

Session 4 Empowered To Walk in True Greatness (Jn. 15:3-5)

“Let me drink from the river of Your pleasures as I delight in Your beauty.” (Ps. 36:8; 37:4)

I. REVIEW: JOHN 15—OUR LIFE IS GREAT AND SUCCESSFUL AS WE BEAR FRUIT

- A. Jesus spoke of some called “great” and some called “least” in the kingdom. God will call their life choices “great” because they loved and obeyed Him. This greatness is attained without regard for outward achievements and impact. It is based on the size of one’s heart response to God. God is far more committed to our fruitfulness or true greatness and spiritual success than we are.

¹⁹“Whoever breaks [consistently] one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does [consistently] and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 5:19)

⁴¹...one star differs from another star in glory. ⁴²So also is the resurrection...(1 Cor. 15:41-42)

- B. Note four truths that Jesus emphasized that are necessary to cultivate an abiding life of fruitfulness. First, that Jesus is the *true vine* (source); second, that the Father is the *vinedresser* who “prunes” us; third, that His people are *branches* (vessels of His presence); fourth, we can bear *fruit that remains*.

¹“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser²...every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ⁵...you are the branches. He who abides in Me [talks to Me]... bears much fruit...¹⁶I chose you...that your fruit should remain.” (Jn. 15:5, 16)

- C. Fruitfulness is about *possessing* love, humility, and purity, and then *inspiring/imparting* it to others.
- D. Abiding in Him results in the miracle of bearing fruit that “remains”—or that God esteems forever. God esteeming our fruitfulness is what defines our true success and/or being great in His sight. Our life becomes epic as engage in a life-long journey of bearing fruit that He remembers.

II. EMPOWERD BY ENGAGING IN CONVERSATION—THE POWER OF HIS WORD

- A. The Spirit empowers us as we engage in an on-going conversation with Jesus around the many truths in John 13-17. Jesus proclaimed that the disciples were clean because of the word that He spoke to them—the implication is that they received His word as Jesus confirmed in John 17:6.

¹“...My Father is the vinedresser...²every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you [and they received]. ⁴Abide in Me [talk to Me]...neither can you [bear fruit], unless you abide in Me.” (Jn. 15:1-4)

⁶“...they have kept Your word...¹⁷Sanctify them by Your truth.” (Jn. 17:6, 17)

- B. Our Father’s “pruning knife” is first His Word which is a knife that is sharper than any sword that pierces deep in our heart (Heb. 4:12). Jesus’ words went forth in the disciples’ heart as a sharp sword when He taught them in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) to deny themselves, forsake all, and embrace a life of servanthood and generosity to those who cannot repay them.

¹²The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit...and is a discerner of the...intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

- C. It is not enough to study the Bible—we must talk to God as we study. Bible study is meant to lead us to conversation with God by giving us the “conversational material” for our prayer life. It provides the language we use as we talk to Him. Using the Bible and speaking the Word back to God makes prayer easy and enjoyable. It “turns up the volume” in our conversation with God.
- ³⁹***“You search the Scriptures [Bible study], for in them you think you have...life; these are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰You are not willing to come to Me [talk to Me] that you may have life.”*** (Jn. 5:39-40)
1. God’s Word works powerfully in us and liberates us as we engage with Him around it.
¹³***...the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (1 Thes. 2:13)***
³²***“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*** (Jn. 8:32)
 2. Paul’s thorn was not a blessing to him until Jesus revealed His promise that His strength was made perfect in Paul’s weakness because he would exalt himself due to his many revelations.
⁷***Lest I be exalted above measure [filled with pride] by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me [persecutions] ... ⁹He said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”*** (2 Cor. 12:7-9)
- D. As we engage in conversation with Jesus around His Word—it is like a *hammer* that shatters resistance against Him in our heart, and like *fire* it tenderizes and refines our heart, and like a *sword* that pierces and lays bare the unperceived areas of error and sin that are lodged deep in our heart.
- ²⁹***“Is not My word like a fire...and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”*** (Jer. 23:29)
- E. Jesus’ words have a supernatural dimension to them—they impart spiritual life. Each time we say what God says in talking to God or to others, it marks our spirit and changes us. Like a computer program may be changed by rewriting each line of code, our inner man is renewed by multitudes of short prayers. This draws us into intimacy with Him while it transforms and unifies us with others.
- ⁶³***“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”*** (Jn. 6:63)
- F. ***God cleanses us:*** God first convicts us of sin directly by His Word (sometimes He confirms it by giving us a personal dream). Next, He may speak it to us in a general way through the voice of others (in a message, or conversation, etc.). Next, He may send someone to correct us privately (Mt. 18:15). Next, He confirms it by sending more people to us (Mt. 18:16-17). Next, He may get our attention through sickness or a painful circumstance (Rev. 2:20-23). Next, He may bring us home by a premature death so that our spirit would be saved in the day of the Lord (1 Cor. 5:1-5).
- ¹***...there is sexual immorality among you...that a man has his father’s wife! ⁴In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered...⁵deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh [sickness] that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. 5:1-5)***
- ²⁰***“...you allow that woman Jezebel...to teach...My servants to commit sexual immorality ... ²¹I gave her time to repent. ²²I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery...into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³I will kill her children...”*** (Rev. 2:20-23)

III. ABIDING IN CHRIST

- A. **Abiding in Christ:** The main activity of a believer related to growing in God is to abide in Christ. It involves three things—*talking with God, applying His promises, and obeying His leadership*. Abiding in Christ speaks of our on-going dialogue with God with an active trust in His Words (promises, warnings, doctrines, etc.) and a spirit of obedience flowing from mutual affection.
⁴Abide in Me [talk to Me], and I in you [I will talk to you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me [talks to Me], and I in him [I talk to him], bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:4-5)
- B. **Talking with Jesus:** Talking with God is the core activity of abiding. This is where it starts, but it includes more. The Christian life is an ongoing dialogue with a real Person. He has much to say, but He allows us to set the pace of the conversation with Him. If we start the conversation. He will continue it as long as we do. Abiding in Him consists of many 10-20 second exchanges.
- C. **Applying His Promises:** We actively trust Him by applying the promises of His Word in our conversation with Him. Shame, fear, and rejection rise up to challenge what He says about loving, forgiving, healing, providing for us, etc. We apply the promises of the Word to our hearts by *confessing the truth* of His promises and *resisting lies* against them (Rom. 10:10; Deut. 30:11-14).
¹⁰With the heart one believes...with the mouth confession is made unto salvation [liberty]. (Rom 10:10)
- D. **Obeying His leadership:** Jesus manifests His presence to those who obey (Jn. 14:21-23). Only in the context of obedient love does He reveal the deep things of His heart. Walking in a spirit of obedience is an expression of our love for Him and the fruit of understanding that He loves us.

IV. CHRIST ABIDING IN US: 2 ASPECTS AND 3 ACTIVITIES

- A. **Christ abiding in us:** There are 2 aspects to the promise of Jesus abiding in us. First, He abides, or lives, in our spirit *instantly* at our new birth. Second, He abides in our hearts *progressively* as He manifests His presence in us—inspiring our emotions and illumining our understanding. Paul spoke of Jesus “dwelling in our heart” (soul) by His manifest presence (Eph. 3:17)—this is the same as “Jesus abiding in us” and of Christ “being formed in us” or “in our hearts” (Gal. 4:19).
¹⁶...that He would grant you...to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... (Eph. 3:16-17)
- B. Some only emphasize our *legal position* with Christ—our *justification* by faith (Rom. 3:21-31). Others emphasize our *living condition* with Christ—our *participation* with His indwelling life. Our *legal position* before God is based on us freely *receiving Jesus’ righteousness* (2 Cor. 5:21). Our *living condition* (our behavior) is based on our *response to the Spirit’s leadership* (Jn. 15:5).
- C. **Christ abiding in our hearts:** This involves at least 3 activities of the Spirit in us. He *teaches us* about God’s heart, Word, and will; *inspires us* with perseverance and courage to keep diligently seeking God; and *empowers us* by inspiring our mind and emotions to live in obedient love.

V. TALKING TO THE LORD: PRAY-READ THE WORD

- A. One important and practical way to enhance our “abiding in Christ” relationship with God is to talk to Lord by pray-reading the Word which is similar to fellowshiping with the Spirit.
- B. Our words are in His heart, and His words are in our heart—this is foundational to our union (15:7). It starts with words. Simple phrases spoken to God can shift our emotions. Over time, what He thinks, feels, says, and does gradually fills our hearts. One of my favorite prayers is to ask the Spirit to let me *see what He sees and feel what He feels* about my life, my family, and many others, as well as what He sees and feels about Jesus, the Church, the harvest, the nations, the end times, etc.
- C. It is a common error to try to live the Christian life without Christ—*without conversation with Him*. Hosea taught that returning to the Lord includes bringing words to speak to Him (Hos. 14:1-3).
¹O Israel, return to the LORD...²Take words with you, and return to the LORD. (Hos. 14:1-2)
- D. There are two broad categories of truth related to pray-reading the Word.
1. Scriptures that focus on promises ***to believe*** in God’s Word are passages that *declare* truths such as God loves, forgives, leads, protects, provides for us, etc.
 2. Scriptures that focus on exhortations ***to obey*** God’s Word are passages that *command* us to walk in purity, bridle our speech, serve others, give time and money in serving God, etc.
- E. We dialogue with God as we read the Word by praying back to God ***promises to believe***. Our conversation includes saying, “*Thank You, show me more!*” for specific truths and promises.
⁹“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)
1. First, ***we thank God*** for a particular truth. We turn these truths into simple declarations of thanksgiving and trust. Say, “Thank You, Jesus, that You love me as the Father loves You and that You forgave me.” Or declare, “I trust that You will lead, provide, and protect me.”
 2. Second, ***we ask God to reveal or release*** more about a specific truth to us. For example, pray, “Jesus, reveal to me how much You love and forgive me and the certainty of Your provision,” or, “Father, release Your promised guidance, provision, protection,” etc.
- F. We dialogue with God as we read the Word and pray back to God ***exhortations to obey***. Our conversation includes saying, “*I set my heart to obey this. Help me more!*”
⁹“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)
1. First, ***we commit ourselves to obey God*** in the specific way set forth in a biblical passage. Make declarations of resolve to obey the Word as you read passages about obedience. Say, “I set my heart to abide in You, to obey You with my speech, time, money, etc.”
 2. Second, ***we ask God to empower us to obey*** a particular command seen in Scripture. Ask God for help by giving you wisdom and motivation to obey in specific areas. For example, pray, “Help me to ‘abide in love,’ to control my speech, to use my time and money in obedience.”