

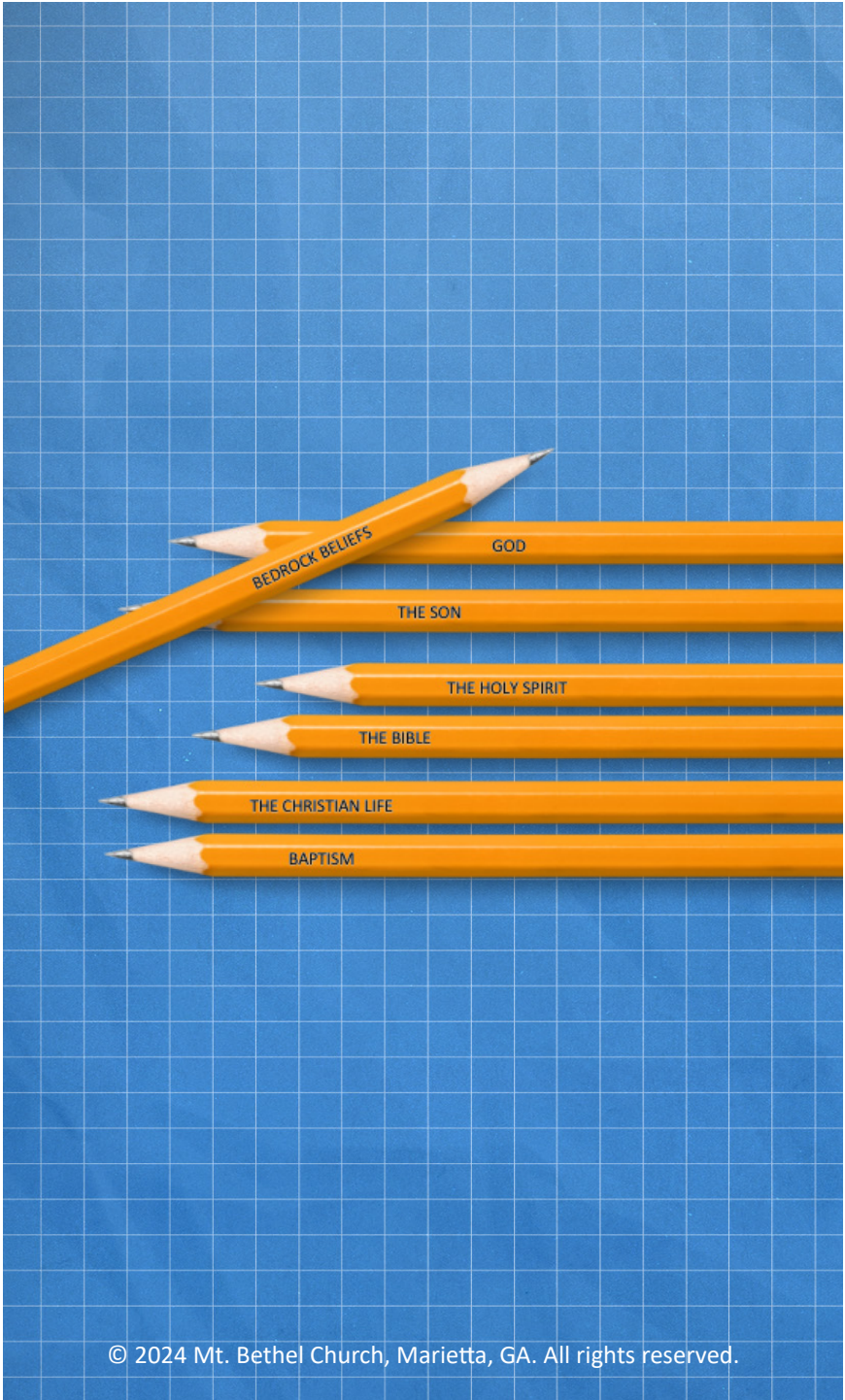
The background is a vibrant blue grid pattern, reminiscent of graph paper. Overlaid on this are various construction-related items: wooden planks, grey panels, and a blue patterned strip in the top-left and bottom-right corners. A wooden ruler is visible on the right side, and two pencils are at the top right. The overall aesthetic is one of building and craftsmanship.

— A Firm — Foundation

THE MARKS OF DISCIPLESHIP

The logo for Mt Bethel Church features a stylized white 'MB' monogram. Below the monogram, the words 'mt bethel' and 'church' are written in a lowercase, sans-serif font, stacked vertically.

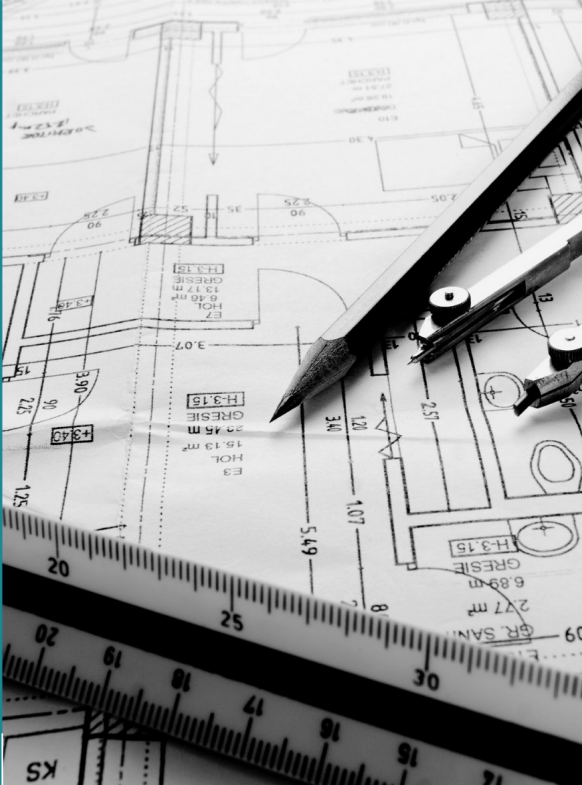
mt bethel
church



WEEK 1

Abides in Truth

By: Dr. Jody Ray



“So, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

(John 8:31-32, ESV)

Introduction

As we delve into the Gospel of John, we encounter a profound declaration by Jesus that resonates through the ages and speaks directly to the core of our faith. In John 8:31-32, Jesus says to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

These two verses summarize the essence of Christian discipleship and the transformative power of the truth found in Christ. Let’s explore a little deeper into the depths of this passage and draw inspiration for our lives as followers of Jesus.

First and foremost, Jesus invites us to abide in His word. This call to abide goes beyond mere intellectual assent; it speaks to a deep, abiding relationship with the teachings of Christ. To abide in His word means to dwell in it, to meditate on it, and to allow it to permeate every aspect of our lives. As we immerse ourselves in the Scriptures and open our hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we position ourselves to be transformed by the truth of God’s Word.

Moreover, Jesus promises that those who abide in His word will know the truth. This truth is not merely an abstract concept, but a living reality found in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the embodiment of truth, and through our relationship with Him, we gain a deep, experiential knowledge of the truth that sets us free. This truth liberates us from the bondage of sin, ignorance, and falsehood, offering us a new perspective and a transformed way of living.

Finally, Jesus declared that the truth will set us free. This freedom extends beyond the temporal and reaches into the depths of our souls. It is a freedom from the power of sin, from the chains of guilt and shame, and from the fear of death. It is a freedom to live as children of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk in righteousness and to fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

Over the next few days, as we reflect on these profound words of Jesus, let us commit ourselves to abiding in His word, embracing the truth, and living as disciples of Christ. It’s vitally important that we continually seek to know Him more deeply and to experience the freedom that only He can provide.

SERMON NOTES:

DAY 1 | WEEK 1

What is Truth?

By: Dr. Jody Ray

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

(John 14:6, NIV)

Day 1 | Week 1

What is Truth?

What Truth Do You Follow?

The nature of truth is a profound philosophical and theological question that has been contemplated by thinkers, scholars, and theologians throughout history. In a general sense, truth can be understood as that which corresponds to reality, or as the accurate representation of facts or the way things really are.

In the context of our Christian faith, truth is found in the person of Jesus Christ, who declared Himself to be “the way, the truth, and the life” in John 14:6. For Christians, truth is not merely a set of abstract principles or propositions, but rather a living reality found in the person of Jesus. We believe that Jesus is the ultimate revelation of the truth of God to humanity. This truth encompasses God’s revelation of Himself, His will, and His redemptive plan for humanity.

Augustine once said, “If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don’t like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.”

From a biblical perspective, truth is not just a concept, it is personified in Jesus Christ. In John 1:14, it is written, “And the Word became flesh

and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” This underscores the inseparable connection between truth and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Tim Keller speaking on the incarnation said, “At Christmas we contemplate the grandeur of a god who loved us enough to enter our world, a god who loved us enough to become one of us, the god who loved us enough to take upon himself our humanity and our sin.”

The Truth will Set You Free

In John 8:31-32, Jesus proclaims that the truth will set us free. This freedom is not merely from external constraints, but it is a liberation of the human spirit from the bondage of sin and death.

Theologically, truth is interconnected with the concept of God’s faithfulness, reliability, and unchanging nature. Throughout the Bible, God is described as the “God of truth” (Isaiah 65:16), and His Word is upheld as the standard of truth by which all other claims are to be measured.

Truth, from a Christian perspective, is both a fundamental reality and a person – Jesus Christ. It encompasses God’s revealed knowledge, His faithfulness, and the freedom that comes from embracing His truth. As Christians, we are called to seek, embrace, and embody the truth found in Christ, and to share it with others as a source of hope, transformation, and freedom.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Why is Jesus Christ the truth?

2. Why is it important to know truth?

3. How does knowing the truth set you free?

DAY 2 | WEEK 1

Abiding in Truth?

By: Dr. Jody Ray

"So, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

(John 8:31-32, ESV)

Day 2 | Week 1

Abiding in Truth?

The Greek word for “abide” means to “conform to.” So, to abide in the truth means to live in and conform to the principles, teachings, and person of Jesus Christ, who is described Himself as “the truth.” This concept of “abiding in the truth” is a fundamental aspect of Jesus teachings and the broader biblical narrative, and it carries profound implications for the lives of believers.

Based on the teachings of Scripture, the following list offers ways in which we are called to abide in God’s truth:

1. Embracing Christ’s Teachings:

Abiding in the truth involves embracing and internalizing the teachings of Jesus as revealed in Scripture. This includes studying the Word of God, meditating on its precepts, and allowing its truths to shape your beliefs, values, and actions.

2. Walking in Obedience: To abide in the truth requires a life of obedience to the teachings of Jesus. This obedience is not driven by legalism or a mere sense of duty, but rather by a heart transformed by love and a desire to honor God through righteous living.

3. Cultivating Intimacy with Christ:

Abiding in the truth involves cultivating a deep, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer, worship, and fellowship with other believers. It is a call to seek the presence of Christ and to allow His Spirit to guide, comfort, and empower our daily lives.

4. Allowing the Truth to Transform:

As we abide in the truth, we open ourselves to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, who works within us to conform us to the image of Christ. This process involves the renewing of our minds, the purging of sin, and the cultivation of values that reflect the character of Jesus.

5. Bearing Fruit: Jesus speaks of abiding in Him as the vine and bearing fruit as branches in John 15.

Abiding in the truth results in a life that bears the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). These qualities reflect the transformative work of abiding in the truth.

Ultimately, for you to abide in the truth is to live in a dynamic, growing relationship with Jesus Christ, allowing His truth to permeate every aspect of your being and to manifest itself in our thoughts, words, and deeds. It is a call to wholehearted devotion, obedience, and transformation in the light of the unchanging truth found in Jesus Christ.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Based on number three above, do you have a daily routine of abiding?

2. Do you think “abiding in the truth” is important? Why?

3. How does truth transform our lives?

DAY 3 | WEEK 1

Disciples Stay Connected to the Vine

By: Dr. Jody Ray

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

(John 15:5-8, NIV)

Day 3 | Week 1

Disciples Stay Connected to the Vine

In John 15, Jesus is using a metaphor to illustrate the intimate relationship between Himself and His followers. He describes Himself as the true vine, and His disciples as the branches. In this context, the concept of bearing much fruit carries several layers of significance:

- 1. Spiritual Growth and Character Development:** Bearing fruit represents the spiritual growth and character development that occur in the lives of believers who remain connected to Christ. This includes the development of virtues such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23.
- 2. Impact and Influence:** The metaphor of bearing fruit also signifies the positive impact and influence that believers have on others when they are connected to Christ. This impact may include sharing the gospel, demonstrating Christlike love and compassion, and serving others in ways that reflect the nature of Christ.
- 3. Good Works and Service:** Bearing fruit can also encompass the good works and service that flow from

a life rooted in Christ. As believers abide in Him, they are empowered to engage in acts of service, compassion, and justice that reflect the values of the kingdom of God.

- 4. Multiplication and Discipleship:** Just as a healthy vine produces abundant fruit, Jesus envisions His disciples multiplying and making new disciples who, in turn, will bear fruit. This speaks to the ongoing expansion of the kingdom of God through the faithful witness and discipleship of those who abide in Christ.

Are You Connected?

Those people who are connected to Jesus understand the vital importance of the spiritual nourishment that only Jesus can give. Just like branches draw their life-giving sap from the vine, Christians are called to depend on Jesus for their strength, purpose, and spiritual vitality.

When you are connected to Jesus it means that you have an intimate and ongoing relationship with Him. It's only through our relationship with Christ that we can grow spiritually and be fruitful in our daily walk.

God's Word Prunes

Make no mistake, a proper study and application of God's Word will serve as pruning shears in your life. Just like pruning involves the careful removal of dead or overgrown branches from a plant to promote its health and fruitfulness, God's word will prune our lives through the teachings and truths found in Scripture. This process involves the removal of attitudes, behaviors, or mindsets that hinder our spiritual growth and fruitfulness.

Consider for example Jesus' teaching on forgiveness found in Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV), "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

In this passage from the Sermon on the Mount Jesus makes it clear that forgiveness is an essential part of the Christian life, and He ties the act of forgiving others to the believer's own experience of receiving forgiveness from God.

Additionally, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus also provides insights on the Christians responsibility to forgive.

"So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive them." Luke 17:3-4, (NIV)

Clearly, Jesus is teaching His disciples to live a life of forgiveness. Living a lifestyle of forgiveness is key to our spiritual growth. So, when we commit to following Jesus, He will prune and remove some of our attitudes and behaviors about forgiveness as we commit to following Him faithfully in every area of our lives.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. What does it mean to be connected to Jesus?

2. Why is staying connected to Jesus as it relates to your spiritual growth so important?

3. Is there an area in your life that God is pruning today?

DAY 4 | WEEK 1

Are You Bearing Fruit?

By: Dr. Jody Ray

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

(John 8:31-32, ESV)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

(Galatians 5:22-23, NIV)

Day 4 | Week 1

Are You Bearing Fruit?

Characteristics of the Disciple of Jesus Christ

The disciple of Jesus Christ is a follower of Jesus who is committed to learning from and emulating the teachings, character, and example of Jesus as revealed in the Bible. The term “disciple” comes from the Latin word “discipulus,” which means “learner” or “pupil.”

A disciple of Jesus Christ is someone who has made the conscious decision to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior, and who seeks to pattern their life after His teachings and example. This involves a personal relationship with Jesus, a commitment to obeying His commands, and a desire to grow in spiritual maturity and understanding.

There are at least four characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. **Abiding in Christ’s Word:** To live as a disciple of Christ, one must actively and consistently engage in following His teachings. This includes studying, meditating on, and applying His Words to one’s life.

2. **Genuine Belief:** Jesus addressed those who had believed in Him,

indicating that genuine discipleship is rooted in faith in Christ as the Son of God and the Savior.

3. **Knowing the Truth:** As disciples of Christ believers are called to seek and understand the truth that Jesus embodies. This truth encompasses the reality of God’s love, grace, and salvation through Jesus Christ, as well as walking in obedience to the principles and teachings revealed in the Bible.

4. **Freedom through Truth:** Jesus promised that knowing the truth would lead to freedom. This freedom is a result of the liberation from the bondage of sin, the ability to live according to God’s will, and the assurance of eternal life through faith in Christ.

So, living as a disciple of Christ is the deep commitment to Christ, a pursuit of truth, and a lifestyle of obedience to the truths revealed to us in Scripture.

Abiding in the Vine Produces Fruit

As a pastor, I am continually reminded of the transformative power of faithful obedience to God’s word in the lives of those

who follow Jesus faithfully. When we wholeheartedly commit ourselves to following and applying the teachings of Scripture, we position ourselves to experience the abundant fruit that God desires to produce in and through us.

Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the connection between obedience and the resulting fruit in the lives of believers. In John 15:5, Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” This vivid imagery highlights

the vital importance of remaining connected to Christ through faithful obedience, which enables us to bear the fruit of godly character, spiritual maturity, and a life of purpose.

The Apostle Paul also underscores the transformative power of obedience in Galatians 5:22-23, where he describes the “fruit of the Spirit” as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These virtues are the natural outcome of a life surrendered to Jesus and shaped by the truth of His word.

When we incorporate the truths into our daily lives and faithfully obey God’s word, our lives will bear fruit:

1. **Spiritual Growth:** Obedience to God’s Word cultivates spiritual maturity, deepening our understanding of God’s character and conforming us to the image of Christ.

2. **Character Transformation:** The fruit of the Spirit begins to manifest in our lives, leading to a transformation of our attitudes, behaviors, and relationships.

3. **Impactful Witness:** Obedient disciples become powerful witnesses of God’s love and truth, drawing others to faith through the example of their lives.

4. **Kingdom Impact:** As obedient disciples, we participate in God’s redemptive work, impacting our communities and the world for His glory.

Faithful obedience to God’s Word is the fertile soil in which the fruit of a disciple’s life is nourished and cultivated. As we abide in Christ and walk in obedience, we can expect to see the evidence of God’s transforming work both within us and through us, ultimately bringing glory to His name and advancing His kingdom.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. Based on the Scripture from John 8:31-32 and John 15:5, how would you define a disciple of Jesus Christ?

2. What fruits of the Spirit are evident in your life? What fruits are lacking in your life? How can you grow in your fruitfulness?

3. What life rhythms can you incorporate into your life today to lead you into a life of “abiding” in Jesus Christ?

DAY 5 | WEEK 1

The Truth Sets You Free!

By: Dr. Jody Ray

“So, Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

(John 8:31-32, ESV)

Day 5 | Week 1

The Truth Sets You Free!

Jesus' statement in John 8:31-32 resonates with a profound truth and offers us a powerful message of hope, freedom, and transformation.

John Stott said, "The truth of Jesus is not only a truth of words and ideas. It is the truth of life. It is a truth that liberates, the truth that transforms, the truth that gives hope."

Jesus, as the embodiment of truth, offers a path to freedom on multiple levels. First and foremost, through His life, teachings, death, and resurrection, Jesus reveals the truth of God's love, forgiveness, and grace. Embracing this truth sets us free from the burden of guilt, sin, and spiritual separation, offering us a restored relationship with God.

Furthermore, the truth found in Jesus provides us with moral and ethical guidance, freeing us from the destructive patterns of selfishness, greed, and immorality. Jesus' teachings on love, compassion, justice, and integrity pave the way for us to live a life of purpose and meaning.

In a world often characterized by deception and falsehood, Jesus' truth offers us freedom from confusion and

spiritual bondage. By embracing His truth, we gain the ability to discern and reject the lies and distortions that seek to entangle and ensnare us.

The truth found in Jesus provides us with freedom from fear and anxiety. As we trust in His love and sovereignty, we find security, peace, and hope, even in the midst of life's challenges and uncertainties.

Let Me Summarize How God's Truth Sets of Free

1. **Spiritual Freedom:** Knowing Jesus and following His teachings brings spiritual freedom. This freedom is experienced when people come to understand and accept the reality of God's love, forgiveness, and grace through Jesus Christ. It liberates individuals from the burden of guilt, sin, and spiritual separation from God, offering them a new life in relationship with God.

2. **Moral and Ethical Freedom:** Embracing God's truth in Jesus Christ will also lead to moral and ethical liberation. Jesus' teachings provide guidance for living a life of love, compassion, justice, and integrity. As individuals align themselves with these principles, they experience

freedom from the destructive patterns of selfishness, greed, and immorality.

3. Freedom from Deception and Falsehood: God's truth shines light on deception and falsehood that are so prevalent in our society. God's truth, found in a relationship with Jesus Christ brings peace and clarity in a world that is often consumed by confusion and chaos. By understanding and embracing the truth revealed in Jesus, individuals can discern and reject the lies and distortions that can lead to spiritual, emotional, and psychological bondage.

4. Freedom from Fear: The truth of God's love and sovereignty will free individuals from fear and anxiety. Believing God's truth provides a sense of security, peace, and hope, even in the midst of life's challenges and uncertainties.

As we walk in the truth of Jesus, we are invited into a life of freedom – freedom from sin, freedom to live according to God's design, and freedom from the grip of fear and falsehood. Let us hold fast to the teachings of Jesus, for in doing so, we discover the truth that sets us free.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. How does God's truth set us free?

2. How do you begin to incorporate God's truth into your life?

3. In what area of your personal life do you need to grow closer to Jesus?



OUR MISSION

To lead people to trade the pursuit of more
for a life worth pursuing in Jesus Christ.



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