

go of it to Him, or else we will never be set free from our bondage to live peacefully at home in Him.

The branch rests contentedly at ease in the vine. Quietly, calmly, without stress or strain, it receives the life of the vine for its own life and for the production of fruit. Being in Christ and He in us is this quiet receptivity of His life as our own. This is the rest that is the golden secret. This is the loving communion and communication that flows primarily from Him to us, and of which we return just a little.

The Foolish Branch

The branch would be very foolish indeed to look to itself, to depend on itself, to rely on itself, to hope in itself, to count on itself, or to try to draw on itself to receive from itself the life to sustain it and produce fruit. We are just as foolish when we try to find in ourselves the life needed to sustain our spiritual lives and produce spiritual fruit.

Instead we must look only to our Lord. We need to depend on Him, rely on Him, hope in Him, count on Him, draw on Him, receive of Him His life to sustain our spiritual lives and produce spiritual fruit. We need to know that just as the fruit is not the fruit of the branch, but the fruit of the vine, so the spiritual fruit is not ours, but the fruit of the Spirit.

Abiding in Christ is simply resting and remaining receptively in the Lord, being at home in God, letting Him do the work, letting Him get the praise. Let's begin being more fully, constantly at home in Him.

Always at Home?

If we can just rest contentedly at home in Him, living in the dynamic of His life in us, why does there have to be the coming, the turning and returning I have described? Simply because, instead of remaining at rest in our home in God, we wander in self-will and rebellion. We are not content to receive the constant flow of His Life in us. We want to rely on our own resources. Instead of looking in restful trust to receive from our God all we need, we look idola-

trously to ourselves or elsewhere.

Why would anyone want to wander from his home in the all-sufficient God where he can be completely at ease, contented in absolute confidence in the love and provision that is always there for him? Irrational as it may be, we do wander in many ways small and large.

Our abiding may never be as constant as we would wish. We may always be tempted to waste our time questioning why. Instead, let us be quick to count on the grace, love, and mercy of the Lord. Upon each recognition of wandering, simply run back into His arms to again rest and remain at home in Him. After all, it is the best place we could possibly be. Tell Him honestly you have foolishly wandered away from Him. Do it without either hesitation or aggravation.

"Keep yourselves in the love of God." Jude 21

Rest contentedly at home in God and His love. Trust yourself to God and His love. Wait at home in God and His love. Rely on God and His love. Be confident in God and His love. Receive the love of God. Be responsive to the love of God. Be renewed in the love of God. Enjoy the Lord and His love. Remain in His love. Don't separate yourself from Him and His love. Be at home in God and His love.

Does this sound like a lot of work? Realize who is really doing the work, the keeping, as you read the context of the following:

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our LORD Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God, our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen." Jude 20-21, 24-25

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By: Pastor Ronald Marr

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. These things have I spoken to you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 15:4-5, 11

What does the word home suggest to you? Safety, relaxation, rest, peace and quiet, comfort, contentment, acceptance, frankness, unpretentiousness, openness, trust, and warmth are terms that come to mind for me. Home is the center of concern, caring, and love, the kind of place anyone wants to be. There a person finds the encouragement, support, correction, direction, and assistance he needs to keep going through the roughest times.

But there is more than this for us at home in God. He doesn't want just to somehow see us through. He holds out to us something of the delights of a perfect eternity beginning even now in this wicked, sin-sick world.

"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Psalm 16:11

"These things have I spoken to you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 15:11

The word here translated remain is the same word translated abide. Abiding, or living, or staying, or remaining at home in God is staying at home in joy.

AT HOME IN GOD

What a delightful thought! It's being at home with God in contentment, peace, happiness, and joy.

I want you to keep these images of this kind of restful, joyful home in God in mind as we look at the picture the Lord gave us of abiding in Him.

Not Cold Theology

Remember, what we have here is a picture, not theology, but illustration.

While still a teenager, I read a book on this passage by the most prolific of "deeper life" writers. I confess, while I valued its emphasis on walking closely with the Lord, I understood little of it. It seemed far too deep and theological for me. While I appreciate it more now, I still wonder whether the picture the author presents is as down to earth as the Lord intended it to be.

Begin with Trust

Another writer of the same era tries to simplify it by saying that abiding is simply trusting. Abiding in Christ surely begins with trusting God and rests entirely on trust. How could it be otherwise? The whole of our relationship with the Lord begins and rests on trust. If God isn't to be trusted with our well-being, who is? Where is our hope? Surely, then, life must lack stability, a rock on which to anchor, a citadel to which to flee, protection from the storms of life, a firm foundation on which to build.

But as I have tried to impress on you, our God is completely trustworthy. He is entirely willing and able to care for every circumstance of our lives and bring from each eternal benefit for us and others, and glory to His own name.

To abide in the Lord is surely to trust Him. But, helpful as it is, to view abiding in Christ as only trusting Him is incomplete and inadequate. Being at home in God, or abiding in Christ, summarizes all

the essential realities I've tried to present throughout this book.

For instance, before we can be at home in Him, believing He is always working all things together for our eternal benefit, He must humble us. Certainly He must do so before He can teach us more, the abundantly above all we can ask or think more that He has for us.

A Prisoner's Problem

For several years, I have been counseling a young male prisoner by phone. When I was first put in touch with him, he thought he had the same intimate relationship with the Lord as the godly folk of centuries gone by whose writings he was reading, only possibly better! In reality, he was always complaining, showing little confidence in the Lord.

After some months, he finally stopped expressing this pretense. But I questioned whether I should continue counseling him because he resisted any direction or correction I offered. His conceit had not changed, only its expression. He wanted his fellow prisoners who professed to know the Lord to look to him for Christian materials and guidance. I wondered whether, by paying attention to him, I was only confirming him in his prideful ways.

Having about given up, one day during a counseling phone call, I found myself asking the Lord to turn the conversation from self-concerns to spiritual topics. Immediately the young man asked me whether I might help him with something. He told me the Lord had withdrawn Himself from him to such an extent that he couldn't even talk to others about the things of God without feeling guilty and hypocritical. How I praised God! Here at last was a glimmer of hope.

Accepting Correction or Affliction

Jesus opened the sermon recorded in John 15 with these words:

"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 bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

John 15:1-2

We need to become willing to let the Lord humble us to accept His pruning and purging. We must accept it from Him whether it comes through His servants' instruction, the sandpapering of abrasive fellow Christians, or the pain and suffering of affliction. Before the fruit of the Spirit can bloom and grow in our lives, we must accept His humbling.

Uncomfortable

Most people live life feeling anything but at home. They live in deep discomfort. They are anxious, fearful, ill at ease, always resenting what life dishes out to them.

Many Christians live feeling anything but at home in God. They share their worldly counterparts' discomfort and fearfulness. But more than this, they feel uncomfortable, condemned, and ill at ease with God and their Christianity. In fact, they are upset most of the time.

Far from knowing the comfort of accepting things as they are at each moment, with gratitude to the God who sent them for their benefit, they live in constant resentment, resistance, and rebellion toward them and toward the God who sent them. They have never been humbled to accept His way as best no matter what it may be.

Of course, they may get very upset with you if you suggest it is so. They are constantly in bondage to negative responses: unkind thoughts, ingratitude, resentment of their circumstances, unforgiveness, frustration, anger, bitterness, anxiety, and fear. The rest and peace of being at home in God is little known or experienced, so they are deprived of the joy that is their right. Far from giving thanks in all things as the Word admonishes, many murmur and complain quite constantly.

Entirely Present

May the Lord teach us to let go repeatedly of all that is not Him or His. It makes no difference if it is our selfish delights or our pain and distress. We must let