

7 QUESTIONS FOR DEEPER BIBLE UNDERSTANDING

JOHN 8:31-32

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31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” *John 8:31-32 ESV*

1. WHAT DID IT MEAN TO THE ORIGINAL READERS?

If you start with today you're twenty centuries too late.

Jesus here is speaking to the crowds who have followed him and have begun to believe in him. His words to them are both an encouragement and a promise of freedom as well as a reframing of their understanding about just what following him entails. As seen in our Greek Word of the Week, the entire promise of freedom rests on abiding (staying, waiting, remaining, continuing on) in his words, which carries the connotation not just of hearing or even agreeing with his words but obeying them as well. This abiding is the mark of his true disciple.

The promise is that those who remain in his word will “know” the truth, and this word carries the idea of coming to understand or perceive through observation. If you came upon a difficult math equation you needed to answer, it's the difference between someone telling you the answer to the equation and you sitting in a calculus class for an entire semester and coming to understand how to solve the math problem yourself. It's more than knowing the answer; it's knowing *how* to answer the equation. Jesus is promising a deeper understanding and perception of the truth (about God, about ourselves, about our world) that will result in freedom. The way the sentence is constructed, Jesus is implying that our natural state is enslavement (we understand this to be enslavement to sin). As we abide in Jesus' word, his truth combats the lies of the enemy, and like light illuminating the darkness, Jesus' word lights the way to our freedom. The truth of Jesus' word has the power to set us free, if we will but remain and abide in it long enough for his word to reshape our mind, heart and soul.

GREEK WORD OF THE WEEK

μένω (*menō*) is a Greek word used many times in the New Testament, especially by John (42x) when writing his gospel account of Jesus. It's the word translated “abide” in verse 31, and it's the verb on which Jesus' whole promise of freedom rests. This word means to continue in a certain state, condition, or activity, like the difference between a wedding day (which almost anyone can celebrate) and celebrating your 50th wedding anniversary (which takes patience, perseverance, resilience, and longevity).

2. WHAT'S THE CONTEXT?

Scripture without context makes no sense.

The context for John 8:31-32 is a much larger interaction with his new Jewish followers that eventually becomes a confrontation. Because of his many miracles, Jesus constantly attracted crowds who declared their belief in him, but not always for the right reasons (they wanted Jesus' miracles, not Jesus). Jesus used this declarative statement about abiding in him to begin a conversation that would clarify what it truly means to be his disciple.

3. WHAT TIMELESS TRUTHS ARE THERE?

Since the Word doesn't change it still matters today.

- Belief in Jesus is not the finish line of our religion but the starting line of a lifelong relationship with our Savior.
- God's Word contains truth, the ultimate standard of right and wrong.
- True discipleship is not marked by verbal assents or mental agreements but with lifelong obedience. You cannot be Jesus' disciple and remain unchanged in your life.
- God's Word has the power to set you free, if you abide in it.

4. WHERE ELSE IN SCRIPTURE DOES IT

SAY THIS? *The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture.*

5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides (*μένω*) in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. *John 15:5 ESV*

36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. *John 8:36 ESV*

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." *John 14:6 ESV*

5. HOW DOES IT APPLY TODAY?

Information without application becomes stagnation.

- There is an aspect of "abiding" that has been lost from our modern understanding of faith. We think our job is done when we "pray a prayer and get saved." That's not the end; it's the beginning.
- There is a freedom promised to us as we remain in God's Word. It's not a quick or instantaneous release but a gradual understanding that reshapes how we think and live.
- There is an aspect of perseverance (abiding) in the faith that is foreign to many Christian minds today.

6. HOW SHOULD THIS CHANGE THE WAY I LIVE IN COMMUNITY?

The Bible comes alive in me when I live it in community.

- Discuss a subject in school or an aspect of your job that you have remained (abided) in for years. How has your understanding changed and grown as you've abided in it?
- In your relationship with Jesus, how have you grown in your understanding of him and his word? As you've abided in Jesus, how has his truth set you free? In what areas are you still wanting to experience true and lasting freedom?

7. HOW CAN MY LIFE GET BETTER BECAUSE OF THESE VERSES?

If I trust God and step in faith, what kind of life will God create?

Jesus makes a bold and life-changing promise that if we hold to his words, if we saturate ourselves in God's Word and remain there, abiding long enough for His truth to become our truth, allowing His Word to change the way we think, see and act, we will be free. God's truth will break the power of sin in our life and will free us from the bondage that ensnares us to death. If we abide in Jesus, then true, lasting, authentic, joy-filled, life-changing, eternity-altering freedom awaits us. It is a freedom from addiction, freedom from depression, freedom from purposelessness, freedom from the power of sin. When the Son sets us free, we are free indeed!