

## **A Storytelling Commentary on John 15:9-17**

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The theme of this second part of the parable of the vineyard is love: abiding in, remaining in, staying in Jesus' abiding love. The source of this love is Jesus abiding in the love of the Father and which flows from the Father to the Son and into the vine. Jesus is the vine and those who are part of the vine—the branches—they also are then connected with that love. The source of the fruit, the source of fruit bearing, the source of life, is love—the love of God.

The commandment then is to abide, stay, and remain in Jesus' love. It is to focus on Jesus' love and to stay in that. When Jesus first says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love," it's not really clear what his commandments are. What have his commandments been? Well, they've been to stay in the vine in terms of the most recent thing, to trust him and to follow him. But there's a kind of question that is raised by this about what exactly are his commandments. What are the Father's commandments and what is "abiding in his love"?

The first comment to this puzzle of the commandments is that this is for the sake of joy. It isn't for the sake of law obedience, nor is it about doing what is right. It is for the sake of the joy that is present in the relationship, for the joy of doing that to which you have been called. And what follows from the joy is the commandment to "love one another as I have loved you."

What does love mean? The ultimate expression of love is laying down one's life for the sake of one's friends. That's what Jesus does and that's how we can see and know the depth of his love. It is to experience and to focus on the love that he has for us in laying down his life.

Regarding the friends relationship: No longer are they called students or servants nor any other subordinate role to himself. "Friends" is something that describes a relationship of two equals. So Jesus addresses us as his friends and we are Jesus' friends if we do what he commands us.

And what's the command? To love one another. To abide in his love. To stay in that relationship. No longer are we addressed as servants, because a servant doesn't know what the master is doing. We know what the master is doing. And Jesus has called us friends because he has made everything known to us. Another thing that friends do is share what they have heard from the Father.

The source of this energy, this choice of relationship was not something that we have initiated. Rather, we have been chosen. Jesus has chosen us and appointed us to go and bear much fruit. Another word for "appointed" is "ordained": I have ordained you,

empowered you, to go and bear fruit that will last. The call of Jesus has as its root bearing fruit that will last. The source of that relationship, of fruit bearing, is that these commands are being given so that we may love one another. The focus of Jesus' attention is first on abiding in the relationship with him, and then of allowing that to be the source for loving our friends, friends of Jesus. Loving one another is the essence of abiding in the vine.

In telling this parable of Jesus, once again focus on the relationship between Jesus and his disciples the night before he dies—his last words to them. Also, focus on the relationship between yourself and those whom you love—your relationship with Jesus. The intensity and passion of that love is what you want to express. Focus on that and on your audience as the recipients of your love. Telling this story is an experience of abiding in Jesus' love and letting it flow through you to others.