

**“Are You Doing What You’re Supposed to Be Doing?”  
John 15:4-12 (NRSV)**

- 4** Jesus said, “Abide in me as I abide in you.  
Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine,  
neither can you unless you abide in me.
- 5** I am the vine, you are the branches.  
Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit,  
because apart from me you can do nothing.
- 6** Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers;  
such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.
- 7** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you,  
ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
- 8** My Father is glorified by this,  
that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.
- 9** As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you;  
abide in my love.
- 10** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,  
just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.
- 11** I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you,  
and that your joy may be complete.
- 12** "This is my commandment,  
that you love one another as I have loved you.

**Introduction**

As a Christian and as a church, do we know what we’re supposed to be doing? I think we do. Do you know how to do what you’re supposed to do? Yes, no, maybe. Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing? Sometimes yes, perhaps too often no.

Becoming a Christian is a first step: the personal acceptance of the biblical message of salvation in Jesus Christ. We human beings were given life by the Creator God. Throughout history and in each personal life, we human beings reject God’s desire and design for life. And we make a mess of everything through prideful rebellion. The results of this sinful nature are well documented. But our Creator God is also our Redemptive God. Jesus came into the world and comes into our lives with the mercy, forgiveness, and new life so desperately needed. One becomes a Christian by accepting this Jesus into one’s life as Savior.

Becoming a Christian is one thing. Being a Christian is another. Accepting Jesus as Savior is one thing. Accepting him as Lord is another.

**I. Doing What We Are Supposed to Do (John 15)**

The Lord Jesus said, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine... I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing... If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.”

When someone asks me, “Where do you live?” I usually would say in Millcreek or Salt Lake City (or at church!). We all have an address. It’s “where we live.” But, if the Lord were to ask that question, he would hope we would say, “I live in Christ.” That’s what Jesus meant when he told his disciples to “Remain in me, abide in me, make your home in me.”

This is the seventh “I AM” saying of Jesus with a predicate. “I, I am the authentic, the true vine.” Jesus no longer speaks of his coming to live with his disciples. He invites them to live with him. “Make your home with me, as I am already with you.” Once again, grace precedes our faith. God’s love prompts ours.

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis made a simple but important analogy. “A car is made to run on petrol (gasoline), and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.”

And yet, western culture has been moving away from its Christian roots for several centuries but the turn from Christianity accelerated in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. In his book *The Soul’s Yearning Upward* (2015), former president of Gonzaga University, Fr Robert Spitzer writes, “At the core of this decline is a loss of a sense of our own transcendence. Scientific materialism has so seriously impacted our belief in human transcendence that many people find it difficult to believe in God and the human soul. This anti-transcendent perspective has not only cast its spell on the natural sciences, psychology, philosophy, and literature, it has also negatively impacted popular culture.” Spitzer’s latest book, *God So Loved the World: Clues to Our Transcendent Destiny from the Revelation of Jesus* (2016), continues an important call to faith in our day. If Jesus is our home, where we live, the next idea is promising: “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit.”

Are you doing what you’re supposed to do? It is very important to remember: it is not that we keep his commandments first, and then he loves us; but that he loves us, and then we keep his commandments. When you want to keep his commands, you will be making your home in his love. The Lord will take this

wanting and make it a keeping. Allow the Lord Jesus to live with you and live with him. In Word and prayer, in thoughts and actions, make your home in Christ.

## **II. Love Others Like Jesus (John 13; Rom 12,15; Eph 4,5; Col 3; Heb 10; I John 4)**

Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Much of the New Testament develops the how to love others. “Live in harmony with one another. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

College student Heidi Neumark took a year off to volunteer in a mission program at Johns Island near Charleston, SC. There she listened to the stories of the sons and daughters of plantation slaves. “The most important lesson I learned was from Miss Ellie. She lived on a small dirt road in a one-room, wooden house. We’d sit in old rocking chairs on the front porch, drinking tall glasses of sweet tea. I never found out Miss Ellie’s age, but it between ninety and a hundred. She still chopped her own firewood she stacked in neat little piles behind the house.

“Miss Ellie had a lifelong friend named Netta. To get to Netta’s house, she had to walk for miles through fields of tall grass. Actually, Netta’s home wasn’t that far, but there was a stream that cut across the fields. Poor Miss Ellie, I thought, old and arthritic, having to walk all that way, pushing through the thick summer heat.

“So, I arranged with some men to build a simple plank bridge across the stream near her house. I was so excited that I could hardly wait to see her reaction. ‘Look!’ I shouted, ‘a shortcut for you to visit Netta!’

“Miss Ellie didn’t look grateful. ‘Child, I don’t need a shortcut,’ she said. Then she told me about all the friends she kept up with on her way to Netta’s: Mr. Jenkins, to swap gossip; Miss Hunter looked forward to the quilt scraps she’d bring by; the raisin wine she’d taste at one place in exchange for her biscuits; and the chance to look in on the old folks (the ‘old folks’) who were sick. ‘Child, you can’t take shortcuts if you want friends in this world. Shortcuts don’t mix with love.’ Shortcuts don’t mix with love.”

All too often our culture wants shortcuts. The world will always take short cuts to cut out God and get on with its own selfish agenda. But there are no shortcuts to “Live in harmony with one another. Accept one another, be patient with one another in love. Be kind and compassionate, forgiving each other.” These stops along the way are important for a life well-lived.

The Tuesday morning Men’s Breakfast has just begun reading a newly published book *Christians in the Age of Outrage: how to bring our best when the world is at its worst*. Ed Stetzer is dean of the School of Mission, Ministry and Leadership at Wheaton College. One reviewer wrote, “From political campaigns

to nightly news, from clickbait headlines to social media, we exist in such a perpetual state of outrage that escape seems impossible. But with thorough research and clarity of vision, Ed Stetzer offers a way out that is not only possible but – for the Christian – imperative.”

He cites a *USA Today* poll: 79% agree that “Christianity today is more about organized religion than loving God and loving people. 44% agree with “Christians get on my nerves.” Where these responses come from is hard to evaluate. Some are justifiable, some maybe not. But, surely, we American Christians can be more Christ-like in our conversations rather than adding to the outrage surrounding our culture.

### **Conclusion**

As we head into the holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas, do we know what we’re supposed to be doing? I think we do. Do you know how to do what you’re supposed to do? From God’s word, of course. Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing? Abide in Christ? Love one another as he has loved us?

“Live in harmony with one another. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

This is not to say this is an easy command. Admit its difficulty and rely on the resource of Jesus’ love, his heart for us.

Let us pray for one another.

### **From John 13; Rom 12 and 15; Eph 4 and 5; Col 3; Heb 10; I John 4**

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Live in harmony with one another. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.