

RIVER *Flow*

Seven Days of Devotional Practice

July 12 – 18, 2026

ABIDING IN JESUS

Seven Quiet Days to Practice Abiding

As the Series Begins

Today, Sabbath, July 11, we begin a new series, “Abiding in Jesus,” built around Jesus’ words in John 15:4–5: “Abide in me, and I in you.” Over the coming weeks we’ll be sitting with one of the most familiar verses in Scripture — familiar enough that most of us stopped really hearing it a long time ago.

The first sermon is called “Wired to Abide.” The title is a claim: that abiding is not a spiritual technique bolted onto an otherwise self-sufficient life, but the way you were built from the beginning. Something in you is already reaching for a source you did not create — and the restlessness you feel when you try to live from your own supply may be less a failure of discipline than a piece of wiring doing exactly what it was made to do.

This guide isn’t meant to summarize what will be preached. It’s meant to give you seven quiet days to actually practice what a sermon can only describe — some space each day to let the word “abide” stop being a concept and start being something you do. Read slowly. Let each day sit before moving to the next, and use the lines beneath each day to write down whatever the Spirit stirs.

- Pastor Mel Baga, D.Min.
Lead Pastor, Auburn SDA Church

Daily Devotional Guide

SUNDAY, July 12 — What a Branch Doesn't Do

"Apart from me you can do nothing." — John 15:5

Read: John 15:4–5

Reflect: A branch has no muscles. It cannot flex, strain, or grip. If you asked a branch how it makes fruit, it would have nothing to tell you, because it doesn't make anything — it simply stays where it's attached, and the vine does the rest. There is something almost comic about how little a branch contributes to its own fruitfulness, and something we resist in that picture, because most of us were taught that the Christian life runs on contribution.

Take a moment today and notice where you've quietly turned prayer, or obedience, or spiritual growth, into something you produce rather than something that happens to you as you stay close to Jesus. You don't need to fix that today. Just notice it.

Respond: Sit still for two full minutes before you pray. Don't ask for anything yet. Just notice what it's like to stop producing for a moment.

Pray: Jesus, today I lay down the effort of trying to make myself grow, and I simply stay near you. Amen.

Notes

MONDAY, July 13 — A Vine With a History

"You are the vine, I am the branches." — John 15:5

Read: Psalm 80:8–16; Isaiah 5:1–7

Reflect: Long before Jesus ever picked up this image, it already had a history in Israel's memory — most of it painful. God had planted a vine, cared for it perfectly, and watched it fail to produce anything

worth eating. By the time Jesus says “I am the true vine,” he’s stepping into a story his listeners already knew the ending to, and rewriting it in front of them.

It’s worth asking today whether you carry your own version of that history — years of trying to be fruitful for God through willpower, only to watch the fruit not come. If so, you’re in good company. Even Israel’s story wasn’t a story about needing to try harder. It was a story waiting for a different kind of vine altogether.

Respond: Read Psalm 80:8–16 aloud, slowly, as if it were your own history with God. Where does your story echo it?

Pray: Lord, my own history with you includes disappointment as well as devotion. Thank you for being a different kind of vine than I could ever be for myself. Amen.

Notes

TUESDAY, July 14 — Grafted, Not Instructed

“I am the true vine.” — John 15:1

Read: John 15:1–2; Ezekiel 15:1–5

Reflect: There’s a difference between being handed a manual and being grafted onto a living thing. A manual gives you instructions to follow on your own strength. A graft gives you a new source of life running through you that was never yours to begin with. When Jesus calls himself the true vine, he isn’t publishing a better set of spiritual instructions. He’s offering an actual, organic union — his life becoming the source that runs through yours.

Most of us default to manual-thinking when we think about spiritual growth: read this, do this, avoid that. Today, try thinking in graft-terms instead. What would it mean to believe that Christ’s own life is already flowing toward fruit in you, rather than waiting on you to generate it?

Respond: Name one area where you've been operating by instruction rather than union — trying to follow a rule rather than trusting a life already given to you.

Pray: Jesus, graft me into yourself again today. Let your life be the source, not my instructions. Amen.

Notes

WEDNESDAY, July 15 — Before Anything Is Asked of You

"You are already clean, because of the word that I have spoken to you." — John 15:3

Read: John 15:3; Ephesians 2:8–9

Reflect: There's an order worth paying attention to here that we tend to skip past. Before Jesus asks anything of the disciples in this passage — before "abide," before "bear fruit" — he tells them something has already happened to them. They are already clean. Not almost. Not on their way to being. Already.

If you've spent any part of your life assuming God's acceptance is still pending — something you're working toward rather than resting in — sit with this order today. And if you've never actually made a decision to belong to Jesus at all, don't let this devotional talk past you: everything in this series assumes that decision has been made. It can be made today, quietly, without any performance required first.

Respond: Say out loud, in your own words, "I am already accepted" — and notice any resistance that rises up in you as you say it.

Pray: Father, let me stop working toward what you've already given. If I've never truly said yes to you, let today be that day. Amen.

Notes

THURSDAY, July 16 – Which One Moves First

“Abide in me, and I in you.” – John 15:4

Read: John 15:4; 1 John 4:19

Reflect: Read that sentence again slowly: abide in me, and I in you. It's easy to hear it as a trade — you stay close to me, and I'll stay close to you — as if both halves depend equally on each other. But look at what actually holds the sentence together: his presence in you isn't a reward for your abiding. It's the reason your abiding is even possible in the first place. We love, John writes elsewhere, because he first loved us.

This matters for how you pray today. You are not trying to earn a nearness that might or might not come. You are noticing a nearness that's already settled, and letting your day be shaped by it.

Respond: Instead of asking God to come close today, spend a moment simply believing he already has — before you've done anything to deserve it.

Pray: Lord, you moved first. My abiding today isn't what earns your presence — it's my response to a presence already given. Amen.

Notes

FRIDAY, July 17 — A Love That Isn't Reading Your Performance

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love." — John 15:9

Read: John 15:9–10; Zephaniah 3:17

Reflect: Most of us carry, somewhere underneath our theology, a quiet meter that tracks how we're doing with God — better on the days we pray well, worse on the days we don't. John 15:9 doesn't seem to know that meter exists. Jesus describes a love modeled on the Father's love for him — steady, without fluctuation, not contingent on daily performance.

Try today to notice the meter running, and then set it down, even briefly. Not because your choices don't matter, but because they were never what was holding you in this love to begin with.

Respond: Ask yourself honestly: what does your inner meter say about you today? Then read Zephaniah 3:17 as God's own answer to that meter.

Pray: Father, you are not keeping score the way I am. Let me abide in a love that was never waiting for me to earn it. Amen.

Notes

SABBATH, July 18 — What the Knife Is For

"Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." — John 15:2

Read: John 15:2; Hebrews 12:5–11

Reflect: No one enjoys being cut. But a vinedresser doesn't prune out of frustration — he prunes because he already knows what this particular branch is capable of, and he's not willing to let something lesser crowd it out. Pruning is not a verdict on your worth. It's closer to a compliment paid to your potential.

This Sabbath, if there's something currently being removed from your life that you don't understand — a habit, a relationship, a season, a comfort — consider that it might not be loss in the way it feels. It might be exactly what a vinedresser does to a branch he has no intention of losing.

Respond: Rest today. Name one thing being cut from your life right now, and instead of resisting it, ask God what fruit he might be making room for.

Pray: Lord, on this Sabbath I trust the hand that prunes as much as the hand that plants. Thank you for caring enough about my fruit to shape me. Amen.

Notes

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A branch contributes nothing to its own fruitfulness except staying attached. Where in your spiritual life have you been quietly trying to “contribute” what was never yours to produce?
2. Israel’s history with the vine image was largely one of failure despite everything given to it. Does your own history with trying to be spiritually fruitful carry any of that same weight?
3. What’s the difference, for you personally, between following spiritual instructions and trusting an actual union with Christ’s life?
4. “Already clean” comes before anything is asked of the disciples. Where do you still find yourself relating to God as if his acceptance were pending rather than settled?
5. If Christ’s presence in you is the reason your abiding is possible — not a reward for it — how does that change what prayer feels like on a hard day?
6. Do you carry an inner “meter” that tracks how you’re doing with God? What would it look like to set it down, even for one day?
7. Is there something being pruned from your life right now that you’ve been resisting? What might change if you trusted the hand doing the cutting?

Notes
