

Abiding in Christ: Moving to higher grounds

Christ Love Assembly (RCCG), Barton, Oxford
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Ref. Passage: John 15:4 (vs. 1-11)

The word, 'abide' (and all its variations—abides, abiding, etc.) is one you are not likely to find in Bible translations that use modern English, and it occurs in John 15 more frequently than in any other chapter of the Bible.

My earliest recollection of the word is associated with Henry Francis Lyte's 1847 song, *Abide with me*. It was a regular evening devotion song in my boarding school. I must have sung it earlier with my parents at the evening services at St James' Cathedral in Ibadan (Nigeria), but it was in secondary school—far away from my parents—that it stuck. The lyrics of the song, and especially the words of the 1st stanza were comforting, as the darkness fell and I got into my bed in the dormitory. With mum, dad and my siblings far away, I held on to the words:

Abide With Me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

In the song I had the reassurance that the Lord will not leave me; even as I fell asleep, He will be by my bedside; He will watch over me; He will stay with me. That was a child's perspective even if it was not quite wrong. And even now, I still sing it, and the popularity of the song is quite extensive; it is used in a diversity of occasion. Years later, I would find out the circumstance of the song; which offers a deeper understanding of the song and the passage in John 15. Henry Lyte was the vicar of All Saints in Lower Brixham, Devonshire. When he composed the words of the song he was dying of tuberculosis. Three weeks later he was dead.

Each last line of the eight stanzas of the song, give profound testimony to a mind stayed firmly on the Lord; a measure of Christian maturity:

- 'Help of the helpless, O abide with me.'
- 'O Thou who changest not, abide with me.'
- 'Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.'
- 'Come, Friend of sinners, and thus abide with me.'
- 'On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.'
- 'Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.'
- 'I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.'
- 'In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.'

Abiding in Christ

So what does it mean to 'abide'? Basic English translation of John 15:4 says "Be in me at **all times.**" The Weymouth NT translation puts it as: 'Continue in me.' The World English Bible version says: "Remain in me..."

The parable of the Lord vine gives a profound insight into the source of our faith and life as Christians. 'Continue', 'remain', 'be in'; these are not things we do intermittently, when it is convenient or when we face difficulties of life. A branch of a tree (or a vine, in this case) cannot decide to walk away, do its own thing, and then return when it needs nourishment or is scared by something. Abiding is being 'glued' to the Lord **all the time**—as the Yoruba word, "lè mo típé típé". It is not that we are inoculated from sin, but repentance and constantly being in the spirit of repentance is an antidote, which is **always** available at the foot of the Cross.

The parable itself offers us a diversity of what it means to 'abide in Christ'.

- There is 'pruning'. Pruning involves clipping away of the dead parts; and being pruned is essential to being fruitful (v.2).
- It is about being always firmly connected to the Lord (v.3). Without it we cannot be fruitful. Without such firm connection we wither spiritually.
- It involves asking the Lord 'what we desire, and that it will be granted to us' (v.7).
- It is about obedience (v.10) to the Holy Spirit
- It involves being in the love of the Lord (vs. 9-10): 'in life; in death'.
- And all these, when we do them gladdens the heart of our Redeemer (v.11).

Christian Maturity: moving to higher grounds

What does it mean to 'Abide in Christ'? What does it mean in the context of 'moving to higher grounds' in being Christians? Paul in the 1st letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 3:2) used the analogy of 'milk' and 'solid food' to highlight the difference between being babies in our Christian journey, and being matured. The writer of the book of Hebrews in (5:12-16) took up the same theme. So if you were to read out John 15: 1-11 in many of our 'evangelical' churches and fellowships, many of us will 'name and claim' v.7 but in principle repudiate other verses. Like the boy away from home, at a boarding house, 'Abide with me' will comfort because Christ will watch over us, but an older person knows (like a mature Christian) that it is a relationship that flows the other way as well. Henry Lyte and the passage in John 15 point us in this direction.

Job in the depth of adversity, of friends who berate him, could utter the immortal words: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15); that "He [the Lord] also shall be my salvation" (v.16). Henry Lyte's 'Abide with me' is not simply a prayer to have Christ abide with him; it speaks of a soul that is firmly rooted in Christ; who 'abides in Christ'; a man who in the face of a fatal illness can say "I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless." It is a confident trust in Someone with whom one has a very close bond. It is about *faith* and *trust*.

If like me, your devotional material for this period is *Every Day with Jesus* you will find a similar theme running through last week's devotions: Trust in God; that quiet confidence in the Lord that He is there with me, regardless of the circumstances around me. "In the midst of mystery and confusion" Pastor Selwyn Hughes wrote, "we can say, 'I see no sense in this,

but I know that God, the Architect of this universe, has my life and times in His hands.” Abiding in Christ involves a never-ending relationship of ‘faith and trust’: in His love; His Presence; His grace. That is something we experience as we daily purify ourselves in the study of the Word of God and in prayer, and we are being nourished by the Holy Spirit.

For a mind firmly laid on the Lord, asking, to which v.7 refers, is not something we do in the flesh but prayerfully under the leading of the Holy Spirit. “No one” Paul reminds us, “knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11). So that like Moses (Ex 33:15), we can say (and mean it) as we ask: Lord “if Your Presence [You Yourself] will not go with us, do not send us up from here.” That could be in terms of a new location, a new job, a new career, or a new venture.

We are unwilling to brave the fog of confusion, and fail to see that it is often in the midst of massive confusion that we have the opportunity to build the muscles of faith and trust

The truth is that God has not chosen to answer every question we ask, but He has promised, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’ (Heb. 13:5).

Whatever your situation or circumstance, strengthen yourself in God today for He is with you.

—Selwyn Hughes

—Jimí O. Adéşínà

Abide With Me

Abide With Me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word;
But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples, Lord,
Familiar, condescending, patient, free.
Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings,
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings,
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea—
Come, Friend of sinners, and thus abide with me.

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile;
And, though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee,
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour.
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Henry F. Lyte