

Next Steps: The Content

Bible Study: Abide - The Daily Shape of Following Jesus

Passage: John 15:1-17

Aim: To help people move from trying harder to remaining connected, and to identify practical next steps for abiding in Jesus.

1. Opening

Starter question:

- When you hear the word “*growth*” in your faith, what comes to mind - effort or connection?

Set the tone: many people have made a decision to follow Jesus, but the real question is what happens *after* that decision, in everyday life.

2. Read the Passage

Encourage people to listen for repeated words or images.

Read **John 15:1-17** slowly.

Leader note:

Draw attention to the repetition of “remain” or “abide.” This is the controlling idea of the passage.

Other repetition: fruit

3. The Gap We Feel

Key idea: Many feel the gap between who they are and who they think they should be.

We often respond by trying harder - more prayer, more effort, more activity - but still feel stuck or exhausted.

Discussion questions:

- Have you ever felt like your spiritual growth isn't matching your effort?

- Where do you feel pressure to “perform” in your faith?
- What does spiritual exhaustion look like in real life?

Leader guidance:

Create space for honesty. Resist the urge to fix quickly. Let people name the gap.

4. Jesus’ Different Model

Key idea: Jesus does not say “try harder.” He says “remain.”

A branch does not produce fruit by effort, but by staying connected to the vine.

Read again: John 15:4–6

Discussion questions:

- What stands out to you about the vine and branches image?
- What is the difference between *effort* and *remaining*?
- Why do you think we default to trying instead of abiding?

Pruning insight:

God prunes both unfruitful and fruitful branches.

- Not punishment
- But purposeful growth

Follow-up questions:

- How do you usually interpret pain or difficulty in your life?
- Could anything you’re experiencing right now be pruning rather than punishment?

Leader guidance:

Handle this gently. Avoid simplistic answers about suffering. The aim is to reframe, not to explain everything.

5. What Abiding Actually Looks Like

Key idea: Abiding is not passive - it is relational and intentional.

Three expressions of abiding from the passage:

1. His words in you (v.7)

- Not just reading Scripture, but being shaped by it: regular reading, reflection, remembering

2. Asking in his name (v.7, v.16)

- Prayer as alignment with His will, not just our desires/requests

3. Loving one another (v.12-17)

- Abiding produces costly love, not isolated spirituality
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Deeper Challenge:

"Abiding sometimes means submitting to being known in a way that's uncomfortable - not just attended, but actually known."

Discussion questions:

- Are you connected to Christian community - but not really known?
- What makes it difficult to be honest and open with others?
- Where do you need to go deeper in relationship with others?
Gatherings/Life Group/friends
- Why is love that "costs something" essential to real discipleship?

Leader guidance:

This is a key moment. Gently challenge surface-level community. Encourage authenticity without forcing vulnerability.

6. Taking a Next Step

Key idea: You cannot abide in theory. It requires intentional choices.

Introduce these practices as *means of connection*, not performance: [see "Remain In Me" resource]

- **Word** - letting God shape your thinking
- **Prayer** - receiving God's love, not just speaking
- **Community** - being known and accountable
- **Obedience** - acting on what God says
- **Confession** - removing what blocks connection

- **Sabbath** - stopping to remember God is the source
 - **Worship** - showing up, even when you don't feel like it
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Reflection exercise:

Ask people to quietly consider:

- Which of these areas feels underdeveloped in this season?
- Where might you be disconnected without realising it?

Discussion questions:

- What is one practice you need to start, restart or deepen or strengthen?
 - What might you need to stop in order to make space for abiding?
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Prayer prompt:

Encourage everyone to try this during the week:

Ask this question of God in prayer each day
"What do you want to do in me that I've been avoiding?"

Sit in silence for a moment as a group to model this.

7. Close

Key truth:

Jesus does not say "produce fruit." He says "remain in me, and you will bear much fruit."

Fruit is the outcome. Remaining is the responsibility.

Even a pruned branch, if still connected, is full of hope.

"You can't produce what only the vine can grow."

- Are you trying to produce what only the vine can grow?
- What would it look like this week to focus on remaining instead of striving?

Leader Tips

- Prioritise honesty over polished answers

- Don't rush through silence - it helps people reflect
 - sometimes the awkwardness prompts people to speak
- Keep bringing the group back to *relationship over performance*
- If discussion stalls, share a brief personal example of abiding vs striving
- End with prayer that focuses on connection, not achievement