

Prayer Vocalizes Our Abiding in Christ

by John Piper

This sermon focuses on the concept of abiding in Christ as depicted in John 15, emphasizing the vital connection between believers and Jesus as the true vine. It delves into the themes of life, love, joy, and the desire for fruitfulness in the Christian walk through prayer and dependence on Christ's words and sacrifice.

Scripture: John 15:1, Galatians 4:6, John 6:35, John 15:11, John 15:7, John 7:37

Topics: "Abiding in Christ", "Fruitfulness in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

We revel, Lord Jesus, in being attached to you like a branch to a vine. This is our life, this is our love, this is our joy, and we thank you. And now I pray for fruit that will redound to your glory as this branch opens its mouth.

Come, do your saving, purifying, strengthening, life-giving, love-giving, joy-giving, obedience-giving, transforming work, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. If you have a Bible, I hope you'll open it to John 15, and we're going to read the first 11 verses again.

John 15, verses 1 to 11. I am the true vine, and my father is the vinedresser. 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.

Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

By this is my father glorified that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full. So my aim today is to try to help us experience prayer as the vocalization of abiding in Christ.

Now when I speak of vocalizing the experience of abiding in Christ, I have in mind three ways that we do that. Number one, the vocalization of our need to be attached to the vine and our ongoing desire to remain attached to the vine and our cry that God would do that. Ongoing, recurring.

If you start to feel that, well now I'm in the vine and my branch is starting to wither, we cry to him, hold on to me, keep me in the vine, don't let me go, be my life. If there's any disease in me, disenchanting me with this sap, this all-satisfying sap, prune me, do whatever you have to do, don't let me prove to be not your disciple by being fruitless. We cry to be in the vine when we are saved.

We cry to stay in the vine. That's the first vocalization of what it means to abide in Christ, in the vine. Number two, there is the daily vocalization of the thankful, happy, confident dependence on the vine, the ever-flowing sap of life into us from Christ.

This is not the desperate cry of, keep me. This is the happy, thankful expression of confident trust. So I dropped my wife off at the airport at seven o'clock yesterday morning on her way to Georgia, where she will celebrate her mother's 100th birthday.

And as we parked by the Delta drop-off, before we got out of the car, I took her hand and I prayed, Father, Noelle and I are so thankful to be in the vine, to be adopted children with all the amazing things that implies. And we receive right now, we receive the sap, the life, the love, the joy of the promise. Don't be anxious.

Cast all your cares on me. I care for you. And we believe that, Father.

We drink that right now. So we rest in your care. We love being branches.

We're not vines. Meet every need that Noelle has as she travels. And help me go get this message ready.

So that's number two. It's the confident, humble, desperate, happy vocalization of belonging to Him. Number three, the vocalization of longing, aching, yearning to bear fruit.

So I got home from the airport, and I got down on my knees in my study, and I pleaded for this moment, this moment. God, it is so good to have walked with you for almost 70 years. And I would long for you to make my experience of your life and your love and your joy that has flowed into me all these decades so long that it would bear fruit, that it would become the life and the love and the joy of these.

Would you grant me a message that would be the means of fruit? I don't want to be fruitless. I don't want to preach in vain. Come, Holy Spirit.

Come, sap. Come, life. Come, love.

Come, joy. Come, Word of God. Come.

Come then. Come now. That's the third way that we vocalize abiding in Christ, to cry for fruit in our lives.

So my aim is that I would be a means of your growing in your experience to vocalize your abiding in Christ. It seems to me that to do that, we should review, or maybe it will be fresh, what it means to abide in Christ. I have six ways of describing abiding in Christ that I see in the Gospel of John, and I'm going to mention them to you.

And as I do this, you think, okay, he's going to turn this into prayer at the end. How will that happen? No. But if we don't know what the experience is to abide in Christ, all prayer will be useless.

So here are the six ways of describing abiding in Christ. Number one, verse five, I'm 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.

And the one thing I'm pulling out of this is simply the picture of branches and vine. Disciple branch, vine Christ. Branch attached to the vine.

Very simply, everybody then, everybody now knows what that means. The branch gets the sap and the life from the vine. Broken off branch, dead branch.

No attachment to the vine, no life in the branch. That's the first meaning of abiding in Christ. We live by being attached to the vine.

If we're not attached in a living, life-flowing way from the vine, we're not a believer and we are not saved. Second, we remain or abide not just in the vine in general, but in the love of the vine. Verse nine, as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

Abide in my love. So the life-giving attachment to the vine now becomes the love-giving attachment to the vine. The vine loves the branches.

The vine loves the branches and that love flows into the branches. The life that we get from the branch, from the vine, is the life of love. And so now abide in me, verse four, and the implicit abide in my life becomes, in verse nine, abide in my love.

Keep on receiving, keep on welcoming, enjoying, trusting, treasuring my love. That's what the experience of abiding in Christ is. Keep on, moment by moment, drinking love.

Right now, are you drinking love from Jesus because of your attachment to him? Number three, a third way of describing the experience of abiding in Christ. Abiding in Christ is abiding in his word. Verse seven, if you abide in me and my words abide in you.

So now my words abiding in you, verse seven, stands in the place of Jesus. In verse four, abide in me and I in you now becomes abide in me and my words in you. And not just his words abiding in us, but us abiding in his words, John 8 31, if you abide in my word you are truly my disciples.

So the experience of Christ as life flowing to us, the experience of Christ as love flowing to us, is mediated to us by his words. Here's the way 1 John 2 24 says it, let what you heard, let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you will abide in the Son and in the Father.

So I take that to mean that the life of Christ and the love of Christ flow from the vine who is Christ into the branches mediated by words. Without words, no life, no love. That's important.

The life of Jesus, the love of Jesus accomplishes nothing in our lives apart from the words by which we know him. There are no incognito Christians, no word, no life. They come, the love, the life by means of the word.

John 6 63, the words that I have spoken to you are life. John 6 68, Jesus, where should we go? You have the words of eternal life. So we abide in love.

We abide in life by abiding in the words of Christ, receiving them, welcoming them, understanding them, believing them, drinking from the word. Number four, the fourth way of describing abiding in Christ. And here we need to note the connection between the branch drinking from the vine, the sap of the vine, the life, the love, the words of the vine, the connection between that and the water of life that we drink unto eternal life.

John 6 35, Jesus said, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. So coming so as not to hunger anymore, coming to Jesus so as not to hunger anymore, and believing in Jesus so as not to thirst anymore, is abiding in Christ.

The moment by moment coming to be satisfied with the bread of heaven, the moment by moment drinking, believing so as to be satisfied with the water of life, is abiding in the vine. Spoken in another metaphor, abiding is believing, understood as eating and drinking Christ. That's what believing is in John, eating and drinking Christ.

Here it is again, John 7 37. Jesus cried, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Then he shifts, he shifts the image.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture says, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. And we're going to come back to that, the rivers of living water flowing out. But right now, I just want us to focus on this.

Thirsting, coming, drinking are defined by believing. So believing is in the gospel of John. Whoever thirsts, let him come and drink.

For whoever believes, thirsts, comes, drinks. He's going to be so full of me that he'll become a river for others. So we can describe the experience of abiding in Christ as believing on Christ, provided, and I've heard many people do this over the years, abiding is believing, abiding is trusting.

That's right. If believing is defined the way John defines believing and Jesus defined believing, namely the full-blooded, thirsting, coming, drinking, saying at the end, that's that's the end of my quest. I am done seeking in this world.

I have found the fountain of living water and the bread of heaven. It's over. I'm here.

He's mine. I'm attached forever. That's believing and abiding in Christ.

Number five. This is glorious. The fifth way of describing abiding in Christ is in John 15 11, verse 11 now of our text.

Drawing out the implications now of vine and branch, he says, these things, all this branch and vine talk, these things I have spoken to you that my joy, that's the vine talking, I have joy, I'm a happy vine, right? So it says that my joy may be in you, and therefore because my joy has flowed into your branch, your joy will be full. Notice what he does not say. He does not say, because we are abiding in the vine, our joy will be full.

That's true. That's not what he says. What he says is, because we are abiding in the vine, his joy will be in us, and therefore our joy will be full.

That is staggering. Staggering beyond imagination, beyond vocalization. The joy of the second person of the trinity in you by virtue of attachment to the vine.

Let me give you a taste of what this means in a fresh way for me. I didn't see this until I was doing my devotions a few days ago. In Galatians chapter four, verse six, Paul says, he's just said, when the fullness of time has come, God sent forth his son born of woman, born under the law in order that he might redeem those who are under the law.

So a great transaction of incarnation and then redemption, a legal freeing of slaves, and then he says, because you are sons, I have legally made you my sons, right? So the redemption purchased you, you are legally my children. Now because of this, he says, God sent the spirit of his son, the sap of the vine. God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Now push into the reality of this with me. Please push in here. Don't let images and metaphors just block you from reality here.

What is going on? What's he talking about in our experience? Because he bought you, he now sends the spirit of the son of God, the spirit of the vine, into our hearts. What's he doing? He's shouting, kradzo, kradzo. It doesn't have to be like negative crying.

It's not negative. This is super happy crying, Father. Jesus, when Jesus says, Abba, Father, he doesn't need a savior.

He's happy in his Father. That's what it says. Where is it? I wrote it down somewhere.

Here it is, John 14, 31. I love the Father. So Jesus, the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of the son of God, is poured into my heart.

And what he does when he comes is shout, Father. What's that mean? What does that mean? Among several things that it means is that the joy of the vine is becoming my joy. Namely, the joy in the Father that the son has in the Father.

The son is singing over the Father as he comes into my heart. And I, the branch, now taste the joy of the son in the Father as my joy in the Father. Now let's just get real here for a minute, because I know words like this can sound like, whoa, what's that got to do with me? Everything, right now.

Let me ask you this. We're just down right at the level where we are right now. Let me ask you this.

Do you find welling up within you the cry, the shout, spoken or unspoken? Father, I need you. I thank you for redeeming me. Father, thank you for adopting me.

Father, oh how precious you are to me. I love you, Father. Guess what? If you do, you are abiding in Christ, and the sap of the spirit of the Son of God has flowed into your life, because you know what? Not in a million years would you need a father from your heart.

You wouldn't want him. You wouldn't want to be a child. You want to be a somebody, not a child.

But if you, in all humility, in all reality, say, Almighty God, through Jesus Christ your Son, thank you for adopting me into your family. What could I want more? If you say that and mean it, you're real. Galatians 6.4 is happening in you.

He poured, he poured the spirit of his Son into your heart, crying, Abba, Father. If you cry, Abba, Father, like a humble, little, needy, dependent child, God is in you. Miracle of miracles.

Be amazed. Sing with John Newton. Finally, number six.

The sixth way of describing abiding in Christ is found in chapter 6, verse 56. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. That sentence sent many people away from him.

That's cannibalism, right? If you're as dense as Nicodemus, or the woman at the well, or the Pharisees, the crucified flesh and the shed blood of Jesus are the wellspring of life and love and joy and words and everything that flows from the vine into your life. To eat and drink at the cross is to get everything from the sacrifice of Christ. Now let me summarize these six things and turn them to prayer.

Let me name them in a new order. Number one, first, the experience of the soul's thirst and hunger in drinking from Christ. Two, these are all six ways of describing abiding in Christ.

So, drinking from Christ like a branch attached to the vine. Second, the branch drinks life from the vine. Not just drinking, but drinking life.

No attachment to the vine, no life in the branch. Number three, that life is the life of love. We are drinking love.

Number four, that life and love produce joy, which is not our own. It is the very joy of the Son of God becoming full in us as he cries, Abba, Father. Fifth, all of that is mediated through the Word of Jesus.

Love this. Love this. Number six, and everything is owing to the sacrifice of the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus, so that if we're eating there and finding our all, we are abiding in the vine.

Now, let's go back and revisit the beginning of this message with three ways of turning all this into prayer. Prayer vocalizes abiding in Christ. And I mentioned first, the desire to be in Christ and to stay in Christ, and we cry for that.

Prayer number one, vocalization number one, prayer number two, or vocalization of abiding number two, the daily reality of abiding in Christ, what it's like moment by moment between classes, in class, after class, abiding, turning it into prayer. What is that? And third, the prayer that vocalizes our longing for fruit. Now, let me just say a word about each of those.

We're done. First, the prayer that vocalizes the desire to abide in Christ. The Samaritan woman is stunned that Jesus asks her in chapter four for a drink.

Can't believe this. He's Jewish. He's male.

I'm Samaritan. I'm female. What's this? And he says to her, woman, if you knew the gift of God, this is John 4.10, if you knew the gift of God and who it was that is saying to you, give me a drink, you would have asked him.

You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. He will. He's going to get her to ask one way or the other.

She's going to ask. You would have asked. So there it is.

That's how it all starts. Do you remember? Maybe you don't. I don't remember, but it started.

It started. There was a sliver, a sliver of a glimpse of the beauty of the vine standing in front of you, maybe right here, maybe on television, maybe in worship service, maybe in a university. There was a sliver of a glimpse of the all-sufficiency of the vine, and God granted there to be just the slightest taste of the sap of the vine on your tongue so that it awakened in you.

Yes! I want that! That's what I'm after! I want that! I ask you, would you attach me? You asked. Whatever words your mom or dad or preacher or counselor helped you use, you asked. I want you.

May I have life and love and joy through this attachment to you? Would you grant that to me forever? And he did. That's why you're here, I presume. If he hasn't, if this is all a foreign language to you, if this experience is just weird to you, this would be a really good time to pray to him.

Father, I'm really, I'm really confused about what he's talking about. That's just all weird to me. All that drink stuff, all that eat stuff, all that joy, love, life, abide, oh my goodness, this is weird.

Would you give me eyes to see? Would you, would you do what needs to be done? I would. That sounds really good! If I could be attached to the Son of God forever and ever and have life and love and joy that gets bigger and bigger and bear fruits that my life counted for something, that would be great! That's number one, the first way we pray. Here's the second one, vocalizing the daily reality of abiding in Christ.

Tell Christ, tell the Father that you trust him. Tell him, tell him often, between classes, in the middle of class, when you're being called on, you don't know the answer, I trust you. You're my life.

You're my love. You're my joy. I trust you.

Tell him. Tell Christ in the presence of your spouse. That's why I mentioned Noel.

There's so many couples who live incognito with each other, spiritually passing each other in the night. Men especially bear an unusual responsibility. We all have responsibility.

Men bear an unusual responsibility given by God to out loud with the spouse, with the children, or if you're not married, with friends, tell Jesus in front of them how precious he is. Tell Jesus how glad you are to be a branch in the vine. Say, Jesus, your sacrifice, your words, your life, your love, your joy is everything to me.

Let your wife hear you say that, or wives, maybe you have a very spiritual husband and you're not. Go there. Risk it.

Out loud. Christ is really precious to me. I love him too.

Say it. Say it. Turn it into prayer.

Turn the abiding, turn the experience of getting life and love and joy through words by cross. Turn it into words that people can hear. Do what the saints have done for millennia, right? Oh God, you are my God.

Earnestly I seek you. I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and your glory because your steadfast love is better than life. My lips will praise you.

I will bless you as long as I live and lift up holy hands. That's what they've done for centuries, right? We tell him, we tell him, and we tell him so others can hear. David would say often, in the great congregation I declare your beauty, your worth.

Turn your experience of abiding in Christ into words for him and others to hear. And finally, number three, prayer that vocalizes the desire for fruit through abiding in Christ. This is so good.

I am so privileged to be a preacher and to be forced to put my face in the book and think and pray and long for fruit. So here we are now. This is the cap of everything.

I mean, I hope you, I hope you, you don't feel what I'm about to say as a burden but as a freedom, an absolute freedom of fruit bearing, okay? The goal of life, love, joy flowing from the vine into the branch, the goal is fruit. Don't hear that as minimizing the preciousness of the experience of life and love and joy in the branch before there's any fruit. It's good, really good.

There'd be no fruit otherwise. As you'll see, the life that flows from the vine, the love that flows from the vine, the joy that flows from the vine is a peculiar kind of life and love and joy. This is getting right at the heart of Christian hedonism.

If you don't like that phrase, just forget I said it. At the very heart of life, love, and joy flowing from the vine into the branch, at the heart of it is a peculiar happy pressure to expand. A love that means to expand.

A life that means to expand. A joy that means to expand. Here to expand in two senses.

Mine gets into this. This joy, this love is moving out into a big apple or whatever the fruit is. Life is going to be created somewhere.

God let it be. Maybe in this room, life is going to be created here. And if I get word that that has happened, my joy, my life, my love that I've taken from Jesus gets bigger because you're included in it.

That's right at the heart. Or let's change the image. That's the ultimate end of Christian hedonism.

We're not Buddha-like people sitting with our arms and legs folded under a tree and saying, the world can go to hell, but I'm happy. No, you're not. No, you're not.

Because this life, this love that's coursing through your life is all designed to get bigger and bigger as more and more people are drawn into it. John 4.14, the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. The sap flows in to become fruit.

Just a different image, right? The water becomes a spring. You drink the water, your heart becomes a spring. Gets better.

John 7.37, I said I would come back to this. Whoever believes in me, whoever abides in me, drinks from me out of his heart, not just a spring now inside welling up to eternal life, but a river, rivers of living water. What is that? That's this moment.

That's in a half an hour over lunch when there pours out of your mouth some sweet word about Jesus into a needy soul. That's rivers, rivers of living water because we have abided in the vine and drunk in. Verse 5 of our text, chapter 15, whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, becomes a spring, becomes a river.

The sap of the vine, the living water, the life, the love, the joy of the Son of God coursing through your branch life miraculously increases in the life and love and joy of another. That's why you live. Your joy getting bigger in the joy of another.

That always goes off when I'm preaching, so don't pay any attention. They're testing the siren, which they do, which means I'm supposed to be done right now. And I am.

I've got one more paragraph, but listen carefully as we are entertained by the siren. John 15, seven and eight. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, every kind of God glorifying fruit, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit. Ask me, ask me. You want your life to count.

Most of you are younger. I got a little bit left. I really want it to count.

You got a lot left. Do you really want it to count? Then do this. Ask me, ask me for God glorifying fruit.

By this is my Father glorified when you bear much fruit. So ask me. So as my words abide in you, my truth, my life, my love, my joy, you will be given, when his words abide in you, you will be given a spiritual taste or Paul calls it spiritual discernment, so that you can discern what kind of God glorifying fruit you should pray toward.

You will. You will. You'll be guided as the word shapes you.

And here's what we will pray. Oh God, make my life fruitful. Oh, let me not wither in the hot blasts of worldliness that blow all around me.

Do whatever painful pruning you must do. That's a risky prayer. Will you pray it with me? Do whatever painful pruning you must do to make me fruitful.

Grant me so to drink that I become a spring, a river, a fruitful branch. Oh, let me never be content until my joy in you bears fruit in the joy of others in you. By this, Father, you will be glorified that I bear much fruit.

Do it, Father. So that's our prayer, Lord, as we go to lunch and to the rest of our lives. Oh, grant that we would so abide in you, so drink of your life and love and joy by your words built on your cross, that we would bear fruit and that our joy would be full, ever increasing as others increase in their joy in you because of our lives.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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