

## November 8 Lesson 10 (NIV)

### ABIDING LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 80:7-19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 15:4-17

#### JOHN 15:4-17

<sup>4</sup> “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.

<sup>5</sup> “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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.”

#### KEY VERSE

*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. —John 15:5*

### LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

#### Unit 3: Godly Love Among Believers

LESSONS 9-13

## 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 tenants (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 cultivating the vines (Deuteronomy 28:39).

## I. The Vine and the Branches

(JOHN 15:4–8)

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

**4. “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.**

The same Greek word translated *remain* is translated many ways depending on context, including forms of *stay* (example: John 11:54) and *living in* (example: 14:10). The same word appears in John 8:31 where Jesus proclaimed, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” The word's wide semantic range suggests many ways of staying connected. We cannot remain in the physical body of Jesus. We remain 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 remain 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).

**5. "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.**

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.

### **B. Severed or Withered (vv. 6–8)**

**6. "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.**

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).

**7. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**

Jesus began a more direct description of what it means to *remain in* him, tying it to having his *words remain 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 wish* 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. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

Jesus summed this up in three ways. First, this faithful remaining and resulting obedience bring *glory* to the Father. Our actions reflect on our Lord. Faithful, gracious actions bring God glory. Second, faithful remaining 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 churchy 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.

## II. The Lord and His Friends

(JOHN 15:9–17)

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

#### 9. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain 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 *remain in Jesus’ love*.

#### 10. “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.

Jesus pushed the connection between command-keeping and love-remaining 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 commands. That is how we *remain in the Father’s love*.

#### 11. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

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 suffering” in the hours ahead (Isaiah 53:3). Suffering is 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. “My command is this: Love each other 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 has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s 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. “You are my friends if you do what I command.**

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. “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made know to 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 *everything* Jesus has *learned from his Father*.

**16. “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.**

Jesus also revealed that his relationship with his disciples was all part of his plan. To be *appointed* in this sense refers to having been chosen for a position of responsibility. The disciples were Jesus’ friends-with-purpose, and that purpose is to produce *fruit*. This is to be *fruit that will last*, 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 *bear 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. Though this does require effort on our part, everything we need for our work comes from Jesus, not from our own power.

**17. “This is my command: Love each other.”**

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

Remaining, obeying, and loving—these are the central elements of discipleship. The love of Jesus exemplifies all of these. He remains 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.<sup>1</sup>