

Release, Rest, Remain



A 30-Day Devotional to Embrace Abiding Over Striving

YVETTE HENRY



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Over Striving

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To Glen, Theo, Uriah, Anaya, and Uzi:

You are my greatest earthly reminder of God's faithfulness.

*Thank you for the laughter that lightens my heart,
the grace that lifts my burdens, and the love
that teaches me daily what it means to remain.*



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First, Breathe . . .

don't know what it took for you to carve out this moment. Maybe sitting with this book open on your lap meant leaving the full inbox that demands your attention, taking a much-needed break from your children, or ignoring the endless list of things you didn't quite check off today. Maybe you had to push past the pull of distraction, fight through the weight of worry, or resist the exhaustion that comes from feeling like you're always running behind. Whatever sacrifice or struggle brought you here, I want to acknowledge it, because I know what it's like to carry all the things.

Before we begin, let's pause and take a deep breath.

Inhale for four seconds . . .

Hold for four seconds . . .

Exhale for four seconds . . .

Hold for four seconds . . .

Let's do it again.

Inhale . . .

Hold . . .

Exhale . . .

Hold . . .

If you need to, repeat this as many times as it takes for your shoulders to relax, for the tension in your jaw to ease, for your heart rate to slow just a little. You made it here.

And my encouragement to you is this: Be fully here.

This devotional isn't something to rush through, another task to check off before moving on to the next thing. You are invited to slow down and be with Jesus, who doesn't demand more of you but instead asks you to lay things down.



Rest and remain in My presence
and allow Me to do the rest.



A few years ago, I found myself trapped in a cycle of anxious striving. I was trying to check every box, meet every expectation, and hold everything together. The doing, proving, and striving left me exhausted, constantly pursuing rest but never quite arriving. I didn't realize how much I was carrying until I finally stepped away to spend time in stillness with my Abba.

In the quiet, I felt the Lord pressing something onto my heart. A

simple invitation: *Rest and remain in My presence and allow Me to do the rest.*

At first, His call was just a whisper in my spirit, a gentle nudge. But when I felt anxiety fill my heart, I found myself coming back to it—rest and remain. With time, the invitation became clearer. Before I could truly rest, I had to release. I had to let go of the things that were never mine to carry in the first place. The need for control. The pressure to be enough. The fears that kept me from trusting God completely.

When I arrived at that place of surrender, rest became possible. A rest rooted not in the absence of struggle but in the presence of a God who holds everything together. A rest that isn't passive but deeply reliant on who He says He is.

I would release, find rest, then try to pick up things I had already laid down at the feet of Jesus. I learned to release, assume the posture of rest, and remain there. And as I remained, I began to see that remaining was an active choice to trust God, even when I felt pulled to take it all back. And then I'd do it all over again.

Release, rest, remain . . . repeat.

This became my rhythm. And over time, I found myself sharing it, not just as encouragement but as a lifeline. I've whispered these words to weary friends, to anxious hearts, and to myself in the middle of the night: *Release, rest, remain.*

And that's why we're here: to learn how to live this out. As we step into this thirty-day journey, we'll go back to where God first revealed this rhythm to me: John 15, which recounts Jesus's last moments with His disciples.

On that holy night, Jesus felt the weight of what was coming. He had washed the disciples' feet, broken bread with them, and spoken of His coming departure. Now, late in the evening and just after the Passover meal, they walked through the darkened streets toward the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus spoke of vines and branches, of abiding love and lasting fruit. Words that weren't about doing but about *being*—about dwelling close to Him when everything else would tell them to run. "Abide in Me," He said. "Rest in My love. Remain in Me."

In this devotional, you'll walk the same path the disciples did, using the gift of time to study Jesus's words. You'll spend ten days in each section—Release, Rest, and Remain—but you'll find that these aren't rigid categories. They don't exist in isolation; they move together in harmony, much like the notes of a melody. You might release something today, but tomorrow you'll find yourself needing to lay it down again. You may arrive at rest, only to realize that true rest requires trust. A trust that keeps pulling you back to His presence when you're tempted to pick up burdens again. And when you remain, you will see just how often you are tempted to wander and how much intentionality it takes to stay rooted in Him.

Think of it like a song.

A melody isn't just one note played over and over—it's a sequence of sounds, movements, and harmonies that create something beautiful. In the same way, release, rest, and remain isn't a destination—it's a rhythm we follow.

So as we begin this journey together, I want to remind you: This is not about perfection. It's about presence.

You don't have to get it all right. You don't have to force anything to happen. You are simply invited to show up, open your heart, and let God lead you in this rhythm, one breath, one release, one moment of rest at a time. And as you do, remain with Him, letting His presence be the place you return to again and again.



Release

Day 1

The gym smelled like rubber and determination. The air was thick with the sound of weights hitting the floor, the steady rhythm of breath control, and the occasional encouragement from our trainer.

I was in the zone. Checking my form in the mirror, I watched as my body moved with precision—squat, swing, breathe, repeat. My leggings and tank top clung to my frame, damp with sweat, but I felt strong. My kettlebell was heavy, but it was mine. I had control.

Then I glanced over at my husband.

Seriously?!

Effortless. Relaxed. He swung his kettlebell like it was weightless, like he was tossing a set of keys in the air. My competitive side flared.

If he can throw that thing around like it's nothing, surely I can pick it up.

So, in a moment of completely unearned confidence, I walked over to his weight. I planted my feet, gripped the handle, and pulled.

Nothing.

Okay, maybe my form was off. I reset, making sure my feet were grounded. I bent my knees, engaged my core, and tried again. This

time, I got the kettlebell off the ground, but that was as far as I got. My arms refused to lift it any higher. Swinging it through the air? Not happening.

Meanwhile, my husband—completely unbothered—finally noticed what I was doing. One eyebrow raised, his face said everything: *Why would you even try?*

It was then that I had a revelation: *His weight was never meant for me to carry.*

That moment in the gym was humbling. But isn't that just like life?

We carry so much—worries about the future, the weight of people's opinions, and the pressure to meet the never-ending demands of daily life. We carry the responsibility of provision, making sure everyone is taken care of, from our families to our co-workers to the friend who always seems to need one more thing from us. We carry the pressure to keep it all together, to be the reliable one, the strong one, the one who makes it look effortless.

And now, in this digital age, we carry even more. We are constantly aware of the heaviness of the world—the tragedies, the injustices, the suffering of people we will never meet but still grieve for. It's an unbearable load, yet we convince ourselves we have to hold it all. We push ourselves past our limits, refusing to release what is too heavy.

But here's the thing: We were never meant to carry the weight of the world.

Jesus knows our tendency to carry weights we were never meant to bear. He knew it about His disciples too.

For three years, the disciples' lives had revolved around Jesus.

They had left everything to follow Him—their jobs, their routines, their sense of stability. He was their teacher, their leader, their friend. But now, as they walked with Jesus after the Passover meal, He was telling them that He was leaving.

I imagine His words must have settled heavy on their hearts. They had watched miracles unfold, heard truth straight from His lips, and built their lives around His presence. And now He was preparing them for a reality in which He would no longer walk beside them.



They couldn't cling to the vine while
holding on to everything else.



To step into what was next, they had to release their expectations of how things were supposed to go, their fear of an unknown future, and their desire to hold on to Jesus as they had always known Him. Would they be able to let go of control and trust that, even in His absence, He was still guiding them?

As they walked toward the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus didn't hand them a step-by-step plan or a list of rules to follow. Instead, He gave them a picture of a vine and its branches.

Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. (John 15:4)

He spoke words that would stay with them long after He was gone. Words about remaining, abiding, and bearing fruit. But beneath those words was an unspoken invitation to release. Because to remain in Him, they would have to let go of everything that kept them from staying connected. They couldn't cling to the vine while holding on to everything else.

Have you ever been there? I've been there more times than I can count. And what I've come to realize is that I can't force myself to release anything without first trusting the One I'm releasing it to.

We often resist release because it feels like losing control. But what if release isn't about loss? What if it's about making room? What if letting go isn't falling? What if it's finally being held?

This is the starting point of our rhythm. Before we can rest, before we can remain, we must release.

Over the next nine days, we'll explore the things we keep holding on to—fear, control, expectations, self-reliance—and what happens when we finally let them go. We'll wrestle with questions like:

- What fears keep us from releasing control?
- Why do we struggle to surrender our expectations?
- What happens when we resist the pruning process?
- How does abiding in Jesus help us release?
- How does releasing lead to true spiritual rest?

We'll spend time in John 15:1–8, lingering over Jesus's words and what they teach us about release. Each day will take us deeper into

this passage, inviting us to let go of what is keeping us from fully abiding in Him.

Does digging deeper feel overwhelming? Are you already stressing over the questions we'll wrestle with? Exhale, friend. You don't need to figure everything out. Letting go doesn't begin with your achievements or efforts. It begins with God's presence. Today isn't about forcing your way forward; it's about leaning into the One who never lets go.



The Vine and the Branches

THE INVITATION TO RELEASE

Read these words from the beginning of John 15. Imagine yourself walking with Jesus. It's late, the air is still, and He turns to look at you as He speaks. His words aren't rushed. He knows exactly what you need to hear.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples. (verses 1–8)

Day 2

I am the true vine.

—John 15:1

For years, I had looked to success for my identity. If I was succeeding, I felt secure. If I was accomplishing something, I felt valuable. But when I failed, when I dropped the ball, or when I couldn't keep up with my self-imposed expectations, I felt like I had nothing to stand on. My sense of worth crumbled.

I saw this play out most clearly when I transitioned from being a public-school teacher to becoming the primary parent at home. Right after my daughter was born, I quit my job to homeschool my two boys, while also nursing a newborn around the clock. I hadn't anticipated how this season would stretch me. Teaching in a classroom had given me a clear sense of achievement. I could measure my success through lesson plans, student progress, and structured goals. But at home? There were no performance reviews. No data

charts showing growth. Just messy days filled with phonics lessons, toddler tantrums, and exhaustion.

Many times, I ended the day feeling like my kids had taken everything out of me. I felt like a failure more often than not, questioning whether I was doing enough, being enough, or if I had made the right decision at all. My identity had been so entangled in being a teacher that when I no longer held that title, I wasn't sure who I was anymore.

That's how false vines work. They give us just enough to make us think they'll sustain us, but they can't hold us when life shakes us. They wither under pressure. They leave us feeling empty. And yet we cling to them. Because they feel familiar. Because we're afraid of what will happen if we let them go. Because in some way, we've convinced ourselves that we need them. But in the end, they cannot give us the nourishment we need to survive.

But Jesus tells us that He is the true vine.

The disciples would have recognized this imagery immediately. In the Old Testament, Israel was often referred to as God's vine, planted to bear fruit for His glory (Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-7). But Israel failed in this role. Time after time, the Israelites turned away from God, drawn to idols, false promises, and the ways of the world around them. The result was fruit spoiled by idolatry, injustice, and rebellion.

Like the Israelites, we often attach ourselves to things that promise life but leave us empty. We root our identity in our accomplishments, our influence, or even our ability to "get things right." We

expect these things to sustain us, but false vines can't nourish us. They can only leave us depleted.

Jesus, the true vine, is different. His life never runs dry. His love never fails. His strength is never insufficient. In this verse, Jesus is saying, "I am the fulfillment of everything Israel was meant to be. Where the old vine failed, I will not. I am the true, unchanging, life-giving source."

He is calling us into something better: A connection that never dries up. A love that never wavers. A source of life that never fails. But to be nourished fully by Jesus, we have to release the things we've been drawing from that were never meant to sustain us.



When we release our grip on the things
that were never meant to hold us,
we finally make room for the One who can.



What are you connected to? Not just on the surface but at the deepest level of your heart. If you cling to relationships, believing that being loved by the right people will make you whole, then release and know the true vine makes you whole. If you look to success, convinced that if you achieve enough, you'll finally *be* enough, then release and know you are worthy because you are connected to Jesus. If you hold on to comfort, trying to avoid anything that feels too hard, too uncertain, too beyond your control, then release and

know that He can carry your emotional burdens and is sovereign over all the areas of your life.

So much of our struggle to release comes down to fear. We've held on to these false vines—success, identity, control—not just because they promised us something but because they *became* something. They became safety nets. Our sense of value. Our proof that we mattered.

But the truth Jesus offers in John 15:1 is simple and stunning: *You don't need those things to live. You just need Me.*

He isn't one vine among many. He is *the* Vine. The only one who won't drain you dry. The only source who can truly sustain. And the invitation is open: *Let go. Connect to Me instead.*

Letting go may feel like loss, but it's actually where life begins. Because when we release our grip on the things that were never meant to hold us, we finally make room for the One who can. We begin to live—not toiling or performing but abiding. And when we abide in the true vine, we're not just surviving anymore. We're growing, resting, then becoming exactly who He created us to be.

Reflection Questions

1. What false vines have you been connected to—things you've relied on for identity, security, or meaning?
2. How has holding on to those things affected your ability to fully trust Jesus as the true vine?
3. What would it look like for you to release a false vine today and abide in Christ instead?

Day 3

My Father is the gardener. Every branch in me
that does not produce fruit he removes,
and he prunes every branch that produces
fruit so it will produce more fruit.

—John 15:1-2

I love planning events. Growing up, I had dreams of becoming an associated student body (ASB) director at the school where I would eventually teach. For those of you who don't speak school acronym, ASB is the magical team that puts together the school dances, rallies, lunchtime shenanigans, and all those other moments that give high schoolers something to talk about at reunions.

Planning is my happy place, especially when it comes to holiday celebrations and birthdays. I'm the one who coordinates the perfect party and obsesses over every last detail, from the invitations to the color of the napkins. I'm also the person who finds it

nearly impossible to attend an event without somehow sneaking into the planning process. I like being in the mix, okay? It's kind of my thing.

A couple of years ago, though, my girlfriends asked what I wanted to do for my birthday. Since life was hectic at the time, I said, "Nothing." Well, they knew me better than that. They sensed the unspoken desire for some form of celebration (because let's be honest, I didn't want to let my birthday go by unnoticed), and they started planning a surprise party.

Now, here's where things got tricky . . . I found out about the surprise. I know, I know, it would have been great if I had stayed blissfully unaware, but alas. And the moment I knew about it? Oh, I wanted to jump in and help! I mean, how could I not? It was practically torture to sit back and do nothing. But, friend, I am proud to report that I managed to stay out of it completely. No suggestions, no color scheme ideas, no detailed itineraries. I just let go. (And by "let go," I mean I clenched my fists and whispered "You can do this" to myself a few times.)

And you know what? It was perfect. I showed up to the most beautiful beach picnic—yummy treats, amazing company, and all the little details that made me feel so loved. My friends had thought of everything, and I got to experience the sweet joy of just being fully present without the weight of planning on my shoulders. It was such a precious time, and I have to admit, maybe not being in control once in a while has its perks!

Letting go like that isn't easy for me. If you're anything like me, you might feel the constant urge to be involved, to "make sure things

get done right” or to control the process. But when it comes to our spiritual lives, that’s not our job.

In John 15:2, Jesus gives us this beautiful reminder that God is the gardener of our souls and *He* is the one doing all the work. Just like I had to step back and let my friends plan the perfect birthday celebration for me, we have to step back and let God be the one to prune and shape in our lives. The branches—that’s us—aren’t expected to prune themselves. Our job is not to control the growth or outcomes. It’s not up to us to decide what needs to stay or what needs to go. The Gardener knows what He’s doing, and our role is simply to remain connected to Jesus—the true vine—and trust that God is taking care of the rest.



If God is pruning you, it’s not punishment.
Rather, it’s proof He sees your purpose and is
preparing you to bear even more fruit.



In the same way a gardener carefully prunes and nurtures plants, God carefully tends to us. And just like pruning a real plant can be painful (think about those sharp shears!), God’s pruning in our lives can be uncomfortable too. Sometimes He removes things we thought were good for us or He cuts back areas where we felt productive.

The idea of something being cut away feels a little scary, naturally. But pruning is a sign of growth. Gardeners don’t prune a dead or

useless branch; they prune a healthy one to make it even more fruitful. So, if you feel like God is pruning certain areas of your life right now, it's not a punishment—it's because He sees more potential in you, more fruit He wants to bring out.

Let me say that again. If God is pruning you, it's not punishment. Rather, it's proof He sees your purpose and is preparing you to bear even more fruit. His pruning process might look like letting go of certain habits, mindsets, or even relationships that aren't aligned with His best for you. It might involve walking through challenging seasons that feel like a setback, but they're actually setting you up for more growth. He's positioning you for a harvest.

What exactly is the fruit, though? Is Jesus talking about achievements or success? Not exactly. Jesus is referring to spiritual fruit. It's about what's happening on the inside: the transformation of your character. Paul beautifully outlines this fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This is the kind of fruit God is producing in you as He prunes and shapes you. It's not about being busier or doing more. It's about becoming more like Jesus! As you release your grip on control and lean into His process, His Spirit works in you, transforming your heart and helping you reflect more of His character.

So take heart, friend. You don't have to hold the shears. You don't have to fight to keep what God is gently asking you to let go of. The

Gardener sees every branch, every bud, every hidden part of your heart. And when He prunes, He does it with love. Release the need to control the process. Release the fear of what might be cut away. Trust that in His hands, nothing is wasted and everything surrendered is making room for something far more fruitful.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond to the idea of God as the gardener who tends to your life? Do you trust Him with that role?
2. When have you experienced God's pruning in the past, and what fruit eventually came from that season?
3. What would it look like to release control today and trust God's process?

