

BE BRAVE

Bible Briefs

Three Timely Bible Lessons for the Busy and the Brave

The Mystery of Abiding

And the bearing of fruit

Bible Briefs by L.G. Westlake, Author, Blogger, Adventurer, Word Advocate



Lesson 1 – Being Still

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. – John 15:4 (ESV)

I've been called a workaholic. I don't claim the title with pride, but I do recognize that my need to stay busy—to sink my teeth into projects whether it be writing a Christian book or blog, repainting my kitchen cabinets for the third time in two years, or putting in an extra five hours a week at the ministry—can look like I have issues with sitting still.

I do.

Again, this is not something I'm proud of because I know Psalm 46:10 by heart: *Be still and know that I am God.*

This has been one of the struggles of my Christian walk—being still, ear in tune to that still small voice that Elijah heard on the mountain top in 1 Kings 19:11-12.

I take solace in this story of zealous Elijah for he, before reaching the solitary mountain top to hear the voice of God, had been in a busy, (and extremely brave, btw) season of life. He'd challenged some 450 prophets of Baal to a prove-your-God showdown where God rained down fire and consumed Elijah's sacrifice. After this jaw-dropping event, Elijah commanded the wayward people of Israel to annihilate the false prophets of Baal. But then brave Elijah took to fugitive life, running from Jezebel who wanted his head for killing her mass collection of fortunetellers. Under a broom tree hidden in the wilderness Elijah prayed that he might die in the aftermath of the chaos, weary of the fight.

I think it's important to note that before Elijah got still before the Lord on the mountain top, he'd had his hands full with the sins of Israel, false prophets, and an evil, murderous queen. And once he reached the mountain top? A wind tore the peaks apart, an earthquake shook the foundations, and a fire blazed—all outside the mouth of his hide-away cave. I can imagine Elijah huddled in the damp dark dreadfully anticipating what would come next.

That's when the still, small voice called this prophet to come forth and receive his next instructions.

A brave warrior for the Lord, Elijah's dark cave moments are only part of his dynamic story.

Elijah walked with the Lord. Sometimes he ran with the Lord. Communing with God constantly, Elijah received instructions in a variety of ways and circumstances.

We take time to review Elijah's story here for my sake. Because there was a time I, brimming with false guilt, thought the only way I could hear the spiritual whispers of God was to shut myself up in my prayer closet (on the floor in the corner of the bedroom) waiting for revelation. After reading my Bible, offering up praise and petitions, I'd sit still, trying to force my mind to focus, ear tuned to the silence, save the neighbor's dog barking. If, by chance, the day's end arrived without my time of strained listening, I'd writhe before the Lord, begging forgiveness for missing the opportunity to hear Him speak.

But believe me, I've learned this important lesson: When God decides to speak, He will be heard.

I've discovered that the Lord speaks to me through dreams, the wisdom of friends and family, in His Word, and once He spoke while I was sick and coughing my head off with Covid-19. He also speaks to me through the simple observation of plant life. I'm a bit of a gardener and as I care for the variety of living plants in my gardens, the Lord teaches me using His nature.

What I didn't understand in my earlier walk with Christ is that abiding is not a once-a-day quiet time. Abiding is a 24/7 state of being.

A special note: Setting oneself off from the world for a time of communion with the Maker is biblical and I don't wish for you to think I'm making a case against it. In the Take Action below, we'll look at the biblical mandate to spend time in solitude with Christ.

TAKE ACTION

Look at Matthew 6:6 in your Bible. What are Christ's instructions about praying? Why? Can you find examples of Christ praying alone?

***write your thoughts in your journal or electronic notebook*

We're called to pray in secret. However, being still, is not the sole method for hearing from God—though it is a darn good one. The well-known *be still* verse found in Psalm 46, is couched in the cry for us to *behold* the mighty and earth-shaking works of the Lord. Psalm 46:10 is not a call to hideaway, but to come forth out of the cave and behold the global works of the Lord. This demand is parallel to Elijah's coming out of the cave post supernatural events and also Lazarus coming out of the death cave.

MORE ACTION

Read all of Psalm 46. I believe these verses give us a prophetic look at what happens during and after God's prophesied wrath on the nations. There are more treasures in these verses, however.

1. What other take aways can you find?
2. In examining this entire psalm, has your understanding of *be still* changed? Why or why not?

****Write your answers in your journal or electric notebook.**

Lesson 1 Wrap Up:

If being still, or as our key verse in John says “abiding” in Christ has been a difficult concept or discipline to practice, there’s hope. In lesson 2 of The Mystery of Abiding, we’ll dig deeper in the metaphor found in John 15.

Lesson 2 – The Metaphor



An important Bible-study lesson I've learned is to always examine a verse within context, avoiding the idea that a single verse should shape a theological stance. Like the *be still* verse we identified in Lesson One, the context (the who, what, when, where) surrounding John 15 can also help us better understand what He wanted to communicate to His disciples.

TAKE ACTION

Put our key verse into its contextual place in the Word. Read chapters 13, 14, and 15 in the book of John and **scribe your answers and thoughts in your journal or electronic notebook.**

1. What is the setting (where are Jesus and His disciples)?
2. Christ speaks of His love and the future in these verses. Why? What is He preparing His disciples for?

3. In John 15:1-8 Christ refers to himself as a vine. What is He communicating to His disciples using this metaphor? What is He communicating to you?

As some of the best wines in the world are produced from the grapes grown in the arid hillsides of Israel, the disciples would have been very familiar with vineyards. The picture of the Father as the vine keeper is fantastic. A vintner (vigneron or vine keeper) in biblical times lived near, if not in, the vineyard. Closely linked to his vines, the vintner cared for his plants like children. Christ's remaining eleven disciples would have instantly grabbed the imagery of the Father tenderly lifting and pruning the growing vines.

As Christ describes His father as the vine keeper, He calls *himself* a vine. In our current form of English, Christ might have said something like this: *My father is the Vintner who cares for the grapevine. I am that vine.*

But for the disciples, at this point, things might have gotten a little confusing. Christ a vine? It's an interesting metaphor but when we dive deeper into the anatomy of plant life, a fantastical teaching of Christ living in us emerges.

DIVING DEEPER

An early and prophetic reference to Christ is found in Isaiah 53:1-3. In Revelation 5:5 and 22:16 this specific metaphoric term is used again. Why would Christ be likened to a root? Look into the Parable of the seeds found in Matthew 13. What do you learn from verse 13:21? **Record your answers in the usual places.**

We're receiving a revelation of Christ. Like a root that spreads deep into the earth in search of water (The Word) and other nutrients, Christ is the foundation of our seedling faith. He is our root. And from the root foundation springs forth a vine (stem). Look at John 15:1 again. Christ reveals that He is the *True Vine*. To understand what His words mean, let's take another quick look at the vineyard and the mystery purpose of the vine.

Grapevine roots extract water and nutrients from the ground, producing hormones which influence plant growth in the spring. As root absorption increases, water is drawn up through the vine's xylem vessels, creating sap— the fluid which carries water and nutrients throughout the plant. Filled with minerals, sap rotates throughout the vine. Without the vascular system operating at capacity, the entire grapevine plant would become weak and die.

The sap is the blood running through the vine and carrying nutrients to the otherwise **lifeless** branches.

TAKE ACTION

Back to John 15:

1. In verse five, what does Christ call you?
2. How are you nourished and sustained?
3. Through the anatomy of the grapevine, what does Christ teach you?

**** Record your answers in your usual spot. Note unfolding revelations.**

Lesson 2 Wrap Up:

Through biblical context, we are given a wider scope of Christ's mandates. Speaking to His disciples for the last time before His crucifixion and ultimate resurrection, He prepared His friends/followers for His death by explaining not only His love, but His sovereignty in sustaining their faith. Only through a connection to the *True Vine*, would these committed men be nourished and bear fruit for future generations.

In Lesson 3, we'll take a closer look at the fruit of the vine.

LESSON 3 – *Bearing Fruit*



I am the vine; you are the branches. John 15:5 (a)

Our key verse reveals an amazing truth: As branches, the only way we'll produce fruit is through our connection to the vine—the life-giving source of the entire plant. Through the metaphor of the grapevine, Christ explains that His sinless blood, soon to be shed, is the sap—the nutrient source—for the branch ... which is you.

Following is the discourse of the *True Vine* Christ gave His disciples at the last supper. He meticulously explains, over and again, that the fruit the disciples are to produce cannot and will not happen unless they are connected to Him—their source; their sap. I've highlighted His repeated point.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear

more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. – John 15: 1-9 (ESV)

In the beginning of this study, I spoke of my misunderstanding of *being still* and waiting on *the still small voice*. I somehow equated communing with Christ as something that could only be done in my prayer closet or secret space. When I look at this revealing teaching of Christ, I come to understand that the branch is always with the vine. A branch doesn't hop on and off the vine to receive life-giving, fruit-producing nutrients. The branch is connected permanently to the vine unless, as we're told, the vintner (the Father) removes the branch because of its fruitless state.

Christ's ultimate point? Because of Grace, we do not bear fruit from our works or own efforts. We bear fruit by receiving Christ's free-flowing power and that power is in us at every circumstance and in every hour.

Go back to the full story of Elijah. Prior to his God encounter on Mount Horeb, Elijah received messages and instructions from the Lord in various ways. The Lord did not wait for Elijah to come to the mountain before speaking. But once in the cave at the mountain

top, three supernatural actions occurred and it is after ... after these powerful and glorifying events that Elijah hears the tender voice of God saying, *Why are you here, Elijah?* Another explosive example of the Lord speaking to His child in God's chosen moment is the story of Moses and the burning bush. While Moses went about his shepherd day tending sheep, God spoke from a common bush, set a fire to get Moses's attention and show God's glory. It is there that God commissioned Moses to go back to Israel and release His people. The takeaway: it does not depend on your ability to sit still to hear from God. Communing with God depends upon His ability to speak. And oh, He speaks whenever and wherever He pleases.

Do we sit still before the Lord? Absolutely.

But because Christ's presence in us is timeless, as we abide, He can speak, make His glory known, and guide us at His appointed time.

All depends on Christ.

For further Contemplation:

Interesting note on the Father (vintner) removing fruitless branches: Grapevine plants are pruned to potentially increase the quantity of fruit from the fruit-bearing branches.

INTERNALIZE

Look up the follow passages about waiting on the Lord:

Psalm 27:14; Psalm 130:5; Isaiah 40:31.

Look up these verses that ensure Christ is near:

Acts 17:18; Acts 17:27

Waiting upon the Lord is trusting, hoping in the power that is not just near, but *inside*, abiding in you.

Spend time contemplating the vine and the branches. If possible, visit a vineyard in the fruiting months or draw the vineyard Christ describes, labeling the crucial parts of Christ's lesson.

Lesson 3 Wrap Up

What does it take to abide? Recognize—cease striving in spiritual matters and acknowledge Christ as your all in all. Live in the truth of this reality. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul compels us to pray without ceasing. This is abiding—trusting Christ in all things and communing with Him as if He's with you in all times. Because ... He is.

The at-risk branch is one that strives to bear fruit apart from Christ. As Christ explains in John 15:4, apart from the True Vine, the branch is lifeless and cannot bear fruit. The Father removes lifeless branches from His thriving vineyard.

****Through Christ's victory on the cross and His blood flowing through us, we have His antibodies against sin. Thankfully, we are grafted into the vine, cut away from Adam's vine of death.**

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Study Questions- The Mystery of Abiding

1. Can you explain what it means to be rooted in Christ? Where are you rooted?
2. Has there been a time when you attempted to produce fruit on your own? Share that story.
3. Has there been a time when you received an unexpected word from the Lord? What were you doing at the time?
4. Has the Lord given you unforeseen instructions? Did you act upon them? What were the circumstances?
5. Are you abiding in Christ now? What does that look like for you?