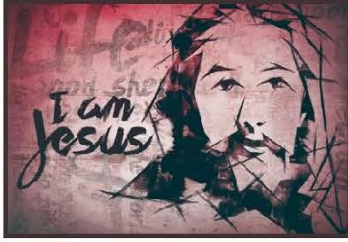


GROWING deeper



Pastor Mike O'Neill
April 26, 2015

I Am Jesus, Part Four **I Am the Vine**

John 15:1-10

John 17; Galatians 5:22-25; Colossians 1:9-10

1. The Person of Abiding

- *John 5:39-40, 15:9; Luke 10:38-42; Psalm 42:1-2*

2. The Principles of Abiding

- *John 15:26-16:15*

- * Abiding is a person, not a program.
- * Abiding is available to any believer at any time or place.
- * Abiding has no limit of depth or length.
- * Abiding must be pursued to be enjoyed.

3. The Practice of Abiding

- *Psalm 27:4; Colossians 3:16; Matthew 6:33*

- * Set apart time that will build Relationship.
- * Savor God's Words to you.
- * Talk and Listen to a Person.
- * Keep a Daily Written record.
- * Go from Morning to an All Day attentiveness.

4. The Product of Abiding

- *2 Corinthians 4:16; Colossians 3:16, 18; Proverbs 13:20; John 14:12, 15:7, 16*

Unbroken Abiding:

- * Renews us in body, mind, and heart.
- * Increases our spiritual discernment.
- * Changes us on the inside.
- * Changes the way we pray and God answers.

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April 26, 2015
West Valley Church
Pastor Michael O'Neill

I Am Jesus, Part Four
I Am The Vine
John 15:1-10

play video

We're in the last week of our series called "I Am Jesus," looking at four of the seven "I Am" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. We began on Easter Sunday, and we found out that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The resurrection is not just an event; it is a person. Then we found out that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Then last week we talked about Jesus as the light, by looking at the story of the woman caught in adultery. We saw that the law reveals our guilt, but the love reveals God's grace, and the light reveals our hope. Many of you prayed for more of that light in your life last week, or you invited that light into your life for the first time. Either way, the light will always defeat the darkness.

Pray for those who made decisions

Would you open your Bibles (in whatever way you have your Bible – digital or analog) to John 15 as we look today at what really is the key to all the others. In other words, if you learn and practice what Jesus is telling us today, you will find that it will be much easier to experience His resurrection power, shepherding and light in your life. It's found in John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:5, niv). Jesus said, "I am the" what? He said, "I am the vine." And we are the what? We are the ...branches. Here's the key part of the passage from John 15. Would you honor God's Word and stand with me as I read it?

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.

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. If you do not remain in Me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples. As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love." (John 15:1-10, niv)

Thanks – you may have a seat.

This is a part of Jesus' last teaching with His disciples before His arrest and crucifixion, and it is found in John 14-16. Following chapter 16, we see Jesus praying for the disciples and for us in

John 17, and then He is arrested and tortured and killed. He died and rose again so that we could be in relationship with Him. So this passage is a part of some very important last words that Jesus shared with the disciples that night of the last supper. It was late in the evening, and most likely they were walking through a vineyard on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus would later go to pray and then was betrayed by Judas and arrested. Jesus must have stopped along the way to give these important lessons, using the vine and branches to make His point. Jesus wants us to know how we can achieve the very highest and most productive lives that God has for us. Jesus makes it clear (*this is important*) that the expectation is that we will “bear fruit” with our lives, and He’s pointing out what we need to do so that bearing fruit can happen (we’ll talk about what that means). The way we will see the greatest abundance, the greatest productivity, the highest purpose for our lives is going to be as we *remain* in Jesus, and we are going to see what that means, too.

If you claim to follow Christ – that means that you have accepted His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead for you, and you are allowing Him to forgive you and cleanse you of your sins and you are following Him, centering your life around Him – if you say you are a Christian – you *will* bear fruit. Conversely, if your life is not bearing fruit, you may not be a Christian. It is God’s plan and desire. That’s why God is called the Master Gardener. What else would an orchardist have in mind but to see the trees produce fruit? What else would a vineyard owner expect than for the vineyard to produce grapes? What else would a hops farmer expect than that his field produce hops? What else would God expect but for you as a follower to produce fruit? So this fruit thing is pretty important. If you are not bearing any fruit – you are not loving and serving others and sharing the Good News with your life, you are disobedient - whether it is the sin of inactivity, apathy, or some particular outright sin you are playing with. And according to what Jesus is saying here, you can expect that the Master Gardener God will prune your life. Pruning is not painless! But it is necessary.

I don’t know how to prune stuff. One time, I started pruning a bush at our old house, and every time I’d step back I’d realize that it didn’t look right (which is crazy because I don’t really know what it’s supposed to look like!). So I’d prune some more. And again. And some more... until I looked at it and realized I’d cut the whole thing down to the stump. Other times I would think I was doing right, and the next thing you know, the entire plant has exploded with leaves inside and out, all up and down the branches. I don’t know how to do it. But God prunes with painful precision! He knows what He’s doing and He will cut whatever is unnecessary or what is causing your fruitlessness. It won’t feel good, but you can trust Him. He will remove distractions from your life; even some of the good things. He will ask you to submit yourself to Him – to relinquish or give up yourself to His pruning process in your life so you will bear even more fruit. When you have finished a season of pruning and are bearing more spiritual fruit in your life, He will do even more so that you can bear “much fruit.” The more fruitful you are, the less severe the pruning.

What is “fruit”? Fruit can be *internal* – as in the character and nature of Jesus in your life:

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:22-25, niv)

Fruit can also be *external* – as in the good works you do in the world for other people (not for yourself):

“We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work...” (Colossians 1:9-10, niv)

That’s what God intends for your life – *internal* and *external* fruit, so that your character is more and more like Christ’s and your behavior – your actions – are more and more good deeds for others.

And the way this will happen in your life is by remaining attached to the vine. Help me: Who is the vine? *Jesus*. Who are the branches? Say *we are*. Say “I am the branch.” Notice I didn’t say you are out on a limb; you are the limb!

So Jesus turns their attention toward the key: “*Abide, or remain, in me.*” Have you seen the place where the grafted fruit tree is attached to the trunk? That’s the place where the branch meets the vine. That’s the place where things happen. That’s the connection where life-giving nutrients in the sap flow through to the growing fruit. And the only limitation on the amount of sap that gets to the fruit is the size or the circumference of the branch where it is connected to the vine.

Who is the vine? *Jesus*. Who are the branches? *We are*. This isn’t just about doing more *for* God (although I’m afraid many of us are woefully lazy when it comes to doing things for God). This is about being more *with* God. Only by abiding can you enjoy the most rewarding relationship with God and experience the maximum abundance of fruit for His glory and your fulfillment.

To abide means to remain, to stay closely connected to, to settle in for the long term. And it describes the ongoing relationship we need with Jesus. It determines the amount of His supernatural power at work in our lives.

In John 15, Jesus says the Greek word *meno* (which means “abide” or “remain” or “stay” or “continue in” or “dwell”) – He says that word *ten times* in just six verses. So you can tell how important this is. And it’s not a suggestion or a request; it’s a command. This is about *doing* and *being*. Just remember: “To do is to be, to be is to do. Doobee doobee do.”

So let’s see if we can figure out what abiding is, and we will start by seeing...

1. The ***Person*** of Abiding

Abiding is all about the most important relationship in your life. It’s not about measuring how much you know about the Bible, or how smart you think you are about theology or Scripture. Jesus said:

“You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.” (John 5:39-40, niv)

It’s all about seeking for, longing for, thirsting for, waiting, seeing, knowing, loving, hearing, and responding to a *person*. It means more of God in your life, more of Him in your activities and thoughts and desires. Right now, those of you who thirst for Him are thinking, “Amen! Yea!” and

those of you who are spiritually dead or are bearing no fruit are wondering what the big deal is all about. But the more of Jesus you get in your life, the *more of Him you will want*. So if that doesn't sound exciting to you, you are either spiritually dead or your branches are barren. The paradox is, spending time with Jesus brings even greater productivity.

There is a story in the Bible about two sisters who were friends and followers of Jesus – Mary and Martha. You might remember that we started out this series talking about the time that their brother, Lazarus, had died and Jesus raised him from the dead and said, “I am the resurrection!” There is another story about them, when Jesus came to their house for dinner. Well, you couldn't just have Jesus over for dinner; you got Jesus and a bunch of His followers. Middle Eastern hospitality expected you to feed everyone. So dinner was a big deal. And Jesus goes to their living room and is sitting there teaching people. *Martha* is busy making preparations – counting heads, cooking, setting tables, cleaning dishes – but *Mary* (Martha's sister) is just sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to Him. Surrounded by so many things to do, so much going on, Mary learned the secret of abiding. (Luke 10:38-42). Mary wasn't being irresponsible; she just knew what was *most* important at the time. Martha chose to *do* more *for* Jesus, while Mary chose to *be* more *with* Jesus. And Jesus said that Mary chose what was best. Now, it doesn't mean what Martha was doing was wrong; it wasn't *best*. It was in the wrong order of priority.

What do you choose? I admit that it's difficult. It's hard for me. Besides working full time I have my degree work, which takes between 30-35 hours each week. Sometimes I feel like it's a luxury to sit at Jesus' feet. But it's not – it is essential. It is a staple of the Christian life, because we were created to be dissatisfied and incomplete with anything less than being attached to the vine. King David figured it out. He wrote this in Psalm 42 in the Bible:

“As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for You, O God. I thirst for God, the living God.” (Psalm 42:1-2, nlt)

Why don't we do this? Well, maybe because we don't really think God *likes* us. We know He *loves* us – He *has* to. But we don't think He likes us – that He's disappointed with us, that He remembers all the bad things we've done, that He's impatient with us, or that He has so many more important things to do than to mess with us, so He's reluctant to give us His time.

I had a boss who, whenever I needed to ask him a question, I'd catch him in the hallway of the office and say, “do you have a minute?” And he'd stop; look at his watch, and say, “I have exactly that.” That didn't really communicate to me that he had time for me. And I think that sometimes we think God's that way with us. “Okay, I'll give you a minute, but I'm really important and really busy and I don't have much more time than that for you.” And if you think God feels that way about you, then why would you want to spend time with him?

But God is not like that. He has all the qualities of the greatest dad, or of the best friend. I hesitate to use those examples, because there are many of us whose dad let them down, or weren't there for them, or worse yet abused them. And we've all had best friends who've betrayed us and hurt us. But if you can imagine the *best* dad or the *best* friend, *that's* God: He is patient with you, has all the time in the world for you, can't wait to be with you, and accepts you just as you are – not as you think you should be. When He looks at you, all He sees is the child that He loves.

God wants to abide with *you* even more than you want to abide with him. Jesus said:

“As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (John 15:9)

You’d think, as a pastor – someone who’s supposed to be close to God all the time – I’d have this figured out. But focusing on everyone else’s spiritual lives, not to mention their emotional and wellbeing needs, it can mean that I end up neglecting my own. There are times when I get tired, and dry, and I feel like God is a long ways away from me. And in those times I go to Him and tell Him how I feel. And you know what He does? He tells me that I don’t have to be a pastor, or a leader. I just need to be His child. He says, “Just be mine. I love you.” It’s not about a job. And I remember again – abiding is about a *person*.

So now let’s look at...

2. The ***Principles*** of Abiding

Do you know why animal trainers in the circus carry a stool with them when they go into a cage with the lions? They have their whip, and their pistol, but they also carry a bar stool. It’s their most important tool. The trainer will hold the stool by the seat and shove the legs toward the face of the dangerous animal. The lion then will try to focus on all four legs at once, and in trying to do so, a kind of paralysis overwhelms it, and it becomes tame, weak, and disabled because its attention is fragmented.

Well, our enemy, the devil, tries to tame us by shoving competing things in our face. We weaken ourselves by focusing on so many things – like Martha did – when what we need to do is focus on only one: and that’s Jesus.

So let’s see some of the principles of abiding with the person, Jesus.

- **Abiding is a *person*, not a *program*.** We’ve already talked about this, but let me also say that you don’t have to wait for Sunday to abide with Jesus. Mary made it a priority to sit at Jesus’ feet. She set aside time for Jesus and gave Him full attention.
- **Abiding is available to any *believer* at any *time* or *place*.** We have the indwelling God with us through His Holy Spirit at all times. Jesus promised to send us the Spirit who would be with us forever – (John 15:26-16:15). We can abide no matter how old we are or how long we’ve been a Christian. You can abide in a traffic jam, a doctor’s office, or a laundry room. It has nothing to do with your denomination, personality, family background, education, or special abilities or schedule.
- **Abiding has no limit of *depth* or *length*.** Our capacity for relationship with God just keeps expanding. One Christian author and pastor named A. W. Tozer once wrote, “A vessel that grows as it is filled will never be full. The soul is like that. The more it wants, the more it is given. The more it receives, the more it grows.”
- **Abiding must be *pursued* to be *enjoyed*.** It doesn’t come naturally. There will always be “more important” distractions. That’s why Jesus *commands* us to abide. He said, “I already abide in you; now you must choose to abide in Me.” There’s a great story about Susannah Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, two great Christian men who strongly influenced the world for Christ and from whom we get much of our

understanding of theology and practice of Christian love in action. Well, Susannah didn't just have Johnny and Charley; she had at one point 19 children, although nine of them died as infants. So with at least ten children in the house, where does a mother go to abide with Jesus? Right in the middle of the living room. She was always wearing an apron, so she would put her apron up over her head and sit in the middle of the room. The children knew that they'd better not bother mother because she was in there with God. And that mother is still having an impact in the world today. So you might try that. Go get an old grocery bag. Paper, not plastic.

Now let's look at...

3. The ***Practice*** of Abiding

If you want to break through to abiding, you will have to deepen the quality of your devoted time. Notice I didn't say your "devotional" time. Have you heard that term: "having devotional time," or "doing devotions"? I intentionally said "devoted" because this is not about "having devotions" it's about *being devoted*. King David said:

"I'm asking God for one thing, only one thing: To live with Him in His house my whole life long. I'll contemplate his beauty; I'll study at His feet." (Psalm 27:4, tm)

All the "how to's" – all the stuff we teach you in the 102 class – those are only to help you create and enjoy time "devoted" with the person of Jesus. Some advice, though:

Set apart time that will build *relationship*: I know some of us try to spend meaningful personal times with God right before bedtime, but unless you get up early you probably will struggle to break through to a deeper relationship with Jesus. But whenever it is, you need a significant time and place where you can read, write, think, study, pray, talk to God out loud, laugh, or even weep if you need to.

Savor God's *Words* to you. When you read your Bible, *receive* it – *savor* it – like a rich meal, like a love letter from God to you. When Shelly and I graduated from college, I went to Los Angeles to work in a church as a youth pastor, and she went to New York to be a nanny for Joan Lunden. Back in those days we didn't have email or cell phones or texting. We had snail mail and telephones, because most people weren't using telegraphs anymore. Snail mail took a long time, and we couldn't afford the long distance phone bills from one end of the country to the other (there were no calling plans). So we figured out a way to communicate. I would take a 90 minute cassette tape (yes, we had cassette tapes then – no CD's yet), and I would use my tape recorder and talk to Shelly on one side (45 minutes), and then I'd mail it to her. She would listen to it, and then she would respond and talk to me on the other side of the cassette tape and mail it back. I can't tell you how great that was – hearing her voice! Thankfully, our boys have never found our cassettes. Of course, even if they found them they wouldn't know how to use them! But remember, you are reading God's Word in order to meet and know *someone* better. Apply it to your current circumstances and let it sink down into the core of your being. Expect him to talk to you. The Bible says, "Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives." (Colossians 3:16, nlt)

Talk and Listen to a Person. Don't treat God like some mystical force "out there" – He wants you to talk to Him like you would a friend. He wants to hear what's on your mind – your requests, your worries, your praise and thanks. Be completely honest, and expect His insight in return. Take time to be still with Him. Decide to seek Him until you find Him. You'll know when you have.

Keep a Daily written record of what God is doing in your life. Keep a journal – here's the latest one of mine. This isn't a diary of your day, and it's not an attempt to be poetic (unless you are!); it's just a record of your journey with Jesus. Leave requests on the page and write down His answers.

Finally, **Go from morning to an all day attentiveness** to His presence. Don't leave Him there in the morning. Seek Him all through the day. Maybe you need to give yourself reminders – like set your watch or phone alarm for every half hour or 15 minutes. You could set your alarm to go off at 6:33 for Matthew 6:33 – "Seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness, and everything else will be given to you." Maybe you could put one of those little dot stickers on your watch, so that every time you check your watch you are reminded to seek Jesus. But find ways to be aware of Him all day long.

These things are called spiritual disciplines because they take discipline – they take effort, but the reward is worth it. Because last of all, I want to tell you about the...

4. The **Product** of Abiding

(Say that with me.) Let me give you four products, or results, of unbroken abiding with Jesus.

First, **Unbroken abiding:**

Renews us in body, mind, and heart. We quickly forget that to do God's work we need God's presence and power. Continual abiding keeps us from getting burned out or cynical or apathetic, because we are constantly being refueled. The analogy is that the sap of a vine is the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. When we stay connected to Jesus, the Bible says, "We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16, niv)

Next, unbroken abiding **increases our spiritual discernment.** When you "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" like Colossians 3:16 says, we understand His will more profoundly, more deeply, and He leads us so clearly. Right now our son is interviewing for a youth ministry position at a church. He is learning what we learned – how to listen for the Spirit's direction. Have you learned that? It's not about becoming a pastor; it's about abiding with Jesus so you can see and hear is leading.

Also unbroken abiding **changes us on the inside.** Have you ever noticed couples who've been married a long time start to look and act alike? The Bible says, "Keep company with the wise and you will become wise. If you make friends with stupid people, you will be ruined." (Proverbs 13:20, gnt) When we spend time abiding with Christ we are "being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18, niv) We are becoming more like Jesus– especially the

way He cared for and ministered to other people in this world. We will do that – and that’s what Jesus meant when He said we would do even greater things than He did (John 14:12)! And in our text for today, Jesus said, “Ask whatever you wish...” Which is the last product or result...

Unbroken abiding **changes the way we pray and God answers**. Jesus said, “If you abide in Me, ask what you wish and it will be given to you. Twice in this chapter He made this promise in relation to abiding (verses 7 & 16). Why? When we’ve surrendered ourselves to God, our requests are much more likely to reflect His desires. Our prayers have the most power when His will and our will become most nearly one. *Then we have maximum fruitfulness, maximum abundance, which is the product of ongoing, unbroken abiding with Christ the vine.*

A story is told of a town where all the residents are ducks. Every Sunday the ducks waddle out of their houses and waddle down Main Street to their church. They waddle into the sanctuary and squat in their proper pews. The duck choir waddles in and takes its place, and then the duck pastor comes forward and opens the duck Bible. He reads to them: “Ducks! God has given you wings! With wings you can fly! With wings you can mount up and soar like eagles. No walls can confine you! No fences can hold you in! You have wings. God has given you wings and you can fly like birds!” All the ducks quack, “Amen!” They quack their prayers. And then they all waddle home.

Folks; we are through waddling around here. I’m tired of waddling. It’s time to fly into great abundance and great fruitfulness for the Kingdom of God – fruitfulness inside and out. It’s time we prioritized abiding in Christ.

Father, awaken within us the awareness and desire to abide with Jesus; to remain in Him as a branch to a vine, to receive from Him all the spiritual nourishment we need for this life, so that we can bear fruit – fruit that will last. The whole reason we exist! Holy Spirit move among us now, I pray.

As you continue in prayer, maybe you are saying, “That’s me! That’s what has been missing in my spiritual life! I’ve known Jesus but I’ve felt powerless and I don’t see much change in my heart and life.” Then the Spirit is convicting you that it’s time to abide.

Maybe you are looking at your Christian life and you see no fruit; you say you are a Christian but you don’t love and serve others. Or maybe there is actually sin in your life. Or maybe you have been going through some challenges and now you are seeing that maybe God is pruning you so you can bear more fruit from your life. Confess your need for pruning; ask Him to prune you (if you dare). Tell Him you want Him to do whatever is necessary to cut away the distractions that have been siphoning off the sap of the Spirit that should be feeding your soul.

Maybe you’ve been approaching your faith like it’s a religion and not a relationship; like it’s piety instead of a person. Or you realize you need to put into practice your abiding and begin spending devoted time with Jesus. Tell Him that is what you are realizing and tell Him what you will do to begin practicing abiding with Jesus.

Or maybe you’ve never known the person of Jesus; it’s time you did. You need to allow the master gardener to graft you onto the vine, so that from now on your source of life is Jesus. It’s time for you to quit doing life on your own and do what you know you need to do – give your life over to him.

I'm going to ask all of us to pray a prayer to do that very thing. Would you repeat after me:

“Father, thank you for your son Jesus Christ. / I believe that He died for my sins / and rose from the dead. / I'm sorry for my sins. / Forgive me. / Come into my life / and make me new. / Master Gardener, / graft me on the vine of Jesus. / May my life be tended by You. / Prune me / whenever necessary. / Let my life bear fruit / inside and out. / For Your glory, / in Jesus name. / Amen.”

Folks, the Holy Spirit is moving through this place in real ways! He has transformed lives and we can all bear much, abundant fruit for the Kingdom of God! Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. Say it: *Jesus is the vine, I am the branch. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches!* Let's start bearing much fruit.