

Session Seven

Abide

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The Eucharist, Grace, and Staying in Christ

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the answer to the question running under the whole book, what does it take to stay, is not effort but reception, and that Christ says so in the same chapter where he warns about branches being burned.

Catholic Touchstone. Abiding is not gripping. It is remaining where you have been placed, and being fed there. That is why this book began with the Eucharist and ends here.

This is the capstone and it has repair work to do. Session Six was the heaviest session in either book, and some of your people are carrying more fear than they showed. Tonight is where that gets answered.

What You Need to Know

John 15 is the only place in Scripture where the warning about being cut off and the promise of abiding sit inside a single image, spoken by our Lord, at the Last Supper, hours before the cross. Everything Book Two has argued is in this chapter.

Notice the grammar of the verbs. Abide in me, and I in you. The branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine. Apart from me you can do nothing. Every one of those puts the branch in a receiving posture. The branch does not clutch the vine; it is attached to the vine and it receives. And then the sentence that decides the tone of this whole session: you did not choose me, but I chose you.

Do not let receiving collapse into doing nothing. Verses 9 and 10 put obedience inside the abiding: keep my commandments and you abide in my love. Cooperation is real, but it is grace-carried cooperation, which is why the branch language works. Fruit is borne in the branch, not manufactured by it.

So the answer to the abiding question is not more effort. Abiding is remaining in a place you were put and continuing to receive what comes through the connection. The sacraments are precisely that: not achievements but the means by which Christ attaches us and feeds us. Baptism grafts us into him, the Eucharist nourishes the communion baptism began, and Penance restores it when grave sin has broken it. This is why John 6:56 uses the same verb. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

Holding the warning without fear

The same chapter says the branch that does not abide is thrown away and burned. Do not delete it and do not dwell on it. The honest reading is that the danger is real and the remedy is not vigilance but attachment. A branch does not stay on a vine by concentrating.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

“For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting.” **Isaiah 5:7**

Israel is the vineyard throughout the prophets. In Isaiah 5 it is a vineyard that has failed, and in Psalm 80 a vine that has been broken down and ravaged, with the psalmist pleading for restoration. When our Lord says I am the true vine, he is saying that what Israel was called to be, he is, and that we are in it by being in him. The vineyard that failed is not discarded. Its vocation is taken up and carried by a vine that cannot fail, and God’s call to Israel is not revoked (Romans 11:29).

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Confessions 1.1

You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

The most famous sentence in Christian literature after Scripture, and it belongs at the end of this book. Augustine is not describing an achievement. He is describing a design, and the restlessness is evidence of it.

Famous and securely attested at the standard locus.

Voice of the Church

St. Teresa of Ávila

The bookmark found in her breviary

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things are passing, God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone suffices.

Found among her things after her death, in her own breviary, which is to say she was reminding herself. This is not advice from someone who found it easy.

Securely associated with her and traditionally titled her bookmark; presented as such.

Voice of the Church

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Act of Oblation to Merciful Love, printed with Story of a Soul (summary)

Thérèse teaches that she expects to appear before God with empty hands, since she has no works to offer that are not his gift, and that this is not a cause for fear but the ground of her confidence.

She is a Doctor of the Church, she died at twenty-four, and she is the clearest modern answer to anyone who thinks Catholic teaching produces anxiety. Her whole way is confidence. And her confidence is not passivity. The empty hands are offered so that she may be filled and spend herself in love; that is the whole point of the oblation.

Summary, not a quotation; locus is the Act of Oblation to Merciful Love. Verify the page reference against the ICS Publications edition of Story of a Soul before print.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 787-789 on communion with Jesus and the Church as his body, which is what the vine image describes.
- CCC 1391-1392 on the Eucharist as what preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at baptism.

- CCC 1821 on hope, and 2091-2092 again if anyone is still carrying last week.
- CCC 260 on the Trinity making its dwelling in those who love God, which is the deepest sense of abiding.

Thread Watch

Leader only. All threads close tonight.

- THREAD A resolves in question 5. The question under the whole book was what does it take to stay, and the answer is that staying is receiving. Let the group say it rather than announcing it.
- THREAD C, Received and Delivered, closes with the Eucharist named as the ordinary means of abiding.
- Check on anyone who seemed shaken by Session Six, privately, before or after.

Session Goals

- 1. Every participant can explain what abiding is, and what it is not.
- 2. Every participant can connect John 15:4 to John 6:56.
- 3. The group discovers that the receiving posture runs through the whole chapter, including you did not choose me.
- 4. Every participant leaves with confidence rather than fear.
- 5. Nobody leaves this course thinking the Christian life is mainly a matter of trying harder.

Timed Plan

- Opening prayer and Win: 12 minutes.
- John 15 walked slowly, questions 3 through 5: 30 minutes.
- The steelman and question 6: 22 minutes.
- Send, the closing practice, and the blessing: 25 minutes. The course ends here; protect it.

THE OBJECTION BENCH

Leader only. Deploy what the room needs, skip the rest. Do not hand this page out. The matching Take-Home carries a shorter version in the participant's own words.

"This all sounds lovely, but Session Six frightened me."

Take it seriously and answer it in the room, since others will be feeling it silently. The warning in John 15 is real and so is the remedy, and the remedy is not vigilance.

Point at verse 16: you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you. Notice both halves. The initiative was never ours, and neither is the grace that keeps us there; but he does appoint us to go and bear fruit, and later in the chapter he asks us to keep his commandments and abide in his love. The response is real. What it is not is the thing holding us on.

"If abiding is receiving, why go to confession or do anything?"

Because those are the receiving. A branch does not work its way onto the vine; it stays attached and takes what comes through. Baptism is the grafting; it is what put you in Christ. The Eucharist is what comes up through the graft and feeds you. Confession mends the branch when you have torn it. None of those is your effort meeting God halfway; each is his life reaching you.

"Protestants abide too. What is this actually settling?"

Nothing, and say so happily. Any Christian who takes John 15 seriously is doing something real, and this book has never claimed otherwise.

What Book Two has argued is what abiding concretely involves and what Christ gave us to do it with. That is a claim about means, not a claim about who is sincere.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, on the last night you spoke about a vine and asked us to stay. We have spent seven weeks on what you give us. Teach us tonight simply to remain. Amen.

Win

1. What has stayed with you most from these seven weeks?
2. Is there something you have been holding onto by force lately? You may pass.

Build

Read aloud, slowly, the whole of John 15:1-17. Then read verses 4 and 5 again.

3. What is a branch's job? List everything it does in this passage.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It abides. It bears fruit, which is something that happens in it rather than something it manufactures. It receives pruning, which is done to it.

Ask what is not on the list. Nothing about gripping, straining, or holding on. The branch does not attach itself.

4. Read verse 16. Who chose whom?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you.

This is the sentence that settles the tone of the whole course. If anyone is still carrying fear from last week, this is the verse to hand them.

5. **For seven weeks there has been a question underneath this book. What is it, and what is the answer?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The question is what does it take to stay. The group has met it in the Eucharist, in the sacrifice, in adoption, in justification, in living faith, and in the warnings about falling away.

The answer this chapter gives is that staying is not a kind of effort. It is remaining where you were put and continuing to receive what comes through the connection.

Let them say it. If they get most of the way, finish it with them rather than for them.

Then hand them John 6:56 and let them see the same verb. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. The book began with that verse without saying why.

DIG DEEPER: The vineyard that failed

Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80 both describe Israel as a vineyard God planted and tended, but they are not the same complaint. In Isaiah 5 the vineyard is indicted: it was given everything and it yielded wild grapes. In Psalm 80

the vine is not indicted but lamented: its wall is broken down, it is ravaged and burned, and the psalmist begs God to look down and restore it.

When Christ says I am the true vine, he is taking that history onto himself. We are in the vineyard by being in him, and this vine does not fail.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH This one is aimed at the book itself. Read it in full and let it sit.

The strongest form of the objection.

Look at what seven weeks have produced. You have learned that the bread must be eaten, that the sacrifice must be applied, that faith must work, that grace can be resisted, and that branches get burned. Whatever the closing session says about receiving, the cumulative effect of this course is a religion with conditions on every side, and a person who takes it seriously will spend the rest of his life auditing himself.

The Gospel was supposed to end that. Christ's work is finished, it is received by faith and not bought, and the obedience that follows is fruit rather than a fee. Do not mistake that for laxity. On this account a Christian still fights sin, still hears the warnings, still uses the means God gave, still expects holiness. The difference is that he is not renegotiating his acceptance every week. What you have built instead is a machine for producing careful people, and careful is not the same as holy.

6. Is that a fair description of what we have learned? What would you say to it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Concede the danger without hesitation. It is entirely possible to take this material and turn it into self-auditing, and some Catholics have. The Church names that failure and calls it scrupulosity, and it is a distortion rather than a rigorous version of the faith.

Then answer from the chapter. If the objection were right about this book, John 15 would be a warning passage with a footnote about grace. It is the reverse. The image is horticultural: a branch stays attached and receives. What our Lord asks of it he spells out in verse 10, keeping his commandments and abiding in his love, and that obedience is fruit growing on a branch that is being fed, not a fee the branch pays to stay on. That is not an audit.

And point at what actually goes in the ledger. Every condition this book has described is a gift: the Eucharist, the sacrifice made present, adoption, grace, living faith, and perseverance itself. Nothing on the list is something we generate. A religion of conditions we must meet would be exhausting. A religion of gifts we must not refuse is a different thing.

Finally, say the honest pastoral sentence out loud. If seven weeks have made anyone more anxious rather than more grateful, the course has been misread, and the remedy is confession and the Eucharist rather than more study.

Send

7. What is one point of attachment you will keep after this course ends?
8. What do you now believe that you did not believe seven weeks ago?

The Closing Practice

Go around the room. Each person names the one person they have prayed for since Session One, and one thing they will do for that person in the next month that is not an argument. Then read John 15:16 aloud together, as a group, and end.

Live It This Week

- Memorise John 15:5.
- Go to Mass this Sunday and receive knowing what Session One and Session Two said about it.
- Go to confession within two weeks.
- Keep praying for your person. You have done it for seven weeks. Do not stop now.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the vine and we did not choose you. Thank you for seven weeks in your word and for everyone in this room. Keep us attached. Feed us. And when we drift, come and find us, as you always have. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Memory Verse

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” **John 15:5**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Isaiah 5:1-7 and Psalm 80:8-16, the vineyard that failed
- John 15:1-17, the true vine (core text, memory verse at v. 5)
- John 15:9-10, abide in my love, keep my commandments
- John 15:16, you did not choose me
- John 6:56, he who eats my flesh abides in me
- Romans 8:38-39, carried from Session Six
- 1 John 4:16, God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God

Catechism: CCC 260, 787-789, 1391-1392, 1821, 2091-2092.

Patristic and later: St. Augustine, Confessions I.1. St. Teresa of Ávila, the bookmark. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Act of Oblation to Merciful Love.