



ABIDING GROWTH

“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” (John 15:5 ESV).

Have you ever seen a grapevine produce a single grape? When we think about grapes, we think about *multiple branches and clusters of grapes*, that’s how they grow! However, often when we read John 15:5 and reflect on abiding in Christ, we think of abiding by ourselves. A focus on abiding might mean spending more time alone with God in the Bible or spending a day alone with God.

Jesus was talking to His disciples **together**. Maybe the English language makes it hard for us to mentally translate the singular “you” to the southern plural “y’all.” Or maybe our cultural background pushes us to emphasize individual spirituality.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

“Western culture took a good thing—individual initiative and responsibility—that thrived among Protestants after the Reformation and divorced it from its biblical context—community life—and let it develop into individualism, thus losing corporate accountability. The adjective *individual*, from which the word *individualistic* comes, had its origin in the Latin *individuus*, meaning ‘one and indivisible, inseparable,’ and it was used with reference to the Trinity. One of the great challenges of disciples today is to inculcate the sense among their disciples that they belong inseparably to the body of Christ.” *Discipling in a Multicultural World* by Ajith Fernando

APPLICATION

How do we practically apply this concept of **us abiding together** to bear fruit?

Look at a picture of a grapevine. Can you tell which grape is coming from which branch? Even more, is it only one grape and one branch? The branches have grown intertwining together, helping hold others up and bearing each other’s weight and the weight of the fruit. The fruit will never say, “Look what I did!” No, it’s thankful to the branch, who in turn points to the vine that sustains them. The True Vine, which is Christ, sustains **us** and gives **us** the nutrients and power to produce the fruit **together**.

The understanding of **us** and the value of the group or body in bearing fruit helps prevent pride about “my ministry.” Boasting is not singular, but a group pointing to the True Vine.

So who helps bring people to faith over the years? We do—all the branches that intersect in and around someone’s life. This is the reality of the physical representation of how we abide together in Christ.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34,35 ESV).

Individually, we can’t love someone into the Kingdom. We need each other to properly display God’s love, grace, peace, patience, and forgiveness through Christ. **The best biblical expression of Christ is through the body of believers, not in lone branches.**

NEXT STEPS

Challenge yourself as you read the Bible to move from “you” to “we” and see how that might give you a different understanding of how you might abide in Christ together to bear fruit.