thereby the disciples of Jesus have been motivated ever since to follow Him unselfishly with the purposes of being obedient disciples themselves and of producing new disciples in every generation.

### **B. Prayer**

Father, may we show our love for You by obeying Your commands. Nurture us so we bear the fruit You want to see in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

When we love, we obey.