

# A Word for Everyone Who Feels Laid Aside

January 4, 2024

Every year I choose a word for the year, a sort of mini–New Year’s resolution, condensed into one word or phrase. It’s easier for me to remember throughout the year, especially after I spell out the word in blocks in my office to remind me every day!

I wish that process guaranteed change, but each year I look back with some regret, wishing I’d seen a marked transformation in me. **But I’m learning to pay attention to small things, as Paul Tripp said about New Year’s resolutions, “commit to living in the little moments of everyday life and looking for the small-change grace that is yours in Christ.”**

In addition to looking for small-change grace moments, I’m praying that the Lord would “*fulfill [my] every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power*” (2 Thess 1:11). I recognize that while I may have many resolves for good, only the Lord can fulfill them.

**With that in mind, my word for 2024 is ABIDE, because I want to abide in Christ and learn to dwell IN him. I want my life to be so immersed in Jesus that I understand and reflect Col 3:3 “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”**

I started thinking about my word *abide* in early-December as I was reflecting on the year. 2023 had been a year of dependence, a year of continual health issues, waiting in doctor’s offices, wondering when life would get back to normal. More than anything, I felt laid aside. On top of everything else, getting Covid in November left me with depleted energy and a mental fog for well over a month. One morning in the midst of that fog, after lying in bed and reflecting on all that was unfinished, I finally got up to read the Bible. I was so behind in my reading plan that I didn’t know where to begin, but I picked up where I’d left off in John and began reading:

*“...every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit”* (John 15: 2b).

I scribbled that verse in red ink at the top of my notebook. This had been a year of pruning, God’s intentional cutting back of what was thriving to produce more fruit. Pruning had always seemed like a barbaric process — to take a fruitful tree and lop off lush and leafy branches, leaving it stripped and bare, seemed cruel and counterintuitive. But I knew it was necessary to make way for new growth.

***Realizing that perhaps God, the Master Gardener, had chosen to prune me startled me. I write about this idea all the time, but I forget that it applies to me, to my specific situation, to my suffering.***

Immediately, God’s comfort and presence enveloped me as I knew this pruning, these circumstances, were part of God’s love for me.

**It wasn’t that I hadn’t found the right doctors or had been wildly unfortunate or was simply the target of Satan’s attacks. No, everything was intentionally brought into my life by the Lord who is working for my good.**

But as I read John 15, I wondered what producing “more fruit” meant? I felt unproductive and useless, accomplishing little of what I had planned each day. Was fruit going to mean more impact, more usefulness, greater productivity? Was 2024 going to be a year of production and recognition? ***But as I sat with Scripture, I saw that fruit had nothing to do with accomplishment. God was producing fruit from my forced rest and waiting, teaching me to rely on him.***

*“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me... Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* (John 15:4, 5b)

**Abiding and dependence were the keys to fruitfulness, not effort.** I'd been living in greater dependence, both on God and my husband, because there was little I could do on my own. Yet I saw that having things stripped away made it easier to rest in the Lord. With this shift in my priorities and abilities, the Spirit was directing me to a different kind of fruit and fruitfulness. This fruit that is not directly observable by others but is indirectly evident by our countenance, our reactions, our responses to others. It is what God brings about when we abide in him, are attached to the vine, and submit to his pruning.

*"And the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:23-24).*

The fruit of the Spirit was indeed what Jesus promised as we remain in him.

- *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in **my love**."* (John 15:9)
- *"I have told you these things so that **my joy** may be in you, and your joy may be full."* (John 15:11)
- *"Peace I leave with you; **my peace** I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you."* (John 14:27)

This. This is what I need. To abide in God's tender love. To be filled with the joy of the Spirit. To experience the unshakable peace of Christ. This is fruit that will last, that is independent of circumstances, and flourishes even in drought. This is fruit that will never fail because it is nurtured by God himself. It has nothing to do with us.

**This idea that fruitfulness is not tied to usefulness has been so freeing.** We don't need to try harder, produce more, figure out how to have a greater impact. We don't need to wait until we're stronger so we can go back to helping others. We don't need be impatient with the present moment, just waiting for it to pass. We need to abide where we are. Our God is not dependent on our service or help – he wants to fellowship with us as he shows us his love, gives us his joy, fills us with his peace.

Much of this year I was waiting for things to return to normal, to figure out what was wrong, for my problems to be resolved. But I discovered that contentment isn't dependent on having my problems resolved; contentment is found in God alone. While I still want things to be different, and keep praying to that end, I am learning to live with things as they are as well, knowing that they are part of God's plan for me.

Many of our lives look small. To say yes to anything, we must say no to countless other things. But perhaps unbeknownst to us, the fruit of the Spirit is becoming more evident in our lives. So we mustn't lose heart, thinking this time is being wasted. Our limitations and forced dependence are bringing us to a deeper walk with Christ, for *"as our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day"* (2 Cor 4:16).

**This is abiding. Resting in God. Letting him renew us day by day. Not mourning what we can't do, but embracing what God is doing in us.**

*"We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."* (2 Cor 4:18).

**Perhaps being laid aside is what produces the most lasting fruit.**

While the visible things we do are important, they are also temporary. Our work, our accomplishments, even our ministry is fleeting. The invisible ways we are changing, the people we're becoming, the fruit that comes from abiding, these will last throughout eternity.