

## The Discipline of Abiding

### John 15:7

As you know, I have been having problems with my shoulder. An MRI shows I have a torn rotator cuff. The problem began back in July of last year when Robyn did some major pruning of our lilacs and some other foliage. With a little help from David, we hauled it all to the back so that I can eventually burn it. Then in August she tackled what could have been a beautiful wisteria vine if it had been controlled by the previous owners, but the problem is that left to its own, it becomes invasive and it choked out some of our lilacs, so she decided it was time to dig it up. The pile in the back has grown to what I now call Mt. Brushmore.

Now the thing about my brush pile is that it's all dead. What is there has been removed from its source of life. You can't stick it back in the ground and expect it to grow or produce anything. It might be good for arms on a snowman or a campfire to roast hot dogs and 'smores, but nothing else. In time, that pile will be reduced to ash.

Jesus tells us in **John 15** about the important relationship between the vine and its branches. He mentions two essential truths for the branches to be productive. First, it must remain attached with the vine all the time. If it ever becomes detached from its source of nourishment, it won't ever produce fruit. The second is that from time to time the gardener will prune the branches so that it can produce even more fruit.

Follow with me as I read **verses 1-10** with the focus of our message on **verse 7** today related to prayer.

### John 15:1-10

Jesus begins by saying that He isn't just a vine, but that He is the TRUE vine. In **John 1:9** and **I John 2:8** Jesus is spoken of as being the true light. The word true refers to what is real, ideal, or genuine.

It is irrefutably true that  $2+2=4$ .

It is irrefutably true that the earth rotates around the sun once a year.

It is irrefutably true that the earth rotates on its axis

once every 24 hours.

It is irrefutably true that I don't like Brussel sprouts. It is irrefutably true that we need oxygen and water to survive. Remove either and in a matter of time we will cease to live.

Jesus says He is the TRUE Vine and we, His followers, are the branches. To survive spiritually, we need to remain in Him. To illustrate the kind of relationship that Jesus has with us, He uses a familiar object lesson of vines that grew in and around Judea. It is a known fact that branches must remain attached to the vine to be productive. That Jesus describes Himself as the TRUE Vine means that there were false vines that people attached to.

Some thought the vine was the synagogue in their hometown or the Temple that was in Jerusalem. Others thought their vine was obeying the Old Testament Law.

People may have thought their vine was being religious and all that is affiliated with it like prayer. They may have thought their vine was doing good to others.

The Pharisees thought their vine was being a descendant of Abraham or following the law of Moses and having the Temple.

It's not all that different today. People attach themselves to any number of false vines, when there is only one real, true vine.

In addition to being religious or charitable or doing good deeds people today have other vines they attach themselves thinking that provides them with their source of life.

One false vine might their job, which they feel provides a sense of worth or value.

It might be their status in the community.

Some attach themselves to hobbies or activities that give them some short-lived thrill or purpose.

Their vine might be a well-manicured lawn with gardens that rival what might be in Better Homes and Gardens.

Their vine might be an avid following of their favorite sports team. Their life rises and falls based on the kind of season their team is having.

Their vine might be what's in the bank.  
 Their vine might be in popularity.  
 Their vine might be in science or some other study  
 in the humanities.

These and so many other things are false vine that offer their adherents false security. But Jesus says there is only one TRUE vine and He is that vine. A couple of chapters earlier Jesus stated that He was **“the Way, the Truth, and the Life”** and that no one could come to the Father except through Him (**John 14:6**).

Embedded in this passage about the true vine and branches is a key to answered prayer. There is a condition on our part that is mentioned 11 times in these verses that enable us to have our requests answered. There is a required condition, something that is our responsibility.

## I. OUR REQUIRED CONDITION – v. 7a

**“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you.”**

First of all, there is our obligation.

### A. Our Obligation

John likes the word abide. The NIV has chosen to translate it as remain. In **Matthew 26:38** Jesus takes Peter, James, and John deep into the Garden of Gethsemane where He tells them to **“tarry”** or **“stay here”** and pray while He goes a bit further to pray by Himself.

In **Luke 10:7** Jesus sends out 72 followers with the instruction to spread the gospel. He tells them to **“stay”** or **“remain”** in the house where they have been offered hospitality.

In **John 1:39**, two men who were following Jesus asked where He was **“staying”** or **“dwelling”** referring to the place where He was living.

In **John 2:12** it says that Jesus **“continued”** or **“stayed”** in Capernaum for a few days.

And then in **I Peter 1:25** the word is translated **“stand”** or **“endure”** referring to the Word of God.

These help us to see that the word abide has any number of translations to remain, stay, to have as our home or dwelling.

As we read **John 15**, we come to understand that it speaks of having a union with Christ who is the vine. Because the vine is living, our abiding with Christ is a living and active relationship where there is a communion or closeness with Christ that exists. It speaks of constant communication that occurs between Christ the vine and we the branches.

Think about the relationship the head has with the body. The head tells the body to move or stand still. The head tells the lungs to breath. The head tells the heart to pump blood. The head tells us to take nourishment. As the head is to the body, so Christ is to the believer. As the vine is to the branch, so Christ is to the believer.

One source defined the word abide as unbroken fellowship, continually living in Christ by His divine influence and energy. A couple weeks ago we looked at **Colossians 2:8** where we are told to be rooted in Christ. We gain strength and stability from our union with Him, which begins at salvation. This is a permanent residence in Him from which we are then supplied from Him all we need to live a godly life. Everything necessary to produce fruit is found in our abiding in the Vine.

This is not only a permanent relationship, but also one that requires continuous action on our part. Christ has everything we need to mature and produce fruit, but we determine how much we allow those resources to flow in us and through us. We are required to remain. To remain simply means that we stay attached to Him and depend on Him for everything we need in every area of our life to be growing and producing spiritual fruit. It is submission and obedience.

An evidence of salvation is for the believer to remain or abide in Christ. It pictures an intimate relationship that begins at salvation and matures the closer we are to the Vine, Jesus Christ. Without

salvation there can be no spiritual productivity.

That intimacy of abiding grows through the second condition that Jesus mentions. It is our obedience.

## B. Our Obedience

**“If you abide in Me and My words abide in you.”  
Or “If you live in Me and My words live in you.”**

We have probably heard it said many times “you are what you eat.”

If that’s the case, I am peanut M&M’s, ice cream with canned peaches, mashed potatoes, French fries, hot dogs and cheeseburgers, chicken, steak, tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches, pizza, bacon and eggs, cheesy chips, and Oreo cookies.

**If you are what you eat, what are you made of?**

**How about you when it comes to letting the Word of God abide or dwell or live in you?**

**What kind of spiritual food are you feeding on?**

**Are you letting His Word live in you?**

Letting it live in us isn’t just an academic or intellectual pursuit of knowing God’s Word, it is letting it live in us so that we in turn live it out, obey it, conform our lives to it.

Now, I’m not going to spend a lot of time on this topic today because the Word of God is going to be one of those disciplines of a godly person that we will look at more closely in weeks to come. For now, understand that when it comes to prayer, abiding in the Word is a condition by which those prayers are answered.

Let me put it this way. **Why should we expect God to listen to our requests if we don’t spend time listening to Him through His Word and obeying what it teaches us on how we should live?**

**How much time do you spend hearing the Word?  
How much time do you spend reading the Word?  
How much time do you spend studying the Word?  
How much time do you spend memorizing the Word?**

**How much time do you spend meditating on the Word?**

Each of those is important in and of themselves, but the glue that binds them all together is in obeying the Word when we hear it, read it, study it, memorize it or meditate on it. In other words, answers to prayer come because we are doers of the Word.

Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice, and they respond to that voice.

If we aren’t hearing God speak through His Word, maybe it’s because we are allowing too many other things to drown Him out. Maybe we’re not as attached to the Vine as we think we are. Our obedience isn’t out of duty, it’s out of devotion.

Jesus said in **verse 10** that if we remain in His love, we will obey His commands. **John 14:21** says that we show we love Christ when we obey His commandments. As one author noted, **“Obedience and love go together.”**

Abiding is being in a place where we remain close to the Lord and where we can wait – to be still and know that He is God.

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson states that **“the only way to continue “clean” (pruned) and to bear fruit is to maintain vital spiritual connection with Christ (the vine).”**

Alexander Maclaren in a sermon states that abiding in the word means being saturated with God’s Word, which affects our desires, our understanding, our affections, our will, all our being shaped by the Word.

He continues: **“See that Christ’s Words be lodged in your inmost selves, by patient meditation upon them, by continual recurrence to them, and all your life will be glorified and flash into richness of coloring and beauty by their presence... The main effect of such abiding of the Lord’s Words in us which our Lord touches upon here is, that in such a case, if our whole inward nature is influenced by the continual operation upon it of the words of the Lord, then our desires will be granted.”**

Letting His Word abide in us means we cherish it. It means that we trust it.

It means that we believe it.

It means that we obey it.

It is the fuel that begins the day.

It is the joy that keeps you in the day.

It is the peace that ends the day.

**Jeremiah 15:16** “Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts.”

**Job 23:12** “Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

**Psalms 119:15-16** “I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”

**Psalms 119:24** “Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.”

**Psalms 119:34** “Give me understanding, and I will keep Your law and obey it with all my heart.”

**Psalms 119:97** “Oh, how I love Your law! I meditate on it all day long.”

**Psalms 119:111-112** “Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping Your decrees to the very end.”

**Psalms 119:167** “I obey Your statutes, for I love them greatly.”

That, my friend, is the example of someone who allows the Word of God abide in Him, to permeate his whole being.

Paul summed it up nicely in **Colossians 3:16** when he exhorted believers to “let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

Let His Word be abundant or overflowing in you. Let it control your thoughts, your motives, your actions, your life, your very being.

Let it be nourishment for a hungry soul.

Let it be water to quench your spiritual thirst.

Let it guide not only what you do, but let it guide how you pray because obedience to it is a condition on which our prayers will be answered.

The better we know the Word of God and understand the Word of God and let it dwell in us, the better able we are to pray for the will of God. I believe that when we pray the will of God on a matter, the more we see God’s answer to those prayers because we are praying the very heart of God on that issue because it is His will.

If we desire to have our prayers answered, Jesus says here that there are two required conditions. First is our obligation to abide or remain or live in Him. Second is our obedience to have His Word abide or remain or live in us. When we meet these two conditions, He continues by showing us that our requests are answered.

## II. OUR REQUESTS ARE ANSWERED – v. 7b

**“If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”**

First, let’s notice an assumption. The assumption is this: since Jesus is the one who says that our prayers will be answered if we meet the two conditions of abiding, it is then implied that He is the source of the answer. The first thing I would suggest to you is that our requests are answered because of Christ’s position.

### A. Our Requests Are Answered Because of Christ’s Position

Because He is God, He is able to answer our prayers. When we think about His position, we think about His name.

#### 1. Pray according to His name - John 14:13-14

Some erroneously believe that by adding the name of Jesus at the end of their prayer, that is the key which unlocks the door of our prayer so that we get what we just prayed for. It’s the magic word.

Praying in Jesus’ name means we are praying with His authority as we bring our requests to God the

Father in the name of His Son.

When an ambassador goes to another country to negotiate a deal, he is going in the name of or with the authority of the President of the United States.

Praying in Jesus' name also means that we are praying for the will of God to be done in that request. Because the Son and the Father are in perfect unity and agreement on everything, when we pray in Jesus' name, we are praying how Jesus would be praying on that matter because He wants what the Father wants – His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

It is also praying in a way that what we are asking for would bring glory to God.

The psalmist wrote that when we delight ourselves in the Lord He will give us the desires of our heart (**Psalm 37:4**).

That does not describe a cosmic genie whose magic lamp we rub so we get whatever we want just because we are happy in Jesus. It doesn't mean that if we are good, He will just lavish us with all the things we ask for. It's not like little Johnny or Suzie who are being well behaved at the store so when they ask mom for some candy or a toy, she just gushes over giving them whatever they ask for.

The essence of praying in Jesus' name is asking for things that are in agreement with His will, for our good, and for His glory. Again, when we allow the Word of God to live in us, when we meditate on It and delight in It, we will better know the mind of God and how to better pray for the will of God. We pray according to His name. Then we pray according to His nature.

## 2. Pray according to His nature

Reading the Gospels it is very evident that Jesus prayed a lot.

**Hebrews 5:7** “He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.”

He prayed at His baptism (**Luke 3:21-22**).

He prayed before His first preaching engagement (**Mark 1:35-39**).

He prayed the night before choosing the twelve disciples (**Luke 6:12-13**).

He prayed after feeding the 5,000 (**Matt. 14:22-23**).

He prayed before healing the deaf man.

In **John 17** He prayed for the disciples and for all believers to have unity.

He prayed for Peter when Satan asked to sift him as wheat (**Luke 22:31-34**).

He prayed before His betrayal in Gethsemane.

He prayed on the cross.

And these are just some of the many instances of His prayer life.

If it was the nature of Christ to pray, how much more so should we be inclined to follow His example to pray.

Our requests are answered because of Christ's position, because of who He is.

Our requests are answered because of Christ's power.

## B. Our Requests Are Answered Because of Christ's Power – **Luke 11:9-10** (**Matt.7:7-9**)

Notice four little words that teem with power – “**I say to you.**” In those words we see His power and authority to grant the petitioner what he or she asks. **As a follower of Christ, do you believe Him? Do you believe those words?** There must be trust and belief in His power to answer. We call it faith.

“**I say to you, ask.**”

“**I say to you, seek.**”

“**I say to you, knock.**”

“**I say to you, ask and it will be given.**”

“**I say to you, seek and you will find.**”

“**I say to you, knock and the door will be opened to you.**”

“**For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.**”

If we doubt His power to answer prayer, read again about His power to create the world from nothing in **John 1:3; Hebrews 11:3** and **Genesis 1**.

If He could do that, it is no big task for Him to hear a prayer and make an axe head float.

It is nothing for Him to make the sun stop for a day or to make it go backwards a few hours.



It is nothing for Him to part the sea or drown an army or bring about a birth to a woman way past her years of bearing children or to take a virgin and make her pregnant.

It is nothing for Him to stop the rain or make it rain again after three years of drought from the prayer of His prophet.

**Is anything too hard for Him?**

All things are possible to God when we pray to Him about the things we think are impossible. He invites us to pray for His will to be done. We learned last week that we are commanded to pray by the very God who would answer those prayers.

Charles Spurgeon gives us something to ponder when he writes **“Does He tell me to pray, and yet does prayer have no more of a result than if I whistle to the wind or sang to a grove of trees? If there is no power to prayer, prayer is a monstrous absurdity, and God is the author of it, which (he says), is blasphemy to assert.”**

The same God who invites us to come boldly into His presence, to pray at all times, on all occasions, for all things, is the same God of whom is said in Scripture that nothing is too hard for Him.

Spurgeon goes on to remark **“Do you believe in His name? How then can a prayer that is sincerely offered in that name fall to the ground? When you present your petition in Jesus’ name (John 15:16; 16:23), a part of His authority clothes your prayers.”**

When God invites us to pray, He backs it up with His power, because He has given us His promise.

### **C. Our Requests Are Answered Because of Christ’s Promise**

When we abide in Christ and His word abides in us we have the promise of answered prayer. We pray because of the position of Christ, the power of Christ, and the promise of Christ. The One who does not lie because He cannot lie will answer our prayers because we are praying the heart of God.

John Piper adds **“Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the**

**turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that He will provide the help we need.”**

He who promised is faithful (**Hebrews 10:23**).

This year, make prayer a daily effort. Have a plan of when to meet. Have a plan of what to pray for. If we are not intentional, it will be like most resolutions that quickly go by the wayside. As you pray incorporate God’s Word for people or situations. For example, if you are praying for someone’s salvation, pray **II Peter 3:9** and insert that person’s name in your prayer “Lord, You are not willing that Chris should perish, but that he comes to repentance.” You can also use **John 3:16**. “Father, you loved Don so much that you sent Your only Son that he might believe and not perish.”

We as Deacons might be praying for each of you according to **II Peter 3:18**. “Lord, I pray that Robert might grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Or from **Colossians 3:16** “Lord, would you let Your Word dwell richly in Leona’s life.”

Pray because of His position.

Pray because of His power.

Pray because of His promise.

When we abide in Christ and His word abides in us, it will transform our prayers so that we pray according to His will, and we will see the answer because He promised. Alexander Maclaren writes that **“we get our wishes when our wishes are molded by His Word.”**

When our will equals His will, we can ask what we desire and it will be done according to His timing and plan.

Prayer begins with faith in God who can do what He says and builds on our abiding in Him and His word abiding in us. If you want to transform your prayers, get to know the heart of God through His Word and then obey it, after which, ask what you will and it will be given you.