

# If You Abide in My Word, You Are Truly My Disciples

by John Piper

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*To be a true disciple of Jesus means to be a true believer, Christian, and follower, and to have been forgiven, vindicated, and given eternal life, which can be achieved by abiding in Jesus' word and being in a relationship with him.*

**Duration:** 45:10

**Scripture:** John 15:4

**Topics:** "Discipleship", "Faith Commitment"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of abiding in God's word to truly be His disciples, distinguishing between real and unreal believers. It challenges believers to remain in the truth, beauty, and value of Jesus as revealed in His word, highlighting the necessity of lasting commitment and perseverance. The message addresses believers, unbelievers, and those who may be deceived about their faith, urging all to deeply engage with the life-giving truth found in Jesus.

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## Transcript

Let's pray. Father, our longings are always higher than our capacities and our abilities because we long for salvation, which we cannot accomplish, only you can. We long for people to be built in their faith and rooted deeply in the truth.

We long for reconciliation among people who are estranged and for a sweet peace to hold sway in families and in churches. We long for our worship to be intensified and our obedience to be made radical. We long for more courage in our hearts and for more vision in our global mission.

Our longings outstrip our abilities and that is as it should be and that's why we pray. We love your word and now come, open your word for us. Oh, speak your mighty word and grant that your people would have ears to hear and minds to understand and hearts to enjoy and wills to obey, in Jesus' name, amen.

If you're a true believer or if you are an unbeliever or if you are a phony believer, thinking that you're a believer when you're not, this text is filled with important things for you. In fact, so much is here in verse 31 that I never got to verse 32 from which I took the title to the message. So what I've decided to do in spending a whole time in this message on verse 31 is to make verse 32 our Easter Sunday text because it

seems to me that if I link it with chapter 11, I am the resurrection and the life, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free, would be a message probably that anyone you would bring to church next Sunday might be very, very helped by.

Believer or unbeliever, everybody wants to be free. And there are all kinds of different definitions of what freedom is and so it just impressed itself on me as I was preparing that I should make verse 32 next Sunday's message. So you can just kind of transfer the title over there and that's what you can invite people to hear.

You could say, if you wanna go hear our pastor talk about, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Why don't you come along to one of our nine services on the weekend to choose from? So here we are in verse 31. Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and I have five questions that I had to answer to understand this verse.

I'll tell you what they are and then we'll take them one at a time. The first question is, what does it mean to truly be his disciple? Second, what is he referring to by my word in the singular? If you abide in my word. Third, what does it mean to be in the word? If you abide in my word.

Fourth, what does it mean to abide in? What does that word carry? And fifth, what's the relationship between abiding in the word and truly being a disciple? Those are my five questions. Here's number one. What does it mean to truly be Jesus' disciples? Verse 31, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

What does the phrase truly my disciples mean? It implies that there are people who are not truly his disciples but are his disciples. They think that they are his disciples but they are not truly his disciples. The word truly could be translated really, really my disciples.

In other words, there are real and unreal disciples. There are real and unreal church members, real and unreal Christians. There are authentic and inauthentic disciples.

There is a discipleship which is merely outward and there is a discipleship that goes down to the deep roots of your life and changes everything from the bottom up. In other words, the world is divided not just into two groups, believers and unbelievers or non-disciples and disciples. The world is divided into three groups, namely non-disciples, unreal disciples and real disciples.

People who make no pretense of following Jesus, people who say they follow Jesus and have a surface connection with him only and people who truly follow him. Now, why did Jesus bring this up? This is very disturbing. We don't want to be told this because then we're thrown off balance and we have to ask, well, am I, I thought I was a real disciple.

Are you saying, Jesus, I might not be a real disciple? Why does he bring this up? Verse 30 says, as he was saying these things, many believed in him. In other words, there had been a very large response to his teaching and wherever there is a large response, a lot of people get swept into it who wouldn't have moved if they had to move by themselves. When a lot of people are moving towards Jesus and you kind of stand around and people are kind of walking by you, kind of like, well, yeah, I'll go.

And therefore, the potential is huge in a large movement to Jesus for people to come who aren't coming. They're not coming, but they're coming. They're not real.

They're signing the card, but nothing is happening on the inside. So Jesus doesn't assume that this belief is real all around him here. Instead, what he does is give a test, a test that you and I now can use to see whether we are phony disciples or whether we are real disciples.

That's what verse 31 is meant to be. It's meant to help us detect if we are real or not and thus to help us be real. It's both a test of reality and it's a path to reality because to be confronted with the possibility that you're not real and to be forced to come to terms with who you really are deep down is a very precious thing for Jesus to do if we were to leave us on our own thinking that we're okay when perhaps we're not at all okay, that would not be a kind and gracious thing of him to do.

So what becomes clear here in this text, we've seen it at least twice, we've seen it in chapter two, we've seen it in chapter six, is that there is a kind of belief in the gospel of John that is not belief that saves. Chapter two, verse 23, then 25, chapter six, verse 26, we've seen this before. So here it is again, which causes me to wanna clarify something about the verse that we've used over and over again about the purpose of this gospel.

Let me read it to you again. This is chapter 20, verse 31, goes like this. These are written, so this whole book is for this purpose.

These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name, which now I take to mean this is written so that yes, unbelievers reading it or hearing it might be awakened from the dead and put their faith in Jesus and have eternal life, but also this book is written so that phony believers might be wakened to the fact that they're not real believers and be drawn in, and it's written so that real believers might know that they're real believers and have their faith strengthened. So for all three groups, this gospel is written. When it said, these are written that you may believe, unbeliever, fake believer, believer, it's all three relevant at every turn.

So don't ever read chapter 20, verse 31, these things are written that you may believe and have eternal life. It's, well, this is for unbelievers. Oh no, every day of my life, I need this gospel and the truth in it to keep me tested and to keep me confirmed.

Make your calling and election firm. Second Peter says, how do you do that? Read a gospel like this. Read verses like this.

So you're in one of those categories, which means that what I have to say, if I'm faithful to this verse, if I get it right, it's for you, all of you. So what's a true disciple? What does Jesus mean in verse 31 when he says, you are truly my disciples? I wanna be really clear about something here, so listen carefully to this particular point of clarification. When he says, you are truly my disciples, he means truly Christian, truly born again, truly forgiven, truly adopted, truly in the family, truly saved.

He does not mean truly advanced in the faith, as though disciple were a thing you attain in the Christian life after you got saved for a while. The reason I even point this out is because whole ministries have been built on this conception. There are these four categories, unbeliever, saved believer, immature, later become a disciple, and then a disciple maker.

That's an awful paradigm. When he says, if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, he doesn't mean those who continue are advanced second stage true disciples and the ones on between conversion and they're just ordinary Christians. That's the furthest thing from Jesus' mind.

Don't ever use the word disciple that way. He means truly Christian. A disciple is a Christian.

One piece of evidence from this text for saying that is to notice that the words he uses in verse 31, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, if you abide in my word, you are my disciples. He did not say to professing believers, if you abide in my word, you will become, you will become truly my disciples. It's not a later stage.

It's what you are if you are abiding in his word. And if you're not abiding in his word, you're not a believer. You're not saved, not a disciple, not a Christian.

So there's no thought here about true discipleship being a second stage of Christian maturity. True disciple means true believer, true Christian, true follower. It means, now let's pack it in.

It means that you're truly forgiven for your sins. Look at verse 24 up above. I told you, Jesus says, I told you that you would die in your sins for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.

In other words, if you do believe, you won't die in your sins. Why not? Because if you believe in him, he takes away your sins. He covers your sins.

He forgives your sins. He cancels your sins. Do you remember chapter one, verse 29? He's called the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

How does he do that? How does coming to Jesus mean that he has in him taken away? Taken away, I don't have them anymore. I still do them, but I don't have them. They're not on me.

They're gone. They're forgiven. They're canceled.

How can that be? What did he do? And he told us how he did it. Chapter 10, verse 15. I lay down my life for the sheep.

He laid down his life so that my life wouldn't have to be taken. He put his life in the place of my life and everything that my sin deserved from the wrath of God, Jesus, absorbed from me so that now it would be double jeopardy and a compromising of God's character if that same wrath were to be put on me in hell. It's not ever again.

Wrath is gone because my sin is forgiven. That's what it means to be a true disciple. It has become mine.

My sins are gone. And if you wonder, would you get the idea of wrath? Would you just bring that in from somewhere? I got it from chapter three, verse 36. It goes like this.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. So you've got this choice.

Wrath is remaining on everybody because we're all sinners. It's on us and one day it will crush us to hell. Or you can believe in Jesus and that wrath goes on to him because he takes our sins and he bears them.

He lays down his life for the sheep. And as he lays down his life, his life is crushed to death on the cross by the wrath that I deserved. And so it's no longer on me.

So when I read in verse 31, chapter eight, you are truly his disciples. I hear true Christian, true believer, truly forgiven, wrath of God removed, true eternal life given to me as a free gift. I'm one of his sheep.

I'm not a slave anymore. I'm a son in the household. And therefore I'm an heir of 10,000 blessings that the children of God alone will receive.

That's a true disciple. Second question. What is Jesus referring to in the phrase, my word? If you abide in my word, my word, you are that, what we just talked about.

You're a true believer, true Christian, true disciple, truly forgiven, truly vindicated, wrath gone, sins canceled, eternal life imparted. If you abide in my word, my word, my word. This is really important, isn't it? I mean, could the word be more important than it is in this sentence? It's singular.

Jesus spoke a lot of words, and it's often plural in this gospel. Here it's singular. So I take it to refer to the sum of his teaching.

It's the sum of his words. Uses the singular not to pick out any particular word, but to say, my words are a word. There's a summary to them.

So if you abide in the sum, in the totality, in the focus, in the centrality, and the integrating truth, the sum of it all, abide in it, then you are truly my disciples. And we can just leave it at that and go on to the next question. Say, word means sum of his teaching.

But I suspect that Jesus really wants me to pause here, wants you to pause here and say, what is it? Like, what's the sum of it? I think he probably would want us to do that and ponder it. And my answer is, he is the sum of his word. All his words in one way or another, especially in this gospel, point to him.

Words like, I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am not of this world.

I am the good shepherd. I am the door. I am not, I am in the Father.

The Father and I are one. I am the resurrection and the life, and on and on. When you take all the words together of this gospel, especially, they have one great sum, Jesus Christ himself.

So now, 2031 again, these are all written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That's the way John sums up his own purpose. Everything, all the words, plural, are for this.

They're all for this, that you might come to Jesus, see Jesus as Christ, the Messiah, the fulfiller of all the promises, see Jesus as the Son of God, and all the other I am statements of the gospel. Know him, see him, embrace him. That's the sum of his word.

If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch. In other words, when you get to chapter 15, he's not saying, if you abide in my word, he says, if you abide in me, then you're like a branch in a vine, and I'm the vine and you are the branches. So there he just makes it crystal clear.

I'm the sum, I'm what you're in. If you abide in my word, you abide in me. If you get this word right, it's all me.

If you're abiding in the word, the sum of the point of the word, you're abiding in me. Let me give you a practical implication of this. If you wanna know Jesus, be much in his word.

One of the most important convictions I ever developed, and I commend it to you, it's one of the most important convictions you could ever form, is that Jesus, as a real, living, precious, present, experienced

friend and person is known chiefly through his word. And the only reason I use the word chiefly instead of only, I first wrote only when I wrote this, only. And in a sense, that would be true, but here's the reason I stepped back from only and wrote chiefly for this reason.

You know it from Paul in Philippians three, you know it if you've walked with Jesus a long time, that as you walk with him through his word, by his word, communing with him, trusting his promises, striving to obey his commandments and enjoying his fellowship, I will be with you to the end of the age. As you walk with Jesus hour by hour over 10, 20, 30, 40 years, you walk through very, very deep valleys, very much suffering, very many hardships, and in those hardships, Jesus proves himself in a way that you know him in a way you could not any other way, any other way. And therefore, it is, even at those moments, it is by his words, I'm almost tempted to go back and change it to only, but I wanted the chance to say that.

I wanted the chance to just say that experience with Jesus, experience, lived out, daily walking, trusting, right now in this horrible, horrible, horrible thing, there's a knowing, there's a knowing there that comes that you don't get anywhere else, nowhere else. And yet, it's by his word at those very, very moments. Let me give you a verse to hold on to for this, because this is just massively important for living your Christian life and knowing Jesus moment by moment.

1 Samuel 3, verse 21 goes like this. The Lord revealed himself to Samuel by the word of the Lord. The Lord revealed himself by the word of the Lord.

That is a structure of reality that controls my whole life. I want to know Jesus, not just books, not even just the Bible, as precious as it is. I want the person of Christ.

He's risen, he's risen. He is here by his spirit. He is as much a person, more than all of us are.

And he's in this room right now, listening to what we say. I'll be with you, and I want to know him. I want to commune with him, fellowship with him, talk to him, listen to him, be helped by him, be drawn by him, be strengthened by him.

I want to know this Jesus and walk with him hour by hour. How shall that happen? Answer, the Lord revealed himself to Samuel by the word of the Lord. If you try to run after the Lord without running through this, you will find someone else.

Don't feel like that makes you some kind of pedantic academic, like, oh, you gotta be a scholar, blah, blah, blah. The least educated person may have the deepest grasp of Jesus through this book. There's no correlation between higher education and sweet fellowship with Jesus through the book.

Question number three, what does it mean to be in the word that is summed up in Jesus? And all these words that mediate Jesus, what does it mean to be in it? If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciple. So here's a picture, I'm gonna push this picture, and maybe it'll stick, and I think it's faithful to the scriptures. The word of Jesus with himself at the center and the focus has a force field around it.

This is an image, like a magnetic field around it. And when you are in his word, you're in that force field. You're under the sway of the force emanating from the word, let me illustrate that.

Part of this force field is the truth of the word. So when you're in the word, you're in the persuasion of the truth of the word. You're in the grip, the hold of the force of the persuasion of the truth of the word.

The word is compelling persuasion, and you're in it, it's got you like that. So when you correlate your being with truth, it's persuasion, I'm there, I'm drawn in, I'm compelled. Second, the force field is created by the beauty of the word, and this beauty attracts.

So when you move into the word, you're attracted and held by the beauty of the word. Third, this force field is created by the supreme value of the word. So when you're in the word, you're captured by the preciousness of the word.

As God opens your eyes to see the beauty and the preciousness and the value of the word, it compels, it attracts, it draws. This field pulls you in, in to the word. Fourth, there is a power and a grace creating this force field, so that as you see this power and you see this grace and you're drawn to it, there is an experience of peace because of the grace and restfulness because of the power.

The power and the grace conspire to guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus and in the word, you are held by a peace that passes all understanding. Another part of this force is the life-giving, soul-sustaining bread of heaven. The word is the bread of heaven, and therefore, when you're in the word, you're in the nourishment of the word.

You experience yourself being nourished, like sitting on the couch Saturday morning Noel's gone to a seminar and Talitha's gone off to her event and I'm all alone in the house with my iPad and my Bible program, and I am feeling so nourished. I wouldn't get up from this moment for anything unless I had to. I am being fed in my soul.

How could I leave? I'm in the word, in the nourishment of the word. Or another one is water. It's living water, and when you're in the word, you're in refreshment.

You're not just being nourished like vitamins and minerals are going down deep and making you strong, but you're drinking, you're feeling refreshed and energetic by the word. When you're in the word, you're in the refreshment of the word. And the last one, light.

The word is light, and this force field is created by this light, and it draws you to it because you love being illumined, you love being guided, you hate the dark. Once you've tasted the light and love the light and you love to come to the light, it grips you and holds you in. That's what in the word is.

You're held in the word of God. So when Jesus says, if you abide in my word, being in his word means being in the persuasion of its truth, in the attraction of its beauty, in the treasuring of its value, in the peacefulness of its grace and power, in the nourishment of its bread, in the refreshment of its water, in the brightness of its light. To be in the word is to be in a whole new life called true disciple.

Question four, what does it mean to abide in it? If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. The word abide is simply the ordinary word for remain. There is no special spiritual connotation in the word itself.

It may gain a special spiritual connotation by the way Jesus uses it, but it was just chosen from ordinary speech. It just remained, stay. So abiding in the word is stay there.

Don't go away to another competitor. Remain, it means not ceasing to be persuaded of the truth. Never, ever, ever elevating anything over the Bible as a criterion of truth.

It means not ceasing to be attracted, always being attracted by its beauty and value. And when you're dangled out there, this looks so attractive, this looks so beautiful, this looks so valuable, and you start to drift away from the word. It says remain, remain, that's deceiving.

Or it means not ceasing to rest in the grace and power of the word as though some greater peace could be found out there like just buy more insurance. Spend all your time in the stock market because if you just got enough money, you could have some peace of mind. You won't, I promise you, you won't.

Rich people are not more peaceful. They're more anxious. It means never ceasing to eat or drink from the word as the bread of heaven and the living water as though anything else could sustain you.

Nothing can. So you're staying, I'm staying. I'm remaining, I'm not leaving.

It's too good. It means not ceasing to walk in the light as though some other new thing on the horizon could reveal the secrets of life because it's light. You won't go.

I'm not going. I'm staying. I'm remaining here.

A true disciple is marked by if you abide, remain, stay in my word of which I'm the sum, you are truly my disciples. And the fact that Jesus puts the emphasis here on abide, remain, gives the answer to question number five. How are abiding in his word and truly being his disciple related to each other? If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.

Jesus is saying the mark of the true disciple, the mark. This is why this is just so useful to everybody. True believers say, yes, yes.

And fake believers say, oh no, I gotta get this right. I gotta get this right. I've just been playing games.

I'm not in that. I'm way out here loving so many other things. And the unbeliever seeing it all, watching all this, saying, oh, oh, this could have the ring of truth.

The mark of the true disciple is lasting, enduring, persevering, keeping on in the force field. It proves you've been really taken. You've been really held.

You're in the force field. You can't, nobody will pluck them out of my hand. I and the Father are one.

You get in this force field, you're staying. And God uses this text to keep you here. Temporary tastes.

So hear this, phony believer. Temporary tastes of truth and beauty and value and power and grace and bread and water and brightness. Temporary tastes don't make anybody a Christian.

There are numerous texts in the Bible of those who tasted, began, fell away. Many tasted, began, fell away. The sun came out, burned them up.

Too hot in the kitchen, they got out. The thorns came up. Riches, cares of this world.

Gone. They're gone. Money's it.

Fame's it. Power is it. Sex is it.

They're gone. They were in the church for a year, two years, three years, 10 years, didn't make any difference. They were never real.

They were never in the word. But do you know what true believers say? They say, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. I can't leave.

I've just tasted and drunk too deeply. I can't go. I can feel the Lord.

Who can't feel the Lord, right? I'm still a sinner. But oh, the sweetness of being held in the force field of the word of Jesus with Jesus crucified and risen at the center. That's a good place to be.

Conclusion. If you're a believer, my prayer is that this word, God would use this word to confirm you. You would sit there and everything in you would just be enjoying, just enjoying.

Yes, yes. I love to see Jesus exalted. I love his word.

No, I'm not perfect. I need his forgiveness every day, but yes. I want you to, I want that resonance to make you feel good about your standing with him.

And for the unbelievers, I pray that God would use this word to give you life. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. And so this very night, as you listen to this exposition of Christ's word, the Holy Spirit, I pray, will give you life.

And that life is signified by the yes of faith to the message of Jesus. That's the way you know you're alive. When babies come out of the womb, if they're stillborn, they don't say anything.

And if they're alive, they cry. They cry. And the cry of the newborn believer is, help! I need you.

I love you. I trust you. I don't know much, but I need you.

You're alive. That's good. And for the phony believer, may God show you the truth of what a Christian is and wake you up and give you a spiritual taste for the beauty and the truth and the value and the grace and the power and the brightness of Jesus in his word.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, how we love your son and his word through which we know him. And oh, we would know him so much better.

So we're gonna be like Mary, sitting there, not scurrying about too much like Martha. Yes, house has gotta be kept up, but God, make us like Mary. Just listening deeply, savoring, eating, drinking, being nourished, being refreshed, being persuaded, being attracted, being ravished, treasuring, until we know you deep enough to walk through the deepest valley with you.

Do your work, I pray, even as we sing. In Jesus' name, amen.

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