

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK SIX - DAY ONE

JUST A BRANCH

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 15:5

READING: Philippians 4:13; John 15:16

INTRODUCTION

"I am the TRUE VINE; you are the BRANCHES." John 15:5 NIV

Let's recap the key players in the story about the vineyard:

1. God the Father is the Master Gardener. (You are not the Gardener.)
2. Jesus is the True Vine. (You are not the true Vine.)
3. The goal is for you to be fruitful. (You are not the Fruit.)
4. You are just the Branch. (Your identity and your purpose are to be a Branch.)

Jesus is the Vine, the true source of life for us believers. We are Branches connected to Him, drawing life from Him as Branches draw the necessary nutrients to survive and flourish. At first glance, we may assume that Branches bear Fruit, but it's the Vine that makes this happen. Philippians 4:13 NLT says, *"I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength."*

The Amplified Bible, Classic Edition puts it this way: *"I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency]."* AMPC

And The Passion Translation Bible puts it like this: *"I find that the strength of Christ's explosive power infuses me to conquer every difficulty."* TPT

Jesus declared these two bold statements in John 15. It is a declaration of truth: He said, I am the Vine; you are the Branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him bears much Fruit, for [otherwise] **apart from Me** [that is, cut off from vital union with Me] **you can do nothing**. In John 15:5 and again in verse 16, He said, **"You did not choose Me, but I chose you.** And I appointed you to go and bear Fruit. Fruit that will remain — so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you." As a Branch, your only goal is to be fruitful, period! When you think about the whole dynamics and interworking of the Gardener, Vine, Branch, and Fruit, there are seven profound truths:

One: In being the Branch, you discover your identity and purpose.

Two: The Branch is completely dependent on the Vine, which is Jesus.

Three: The Branch's identity and purpose are discovered as they ABIDE in the Vine (Jesus).

Four: The Branch's ability to be fruitful solely depends on the Vine (Jesus).

Five: The relationship between the Vine and the Branch is not optional. It's mandatory — it's **life**.

Six: The relationship between the Vine and the Branch is intended to make you fruitful.

Seven: The relationship between the Vine and the Branch is for God's Glory.

A Branch can't bear Fruit that is different from the Vine. A cherry tree produces cherries; a blueberry bush produces blueberries; and a grapevine produces grapes. But what Fruit does a disciple of Jesus produce? The Fruit we produce should meet these two criteria: It should be Christlike and also for the Father's glory. In other words, it should reveal Christ in us (His disciples) and should be approved by the Father, our Master Gardener. Ultimately, the Fruit of your life as a believer is what is produced because you are connected to Jesus, the source of life. It is the result of the Holy Spirit working in and through the life of a disciple. 1 Corinthians explains: *"All these [gifts, achievements, abilities] are inspired and brought to pass by the same [Holy] Spirit, Who apportions to each person individually [exactly] as He chooses."* 1 Corinthians 12:11 AMPC

The scripture tells us in the book of Zachariah: "... *Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, 'says the Lord Almighty.*" Zachariah 4:6 NIVUK

RESPOND

Take a moment and reflect on the following...

Jesus is the Vine: Jesus is the source of my life, and I, as His disciple, am the Branch that grows from Him.

God is the Gardener: God the Father is the Master Gardener of my life, and He tends the Vine I am connected to so I can be fruitful.

Branches need to be connected to the Vine: I am just a Branch, and I need to stay connected to the Vine to grow and bear fruit. [Abide]

Pruning is necessary: As a Branch, I am required to bear Fruit. If I do not, the Lord will care, prop up, or elevate me so I can be fruitful. And if I am bearing Fruit, He will prune by removing all the dead branches in my life so that I can produce more Fruit.

Interconnectedness: There is an interconnectedness between the Vine and the Branches so that while I am obediently doing His work, Jesus, my true Vine, is also working in me.

Spiritual life: The spiritual life of every born-again believer comes from Jesus's life.

God's intent: God's intent for my life is to progress from barrenness to fruitfulness.

Love: Jesus commands me to love others, and He refers to me as a follower of His teachings and as His "friend."

PERSONAL REFLECTION

LIFE AS A BRANCH

There are many things that, as believers, we ought to be doing. But the one essential thing is to remain in Christ. If we remain in Him, we will experience the life He gives to us. And as His life flows through us, we will be fruitful. All the other things we might be called on to do as believers depend on that. As we ABIDE in Christ and experience fruitfulness, we can anticipate that the Father will periodically take the pruning shears to us. This is not to punish or remove joy from our lives, but instead, to enable us to be more fruitful. Rather than resist the pruning shears, embrace them and what they will do.

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK SIX - DAY TWO

THE MINDSET OF A BRANCH

KEY SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:5

READING: John 15:8; Psalm 24:1; John 17:24; Luke 2:49; Matthew 5:6

INTRODUCTION

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2:5 NJKV

“Mindset Is Everything.” Mindset is a fundamental guiding force that shapes how you experience the world and your reality. Your mindset influences how you think, feel, and behave in any situation. Mindset is a set of beliefs that shapes your way of thinking or attitude about yourself and the world around you. Your mindset can make you or break you. You can choose to have an **“I can...”** mindset or an **“I can’t...”** mindset. Philippians 2:5 admonishes us to have the same mindset that Jesus had while on Earth. Jesus lived on Earth to fulfill His Father’s will. He lived as a Branch dependent on the Holy Spirit and His Father. He cultivated a mindset that we need to help us live as a Branch.

- **BRANCH MINDSET #1: MY FATHER IS THE OWNER AND I AM A STEWARD**

Psalm 24:1 NIV reminds us that “the Earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” A steward is someone who manages someone else’s property. In **John 9:4 KJV**, Jesus said, “I must work the works of Him that sent me,” and then finished the work. In other words, He bears the Fruit that reveals His Father. As a steward, Jesus acknowledged God, His Father, as the owner. He knew He was responsible for all the Father had entrusted into His care. He knew He was accountable only to His Father, and He knew He would be rewarded for His stewardship. As a Branch ABIDING in the Vine, I am a steward, I am responsible for bearing Fruit, I am accountable to the Master Gardener, and I will be rewarded for my fruitfulness.

- **BRANCH MINDSET # 2: GOD IS MY SOURCE.** I depend on Him completely. Jesus saw God as His source, as evidenced by many Bible passages. Luke 22:42 CEB: *“He said, ‘Father, if it’s your will, take this cup of suffering away from Me. However, not My will but Your will must be done.’ ”* John 17:24 NLT: *“Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am.”* John 15:9 NLT: *“As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Remain in My love.”* John 10:38 NLT: Jesus says, *“The Father is in Me, and I am in the Father.”* And in John 5:25–27 NLT, Jesus claims that He has authority from the Father. As a Branch, I depend upon the Vine and the care of the Master Gardener. Remain

- **BRANCH MINDSET # 3: I ABIDE: REMAIN: STAY CONNECTED.** I ABIDE in My Father, and My Father ABIDES in Me (Love Relationship). Jesus spoke of ABIDING in the Father in these verses of scripture. John 10:30 NKJV, *“I and my Father are ONE.”* John 14:10 TPT, *“Don’t you believe that the Father is living in me and that I am living in the Father? Even my words are not my own but come from my Father, for he lives in me and performs his miracles of power through me.”* John 14:11 NIV: *“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.”* As Branches, we are called to stay ABIDED in the Vine, which is Jesus.

- **BRANCH MINDSET # 4: WORKS OF GOD.** I am about My Father's business. Jesus said in Luke 2:49 NKJV: *"Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"* John 4:34 LSB: Jesus explained, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work."* John 10:37-38 BLB: *"If I do not the works of My Father, do not believe Me. But if I do, even if you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father."*
- **BRANCH MINDEST # 5: GOD'S GLORY.** I live for my Father's glory. John 15:8 NIV: *"This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples."* John 14:13 NIV: *"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."* Matthew 5:16 NIV: *"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

Finally, John 15 uses the analogy of a Vine and Branches to describe the mindset of a believer in Christ. These are the highlights:

Dependence on Christ: Branches are completely dependent on the Vine for nourishment, support, and strength. They cannot bear Fruit on their own.

Obedience to Christ: Branches that ABIDE in Christ will naturally follow His teachings.

Fruitfulness: Branches that bear Fruit are pruned to produce even more Fruit. Branches that do not bear Fruit are eventually cared for so they can be fruitful.

Growth: A mindset of growth involves humility, being open to God's molding, and seeking to expand one's thoughts.

Abiding: As a Branch, ABIDING in Christ is the hallmark of your life, and the evidence is in the Fruit you bear.

RESPOND

Repentance: Identify and repent for any mindset that is contrary to a Branch ABIDING in the Vine. (Not depending on the Vine)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What does each of these ways of thinking mean to you?

Dependence on Christ Mindset:

Obedience to Christ Mindset:

Fruitfulness Mindset:

Growth Mindset:

Abiding Life Mindset:

REFLECT ON THE FIVE MINDSETS OF JESUS

- **BRANCH MINDSET # 1: OWNERSHIP AND STEWARDSHIP**

- **BRANCH MINDSET # 2: GOD IS MY SOURCE.**

- **BRANCH MINDSET # 3: I ABIDE; REMAIN; STAY CONNECTED.**

- **BRANCH MINDSET # 4: WORKS OF GOD**

- **BRANCH MINDSET # 5: GOD'S GLORY**

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK SIX - DAY THREE

HOLY SPIRIT MAKES ME A FRUITFUL BRANCH

KEY SCRIPTURE: Philippians 2:13

READING: John 14:15-17; Romans 8:9; John 16:7; Romans 8:15

INTRODUCTION

“For it is [not your strength, but it is] God who is effectively at work in you, both to will and to work [that is, strengthening, energizing, and creating in you the longing and the ability to fulfill your purpose] for His good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13 AMP

In chapter 14 of the gospel of John, we see the following:

Jesus comforts His Disciples (verses 1-3 NIV): *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you also may be where I am.”*

Jesus tells them He is the Way to the Father (verses 5-14 NIV): *“Thomas said to Jesus, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ ” In verse 8, “Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’ ” In verses 11-13, Jesus then told His disciples to be fruitful: “Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or at least believe in the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” I believe His disciples were wondering: What is He talking about? How can we do the work Jesus did? Jesus told them about the Holy Spirit.*

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit: Jesus was going away and returning to the Father (John 14:1 –3 ESV), and in John 15:26–27 ESV provides the answer to their wonderings. Jesus said He would send “the Helper” to be with them. This “Helper,” of course, is the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to His followers earlier in the farewell discourse (John 14:15 –17 ESV). The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9 ESV; 1 Peter 1:11 ESV), the third person of the Trinity, and the means by which the ascended Savior continues to dwell in and among the disciples. While Jesus is apart from His people in the flesh, He remains among them by the Spirit. He also emphasized how critical and important it is for us to receive His Spirit. He said in John 16:7 AMP, *“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor— Counselor, Strengthener, Standby) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him (the Holy Spirit) to you [to be in close fellowship with you].”* Jesus further assured them that He would ask the Father, and He would give them another Advocate to be with them forever: the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, Jesus said, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But we know Him, for He abides with us and will be in us. He will not leave us as orphans but will come to us in the Person of His Spirit. (John 14:16-18 ESV) While Jesus was together and eating with His disciples, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, *“Of which,” He said, “you have heard Me speak.*

For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” In other words, He was telling them, you cannot bear Fruit until you receive My Holy Spirit. You cannot be My disciple without the Holy Spirit. You cannot be My living witness until you receive My Spirit.

Let’s look at the role of the Holy Spirit in the story of the vineyard (John 15:1-17). He is the silent and yet active partner in this whole story.

Holy Spirit in John 15 – The Story of the Vineyard

- Holy Spirit connects, unites, and attaches the Branch to the Vine relationally. *“But the one who is united and joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”* **1 Corinthians 6:17 AMP**
- Holy Spirit is responsible for the relationship between the Master Gardener and the Branch. *“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”* **Galatians 4:6 NKJV (Romans 8:15)**
- Holy Spirit is the nutrient that is sapped from the Vine (Jesus) to the Branch. He empowers the Branch to bear Fruit. *“I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power ...”* **Ephesians 3:16-18 NIV**
- Holy Spirit is the Person at work in the Branch. He teaches us (**John 14:26 NIV**). He helps us (**John 14:16 NIV**). He guides us (**John 16:8 NIV**).
- Holy Spirit anoints the Branch to be fruitful. *“You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know”* **1 John 2:20 NASB**
- Holy Spirit convicts us, pruning us so we can bear much Fruit. *“And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”* **John 16:8 NASB**
- Holy Spirit gives the Branch spiritual gifts. *“All these [gifts, achievements, abilities] are inspired and brought to pass by the same [Holy] Spirit, Who apportions to each person individually [exactly] as He chooses.”* **1 Corinthians 12:11 AMPC**
- Holy Spirit ABIDES (dwells) in us. The Holy Spirit dwells in believers and fills us up. *“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”* **1 Corinthians 3:16 ESV**
- Holy Spirit affirms our identity as Sons/Daughters of God. *“In Him, you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.”* **Ephesians 1:13 CSB**
- He helps the Branch discover purpose. *“While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for the work to which I have called them.’”* **Acts 13:2 AMP**
- Holy Spirit is the connector of all the parties in the vineyard: From the Gardener to the Vine to the Branch to the Fruit. *“Remain in Me, and I [will remain] in you. Just as no branch can bear fruit by itself without remaining in the vine, neither can you [bear fruit, producing evidence of your faith] unless you remain in Me.”* **John 15:4 AMP**
- Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Love. *“Such hope [in God’s promises] never disappoints us, because God’s love has been abundantly poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”* **Romans 5:5 AMP**

- Holy Spirit shapes the character of the Vine in us. The “Fruit of the Spirit” (the result of His work) is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” **Galatians 5:22-23** NIV added part of verse 23 so it could end in a sentence.

I sincerely believe that we can never live our Christian life to its fullest apart from the Holy Spirit. He is not an option; rather, He is life to us. How can you ever be fruitful without Him? It’s impossible!

- He is responsible for the Fruit borne within. (The Fruit of the Spirit)
- He is responsible for the Fruit we manifest. (Empowering us to serve, He is responsible for the Fruit borne within our sphere of influence.)
- He is responsible for fruiting. Fruitfulness, perhaps through pruning.

Come, Holy Spirit, I need You!

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Meditate on this scripture and let the Lord speak to your heart.

“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God [proclaiming the Father’s message]; for God gives the [gift of the] Spirit without measure [generously and boundlessly]!” **John 3:34 AMP**

A PRAYER TO PRAY

Holy Spirit, You are God. I praise You because You are holy, and I thank You for dwelling in my heart. Thank you for working in my life. You guided me into salvation, revived my dead spirit, and opened my eyes to the Truth. Thank you. Forgive me for grieving, resisting, or disobeying You in any way! Help me to see You more clearly – to recognize Your movement in my life. Make me more sensitive to You so I can follow You more closely. Still, I know that I am selfish and rebellious. Help me to recognize Your leading and be obedient. Lord, there is no way I can be fruitful apart from You. Help me, Lord! You know the pain, fears, and anxieties I struggle with. Thank you for being my ever-present help. Help me to rest in Your comfort today. Help me to walk in You, Spirit of God. I surrender to Your Lordship, work of grace, and growth in my life. Make me fruitful and help me abound in every good work. You are the One Who produces this Fruit in me: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I cannot live out these things on my own; I need You. Thank You, Lord!
In Jesus' Mighty Name. Amen

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK SIX - DAY FOUR

STAY IN YOUR LANE

KEY SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:10

READING: Hebrews 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12:8; Ephesians 2:10

INTRODUCTION

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10 NIV

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin that clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2

We live in a world filled with so many distractions. Each distraction is intended to keep you from either discovering your purpose lane or hindering you from focusing on your lane and race. In an Olympic track competition, every runner is given a pre-assigned lane to run in. There are eight lanes, each 4 feet wide from start to finish. Any athlete who runs outside the assigned lane can be disqualified.

With that in mind, Paul is comparing an Olympic race to the Christian life. Every Christian has an assigned lane for an assigned race. Listen closely again: *“Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.”* Not just any race, but THE race God has set before you. *“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10 NIV*

Paul describes finishing “the” race as his number one burning ambition: He said in Philippians 3:13-14 NIV, *“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* So, the Christian life is an earthly race rewarded with a heavenly prize! And what is the PRIZE? It is when we hear the words: *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, and I will make you ruler over many things. Enter the joy of your lord.” Matthew 25:23 NKJV*

Our text in Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV gives us three keys to successfully staying in the right lane:

- 1. Get rid of what slows you down.** “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.”
- 2. Stay focused on Jesus.** “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”
- 3. Consider His suffering.** Literally, compare your suffering to His.

As a Branch designed to bear Fruit for God's glory, I realized why God calls us to stay in our lane. It's simply because God has put each one of us on the path specifically, intentionally, and purposefully. He has set my pace. He will order my steps. Let's look at each lane within the context of the ABIDING CHALLENGE:

LANE #1: GOD THE FATHER – OUR MASTER GARDENER. He has the master plan. He is the intelligent designer and architect of our lives. He is the owner of the vineyard and the source of provision and protection for the entire vineyard. He is responsible for the entire vineyard and expects a return on His investment, which is His Glory! The Vine and Branches look to Him for care and pruning to be fruitful.

LANE # 2 – TRUE VINE – OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. He is the foundation, support, and sustainer of the Branch. He causes the Branch to bear Fruit. He is the connection between the Gardener and the Branches. He supplies what the Branch needs to produce. He is the source of life for the Branch.

LANE # 3 – FRUIT. Fruit is the evidence of the Branch abiding in the Vine. Fruit is for God's glory. Fruit is born internally (God's Nature). Fruit is born externally (our calling and service). Fruit is also born by association with those in our sphere of influence. Fruit is the return on the Father's investment.

LANE # 4 – BRANCH. For the Branch to stay in his/her lane, we must do the following: Focus on Jesus (Vine). Trust and obey. Surrender. Be a steward and not an owner. Receive love and give love. Submit to the Father's pruning. Finally, be fruitful and abound in every good work.

As 1 Corinthians 12:18 NIV says, *"God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be."* God wants each of us to stay and excel in our lane. And so, let's

- Run to get the PRIZE!
- Run with all our MIGHT.
- Run through the STORMS.
- Run through the HURTS, SETBACKS, and BATTLES!
- Run to the END so we can finally hear the longed-for words, "Well done!"

RESPOND

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Meditate on Ephesians 2:10 NIV and let the Lord speak to your heart.

“For [YOU] are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for [YOU] to do.” What good works has the Father prepared in advance for you to do?

HEBREWS 12:1-2 NIV BREAKDOWN

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin that clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

WEIGHTS AND SIN

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you the weights and sins that entangle you.

Identify, Repent, and Release These to God and Ask for Healing.

- **EMOTIONAL WEIGHTS**

- **MENTAL WEIGHTS**

- **SPIRITUAL WEIGHTS**

- **PHYSICAL WEIGHTS**

RUN WITH ENDURANCE

Are you running your race? If yes, then explain. If no, ask the Lord to show you what He planned for you.

FOCUS

Looking unto JESUS our True Vine

What are some of the distractions in and around you? List and pray!

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK SIX - DAY FIVE

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

[BRANCH TO BRANCH]

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 15:12-13

READING: 1 John 3:16-18; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; Ephesians 4:15

INTRODUCTION

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:12-13 NKJV

In this passage, Jesus defines love by sacrifice, rather than by emotional response or acceptance. Jesus’s command is for believers to love each other in a way that reflects the character of Christ’s love, which is characterized by four traits: Practical love, Humility, Sacrifice, and Service. Before we can love each other as Christ loved us, we must address how culture defines love. The world primarily limits love to feelings, assuming that as long as we feel good towards God and others, we are demonstrating love. However, biblical love is a character trait produced within us by the Holy Spirit, who transforms both our attitude and actions toward God and people. Biblical love does not disregard feelings, but “it” surpasses them and sometimes exists despite feelings. The Greek word for “love” used in John 15:12 is *agapao*, a verb that refers to sacrificial love. Jesus portrayed His love through sacrifice, and we are called to do the same. Again, John has insights for us: *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” 1 John 3:16–18 NIV*

John 15:12 NIV states, *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”* Jesus spoke these words to His disciples shortly before His crucifixion in a long discourse with different instructions. From verses 9-17, Jesus emphasizes the importance of love, both toward Himself and others. His disciples are to love Him by keeping His commandments, and they are also to love one another. The theme of love holds great significance in Jesus’ ministry. While John emphasizes love more than other gospel writers, we can find this theme in the Synoptic Gospels as well. Here is an example from Matthew:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. ... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” Matthew 5:43-44, 46 NIV

We sometimes isolate love from other aspects of God, such as justice, holiness, or pruning — something Jesus never did. There is no true love without justice, holiness, and righteousness. It would be challenging for anyone to thrive in a country where there is “love” but also a high level of injustice, immorality, and wrongdoing. We would not refer to such a country as “loving.” Another misconception is that love always affirms every behavior, even sinful ones. However, **“Love without truth is sentimental; it supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws,”** By Timothy J. Keller.

Truth and love must go hand in hand; we are told in Ephesians 4:15 [Paraphrased]. Loving one another is not a choice, but a command from the Lord.

In John 13:35, Jesus said: *“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so also you must love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples – when they see the love you have for each other.”* John 13:35 MSG

In conclusion, let's remind ourselves what love is. 1 Corinthians defines it like this:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV

RESPOND

Meditate on the characteristics of love and let the Lord speak to your heart.

1 Corinthians 13:4–8 describes the characteristics of love:

- Love is Patient – Are you always patient?
- Love is Kind – How kind are you?
- Love does not envy – Are you an envious person?
- Love does not Boast – Are you boastful?
- Love is not Proud – Are you prideful?
- Love does not dishonor others – Do you dishonor people?
- Love is not Self-Seeking – Are you always driven by self?
- Love is not easily angered - Are you easily angered?
- Love keeps no record of wrongs – Do you keep records of wrongs?
- Love does not delight in evil – Do you delight in evil?
- Love rejoices with the Truth – Do you rejoice in truth?
- Love always Protects – Do you seek to protect?
- Love always Trusts – Are you trustworthy, and do you trust others?
- Love always Hopes – Are you hopeful?
- Love always perseveres – Do you seek to always preserve?
- Love Never Fails – Is love a feeling or a choice?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Meditate on these Scriptures and let the Lord speak to your heart.

Romans 5:5 AMP

“Such hope [in God’s promises] never disappoints us, because God’s love has been abundantly poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

1 John 4:12 NASB

“No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is perfected in us.”
