

## **Session 10 Abiding in Christ: Committed to Fruitfulness (Jn. 15:1-3)**

### **I. REVIEW: 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). Jesus is the vine, or source, and we are the branches, the expression. The result of this two-way conversation is the miracle of bearing fruit that remains; God recognizes and esteems it forever.
- <sup>5</sup>***"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... <sup>16</sup>I chose you...that your fruit should remain..." (Jn. 15:5, 16)***
- B. This is a 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 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—godly character (Gal. 5:22) and ministry and service (Jn. 4:36; Rom. 1:13; Phil. 1:22). Fruitfulness is about *possessing* love, humility, and purity, and then *inspiring* it in others.
- D. ***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*.
1. ***Talking with Jesus***: The Christian life is an ongoing dialogue with a real Person. Talking with God is the core activity of abiding. This is where it starts, but it includes more.
  2. ***Applying His promises***: Applying the promises of God's Word empowers us to bear fruit. Shame, fear, and rejection rise up to challenge what He says about loving, forgiving, healing, and providing for us, etc. We must apply the promise of the Word to our heart, by *confessing the truth* and *resisting lies* against it when we feel shame (Rom. 8:1).
  3. ***Obeying His leadership***: Jesus manifests His presence to those who obey (Jn. 14:21-23). Our spiritual capacity to feel and experience God's love increases as we obey (Mt. 5:8). We do not *earn* God's love or blessing by our obedience. We *position ourselves* to receive, express, and experience more grace by setting our hearts to walk in obedient love.
- E. ***Christ abiding 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 hearts and renews our mind and emotions. We can have the fullness of God in our spirit, while our mind and emotions remain unrenewed.
- F. Paul spoke of Jesus "dwelling in our hearts," or abiding in us by His manifest presence (Eph. 3:17), and of Christ being formed in our hearts (Gal. 4:19).
- <sup>16</sup>***...that He would grant you...to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup>that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... (Eph. 3:16-17)***

## II. GOD'S FRUITFUL VINEYARD (JN. 15:1-5)

- A. Jesus exhorted the redeemed to abide in Christ as the way to bear fruit (Jn. 15:5). He began by emphasizing two important truths necessary to cultivate an abiding life that bears fruit (Jn. 15:1). First, that Jesus is the true vine; and second, that the Father is the vinedresser.

***<sup>1</sup>“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...<sup>2</sup>Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit...<sup>5</sup>He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...” (Jn. 15:1-5)***

- B. ***True vine***: Jesus as the vine is the *source* and *model* of how to relate to God and bear fruit. Jesus is like the sap in the vine; He is the source of divine life and leadership for our life.

1. ***Model***: Jesus is the model of how a believer is to relate to God. In John 14, Jesus described how He related to the Father in His humanity, by abiding in Him (Jn. 14:10-11, 20). In John 15, Jesus called us to relate to Him in the way He related to the Father.

2. ***The vine***: Jesus is “*the*” true vine—the only source of life that satisfies the human heart and empowers us to bear fruit. The vine that satisfies our heart is not wealth, favor, fame, prominence, friendships, or entertainment, etc. Some believers only see Jesus as savior, healer, or provider, but do not yet know Him as the vine from which they draw life.

- C. ***Vinedresser***: We must see the Father as a zealous vinedresser, or chief gardener, who oversees the health and fruitfulness of His vineyard. He takes the initiative to intervene to train, provide, heal, protect, and direct every fruitful believer to bring them to greater fruitfulness.

***<sup>1</sup>“...My Father is the vinedresser...<sup>2</sup>Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” (Jn. 15:1-3)***

- D. ***More fruit***: The Father’s plan is that we bear fruit that *remains forever*, fruit that He rewards. Jesus spoke of “more fruit” (v. 2), “much fruit” (v. 5, 8), and “fruit that remains” (v. 16). Greater fruitfulness does not guarantee that we will have more financial resources or influence, etc.

- E. The Father is committed to our fruitfulness and wants us committed to it by trusting His leadership even when He prunes us. He wants us to be committed to the fruitfulness of others by helping them to trust His leadership when He prunes them.

***<sup>28</sup>We know that all things work together for good to those who love God... (Rom. 8:28)***

- F. ***Pruning***: A gardener cuts branches off the vine so it will be more flush with life. Each year after the harvest, in early spring, the vinedresser prunes (cuts away) over 80% of the vine from the previous year’s growth. If it is not cut off, the vine will grow as a wild vine without producing many grapes. The pruned branches are those resulting from the good life in the vine.

- G. Practically, the pruned branches speak of removing some of the increased activities, demands, responsibilities, and expectations that came with increased fruitfulness in the previous season. It may result in a decrease of money, ministry, influence, popularity, position, or power, etc.

- H. In our circumstances, pruning sometime looks like a decrease of God’s blessing in our lives; thus some totally misinterpret it and feel discouraged, instead of thanking God and trusting His leadership, knowing that they will be more fruitful in love. Too much activity diminishes our life of abiding in Christ. Blessing in one season can create added distraction in the next season.
- I. Pruning results in us *possessing* more love, humility, and purity in our life and *imparting* it in our ministry. He cuts off the branches that cause the life-flow in us to be distracted or diminished.
- J. ***Every branch***: The Father wants every fruit-bearing believer to bear more fruit. His commitment to prune us is a *glorious promise*, not a *dreadful warning*. He intervenes to bring forth more love, and purity in our life and ministry. The Lord is more committed to our greatness in His grace than we are (Mt. 5:19).
- K. The Father needs to prune us because we do not have the resolve or wisdom to cut off the familiar and seemingly good activities in our lives that result from seasons of fruitfulness.

### III. THE FATHER’S PRUNING IS NOT DIVINE DISCIPLINE

- A. The purpose of the Father’s *pruning* is to *remove distraction* from an obedient believer, whereas the purpose of the Father’s *discipline* is to *remove sin* from a compromising believer. They are very different. He does not prune sin, but prunes distractions that hinder our growth in love.  
***<sup>1</sup>...let us lay aside every weight [distractions], and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... (Heb. 12:1)***
- B. ***You are already clean***: We are lovely to God even in our weakness, because of Jesus’ blood.  
***<sup>2</sup>...every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. (Jn. 15:2–3)***

### IV. FOUR SOURCES OF PRESSURE

- A. ***The Father’s zeal***: He prunes and disciplines to remove that which hinders love in us (Heb. 12:5-12). *We must submit to His leadership.*
- B. ***Satan’s attacks***: He seeks to devour us. *We must actively resist him.* He has no “ceasefire” in his attack against us. It is permitted within the limitations that God sets, yet we must resist him.
- C. ***Man’s sin and weakness***: In our sin and weakness, we can make decisions that can lead to a decrease in the blessing that the Lord made available to us. *We are to repent of wrong decisions.*
- D. ***Creation groans***: We see creation’s groan in earthquakes, violent weather patterns, etc., (Rom. 8:22-23). When Adam sinned, a curse came on the land (Gen. 3). His work was cursed by toil and frustration. *We work hard to restore* what is lacking or destroyed. There is a connection between our actions and the condition of the creation (land, vegetation, weather patterns, etc.).  
***<sup>17</sup>Cursed is the ground...in toil you shall eat of it...<sup>18</sup>Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you [frustration]...<sup>19</sup>In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread... (Gen. 3:17-19)***

## **V. WESTERN PARADIGM AND PRUNING**

- A. In our Western mindset, we often see “bigger as better”; to have more money, influence, honor, friends, and comfort is usually seen as being successful without regard for the quality of one’s relationship with God. Sometimes more of a “good thing” hinders us from abiding in Christ.
- B. A believer can be popular in ministry—in the Church or marketplace— without being spiritually fruitful. Being wealthy and influential is not synonymous with being faithful and fruitful.
- C. Someone who only influences a few people to grow in love is fruitful from God’s point of view. I want to be faithful and fruitful much more than I want to be rich and influential without fruit.
- D. Our highest life goal and primary dream is to be faithful and fruitful. I am grateful when the Lord gives me increase in finances, influence, and other things, but I do not mix that up with being faithful and fruitful in love, humility, and purity.

## **VI. PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

- A. Believers who do not see the Father as “the vinedresser” see all decrease in their circumstances as being only negative. They cannot see any redemptive purpose in the decrease. Without the revelation of the Father as the vinedresser, we are more tempted to be offended with His leadership, instead of being grateful for His loving hand pruning us.
- B. Such believers are prone to assume God is ignoring, punishing, or disciplining them for past failure or that the devil is attacking them when circumstances are small. They see all decrease as bad and from the devil or as a result of wrong or sinful decisions. With this wrong perspective, they feel discouraged and ashamed, instead of trusting God’s leadership in their life.
- C. Many are so rooted in a Western paradigm that they live perpetually in discouragement about their ministry in the church or marketplace, because it is small and difficult (Mt. 25:23); thus, they are often in “transition” to a new ministry assignment.
- D. The truth of “the vinedresser” is essential to cultivating a life of abiding in Christ. If we do not see the Father as the vinedresser who prunes us to remove that which hinders love in us, then we will not trust His leadership. We will often be too discouraged, or in a frenzy to fix the smallness in our ministry, that we cannot maintain the dialogue with the Lord that is essential to abiding in Christ (v. 4). When we see the redemptive goodness of the Father’s commitment to prune us (v. 2), we feel clean instead of rejected (v. 3), and then we can abide in Him (v. 4). Confidence in the process and in the Father’s leadership leading to fruitfulness is essential in this.

## **VII. 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?