

Session 2 Abiding in Christ: Cultivating Union with God (Jn. 15:1-6)

I. THE CALL TO UNION WITH GOD

- A. John 15 is a highpoint in the Scripture in terms of our relationship with God. Jesus' main exhortation was to "abide in Me" (v. 5, 9c) so that we may bear fruit that remains forever (v. 16).
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... ¹⁶I chose you...that your fruit should remain..." (Jn. 15:5, 16)
- B. Jesus chose us to bear fruit that would remain forever (v. 16). This is a most glorious reality for weak and broken people—that through the activity of the Spirit in us and through us, we can do things or bear fruit that God esteems forever. Our life becomes epic as we diligently press into a lifelong journey, knowing that He longs to be deeply engaged with us and that He sees, is moved by, and remembers all that we do in our quest to commune with Him in obedient love.
- C. ***Bears fruit:*** We bear fruit inwardly in our character and outwardly in our ministry and service to others in the grace of God—godly character (Rom. 6:22; 7:4-5; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9; Heb. 12:11; 13:15; Jas. 3:18) and ministry and service (Jn. 4:36; Rom. 1:13; 15:28; Phil. 1:22; Col. 1:5-6).
- D. Transforming union with God has two elements—we abide in Him and He abides in us.
- E. ***Abides in Me:*** The main activity of a believer related to growing in God is to abide in Christ. It involves three activities—*talking with God, applying His Word, and obeying His leadership*. Thus, talking with God is the core activity of abiding. This is where it starts, but it includes more.
1. ***Talking with Jesus:*** 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. When we stop it, He stops it and waits until we begin it again. He responds to the measure that we desire to talk to Him.
 2. ***Applying His Word:*** Applying the truth about God's love and power empowers us to bear fruit (Rom. 8:1, 15). Shame and rejection rise up to challenge what He says about loving, forgiving, leading, healing, and providing for us. We must apply the Word to our heart, by *confessing the truth* and *resisting lies* against it when feeling rejected or shame etc.
 3. ***Obeying His leadership:*** Jesus promises to manifest His presence to those who obey Him (Jn. 14:21-23). Only in the context of obedient love does He reveal the deep things of His heart. We must love God on His terms. Obedience is an expression of our love for Him. We do not *earn* God's love or blessing by our obedience. However, we *position ourselves* to receive and express more of it by setting our heart to walk in obedient love.
²¹He who...keeps [My commands], it is he who loves Me...I will manifest Myself to him ... ²³If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word...We will come to him..." (Jn. 14:21-23)
 4. Abiding includes our words being "in" Him, or in His heart. The fact that He answers our prayers and eternally rewards us related to our words shows us how He delights in them.

- F. ***Jesus abides in us***: There are two 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 our heart that renews our mind and emotions. Both aspects of this great promise are in view in John 15:4-5, but the second aspect is what Jesus emphasized here.
¹⁷But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. (1 Cor. 6:17)
- G. Paul spoke of Jesus “dwelling in our heart” or abiding in us by His manifest presence (Eph. 3:17) and of Christ being formed in our hearts (Gal. 4:19). Jesus manifests Himself to us (Jn. 14:21).
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)
¹⁹My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you... (Gal. 4:19)
- H. ***Jesus abiding in our hearts***: This involves at least three activities—the indwelling Spirit *teaches us* about Jesus’ heart, Word, and will, *He inspires us* to obey or respond, and *empowers us* by renewing or transforming our mind and emotions (desires) to come into agreement with His.
- I. Some only emphasize our *legal union* with Christ—our *justification* by faith (Rom. 3:21-31). Others only emphasize our *living union* with Christ—our *participation* with His indwelling life. Our legal union describes our *legal position* before God based on *receiving Jesus’ righteousness*. Our living union describes our *living condition* (our character) based on *responding to the Spirit*.

II. TALKING TO JESUS: PRAY-READ THE WORD

- A. Talking with God is the core activity of abiding in Christ. Bible study is to lead us into conversation with God by giving the “conversational material” for our prayer life. It is simply speaking the truths of the Word back to Him as we read it. This makes prayer enjoyable. (*For notes on How to “Pray-Read” the Word, see mikebickle.org*)
- B. Talking to God as we pray-read the Word is a practical way to strengthen our abiding in Christ.
²Take words with you, and return to the LORD. say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips [words of love, trust and obedience]. (Hos. 14:2)
- C. We direct our dialogue to the Father on His throne (Rev. 4) and to the indwelling Spirit. Paul referred to fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit who dwells in us (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1)
¹⁴... and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor. 13:14, NAS)
- 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, and 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 to God, etc.

- E. We dialogue with God as we read the Word by praying *promises to believe*.
1. First, ***we thank God*** for a particular truth. We turn these truths into simple declarations of thanksgiving or trust. Say: “Thank You 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.”
9“***As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. (Jn. 15:9)***”
 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, and protection,” etc.
- F. We dialogue with God as we read the Word by praying *exhortations to obey*.
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. Declare, “I set my heart to abide in You, to obey You with my speech, time, money, etc.”
9“***As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. (Jn. 15:9)***”
 2. Second, ***we ask God to empower us to obey*** a particular truth seen in Scripture. Ask God for help by giving you wisdom, motivation, and power to obey in specific areas. For example, pray, “Father, help me to abide in You, to control my speech, to use my time and money in obedience,” “Lord, strengthen me to love You even as David did.”
- G. We will pray-read the Word much more if we schedule time for it. If we pray-read only when opportunity presents itself, then we will not do it nearly as much. This does not earn God’s love but it positions us to receive more. One issue in our ability to follow through in our scheduled times to pray-read the Word is in setting aside some activities that take up our free time.

III. SEEING JESUS AS THE VINE AND THE FATHER AS THE VINEDRESSER (JN. 15:1)

- A. ***True vine***: Jesus as the true vine is the *model* and *source* of what ideal humanity was originally meant to be when God created Adam. Jesus is the ideal Man—He lived out what the Father had in His heart for humanity in Genesis 1. Jesus was saying, “*Look at Me to see how a person filled with the Spirit is meant to relate to the Father.*” (This is a primary truth emphasized in John 14).
1“***I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser [gardener].***” (Jn. 15:1)
1. Jesus is “***the***” vine—the only source of life that satisfies our heart. The vine that satisfies our heart is not wealth, fame, physical pleasure, or entertainment. Some only see Jesus as savior or provider, but do not know Him as “the vine” to continually draw life from.
 2. The vineyard metaphor speaks of the relationship of redeemed to the Lord (Ps. 80:9-16; Isa. 5:1-7; 27:2-13; Jer. 2:21; Mt. 20:1-16; 21:28-41; Mk. 12:1-9; Lk. 13:6-9; 20:9-16).
- B. ***Vinedresser***: We must see the Father as a zealous gardener, who oversees the health and fruitfulness of His vineyard. He is zealous to take the initiative to train, provide, heal, protect, and direct every believer who responds to Him in order to bring them to greater fruitfulness.

IV. THE NECESSITY OF PRUNING (JN. 15:2)

- A. All fruitful believers will be pruned by God to help them focus so that they may bear more fruit. A gardener cuts the smaller branches off a larger branch that it will be more flush with life. The Father prunes us to bring our life into greater focus on our relationship with Jesus (transforming union) and to be more fruitful. Pruning is not the same as God’s discipline that addresses our sin. We often don’t have the wisdom or resolve to remove “good” things that hinder our fruitfulness.
- ²***“Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (Jn. 15:2)***
- B. ***Fruit***: The Father’s plan for us is to bear fruit that will *remain forever*—fruit He rewards forever. Jesus spoke of “more fruit” (v. 2), “much fruit” (v. 5, 8), and “fruit that remains” (v. 16).
- ¹⁶***“I chose you...that you should bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain...” (Jn. 15:16)***
- C. Outwardly, pruning looks like the decrease of God’s blessing in our life; thus some completely misinterpret it, feeling discouraged instead of thanking God that they will be more fruitful in love. The Father prunes us because He loves us and works for our greatness and fullness (Mt. 5:19). *His commitment to prune our life is a glorious promise not a dreadful warning.*
1. Pruning may result in a loss of money, ministry, influence, popularity, position, or power, etc. Pruning removes branches or some previous growth that was caused by the sap or the life in the vine. It is not about removing sin but distraction that hinders our ability to love.
 2. In our Western mindset, we often see “bigger as always better”—to have more money, influence, honor, friends, comfort, etc. However, sometimes “bigger” diminishes our ability to connect with Lord and bear the fruit of love, humility and purity. Sometimes “more” of a good thing causes distraction that hinders our life of abiding in Christ.
- D. This two-fold abiding relationship includes cultivating an ongoing conversation with Jesus—without this relationship, *we cannot bear true spiritual fruit that remains forever*. It is pride to think that we have the strength to live right spiritually, to relate to people in God’s love, and to do the work of ministry that bears fruit that remains forever without connecting with Jesus.
- ⁵***“He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5)***
- E. There are two different lifestyles that are associated with Christianity—“*abiding Christianity*,” which results in peace, joy, and spiritual fruitfulness, or “*non-abiding Christianity*,” resulting in spiritual boredom, burnout, and much anxiety, fear, and turmoil. We must *cultivate and contend* for an abiding relationship with Jesus to bear spiritual fruit in our life that lasts forever.

V. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (*i.e.*, FCF FRIENDSHIP GROUPS)

1. Which point in this session would you like more understanding of?
2. Which point most inspired or challenged you? Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
3. Which point do you want to impart to a younger believer? Why? How will you elaborate on it?
4. What is one point in this session that needs to be emphasized to the larger Body of Christ? Why?