

A Call to Abide



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THERE ARE WORDS THAT CONVEY important concepts in Scripture that aren't used commonly today. "Abide" is just such a word—rich and full of spiritual meaning.

The word "abide" has been a part of the English language since before the 12th century. According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, "one of abide's former meanings was 'to stop,'" while today, "abide by" means "to accept and be guided by (something)." Terms like "abiding" mean "continuing for a long time," for instance "an abiding friendship."

What about the biblical concept of the word? What did Jesus (Yeshua) mean when He spoke to His disciples, saying, "**Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me**" (John 15:4, emphasis added).

In the Beginning

It is evident in the Bible that the Lord's plan was always to abide, to dwell in love with mankind. The *Tanakh* (Gen.–Mal.) is full of examples. The first is found in Genesis when God met Adam and Eve face-to-face on a daily basis in the Garden of Eden. Later, sin entered the world and became a barrier that prevented the intimate relationship man had known in the Garden. But God did not abandon His desire for relationship, to abide with mankind. We see that in the fact that the words "abide" and "dwell" appear 249 times in Scripture.

The primary words used for "abide" are Strong's H7931 *shakhan* (שכן), H3427 *yahshav* (ישב) and G3306 *men-ō* (μένω), which is the Greek equivalent. *Shakhan* and *yahshav* mean "to settle down, abide, dwell, tabernacle, reside," while *men-ō* includes these meanings with an additional element of one's condition—"to remain as one, not to become another or different." Both are translated interchangeably as "to abide" or "to dwell."

My Name Will Abide

Shakhan is used in the *Tanakh* to describe God's desire to have a place on earth for His Name to abide or dwell. We find it in Deuteronomy as the Lord gives instructions on the building of the Tabernacle. He specifically states that "*there* [the Tabernacle]

will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide [shakhan]” (Deut. 12:11a, emphasis added).

In Exodus 25:8, the Lord puts it another way, “*And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell [shakhan] among them*” (emphasis added).

Related to the word *shakhan* is *mishkan* (שמכון)—the Hebrew word for the portable Tabernacle that was used during the wilderness years as well as another 369 years at Shiloh. You may also recognize the Hebrew word *shekinah* (שכינה), which literally means “the dwelling place of God.” Both *mishkan* and *shekinah* share the same root letters, *shin, kaf, nun* (שכנ), as does the word translated “abide.” Interestingly enough, the modern Hebrew words for “neighbor,” “neighborly” and “neighboring” are also formed from that root. All imply a relational context rather than an uninvolved group of people spending time in proximity to each other.



Abide in the New Testament

Not surprisingly, nearly all of the New Testament references of the word “abide” appear in the writings of the apostle John. As we are discovering, in addition to a physical place, the word “abide” contains a relational aspect. John, who referred to himself as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” four times (John 13:23, 20:2, 21:7, 20), was perhaps the disciple most familiar with its deepest meaning.

Author and Bible teacher Skip Moen writes that the Greek word for “abide” in John 15 can be translated as “remain, persevere, stay, continue or abide...[and] borrows a context from the Old Testament where God is portrayed as consistently faithful and steadfast in His commitment to men.”

So what exactly did Jesus mean when He called His disciples to abide in Him? Theologian Sinclair Ferguson writes that Jesus’ call to abide is not some “mystical, indefinable experience but rather He points out some concrete realities.”


Ferguson goes on to describe some of those realities as follows: “Union with Jesus depends 100% on grace; it requires obedience and it means allowing His Word to fill our minds, direct our wills and transform our affections.” We will also experience times of pruning.

Let’s explore these realities in more depth.

Reality #1: Abiding Depends on Grace

Since we are not accustomed to using the word “abide” in the fullest sense of its biblical meaning, we need help to understand just how to do it. The first reality is that apart from the grace of God, we can’t. Abiding depends upon grace. The late Rev. Billy Graham wrote, “Grace is not bought. It is a free gift of almighty God to needy mankind.” In other words, grace is the unmerited, undeserved favor of God.





Jesus' illustration of the vine and the branches is also very useful in understanding our total dependence on Him. If a branch is cut off from the vine, its source of life and nourishment, it will quickly wither and die. In nature, a branch neither chooses to attach nor detach itself from the vine; it is 100% dependent.

Reality #2: Abiding Requires Obedience

In order to abide, we must obey. By the very fact of God's mercy and love, we have two choices set before us. From earliest beginnings in the Garden of Eden and throughout the *Tanakh*, it was always God's desire to have fellowship with His created beings. Here the illustration of abiding as the branch with the vine breaks down a little bit because we were given free will. When Adam and Eve sinned by choosing to disobey God, that relationship changed, and there was no longer a direct, intimate relationship between God and mankind.

Disobedience aside, throughout the years, God did dwell among His people. The Tabernacle, or *mishkan*, was placed in the center of the Israelite's camp during the years of wandering in the wilderness. However, just one of the twelve tribes was given specific priestly duties. *"At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day"* (Deut. 10:8).

When the order of camp was established, the Tabernacle was placed in the center. The tents of Moses and Aaron were in front of the Tabernacle's entrance to its east, the Kohathites on the south, the Gershonites on the west and the Merarites on the north. The tribe of Levi thus formed a barrier between the dwelling place of God (Num. 1:51–53) and the rest of the Israelites. And even then, access to the Holy of Holies occurred only once a year when the Levitical priest entered to make atonement for the people.

Limited access to God as the result of our disobedience remained until the coming of Jesus. However, the

requirement for obedience remained as a condition for truly abiding with God. We see that exemplified in the life of Jesus. He is the Son of God, modeling complete obedience to the Father. *“I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me”* (John 5:30).

Reality #3: Abiding Means We Will Be Pruned

Jesus is clear, even harsh, when He tells the disciples that they will be pruned. *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit”* (John 15:1–2).

Notice there are two things that can happen to the branches. If there is no fruit, they are taken away. If there is fruit, they are pruned. In the first case, the fruitless branches are eventually burned in the fire and are no more. But every vine that does produce fruit is pruned, which sounds painful. Why is it necessary?

We can look to the physical grapevine for an answer. According to the Iowa State University’s website: “Grapevines produce fruit clusters on the previous season’s growth. Before pruning, a grapevine may have 200 to 300 buds capable of producing fruit. If the vine is not pruned, the number of grape clusters would be excessive. The purpose of pruning is to obtain maximum yields of high quality grapes.”

The Father as the Vinedresser is looking for a perfect, high-quality yield from those who are abiding as branches.



Pruning is an important step to produce good yields

Reality #4: Abiding Means We Will Produce Fruit

We will know whether we are really abiding by the type of fruit in our lives. According to Jesus, there are distinct differences. *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit”* (Matt. 7:16–18).

One way we can do a self-examination is to look at the list of nine very familiar fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22–23: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Are they evident in our lives?

If we are truly abiding, they should be present. Jesus says clearly that if we abide in Him, totally dependent as a branch to the Vine, we will bear much fruit. *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5). We’ve come full circle—abiding depends 100% on the grace of God.

A Continuous Journey

Christian blogger, Diane Ferreira, writes, “Abiding in God is an active and continuous journey that encompasses every aspect of our lives.”

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, knew about the importance of abiding because it resulted in an intimate, two-way relationship. One could say that the goal of our lives on earth is to learn of God and to know Jesus through our relationship with Him. Our most intimate relationships are with those we share a living space with day in and day out. We know them as family—in good times and bad. This is abiding with another person. How wonderful that we can have an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus as we learn to abide with Him!

1 John 2:28 contains a promise and a reward for those who faithfully “abide” on a spiritual level. *“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.”* Could anything be better than that?



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Scripture from the New King James Version

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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