

# LIVING PORTRAITS OF THE CHURCH

Making Room for the Family  
Selected Scriptures



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

In the three previous messages, we have examined other “living portraits” of the universal church of Jesus Christ: a growing *family*, a flock of *sheep*, and a human *body*. Each analogy conveys different aspects of God’s people on earth.

We have come to the fourth and final mental picture—a productive *vine*—another vivid analogy preserved for us in the Word of God. In fact, this one comes to us from the lips of Jesus as He left His disciples words of encouragement just before He was crucified. They have been recorded for us in the fifteenth chapter of John, a chapter that centers attention on three vital relationships the Christian must maintain. Our hope is to focus on the first eleven verses, where we shall learn the one-word secret of producing fruit in our daily life.



## Quotable

*God often turns  
tragedies into  
yet another  
opportunity for  
spiritual growth.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. Overall Survey of John 15

John 15 marks the moment where Jesus told His followers how to carry on building the church after His ascension. The chapter divides easily into three distinct sections.

First, *Jesus addressed the believer's relationship with Christ* (John 15:1–11). God's people were to abide in Christ, pursuing protecting the union between them and Christ. Second, *Jesus addressed the believer's relationship with other believers* (15:12–17). God's people were to love one another, seeking out communion with one another. Third, *Jesus addressed the believer's relationship with the world* (15:18–27). God's people were to hate the world, living in a state of disunion with those opposed to Christ.



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## 2. Specific Study of the Vine and the Branches

The first eleven verses of John 15 make clear the believer's connection to Christ. Four general observations can give us a foothold in the passage. First, *the instruction is for believers only*. Only believers abide in Christ because only believers cling to life in the vine. Second, *the verses revolve around a symbol*. The vine and the branch would have been familiar imagery for those in first-century Israel. Third, *the main subject is abiding*. And fourth, *the result of abiding is fruit-bearing*.

Digging a bit deeper into the symbolism of the passage, we can make specific comments about the vine, the vinedresser, and the branches. The vine is Christ, as Jesus Himself says directly (John 15:1). John 15:1 also makes clear that the vinedresser is the Father. And the branches are identified as Jesus's followers (15:5). The branches, when connected to the vine, bear fruit. The fruit comes not as a result of its own power but because of the life the fruit receives from the vine itself.



## LET'S LIVE IT

Two contrasting responses are common in light of a passage like John 15.

- First, *refusal to abide leads to barrenness*. There will be those who refuse to stick with Christ, and as a result they will bear no fruit.
- Second, *willingness to abide results in fruitfulness*. Those who stick closely to Christ will find their lives to be fruit-bearing.

**Where do you sit on the spectrum of abiding? What evidence do you have in your life as a result of your abiding in Christ?**



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## Survey Chart of John 15

For centuries the fifteenth chapter of John has been a source of encouragement and inspiration for God's people. While it is written in simple terms, it contains some of the most profound, valuable, and helpful truths Jesus ever taught. Here is a chart that provides an overall survey of how the chapter fits together.

Suggested Theme of John 15: *The Most Important Relationships a Believer Maintains*

Overall Survey of Chapter:

| SECTION      | RELATIONSHIP                   | KEY TERM                                    | EMPHASIS  |
|--------------|--------------------------------|---|-----------|
| Verses 1–11  | Believer with <u>Christ</u>    | “ <u>Abide</u> ”<br>(10 times in 11 verses) | Union     |
| Verses 12–17 | Believer with <u>Believer</u>  | “ <u>Love</u> ”<br>(4 times in 6 verses)    | Communion |
| Verses 18–27 | Believer with <u>the World</u> | “ <u>Hate</u> ”<br>(8 times in 10 verses)   | Disunion  |

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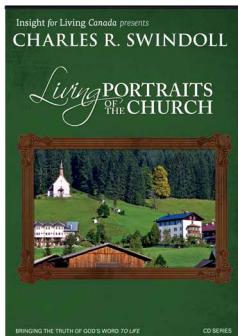
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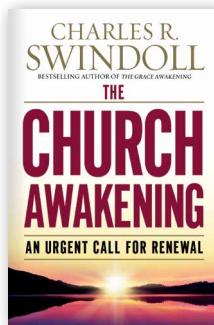
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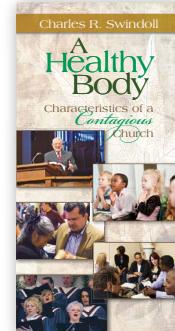
## Tools for Digging Deeper



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