THE INTIMACY OF THE INVITATION

At His last supper with His disciples, Jesus ascribed new meaning to the Passover elements. He consecrated the bread as a symbol of His body, about to be broken for the world. He consecrated the cup as a symbol of His blood of "the covenant" (Matt. 26:28, NIV; Mark 14:24, NIV)/the "new covenant" (Luke 22:20)/the "everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20), which ratified His covenant(s) with humanity.

After supper, He shared with them His "last words" (John 13:31–16:33). Among His other themes that night was His invitation. Their faithfulness to the covenant and their reception of all that it promises would depend on their response to His invitation; it remains the same today. The invitation: “Abide in Me, and ['as,' NIV; the Greek allows for either] I in you... For without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4, 5, NKJV).

The Greek root menō is variously translated “abide,” “dwell,” “remain,” “stay,” “continue.” Used 118 times in the New Testament, John uses it 55 times, often with theological meaning. Significantly, its most concentrated use, ten times in seven verses, occurs in John 15:4–10! Jesus was emphasizing something here!

With “the covenant,” which He was about to ratify with His blood, still fresh in His mind, He invites the disciples, and all subsequent believers, to “abide”/“dwell”/“live”/“remain” in Him. Not just to “abide with” but to “abide in” Him! That connotes an intimacy beyond human experience.

Welcome to the invitation . . . from Jesus . . . to you!
Write out John 15:1–17 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out John 15:4–7. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
**The Purpose of the Invitation**

Why would Jesus invite His baptized covenant members, “Abide in Me”? He tells us: “You are my friends.” “I have . . . loved you” (John 15:14, 9, NKJV). If for no other reason, our Creator invites us into this most intimate relationship imaginable simply because He loves us and calls us His friends! But there’s more.

The “more” has to do with bearing fruit. Using the image of a vineyard where branches connected to a healthy vine bear fruit, Jesus likens those who have chosen to be in covenant relationship with Him to branches connected to (“abiding in”) Him, “the vine,” and thus enabled to bear “much fruit” (John 15:4, 5). You don’t “bear fruit” to “abide in Jesus”; you “abide in Jesus” to “bear fruit”!

The life of every human being bears fruit, either “fruit [for] . . . death” or “fruit [for] . . . God [and] . . . holiness” (Rom. 6:20–22; cf. 7:4, 5). Living an old-covenant experience produces the former; a new-covenant experience the latter. In the wake of someone characterized by an old-covenant experience is a host of damaged lives; in the wake of someone characterized by a new-covenant experience is a harvest of healed lives or lives on the mend. Jesus chose us to bear good fruit, healed lives, on-the-mend lives; He “prunes” us, disciplines us, often through various hardships, to maximize the results (John 15:2, 16); because we will get to live forever with those whose lives were healed in part through our influence!

Simply put, bearing fruit for the kingdom of God is two-dimensional: (1) “keep[ing] oneself unstained by the world” and (2) “visit[ing] orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27, NASB). The first involves allying with the Spirit in His war against the flesh (see lesson 5). The “world” entices, addicts, and enslaves: entertainment, sports, pornography, shopping, overeating, accumulating stuff, and so forth. You do not realize you have been enslaved until you cannot stop using. The fruitage is “death,” not only for oneself but also for others within one’s circle of influence.

The “much fruit” (John 15:5) produced from abiding in Jesus is that which contributes to healing and hope for those in our circles of influence. Jesus summed up the entire Old Testament in one line: “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matt. 7:12, NKJV). Throughout Scripture, this love command has always been expressed as a very practical ethic, as in the Ten Commandments, for example. In Jesus’ most graphic description of the final judgment, He based the outcome on how we treated people in need (Matt. 25:31–46). “Christ’s rule of life, by which every one of us must stand or fall in the judgment, is, ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’ Matthew 7:12” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 640).

This is the essence of the everlasting covenant, how the Trinity has eternally related among themselves and, by extension, relates to the creation as a whole, including humanity in its original perfection, including humanity at its ugliest and most vicious. Once Jesus lived out that love principle at a depth that even the unfallen universe had not comprehended (Col. 1:20), He could reissue it as a new-covenant command: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12, NKJV). This is the fruit that abiding in Him produces.

“It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, ‘Love one another, as I have loved you’ (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts” (White, *The Desire of Ages*, 641).
Assuming that Jesus’ invitation to “abide in Me” contains an RSVP, how does one accept it and actually “abide in” Him?

First, simply tell Jesus you accept His invitation. Do this daily, either verbally or written as in a prayer journal. Never take it for granted. Accepting His invitation daily is the greatest honor and privilege imaginable. Never lose sense of its awesomeness. Invited to abide in your Creator, Redeemer? Really? Yes! Whatever it might mean; whatever it might involve—yes! Similarly, daily invite Him to come in and eat with you and with all those on your prayer list, as per Revelation 3:20.

The familiar steps to maintaining that relationship include three daily actions and a commitment:

**Prayer.** “The life you have received from Me can be preserved only by continual communion” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 676). Well then, “continual communion” it must be. Jesus said, “If you abide in Me . . . ask what you desire” (John 15:7, NKJV). What we desire is for ourselves, of course, for our own growth in His image and likeness and for our personal needs. But also at our baptism, Jesus grants us intercessory authority. Our prayers can make a difference in the lives of others whom God lays on our hearts. Praying for them is one way we can bear fruit for eternity without even leaving home!

**Scripture.** Jesus associated “abide in Me” with “My words abide in you” (John 15:7). There is some direct correlation. Isaiah said that as surely as the rain produces vegetation and food, His word will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it (Isa. 55:10, 11). He sent His word to secure you to Him spiritually and that your life might bear fruit for His kingdom. Therefore, if you sincerely and prayerfully meditate on His word daily, you cannot be lost and you will bear fruit, because these were purposes for which He sent His Word!

**Quiet time.** “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). Alternate translation: “Turn it off! and know that I am God.” Media, that is, in all its forms! Do not turn it on each day before you overtly accept Jesus’ invitation and spend some quiet time in prayer and meditation on His Word. If you commute to work or school before that occurs, mute the radio or podcasts unless they are devotionally nurturing; spend quiet time with Jesus instead. Occasionally fasting from all media for a set period of time to “Be still, and know that I am God” could be a more effective spiritual discipline than fasting from food.

**Commitment to an obedient life of covenant faithfulness.** “If you do whatever I command” you will “abide in My love” (John 15:14, 9, NKJV). We all fail here in terms of perfect obedience. But remember, *we do not obey in order to abide in Jesus; we abide in Jesus in order to obey!* Do not confuse the sequence. “Without Me you can do nothing,” Jesus said, including true obedience from the heart. While most modern scholars have fled from Jesus’ high standard (Matt. 5:48; Luke 6:36), C. S. Lewis has rightly maintained, “After each failure, ask forgiveness, pick yourself up, and try again. . . . The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection” (*Mere Christianity* [New York: Macmillan, 1960], 93, 94). By “perfection” in Matthew 5:48 Jesus may have meant: “Don’t set a limit on what I can do in you and through you!” The final goal is the Matthew 7:12 life, the John 15:12 life, the new-covenant-experience life in its ultimate maturity—and it is not yours to achieve, but His as you abide in Him and trust Him (1 John 5:14, 15).

OK then!
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

John 17:20–23
Galatians 2:20
Galatians 5:19–25
Revelation 3:20, 21
1 John 5:14, 15
Isaiah 55:10, 11; 5:1–6
Matthew 23:37

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with John 15:1–17?

Review your memorized verse from John 15:1–17.
THE PERSISTENT INVITER

Jesus never gives up on us.

In His parable of the “great supper” (Luke 14:15–24) Jesus portrays the host sending out invitations to attend His immaculately planned celebratory feast. The invited guests sent back their declines with “excuses” (too busy at work, home, and so on). The host never gave up. He kept expanding His guest list and sending invitations until the banquet hall was finally filled. Jesus thereby revealed the pain He feels when His daily invitation to “abide in [Him],” and ultimately to receive the eternal inheritance He has prepared for us, is rejected. His anticipation of sharing eternity with us was the “joy . . . set before Him” as He hung tortured in body and spirit on the cross (Heb. 12:2). The parable also portrays His commitment to continue extending His invitation until everyone has made a final decision.

In another parable (Isa. 5:1–6) Jesus likened His people to a vineyard that He planted in the choicest soil and tended meticulously, but it continued to bear only “wild grapes.” It eventually became encumbered with “briers and thorns” and was “trampled down.” The centrally positioned climax occurs when the vineyard owner, heartbroken, cries out, “What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?” (v. 4). A brokenhearted Jesus echoed this cry shortly before His crucifixion: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:37, NKJV).

The divine covenant is not merely a subject for study; it is the story of Jesus’ unrelenting pursuit of us. Prayerfully studying the divine covenant should help us to feel it as much or more as to understand it. It is His heartbeat, His passion. We, and all of those in the wake of our life influence, are in its focus.

A quick review of our thirteen vignettes on Decoding the Covenants provides a fleeting glimpse of the breathtaking breadth and depth of His commitment to us and to the prospects of our eternal future with Him in the earth made new (lessons are designated by numbers):

1. Our plight, which we didn’t sign up for in this world of sin, has been a major concern of the divine everlasting covenant from eternity past.

2–3. The four comprehensive new-covenant promises assure us that every provision has been made to secure our eternal salvation.

4. The all-encompassing benefits of His covenant of grace are explicitly spelled out in the gospel of Moses.

5–10. Reception of the covenant benefits depends on our individual response, not on when we were born, and God has provided a clear definition of an old-covenant experience resulting in death, in contrast with a new-covenant experience resulting in eternal life, so there can be no doubt concerning what choice we are making.

11. Jesus ratified His eternal commitment to us with His “blood of the everlasting covenant.”

12. He assures us that when we are “imbued with His Spirit” (i.e., abiding in Him), every hardship and opportunity that reaches us has passed through Him first and has a purpose.

13. If we daily accept His invitation, “Abide in Me,” we are as safe as though already in the kingdom now, and our lives will continue to bear fruit for Him to the end, even posthumously through the legacy we leave, as well as in eternity!
“Jesus says, ‘Abide in Me.’ These words convey the idea of rest, stability, confidence. Again He invites, ‘Come unto Me, . . . and I will give you rest.’ Matthew 11:28. The words of the psalmist express the same thought: ‘Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.’ And Isaiah gives the assurance, ‘In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.’ Psalm 37:7; Isaiah 30:15. This rest is not found in inactivity; for in the Saviour’s invitation the promise of rest is united with the call to labor: ‘Take My yoke upon you: . . . and ye shall find rest.’ Matthew 11:29. The heart that rests most fully upon Christ will be most earnest and active in labor for Him.

“When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence it is Satan’s constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life’s cares and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections—to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ he hopes to gain the victory. Do not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears. . . . Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to Him. If you will leave yourself in His hands, He will bring you off more than conqueror through Him that has loved you.” (Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 71, 72.)

“Christ will never abandon the soul for whom He has died. The soul may leave Him and be overwhelmed with temptation, but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life. Could our spiritual vision be quickened, we should see souls bowed under oppression and burdened with grief, pressed as a cart beneath sheaves and ready to die in discouragement. We should see angels flying swiftly to aid these tempted ones, who are standing as on the brink of a precipice. The angels from heaven force back the hosts of evil that encompass these souls, and guide them to plant their feet on the sure foundation. The battles waging between the two armies are as real as those fought by the armies of this world, and on the issue of the spiritual conflict eternal destinies depend.

“To us, as to Peter, the word is spoken, ‘Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.’ Luke 22:31, 32. Thank God, we are not left alone. He who ‘so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life’ (John 3:16), will not desert us in the battle with the adversary of God and man. ‘Behold,’ He says, ‘I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.’ Luke 10:19.”

“Live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold you firmly by a hand that will never let go. Know and believe the love that God has to us, and you are secure; that love is a fortress impregnable to all the delusions and assaults of Satan. ‘The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.’ Proverbs 18:10. (Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, 118, 119.)
inQuire

Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How intimate is your experience with God?

Why is this intimacy foreign to other so-called Christians?

What fruit have you seen in your walk with God?

How has your new-covenant experience been more vivified through this study of “Decoding the Covenants”?

How has this quarter reaffirmed your identity as a Seventh-day Adventist who believes in the entire Bible as a whole?

How has this quarter challenged you personally and spiritually?

Why do you think God has led you personally to the completion of this study on His covenants?