

Abide With Me

The song "Abide With Me" is a prayer for God to remain present with the speaker throughout life, through trials and death. The author of the hymn, Henry Francis Lyte, was an Anglican minister. Lyte suffered from poor health for most of his life, and he would regularly travel abroad for relief. Therefore the exact date he wrote the text of the song is not known. He had often spoken to a friend of the thoughts conveyed in the song before finishing the poem and later set it to music. The friend, William Augustus Le Hunte, kept repeating the phrase "abide with me..." during his final days of life. After leaving William's bedside, Lyte wrote the hymn and gave a copy of it to Le Hunte's family. How and when the poem and at least five different melodies came together is not essential to this discussion.

Bible verses influence these words that convey peace and comfort to many people. Remember Jesus and the two men of Emmaus? *"And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther. But they urged Him, saying, **"Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening, and the day is now nearly over."** So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them"* (Luke 24:28-30). This man, whom they had not recognized, eased their minds. They had witnessed the crucifixion but not the resurrection. They finally recognized Him and said, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"* (Luke 24:32).

The only Bible Version I have with the word "abide" rather than "stay" in Luke 24:29 is the American Standard Version (ASV). *"And they constrained him, saying, **"Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent. And he went in to abide with them"*** (Luke 24:29 ASV). The same word is used in Acts 16:15 as Lydia invited Paul and his companions to remain in her house. *"When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, **If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us"*** (Acts 16:15). Paul's help and comfort for a new convert can only be imagined.

Jesus used the word to mean more than a simple "do not leave." It is a working relationship between two or more people. Translators use "abide" in these verses. *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you"* (John 15:4-7).

The lesson Jesus presented comes from His metaphor "I am the vine, and ye are the branches," which reminds us of another song. We cannot have spiritual life without "abiding" in Jesus, constantly associating with Him, and drawing nourishment from Him and His words. A. T. Robertson has this to say about the word abide in this passage. "The only way to continue "clean" (pruned) and to bear fruit is to maintain a vital spiritual connection with Christ (the vine). Judas is gone, and Satan will sift the rest of them like wheat." See (Luke 22:31). We have the assurance that He will never leave us, but our desire must be to cling to Him and express desire in actions and words of prayer.

In (John 15:7) the thought changes from abiding in Him to "My words abide in you." With His words,

living and abiding in us, changing us, leading us, making our thoughts and actions as His, our requests will be granted. And then, in verse 9, He adds Love. *"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (John 15:9-10). He also said, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments"* (John 14:15).

The original poem and hymn contain eight verses. Most songbooks only carry three of the verses. Our song #308 contains four verses. Verses 1 and 2 allude to the shortness of life and the swift approach of death. The comfort of abiding with the creator and savior is the theme of the body of the song. The last two lines in verse eight (not carried in most books) speak of the universe's last day and the dawning of eternity. "Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me."