

DWELL

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[Introduction] WEEK 1 - DAY 1

John 14:17 “But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

John 14:19b-20 “Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you”

John 15:4 “Abide in me, as I also abide in you.”

"In the deepest mystery of his being, God is an intimate relationship,
a fellowship, a community of love."

—Darrell Johnson

These verses from John are an invitation into the intimate fellowship of God. Abiding is a conscious decision to be connected to this community of love and to remain there. John 14:23 tells us that when we make that decision, "The Father and His Son will love us, and make their home with us. To abide means to remain, stay, or live. Jesus lives in the Father. We live in Jesus. Jesus lives in us. The place of abiding is such an intimate fellowship that Jesus says that abiding is remaining or living in His love." (John 15:9)

Abiding is not sentiment or emotion. It is the power of relationship and connection. Even as the Father loved Jesus, Jesus has loved us. The invitation is for us to live in that love. Abiding is a shift from self-reliance and focus on me to living in relationship. When I am my only reference point and power source, my spiritual life withers. I was created in relationship, saved for relationship, and I am being sanctified for even *greater* relationship. Abiding connects me to life and love. Self-reliance disconnects me from love, and these verses even tell me apart from this love, I can do nothing. Will you begin this book and series with the invitation to live in His love?

[APPLICATION]

Throughout the day stop and respond to Jesus invitation to abide in Him.

Dear Jesus ...I say yes to abiding with you. I pray that as I focus on connecting more with you, your presence will become more evident in my life. I choose relationship with you and confess that my self-reliance has disconnected me and that these next weeks are an important invitation from you to reconnect and to learn how to abide with you.

NOTES

[Introduction] WEEK 1 - DAY 2

John 15:1-8 Message “I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn’t bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can’t produce a thing.”

In our region, we understand seasons. We live through the long winters, pray for the beautiful springs, revel in the sunshine and long days of summer, and love the cool crisp autumn days of harvest. Fruit is a result of seasons and depends on a connection that endures all of the seasons. The branch has to stay connected to the vine through the cold and the ice. The branch can't be independent even though the pruning of early spring seems a little too severe when everything else seems to be erupting with growth. The branch has to keep connected all through summer and fall or there will be no fruitful harvest.

Our Father is the Farmer. He is the One who prunes. He is the One who understands the seasons. Winter, spring and summer, the Farmer is producing fruit. Some of those seasons, you can't see any growth at all in terms of fruit, and yet the branch is growing and developing because it is attached to the vine. What is true agriculturally is even more true spiritually.

Here is our problem: a branch does not have good perspective on fruit. It is the Farmer who understands what is needed in all of the seasons. The Farmer is cutting back anything that is getting in the way of a fruitful connection. As we learn about abiding and living in connection, we have to recognize the Farmer's place in the process. The "Farmer" knows things that the branch will never understand.

[APPLICATION]

Pray through your abiding connection with the Farmer today. Dear Father, I confess that I don't have good perspective on how to abide, but I need what the abiding connection produces in my life. You are the Farmer and I surrender to your wisdom as I choose today to connect and abide in your Son.

NOTES

[Introduction] WEEK 1 - DAY 3

John 15:1-8 Message “I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn’t bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can’t produce a thing.

Seasons change, and yet through all the change, the branch stays connected to the vine.

Late summer to early fall is harvest time. Fall is an intense time when so much happens. Harvest requires a lot of work and the available time for that harvest can be short. But fall is also the time when the first frost happens. The leaves begin to shrivel up and die as they are touched by the cold. For a branch, it can feel like a death to lose your fruit in harvest and then you lose your beautiful leaves. Abundance and stripping all happen in a single season. Winter is not a busy time. The cold seems to stretch on forever. The days are short but the nights are long. The branches that seemed so full are now empty and feel barren. It's hard for a branch to realize that winter and barrenness are two different things.

Spring begins slowly and then erupts with buds and blooms. When every other plant seems to be making a spectacle of themselves, the vine and branch must reduce themselves. The Farmer cuts them back drastically. The focus is not on green display but on future fruit. And then summer comes. That time of fruit and abundance when growth and fruit seem easy.

In every season the vine says to the branch, "Live in ME. Make your home in me, just as I do in you." The vine understands seasons. The vine is willing to live through every season with you. The vine offers you wisdom, insight, nutrients and energy. The vine offers to sustain you, the branch, in every season.

[APPLICATION]

Make a declaration today of your intent to stay connected to the Vine.

You can make this declaration many times through out your day: “I choose today to make my home and live connected to the Vine. He is the Vine and my source. I am a branch connected to Him.”

NOTES

[Introduction] WEEK 1 - DAY 4

John 15:1, 4 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”

Andrew Murray, the great author, who wrote Abide in Me, explained abiding in this way:

“How much weary labour there has been in striving to understand what abiding is, how much fruitless effort in trying to attain it. Why was this? Because the attention was turned to the abiding, as a work we have to do, instead of the Living Christ, in whom we were to be kept abiding, who Himself was to hold and keep us. We thought of abiding as a continual strain and effort — we forget that it means, rest from effort to one who has found the place of his abode. Do notice how Christ said—Abide in Me; I am the Vine that brings forth, and holds, and strengthens, and makes fruitful the branches. Abide in Me, rest in Me, and let Me do my work. I am the True Vine, all I am, and speak, and do is Divine Truth, giving the actual reality of what is said. I am the Vine, only consent and yield thy all to Me, I will do all in thee.”

1. Abiding isn't work. It is staying or remaining in relationship.
2. Abiding is possible because as we abide in Him, He abides in us, holds us, and keeps us.
3. Abiding is not strain or effort. It is actually a rest from effort.
4. Abiding is letting the "true vine" bring forth life, hold us and strengthen us, and make us fruitful.
5. Abiding is resting in Christ and letting Him do the work.
6. He is the True Vine, and what He says is true and can be our reality.
7. Abiding needs our consent. We need to surrender and allow Christ to do it all.

Connection is hard for us. We live in a world that values independence. Abiding is counter-cultural. Instead of producing and working and straining, abiding is taking a rest from effort. Branch life is not about work but it is about connection. Branch life is more about availability to the vine than about personal production. Will you exchange your fruitful efforts for abiding and living in the vine?

[APPLICATION]

Confession

I confess, Lord, that I have spent a lot of time striving in my relationship with you. I choose today to connect to you and to allow that connection to produce fruit instead of my efforts. I yield and surrender to my relationship with you and all that you have for me.

NOTES

[Introduction] WEEK 1 - DAY 5

John 14:3, 18-21 “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am..... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

John 15:4 “Abide in me, as I also abide in you.”

Our efforts and striving leave us feeling like orphans. We end up feeling disappointed and disconnected. Jesus knew that would be the result of our trying to reach God through our own efforts. Thankfully, He promised that He would not leave us like orphans. He promised to come for us in intimate relationship.

To abide is similar to floating in His love. Abiding is an intimate connection to His love. The problem is that too often we resist the very thing that we long for.

“We need to stop searching and see that we are surrounded by the sea of Perfect Love.

But we also need to stop our panicky thrashing about in an effort to float. Paradoxically, our efforts to stay afloat usually lead to sinking. Every time we start to panic and think we need to do something to stay afloat, we lift our head out of the water and no longer rest in it. As soon as we do we begin to sink. Our efforts to stay afloat may keep our head above the water for a while, but eventually we tire, and eventually our efforts to keep afloat will drown us.” (David Benner)

Abiding is surrendering to the love of God. God has not left us as orphans. He also does not obligate us to keep his commands to earn a relationship with Him. Obedience without love is obligation and it kills relationship. Jesus’ promise is that He would come for us. He promises to make a home for us. He promises to live in us in a deep relationship, and then He asks us to live in such a way that we reflect that relationship. Loving His commands and keeping them is the mark of those who love Him enough to guard the relationship. We keep His commands out of love.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect today on what you need to do to abide in His love.

In what ways are you acting like an orphan? Where are the places that you are resisting His love in trying to stay afloat through your own efforts?

NOTES

[PRUNING] WEEK 2 - DAY 1

John 15:1-4 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

"Pruning in biblical times was done with pruning hooks (Is 2:4; 18:5). These were small, sickle-shaped knives forged at spearpoint and attached to a short handle. As a tool the pruning hook in the Bible is a physical icon symbolizing prosperity and peace." (Dictionary of Biblical Imagery)

To us pruning sounds drastic given the fact that we are branches that will experience the cutting. Agriculturally speaking pruning is not a negative process. Pruning produces a greater harvest and thus greater prosperity. Biblically speaking, pruning is seen as God's favor exhibited in the prosperity and peace. The Old Testament refers to pruning as a picture of peace (Is 2:4; Joel 3:10; Mic 4:3). These passages speak of not needing a spear for war any longer and beating those spears into pruning hooks.

When we are entering a new season of success and prosperity it often comes after a time of pruning. A new season of peace often comes with pruning. Pruning is not the negative that we think of; it is God's way of producing the very things that we long for.

"Just as a gardener prunes back a rose tree to get it ready for a new season of growth, God prunes us when He is about to take us into a new season of growth and expansion. Sometimes you can think the blessing and favour of God have lifted from your life but He is simply trimming and pruning making room for more." (Christine Caine)

[APPLICATION]

Make a declaration today about pruning in your life.

Declare: "Pruning is not a negative process. Pruning is about my peace and prosperity. Pruning is preparing me for growth and expansion. "

NOTES

[PRUNING] WEEK 2 - DAY 2

John 15:1-5 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

"A rose bush, left to itself, will get straggly and tangled, and grow in on itself. It will produce quite a lot of not-so-good roses rather than a smaller number of splendid ones. It will, quite literally, get in its own light. It needs help to grow in the right directions and to the right ends. So you prune it to stop it wasting its energy and being unproductive. You cut out, particularly, the parts of the plant that are growing inwards and getting tangled up. You encourage the shoots that are growing outwards, toward the light. You prune the rose, in other words, to help it to be its true self. As far as I understand it, more or less the same thing works with vines....Vines, too, need to focus their energy on producing good quality grapes, rather than lots of second-rate ones. Vines, too, need to grow towards the light rather than getting in a tangled mass. Left to themselves, they produce a lot of superfluous growth which must be cut away if the vine is truly to be what it's capable of." (N. T. Wright)

Pruning is about you finding your true self. One of the fruits of remaining and living in the true vine is learning about your true self. The problem is that pruning can be very uncomfortable. When we live lives that focus on what is most expedient and comfortable, we get straggly and tangled. Pruning moves us from wasted focus and energy to productivity and fruitfulness.

Pruning also forces us to grow towards the light. Pruning cuts off the superfluous and points us toward that which is the most real and authentic about us. If the "Vine is true," then the branches that live in Him must also be true.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect on those places of pruning.

Where is God trying to focus you away from the superfluous and get you to focus on what you are truly capable of? Pray about the pruning: “Dear Jesus, You are the true vine. I submit to the Father’s pruning so that I can reflect who I truly am in Christ.”

NOTES

[PRUNING] WEEK 2 - DAY 3

John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Warren Wiersbe, commenting on this text, says,

"He cuts away dead wood that can breed disease and insects, and he cuts away living tissue so that the life of the vine will not be so dissipated that the quality of the crop will not be jeopardized. In fact, the vinedresser will even cut away whole bunches of grapes so that the rest of the crop will be of higher quality. As the vinedresser, God wants both quantity and quality. This pruning process is the most important part of the whole enterprise and the people who do it must be carefully trained or they can destroy an entire crop. Some vineyards invest two or three years in training the 'pruners' so they know where to cut, how much to cut, and even at what angle to make the cut."

Pruning is important. It is the Father's quality control process in our lives. The pruning of the Father means that we have both quality of fruit and great quantity in our fruit.

Pruning is important because "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8) Pruning reveals that we truly are His disciples. Pruning produces fruit that glorifies God. Everything created by God is to give Him glory. The vine spills out everything that it has for God's glory.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect on the importance of pruning.

How is the Father using pruning as "quality control" right now in your life?

NOTES

[PRUNING] WEEK 2 - DAY 4

John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

"If your life bears some fruit, God will intervene to prune you...

If necessary He will risk your misunderstanding of His methods and motives. His purpose is for you to cut away immature commitments and lesser priorities to make room for even greater abundance for His glory.....Without pruning, growing Christians will only be able to live up to a fraction of their potential.

(Bruce Wilkinson, Secret of the Vine)

God is committed to developing us through pruning. The tools of God's developing us are prayer and His Word. (John 15:7) So many of our prayers are answered with pruning. We ask God to use us. We ask God to glorify himself in our lives. We ask God to make us like Him. The answer to those prayers very often require pruning away self so that the spirit of God within us flourishes.

God also uses His word alongside pruning. Often, the word God uses during a pruning season goes deep within us, and we begin to pray that Word as a promise from Him. This is what abiding looks like. That word prayed while the pruning shears are at work bears fruit in the next season of our lives. God produces in us our potential through pruning, prayer, and the promises of God.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect and pray.

Reflect on a verse that God has used in your life during a time of pruning. Pray through that verse today asking God to use his Word, prayer and this series to produce fruit, even as He is cutting away lesser things.

NOTES

[PRUNING] WEEK 2 - DAY 5

John 15:1-4 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

Pruning is different than discipline.

"If disciplining is about sin, pruning is about self. In pruning, God asks you to let go of things that keep you from His kingdom purposes and your ultimate good... Jesus wanted His disciples to be very clear about the difference. Why? Because the purposes of discipline and pruning are entirely different, and because the consequences of confusing them can be disastrous! Jesus knew that if His future followers misread the Vinedresser's actions in their lives, they would come to the wrong conclusions about the Vinedresser's purpose and plan." (Bruce Wilkinson)

[APPLICATION]

If you suspect that you are being pruned, follow these steps:

1. Acknowledge that God is trying to get your attention. Decide that you don't want this season of turmoil to go to waste.
2. Trust that since a loving parent would tell a child why he or she is receiving correction, your loving Father will do no less. Believe that He wants you to know whether you are experiencing discipline or pruning.
3. Ask the Lord to help you answer this question: Do I have a major sin that's causing You to discipline me?
4. Pray: "Lord, I want to know. If You do not show me within a week from today that it is discipline, then I will take it by faith that it is pruning." From my own experience, I can assure you that God has many ways to let you know if sin is the issue—you will find the truth in a Scripture, a conversation, a teaching, or a phone call from a friend.
5. If you conclude that you're being disciplined, sin is the problem. Repent and turn around. You'll never regret it.
6. If you conclude that you're being pruned, your response is just as crucial, and the rewards will be even greater. Ask God to show you clearly what He wants you to let go of, and trust Him enough to release it completely to Him.

Today's whole reading is from Bruce Wilkinson's book, Secrets of the Vine.

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD ALONE] WEEK 3 - DAY 1

John 5:19-20 “Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.”

John 15:5. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Jesus is saying, “Listen up.” He is about to tell us an amazing truth: Jesus only does what He sees His Father doing. He and His Father work in complete agreement with each other. The Father and the Son have such an intimate connection they can be in perfect step with each other.

“Whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. This is different from saying: Jesus chooses some things to do that he sees the Father doing and so only does what the Father is doing. It says, ‘Whatever the Father does,’ Jesus does. When the Father acts, Jesus acts. This is the sort of thing the Jews heard Jesus say. And they concluded rightly: You talk like you’re equal with him. You talk as if for him to act is for you to act—as if there is some kind of essential connection or union.” (John Piper)

The union that Jesus has with the Father influences, launches, grants, and empowers everything that Jesus does. Jesus then teaches us that everything that we do should be dependent on and empowered by Him. Our lives are meant to be in step with the one we abide in. We need and depend on an essential connection and union with Jesus. And just as it is true that Jesus can do nothing by himself, it is even more correct to say that apart from Jesus we can do nothing. The Father works even greater works through the union that He has with His Son so that we will all be amazed. Through the union that we have with the Son great things also will happen. Jesus tells us, “*Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*” (John 14:12)

[APPLICATION]

Meditate on this verse.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Ask God to help you understand what it means that apart from me you can do nothing.

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD ALONE] WEEK 3 - DAY 2

John 15:4-8 Message “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can’t produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.”

Jesus is calling to us to live in Him. The vine is more than just an illustration; it is our way to understand life. We have a home. We belong to something bigger and more than ourselves. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, but apart from Him we can do nothing.

"Branches that decide to 'go it alone', to try living without the life of the vine, soon discover their mistake. They wither and die, and are good for nothing but the fire (verse 6). But branches that remain in the vine, and submit to the pruner's knife when necessary, live and bear fruit. That is the prospect that Jesus holds out to his followers, to all of us." (N. T. Wright)

Branches can't make it alone. This is a parable to teach us how to live connected lives. Disconnected branches aren't good for anything. Branches rely on the vine for everything. Branches can't go for a day without connection. Once a branch is no longer joined to the vine, withering quickly follows.

“'Apart from Me ye can do nothing.' What a plea and what a call every moment to abide in Christ! We have only to go back to the vine to see how true it is. Look again at that little branch, utterly helpless and fruitless except as it receives sap from the vine, and learn that the full conviction of not being able to do anything apart from Christ is just what you need to teach you to abide in your Heavenly Vine. It is this that is the great meaning of the pruning Christ spoke of—all that is self must be brought low, that our confidence may be in Christ alone. Abide in Me; much fruit! Apart from Me; nothing!— ought there to be any doubt as to what we shall choose?" (Andrew Murray)

[APPLICATION]

Reflect and pray.

Ask God to show you the places where you have acted as a disconnected vine. Reflect on why you have resisted dependence on Christ and what makes you regularly choose independence from Him.

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD ALONE] WEEK 3 - DAY 3

John 15:5-8 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Moses has a similar message in Deuteronomy 30:15-20:

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

“Live in me and bear fruit,” Jesus says, “or apart from me you can do nothing.” Moses said it this way: SEE today you get to choose — life and fruitfulness, or death and destruction. Jesus says when we live in Him, we bear fruit and glorify God. Moses says when you choose life, you live and increase. We can choose death. John 15 says when we don't live in the Vine, we are thrown into the fire and burned. Deuteronomy 30 says if your heart turns away and you disconnect to the point of worshipping other gods, you will be destroyed.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect and pray.

Today, with heaven and earth as your witness, God has set before you life and death. Choose life. Abide in Him. Remain in Him, that you may love God and hear His voice. When His words remain in you and you really hear His voice, you can ask whatever you want and God will do it.

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD ALONE] WEEK 3 - DAY 4

John 15:5-8 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

"Apart from Me—you nothing. Lord! I gladly accept the arrangement: I nothing—Thou all. My nothingness is my highest blessing, because Thou art the Vine, that givest and workest all. So be it, Lord! I, nothing, ever waiting on Thy fulness. Lord, reveal to me the glory of this blessed life." (Andrew Murray)

"Apart from Me—you nothing. Lord! I gladly accept the arrangement: I nothing— You are all!" To really come into agreement with the truth of abiding means we have to surrender. We can't do anything without our connection to Jesus. It is pointless to resist this fact. But we actually have to go a step further, Andrew Murray says. We have to embrace the situation and say, "I gladly accept the arrangement." For most of us this is where we really struggle. Hudson Taylor, the great writer of Spiritual Secret, said it this way: "The real secret of an unsatisfied life lies too often in an unsundered will." Surrender looks like me saying God I gladly accept this arrangement. I can do nothing- You are all!

My nothingness is my highest blessing, because You are the Vine and I am but the branch. Surrender allows me to move from fruitlessness to fruitfulness. My efforts alone accomplish nothing. My efforts, when they are directed towards staying connected to Christ and living there, result in my bearing much fruit. If our efforts accomplish something, then we would receive the glory that comes from these efforts. We learn from these verses that when we remain in Jesus and He remains in us, the fruit that comes gives the *Father* glory. My nothingness brings Him glory.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect and pray.

Take a few moments to surrender today. Surrender is choosing His glory over my own glory. Surrender is saying with John the Baptist: "He must increase, I must decrease." Where is God asking you to surrender?

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD ALONE] WEEK 3 - DAY 5

John 15:1-8 NLT "I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father."

"The urgent question, then, is this. How do we 'remain' in him? What does it look like in practice? ...

We must remain in the community that knows and loves him and celebrates him as its Lord. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. We can't 'go it alone'. But we must also remain as people of prayer and worship in our own intimate, private lives. We must make sure to be in touch, in tune, with Jesus, knowing him and being known by him. Once again, the most extraordinary promises about prayer (verse 7) accompany the sharpest warnings (verse 6)." (N.T. Wright)

If apart from Jesus we can do nothing, then the question how to remain or live in Him has a lot of import for us. N. T. Wright, the scholar and bishop, answers the question in this way:

1. We remain in the community that knows, loves and celebrates God because we do not make it as solitary people of faith.
2. We maintain an intimate connection with Jesus through prayer, worship, the Word. Spiritual disciplines are extremely helpful to maintain our living connection with Jesus.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect and choose.

Reflect on any practical steps you need to take to abide in Christ. What has helped you in the past to abide in Christ? Choose to make an action step today that enables you to be more powerfully connected to Christ.

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD'S WORD] WEEK 4 - DAY 1

John 15:7-15, J.B. Phillips Translation “But if you live your life in me, and my words live in your hearts, you can ask for whatever you like and it will come true for you. This is how my Father will be glorified—in your becoming fruitful and being my disciples.

I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. You must go on living in my love. If you keep my commandments you will live in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and live in his love.

I have told you this so that you can share my joy, and that your happiness may be complete. This is my commandment: that you love each other as I have loved you.”

When we abide, we are choosing to live our lives connected to Christ. Abiding is a consistent choice to value that connection. The Puritans explained it this way: we have our union with Christ and then there is also the possibility of a deepening communion with Christ. Our union with Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit. Our communion in Christ is also the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit deepens our communion by asking us to remain in Jesus and let His words live and remain in us.

"The Puritans emphasized this distinction between our status and our experience by speaking of union and communion. We are united to Christ by faith through the gracious work of God's Spirit. Now we must seek to live out that union in a relationship of communion with God. Our union precedes our communion and provides the sure and certain basis for it, grounded entirely in the saving work of God. Our experience of communion can fluctuate with the inconsistencies of our efforts to engage in those activities which foster that relationship. But God's love cannot fluctuate, for we have a union with Christ that nothing can separate."
(Bill Kynes, "Abiding in Christ-Experiencing Our Union with the Savior")

[APPLICATION]

Read and pray.

Abiding is an invitation to go deeper in our communion. This week, you can explore that invitation by taking a deeper step with God's Word. Pick a verse today and ask God to show you how to let the words of that verse live in you.

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD'S WORD] WEEK 4 - DAY 2

John 8:31-36 “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

John 15:7-8 “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

Here's a quotation from New Testament scholar, D.A. Carson: “The verb rendered ‘hold’ is *menō*, to abide, to remain—a theme of critical importance that returns in a concentrated way in chapter 15. In short, perseverance is the mark of true faith, of real disciples. A genuine believer remains in Jesus’ ‘word’ (*logos*), his teaching... i.e. such a person obeys it, seeks to understand it better, and finds it more precious, more controlling, precisely when other forces flatly oppose it. It is the one who continues in the teaching who has both the Father and the Son.”

Disciples remain and live in the Word of God. In turn, that Word makes a living connection in the disciple's life that empowers the truth and sets the disciple free. Those who practice sin are abiding there and become slaves to the sin that they practice. Free people have met the living abiding truth in the Word of God.

Abiding in His Word- is to hold his Word, live in his Word, not let go of his Word. It is to be connected to Christ through His words, but then to use those same words to develop and form every decision in our lives. Abiding in His Word is to read his Word, meditate on his Word, obey his Word, pray his Word and live his Word. Disciples hold on to the words of their Master.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect.

The abiding Word calls us into discipleship.

The abiding Word reveals to us His truth.

That abiding Word sets us free.

That abiding Word lived out in our prayers frees us to ask whatever we wish and it will be done for us.

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD'S WORD] WEEK 4 - DAY 3

John 15:7-8 "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

"Christ abiding in us is interchangeable with his words abiding in us because Christ never comes without his authoritative views on things. To have him abiding is to have all his views abiding in us. If he abides, his views abide. If he abides, his priorities abide. If he abides, his principles abide. If he abides, his promises abide. If he abides, his commandments abide. In short, if/when Christ abides in us, his words abide in us." (John Piper)

"Letting the words of Jesus abide in us is not like memorizing axioms and theorems in geometry. It's not even like mulling over wise saying from ancient teachers. It is not like that because Jesus is alive today, and he does not mean for thinking about his words to replace fellowship with him. He means for musing on his words to be fellowship with him." (John Piper)

"And so letting the words of Jesus abide in you means taking whatever steps are necessary to keep the living voice of Jesus speaking with you through the words that he spoke in Scripture. It is a spiritually intentional act of relating to a living person when you take his words into your mind." John Piper

[APPLICATION]

Pick a verse or two of Scripture for today. Walk through these steps as you meditate on these verses.

1. Abiding in Christ is allowing His authority, through His Word, to impact and live in me.
2. Abiding is a living fellowship with Jesus. Jesus' words reveal His heart and mind to me much like my words reveal my heart and mind to those I love. In a living abiding fellowship, I choose to value the words that I am reading from Scripture and give them importance
3. Abiding requires me to make intentional steps to focus on Jesus speaking living words to me through His Word. Abiding is relating to the living Jesus and then allowing His words that I have read to begin to live in me.

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD'S WORD] WEEK 4 - DAY 4

John 15:7-8 Message "But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples."

"Abiding begins with visible spiritual disciplines, such as Bible reading and prayer. Yet it may shock you to find out that we can do these things for years without abiding. After all, reading a book about a person isn't the same thing as knowing the person who wrote the book. The challenge in abiding is always to break through from dutiful activities to a living, flourishing relationship with God." (Bruce Wilkinson)

God's desire is not that we just read our Bibles more, but that we meet Him in a living connection through the Bible. When we make our home somewhere, it does involve a commitment of time, but a home is more than a financial responsibility and an obligation to take care of the needs of the house. A home is where we have our most intimate fellowship, where we are comforted, celebrate our joys and accomplishments, and feel our deepest sorrows. Jesus doesn't want us to look at His Word like a spiritual responsibility that requires our time and efforts, but He desires that we seek out His Word as a home. It is said that a home is where the heart is, and this is true when we think of what it means for us to abide in Jesus and His words. Jesus wants us to find a living, intimate home within Him and with His words.

God doesn't want us to do more for Him, but He wants us to be with Him more.

[APPLICATION]

Reflect and pray.

What do you need to break through to a living and flourishing relationship with God? What would it look like for you to make your self at home with Jesus and let His word make it's home inside of you? How would you approach God's word to make it your home?

NOTES

[DWELL, REMAIN, ABIDE IN GOD'S WORD] WEEK 4 - DAY 5

John 8:31 “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.”

John 15:5-8 “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples.” Here’s a picture of what I think that means. The word of Jesus, with Himself as the center and focus of it, has a kind of force field, like a magnetic field around it. And when you are “in his word,” you are in that force field. You are under the sway of that force coming from His word. So, for example:

- Part of this force field is the truth of the word. So when you are “in” the word, you are in the persuasion of the truth of the word. You are persuaded that the word is true. And you live in a forcefield of that persuasion. You live in the truth.
- Another part of this force field is the beauty of the word (I’m referring here to moral and spiritual beauty, not stylistic beauty), and when you are “in” the word you are in the attraction of that beauty. You are held by that beauty.
- Another part of the force field is the supreme value of the word, and when you are “in” the word you are captured by the preciousness of the word, and the Savior. You are drawn to treasure the word.
- Another part of the force field of the word is the power and grace of the word, so that when you are “in” the word, you are made peaceful and hopeful by the word. You trust in the word. Because it can do what it promises; and what it promises is gracious.
- Another part of this force field is the word as the life-giving, soul-sustaining bread of heaven, so that when you are “in” the word, you are in the nourishment of the word. You are being fed and strengthened by the word.
- And the force field includes the word as living water so that when you are “in” the word, you are being refreshed by the word.
- And the force field includes the word as light so that when you are “in” the word, you are being illumined and guided by the word. You see everything in the light of the word.

(This whole section is from a sermon by John Piper)

[APPLICATION]

Take time to pray.

The Spirit of Christ and the Word of God combined release a powerful force in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to release the truth, beauty, value, life, power and grace of the Bible into your spiritual life as you abide in the Word.

NOTES

[ABIDING PRAYER] WEEK 5 - DAY 1

John 15:7 “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, *ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*”

Have you ever tried to develop a friendship with someone who has nothing in common with you? Nothing in your lives align: hobbies, core values, religious beliefs, political beliefs, family background, education, career, or even sports you watch. It's very difficult for two people with zero mutual interests to grow in friendship. One person would have to take an interest in at least one thing the other likes if they are to have any kind of relationship.

In the same way, if we want to abide in Jesus through prayer, alignment is crucial. And let's be clear: Jesus doesn't align his values and desires to ours, we align our values and desires to His! This may surprise (or even shock) you but you don't always have your best interest in mind when you pray. We can pray the most passionate and earnest prayer known to man, however, if it's not aligned with Jesus' desire for you, that prayer will not be answered (or it'll be answered in an unexpected way).

One bible commentary put it this way:

To remain in Christ and to allow his words to remain in oneself means a conscious acceptance of the authority of his word and a constant contact with him by prayer. The prayer request itself must be related to a definite need and must be for an object Jesus himself would desire. Jesus never promises to gratify every chance whim believers may have. But as long as they are seeking the Lord's will for their lives, Jesus promises to grant every request that will help accomplish this end.

To abide in Jesus through prayer is to actively seek His will and desire for your life. It is to align your thoughts, attitudes, desires, and dreams to His for you. Friends, your dreams for your life *pales in comparison* to Jesus' dreams for you. Align yourself to Jesus through prayer. When you do that, Jesus says, “ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

[APPLICATION]

If possible, go someplace where you can have privacy for a few minutes. Invite the Holy Spirit and ask the following questions:

- *How am I abiding in Jesus through prayer?*
- *How am I aligning my thoughts, attitudes, desires and dreams to Jesus'?*
- *How am I seeking Jesus' will for my life?*

If you find that you are not abiding in Jesus or seeking His will for your life, continue in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit the following questions:

- *What is at the root of my resistance in seeking or abiding in Jesus?*
- *What is driving me away from His desire and will for my life?*

Write down everything you receive from God's Spirit. It doesn't matter if it sounds weird or unrelated. If you're not sure about something you wrote down, ask God for a confirmation. It may be helpful to ask a trusted friend (who has a relationship with Jesus) to pray with you. If you're still not sure, it may help to ask people closest to you if what you received from prayer applies to you. Sometimes, things that are unclear to us may be very clear to others.

If you find that you are living in disobedience before God, bring it to the cross in repentance. There is always forgiveness, redemption and restoration because of the blood of the Lamb (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:9). Do whatever you have to do realign your life to Jesus.

NOTES

[ABIDING PRAYER] WEEK 5 - DAY 2

Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God.”

Matthew 6:6 “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Yesterday, you learned to abide in Jesus through prayer is to align your thoughts, attitudes, desires, and dreams to His for you. In order to do that, we must first seek Him and abide, or actively remain in, His presence. Like any relationship, the closer you draw near to Jesus, He will reveal His heart and desires for you. Today, we’re going to actively draw near and remain in Jesus’ presence through **Centering Prayer**. Centering Prayer is a type of contemplative prayer that focuses on deepening your relationship with the Triune God: Father, Son and Spirit.

[APPLICATION] *If possible, try to devote 10-20 minutes in Centering Prayer.*****

1. Choose a *sacred word* as the symbol of your desire to draw near God’s presence.
 - The word you choose isn’t sacred because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning you give it as the expression of your desire to draw near to God.
 - Some examples of a sacred word: God, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Love, Peace, Grace, Stillness, Faith, Trust.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, *settle briefly and silently (or quietly) introduce* the sacred word as the symbol of your desire to draw near God’s presence.
 - Closing your eyes helps to let go of what’s going on around you.
3. When engaged with your *thoughts, return ever-so-gently* to the sacred word.
 - “Thoughts” includes body sensations, sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, self reflections and concepts.
 - “Thoughts” are an inevitable and important part of Centering Prayer.
4. At the end of the prayer period, *remain in silence* with eyes closed for a *few minutes*.
5. Write down your experience below or on a notebook.
 - What did you experience during the Centering Prayer? How did you engage with God?
 - Did you find any pattern in your thoughts?
 - Did you hear (or sense) anything?
 - Did you feel a physical sensation?
 - Did you get an emotional sensation?
 - What else did you experience?

It’s absolutely normal if you did not experience anything, especially if this is your first time doing Centering Prayer. You didn’t develop an intimate relationship with your best friend or significant other overnight. Don’t expect the same here.

Keep at it! Keep pursuing God! He’s with you!

NOTES

[ABIDING PRAYER] WEEK 5 - DAY 3

Psalm 3:5-6 “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*”

Jeremiah 29:11 “*For I know the plans I have for you,*” declares the Lord, “*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*”

Yesterday, we focused on drawing near to Jesus through Centering Prayer, and we encourage you to continue abiding in His presence through Centering Prayer. We learned that abiding in Jesus through prayer is to align your thoughts, attitudes, desires, and dreams to His for you. The Almighty God, the one who holds all things in His hands, has “plans to prosper you not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Do you believe that God’s will for your life is good, even though it may not seem that way right now? If your honest answer is “no”, don’t lose hope. In Psalm 3, David tells us that those who choose to trust in God’s good plan for their life and submit their way for His way, God WILL make your paths straight. Did you catch that? **No matter what you’re going through now, your current path WILL STRAIGHTEN because God will do it.**

Now, let’s go to Jesus in prayer and seek His thoughts, desires and dreams for your personal life. We’ll address your relational and professional lives tomorrow.

[APPLICATION]

Continue abiding in Jesus through Centering Prayer. When you’re ready, ask Jesus the following questions:

- Jesus, I believe and trust that you desire nothing but good for me. *What is your good will for my life today?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *Is there any area of my personal life where I am purposefully living out-of-alignment with your good will?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *Is there any area of my personal life I’m unaware of that’s out-of-alignment with your good will?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.

Bring every area that is not aligned with Jesus’ good will for your life into the Light and blood of Jesus Christ. Receive His redemption and forgiveness.

Ask Jesus to align your desires and will to His good will for your life today.

Jesus, I thank you that you desire nothing but good for me. I choose this day to live by faith in you, Jesus. I choose to abide in your presence and your good will for my life. I place my thoughts, my attitudes, my desires and my dreams in your Good Hands. Mold and shape them so they are aligned with your good and perfect will for my life. Amen.

NOTES

[ABIDING PRAYER] WEEK 5 - DAY 4

Psalm 3:5-6 “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*”

Jeremiah 29:11 “*For I know the plans I have for you,*” declares the Lord, “*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*”

Yesterday, we focused on aligning your personal life to Jesus’ good will. Today, we’ll focus on your relational and professional (includes students and parents) lives. Aligning our relational and professional lives to Jesus’ will is tough because there are areas that are completely out of our control. We can’t always control how a neighbor, friend, family member, significant other, or co-worker acts. Yet, Jesus may call you to offer patience, love or forgiveness to someone, even though you would rather do anything but that! You may want to run as far away as possible from a certain person or a workplace, but Jesus may call you to stay and deal with what’s in front of you. Or, Jesus may call you to leave a person or workplace you really like or love.

Friends, if you want to abide in Jesus through prayer, you must seek His good will in these areas of life. Are you ready to do that?

[APPLICATION]

Continue abiding in Jesus through Centering Prayer. When you’re ready, ask Jesus the following questions:

- *Jesus, what is your good desire for my relational life?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *Are there any relationships that are not aligned to your good will?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *If so, who do I talk to? What do I have to do to align this relationship to your will?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *What is your desire for my professional life?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *Is there any area of my professional life that is not aligned to your good will?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *If so, what do I have to do to align it to your will?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.

Bring every area that is not aligned with Jesus’ good will for your life into the Light and blood of Jesus Christ. Receive His redemption and forgiveness.

Ask Jesus to align your desires and will to His good will for your relational and professional lives today.

NOTES

[ABIDING PRAYER] WEEK 5 - DAY 5

John 15:7 “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, *ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*”

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but *I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*”

[Expositor’s Bible Commentary]

“The prayers of Christians who abide in Christ are answered because “whatever (they) wish” turns out to be what God would like to see happen. The fruit that we bear is the direct result of God’s activity released by our prayers. Prayer has always been the primary ingredient in any significant advance of God’s kingdom on earth.”

“God’s purposes in history are realized when believers, through fellowship with him, come to understand his will and then by prayer release him to act redemptively in the world.”

John tells us that Jesus “chose you and appointed you” to bear fruit. John makes Jesus’ good will very clear: you are meant to bear fruit! And how does that happen? When we seek His will and pray that it comes to pass. This week you did some heavy duty work in seeking and abiding in Jesus through Centering Prayer, aligning your desires to His and seeking His good will for your life.

You’re one step closer to bearing fruit, but there’s one important imperative John gives us. He tells us to “GO and bear fruit.” It’s one thing to know Jesus’ will for your life but it’s another thing to live it out. Living out His will precedes bearing His fruit. The fruit may not come right away but take heart, it will come.

[APPLICATION]

Continue abiding in Jesus through Centering Prayer. When you’re ready, ask Jesus the following questions:

- *Jesus, how do you want me to live out your good will in my personal life?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *Jesus, how do you want me to live out your good will in my relational life?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.
- *Jesus, how do you want me to live out your good will in my professional life?*
 - Write down anything you hear or sense.

Now, GO and live out Jesus’ good and perfect will for your life. Focus on living out His good will for your life. The fruit will eventually follow.

NOTES

[FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS] WEEK 6 - DAY 1

John 15:9 “As the Father has loved me, so *have I loved you*. Abide in my love.”

John 15:14-15 “You are my *friends* if you *do what I command you*. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for *all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you*.”

“The disciples will prove their friendship by their willingness to do what Jesus commands. While this does not mean that Jesus offers a conditional friendship, it does indicate that friendship is a reciprocal relationship. The disciples do not earn Jesus’ friendship by their obedience; they give evidence that such a friendship does in fact exist.” [Expositor’s Bible Commentary]

In verses 14-15, Jesus calls his disciples, “*friends*.” The definition of “friend” has changed a lot in recent years due to the proliferation of social media. Just look at your Facebook friends list. Are you “friends” with every person on that list? There’s probably a good chance there’s a group of people on that list you haven’t talked to in years! Jesus’ definition of “friend” is wholly different from today’s definition. For Jesus, friendship is defined in terms of *obedience*. However, Jesus doesn’t view his friends as mere instruments in His Grand Plan. No! Jesus’ friends are Kingdom Partners. One bible commentary notes this friendship as a “*partnership of mutual esteem and affection*.”

Jesus gives a clear picture of his view of friendship by placing it side-by-side with servanthood. Two commentaries explain Jesus’ view of friendship well:

“A slave is never given a reason for the work assigned to him; he must perform it because he has no other choice. The friend, however, is a confidant who shares the knowledge of his superior’s purpose and voluntarily adopts it as his own. Jesus declares that he has revealed to the disciples all that the Father has given to him. The disclosure of the mind of God concerning his career and theirs will give them assurance that they are engaged in the right task and that God will ultimately bring it to a successful conclusion.” [NIV Bible Commentary]

“As friends they share the secret of the incarnation. In times of difficulty, when we may be tempted to think that God has removed himself from us and concealed his plans, it is good to remember that we are still friends of Jesus and as such have access to insights unavailable to the unbeliever.” [Expositor’s Bible Commentary]

As if Jesus’ definition of friendship wasn’t too good to be true, it’s undergirded with this amazing truth in verse 9, “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you*.” His love for you has nothing to do with your performance, morality, or heritage. In fact, Jesus’ love for you isn’t a reaction to anything you’ve ever done. However, Jesus said his active, ongoing love for you is a mirror reflection of his Father’s active ongoing love for himself. Friends, we’re talking about perfect, unadulterated, pure love.

Jesus calls you: ***disciple, kingdom partner, confidant and beloved friend***.

[APPLICATION]

Read again the privileges friends of Jesus have.

Do you embrace this identity as Jesus’ beloved friend?

- *If so, how does that impact you? Celebrate this amazing truth!*
- *If not, what is keeping you from accepting this truth of your identity in Jesus?*

If you are struggling to embrace the truth of your identity as Jesus’ beloved friend, ask him to reveal every lie underneath this struggle. Ask him to align your view of friendship and of yourself with his view of friendship and of you.

NOTES

[FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS] WEEK 6 - DAY 2

“God didn’t want me to *do more for* Him. He wanted me to *be more with* Him.”

“I’d become an *expert at serving God* but somehow remained a *novice at being His friend*.”
(Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine*)

If we’re honest with ourselves, many (if not all of us) can relate to these statements. It’s so easy to get caught up in the **work of the Lord** that we completely miss the **Lord of the work**. Growing up in a performance centered culture, it’s no surprise Christians are very comfortable serving God but have little to no idea how to be His friend.

Let’s be clear - this is **not** God’s desire for His children. In His eyes, living like this is **not** the Kingdom Norm. The following is Bruce Wilkinson’s **Five Abiding Busters** - common mistakes Christians make in attempting to abide in a loving friendship with God.

FIVE ABIDING BUSTERS

1. The “But I Don’t Feel Anything” Foul-Up

- You assume if you didn’t experience strong emotions then nothing happened.
- Read Psalm 145:18; 1 John 3:19-20.

2. The “He Doesn’t Like Me” Muddle

- You believe God loves you, but you doubt that He actually likes you.
- Read John 15:15; Ephesians 3:17-19; 1 John 3:1.

3. The “I’m Too Busy” Blunder

- You let your schedule keep you from regular abiding, but you think God will connect with you anyway.
- Read Isaiah 40:31; Matthew 6:33; Matthew 11:28

4. The “Sin Doesn’t Matter” Mistake

- You think ongoing disobedience won’t keep you from abiding, especially if you experience pleasant feelings during church.
- Read Psalm 15; Psalm 66:18-20; James 4:8; 1 John 1:5-7

5. The “Going Through The Motions” Notion

- You think bible reading and prayer are proof you’re having a relationship with God.
- Read 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 27:4-8; Matthew 5:6

[APPLICATION]

As you read through the **Five Abiding Busters**, did the Holy Spirit convict you of any of them?

If so, bring every area into the Light and blood of Jesus Christ. Receive His redemption and forgiveness. Read the scriptures that speak against each lie. Proclaim it over your life.

NOTES

[FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS] WEEK 6 - DAY 3

John 15:11 “These things I have spoken to you, that *my joy may be in you*, and that *your joy may be full*.”

“Unless my friendship with God became my first priority, I would never fulfill my true destiny as a Christian.”
(Bruce Wilkinson, Secrets of the Vine)

Two days ago we learned this extraordinary truth: Jesus calls you *disciple, kingdom partner, confidant and beloved friend*. Because you are His beloved friend, Jesus desires to reveal to you everything he hears from his Father. On top of that, Jesus said his love for you is similar to the love he receives from his Father. Who doesn't want that?

Yesterday, we learned about five common mistakes followers of Jesus make when they attempt to abide in Jesus. Today, we're going to go over *some benefits of abiding in a loving friendship with Jesus* (from Wilkinson's Secrets of the Vine).

BENEFITS OF ABIDING

1. Abiding helps us to sense God's leading.

- “*Abiding helps us to accomplish more for Him because we are more in tune with His directives.*” (Wilkinson, Secrets of the Vine)
- Abiding teaches us to recognize God's “still small voice” and become more sensitized with His ways.

2. Abiding helps us to tap into God's spiritual riches.

- In Acts 14, Peter and John speak with a group of highly influential religious leaders. The text says these leaders were “*astonished*” with Peter and John's boldness. Why? They knew Peter and John were “*uneducated, common men.*” So then, where did their boldness come from? The religious leaders “*recognized that [Peter and John] had been with Jesus.*” (Acts 14:14)
- When you abide in Jesus, you are filled with His Spirit, power and boldness.

3. Abiding gives us the “rest” we need to bear more fruit.

- “*When we spend intimate time with our Savior, we are strengthened and refreshed to do His work.*” (Wilkinson)

4. Abiding makes our joy complete.

- In John 15:11, Jesus tells us we are to abide in Him so that His “*joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*” The word “full” in ancient Greek is defined as “*to make complete in every way; to render perfect.*”
- When we abide in Jesus, He is doing the supernatural work of completing and perfecting our joy!

5. Abiding carries with it a promise of answered prayer.

- “*Nothing pleases God more than when we ask for what He wants to give. When we spend time with Him and allow His priorities, passions, and purposes to motivate us, we will ask for the things that are closest to His heart.*” (Wilkinson)
- Read John 15:7-8, 16

[APPLICATION]

If you are not experiencing any of these benefits yet from abiding in a loving friendship with Jesus, go to Him in prayer and ask for them! Jesus loves to answer these prayer requests!

If you are experiencing some of these benefits from abiding in Jesus, that's great! Keep nurturing your friendship with Him!

NOTES

[FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS] WEEK 6 - DAY 4

John 15:4 “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, *unless you abide in me.*”

John 15:7 “If you abide in me, and *my words abide in you*, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

John 15:10 “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.

Day 1 of this week's devotional painted a picture of what a loving friendship with Jesus looks like. Day 2 focused on the **Five Abiding Busters**, some common mistakes Christians make in attempting to abide in Jesus. Day 3 centered on the benefits of abiding in friendship with Jesus. Today, we'll go into how to build this wonderful, life-changing friendship with Jesus.

Ask any Christian, “How do you build a relationship or friendship with Jesus?” and you will most likely hear Bible reading and prayer. Yes, these two spiritual disciplines are absolutely vital in deepening intimacy with Jesus. However, it is entirely possible to read the Bible and pray without abiding in Jesus. Wilkinson wrote, “**reading a book about a person isn't the same thing as knowing the person who wrote the book.** *The challenge in abiding is always to break through from dutiful activities to a living, flourishing relationship with God.*”

[APPLICATION] DEVELOPING A LOVING FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS (from Wilkinson's Secrets of the Vine)

To break free from “doing my religious duty” to breaking through to “abiding in Jesus”, deepen the quality of your time with Him by:

- **Set apart the kind of time that will build relationship.**
 - It's very difficult to have meaningful connections with Jesus minutes before going to sleep.
 - Set aside a significant time and place where distractions are minimized so you can focus on abiding in Jesus.
- **Read and savor God's words to you.**
 - You're reading the Word of God to have an encounter with the God of the Word.
 - Receive, treasure, and allow His Word to penetrate deep into your mind and soul (Colossians 3:16).
- **Pray: talk and listen to a Person.**
 - We learned that Jesus sees you as his beloved friend. He wants to hear from you. Tell him your requests, worries and gratitude.
 - “*Risk being honest, and expect His insight in return.*” (Wilkinson)
 - Ask Him for wisdom and guidance.
 - Jesus sees you as His confidant - desiring to reveal everything the Father has given Him. He wants to talk to you. Be still, give Him your ear and listen.
 - Seek Him until you encounter Him.
- **Engage in other practices that help you connect deeply with God.**
 - Listening to worship music, playing worship music, reading a Christian book, taking a walk outside, having faith conversations with friends, etc.
- **Keep a daily written record of what God is doing in your life.**
 - This is not just a journal. This is a record of your personal faith journey with God.
 - Don't hold back. Tell him everything: the good, the bad, the ugly. He can handle it.
 - Keep track of the prayers you've made and how God has responded to them. It's very encouraging to go back and read how God has answered your past prayers, especially when you're currently going through a difficult time.

NOTES

[FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS] WEEK 6 - DAY 5

“A rule I have had for years is: to treat the Lord Jesus Christ as a *personal friend*. His is not a creed, a mere doctrine, but it is He Himself we have.” (D.L. Moody)

“The steady discipline of intimate friendship with Jesus results in men *becoming like Him*.” (Harry Emerson Fosdick)

Let's recap what a friendship with Jesus looks like:

- You are the recipient of Jesus' love - a love that led Him to lay down his life for you (John 15:9,13).
- He calls you His “friend” and Kingdom partner (John 15:14).
- He is your confidant - telling you everything the Father shares with Him (John 15:15).
- He desires to fill you with His joy so that your joy may be complete (John 15:11).

Jesus calls you his “friend.” Not a “Facebook friend”, who you barely interact with on a personal level. You are a friend held in such high regard that he voluntarily gave His life for you. This friendship is so unique because we will never repay back the glorious riches we receive from our dear Friend.

No friend is...

- More loving than Jesus,
- More gracious than Jesus,
- More faithful than Jesus,
- More patient than Jesus,
- More courageous to reveal harmful areas of our lives (even if it leads to us running away from Him) than Jesus.

Jesus, your Friend, is asking you to draw near and abide with Him.

Do you want that? He's waiting. Go to Jesus.

[APPLICATION]

Seek Jesus through the disciplines mentioned in yesterday's devotional. Go with expectation to meet Him.

NOTES

[LOVE FOR OTHERS] WEEK 7 - DAY 1

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that *you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*"

John 15:12 "This is my commandment, that *you love one another as I have loved you.*"

Matthew 22:37-39 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

All of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels can be summed up in Matthew 22:37-39...love God and love people. So, here's the question for today's devotional: **why is loving one another so important?**

1) **Jesus commands us to. Repeatedly.** If abiding in Jesus is about aligning our ways to His ways, then we better get on the "**Love One Another**" train quick. And according to Jesus, this is the *second greatest commandment* by which we are to live our lives. **SECOND.** And Jesus backed up His words by laying down his life for people who were utterly undeserving of such a sacrifice.

2) One bible commentary says, "*Jesus knows that **the future of the disciples' work among others depends on their attitude towards one another.** His stress on love had been underscored earlier in this discourse (John 14:15,21,23,28).*"

It is only through loving one another that we can live in **unity** with others, not **rivalry**.

It is only through loving one another that we can live in **trust** with others, not **suspicion**.

It is only through loving one another that we can live to **build up** others, not **tear down**.

3) **How we love others reveal how we love (and abide in) God.**

"If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." [1 John 4:20 ESV]

"Thus you will recognize them by their fruits." [Matthew 7:20 ESV]

Our love for others is a **reliable indicator** of the place God holds in our hearts. You want to know if you're abiding in Jesus? Ask those closest to you, "Have I been loving to you lately?"

[APPLICATION]

Think about your interactions with your family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. from the last month.

- *How have you been loving people?*
- *Have you given yourself a "free pass" on loving a particular person or group of people? If so, what's underneath that?*
- *Do your actions help foster unity*
- *Do your actions create trust?*
- *Do your actions build others up?*

Go before Jesus in prayer and ask Him to reveal all areas of loving others that are not aligned with His way of love. If there are areas of sin in your life, repent, receive His forgiveness, and ask Jesus to change your heart to love as He commands.

NOTES

[LOVE FOR OTHERS] WEEK 7 - DAY 2

John 15:12 “This is my commandment, that *you love one another as I have loved you.*”

“Love one another.” Did Jesus *really* mean that? Surely, he doesn’t expect me to love that coworker who lied, cheated and backstabbed me into getting that promotion I wanted, right? Jesus doesn’t really expect me to love my relative who is always looking for an opportunity to critique and judge me, right? He doesn’t want me to love that person at church who is always rude, ungrateful and criticizing others, right. **These people** can’t possibly be included in the “one another” group Jesus mentioned in verse 12, right?!

You know the answer. There are no exceptions to this command. During the famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives a radical challenge to a new way to love:

Matthew 5:44,46 ESV

“**44** But I say to you, *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*”

“**46** For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? *Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*”

Jesus made it clear: loving your friends and hating your enemies is easy; even the “tax collectors”, those seen as scoundrels and without morals, do that. Those who abide in Jesus love everyone. And let’s not forget the last five words of John 15:12 - “**as I have loved you.**” This love is not cheap; it will cost you. This love will stretch you in uncomfortable and possibly awkward ways. But, it’s this kind of love that sets you apart as Jesus’ disciples. This is the kind of love, when exemplified through you, that can radically change the coldest of hearts and bring people to Jesus.

[APPLICATION]

Who is difficult to love these days?

Is God calling you to pray for someone who has or is treating you unfairly?

Are you holding onto unforgiveness and bitterness towards someone?

Is God convicting you to forgive him/her? Do you need to ask someone for forgiveness?

Write down all the names the Holy Spirit is bringing to the light.

Ask the Spirit to reveal the offenses committed against you and all the offenses you have committed against another.

Write them all down.

We’ll address them tomorrow.

NOTES

[LOVE FOR OTHERS] WEEK 7 - DAY 3

Colossians 3:12-14 "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, *compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

Difficult people. They come in all backgrounds: age, ethnic, cultural, religious, academic, and socio-economic. And they've been around since Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve's cover was blown in the Garden and God asked them about eating the forbidden fruit, Adam *completely threw Eve under the bus* by saying, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." (Genesis 3:12) So much for owning your decision, Adam! Throughout the Bible we see disobedient, complaining, ungrateful people receive undeserved love, patience and redemption from God. God loves difficult people. They matter to Him. So, difficult people must matter to us and we must love them too.

Today, we're going to talk about practical steps to love people, especially difficult ones. If God revealed some difficult people in yesterday's devotional, try these steps.

[APPLICATION] Few Practical Steps To Love Difficult People

Pray for your own heart.

- Ask God to soften your heart towards this person.
- Repent if you have held onto anger, bitterness and/or unforgiveness against this person.
- Put on compassion, meekness and patience to understand this person's struggles (Colossians 3:12-14).

- If YOU have been a difficult person, ask God to soften your heart towards a person you have wronged.
- Repent for how you have affected that person.
- Ask God for help in reconciling this relationship.

Pray for them.

- Ask God to work in their heart, as He is working in yours right now, drawing them to Himself so they can become more like Jesus (Philippians 1:9-11).

Move towards them, not away from them.

- Praying for the difficult people in your life is great. Now, look for ways to engage them in a conversation, meet them for a coffee, etc.

Find specific ways to bless them.

- Pray blessings over them. If you're not sure how to bless them, think of every blessing you want from God and pray that over them.
- Write them a note of appreciation. Buy them a gift card to their favorite cafe. Tell them you are praying for them.

Give them (lots of) grace.

- Remember God's abundant grace poured out for you and your mess ups. Now, ask God to help you extend the same grace given to you to this person, to forgive them as God has forgiven you (Colossians 3:13).

Remember that you can be the difficult person too.

- This goes back to step 1 and looking at yourself. We're just as capable of doing what that person did to you.
- Instead of wanting to run away or ignore this person, keep engaging him/her with the life-changing love of God!
- This touches the heart of God and it will touch that person's heart as well.

God is with you and for you! You can do this!

NOTES

[LOVE FOR OTHERS] WEEK 7 - DAY 4

Romans 15:7 “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

Romans 12:10 “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”

If you're like me (and countless number of Christians), getting to know new people can be tough. It requires time and energy to meet new people. If you're happy with your current group of friends, why bother getting to know new folks?

Because the neighbor you rarely talk to needs you. And you need them too.

Your new co-worker needs you. And you need them too.

The person whose been sitting next to you at church for the last month needs you. And you need them too.

When you accepted Jesus as your Lord, you became a member of the Family of God. Your life is interwoven by the Holy Spirit to millions of your spiritual brothers and sisters around the world. And God, in His infinite wisdom, has chosen to **work through you** to minister His life-transforming love to your spiritual siblings (many of whom you don't know), as well as, those who are not YET part of the Family. **This works the other way too!** Each of us is a vehicle of Jesus' life-changing love and life to one another!

[APPLICATION] Few Practical Steps To Love New People

Welcome people like friends rather than strangers.

-Loving someone often begins with our attitude. Extend them the same grace you would to a friend. (Romans 15:7)

Talk to someone different from you.

-It's always interesting to hear people's life stories from different upbringings and backgrounds. Everyone has something valuable to offer through their friendship. (James 2:9)

Look to serve a felt need.

-The early church flourished because people were meeting the needs of others by selling their possessions and spreading the proceeds to those in need (Acts 2:44-47). See if there is a need you can fill.

Don't try to look perfect in front of others. In fact, share how God moved through your imperfect life.

-Don't be someone you're not. People gravitate towards authenticity.

-If God leads you, share a time when God moved through your imperfect life. You have more in common with that person than you think.

Share a meal at your home.

-There's something disarming about going to someone's home and eating a home cooked meal.

-Welcome them like friends and the rest will take care of itself.

Pray together.

-Similar to yesterday's tips to pray blessings over difficult people in your life, bless them with prayer.

-Blessing others with no strings attached is countercultural. It will be a powerful witness of Jesus' love for them.

NOTES

[LOVE FOR OTHERS] WEEK 7 - DAY 5

John 15:12 “**This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.**”

Throughout this series we learned that abiding in Jesus is to be in relationship with Him, and in order to do that we must be in tune with and aligned with all that He desires for our lives. Jesus made it plain and simple, His heart for us is to **love all people** (including difficult and new people) **just as He loves us**. This week, we went over some practical steps on how to do that.

Now, lets put our faith in action. Ask Jesus to reveal His heart to you about the people in your life.

[APPLICATION]

Family

-Is there someone I need to reconcile with?

-Is there someone you want to pour out your love on through me? How?

Friends

-Is there someone I need to reconcile with?

-Is there someone you want to pour out your love on through me? How?

Neighbors

-Is there someone I need to reconcile with?

-Is there someone you want to pour out your love on through me? How?

Co-workers

-Is there someone I need to reconcile with?

-Is there someone you want to pour out your love on through me? How?

Others

-Is there anyone else I need to reconcile with?

-Is there anyone else you want to pour out your love on through me? How?

NOTES

[FRUITFULNESS] WEEK 8 - DAY 1

John 15:8 “By this my *Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit* and so prove to be my disciples.”

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but *I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit* and that your fruit should abide”

Disciples of Jesus, you were chosen and appointed to bear **fruit**. Bearing fruit is NOT reserved for pastors, church leaders, missionaries, or the “holy people.” Wilkinson said, “*Bearing fruit is not some unique phenomenon reserved for certain kinds of Christians. It is the destiny of every believer.*” If this is Jesus’ mandate for you and I, let’s get on the same page about bearing fruit.

What is “fruit”?

Wilkinson says fruit is all good works (thoughts, attitudes, actions) that “God values because it glorifies Him.” There are two types of fruit: inner and outer.

- **Inner fruit** = the *Christlike qualities* that God nurtures and produces in you (Galatians 5:22).
- **Outer fruit** = the *good work* you do when you allow God to work through you to bring Him glory, including sharing your faith (2 Cor. 9:8). *The motivation for good works is always to bring God glory.*

What is the purpose of bearing fruit?

John made it plain and simple, we bear fruit so that the Father is glorified. We know God has produced in us and through us genuine Kingdom fruit when people acknowledge Him and give Him praise.

“We’re here to fulfill God’s dreams - that we will bring Him glory through a remarkably abundant life. That’s how we find our greatest personal fulfillment, now and for eternity.” (Wilkinson, Secrets of the Vine)

Who are the key players of bearing fruit?

Jesus = “the true vine”

- Notice how Jesus describes himself, “I am the **true** vine.” There are many “vines” in this world calling and enticing us to attach ourselves to it to find our sense of worth, direction and purpose in life. It is only when we are connected to the **true vine** that we can produce **true fruit**. Every other vine produces **counterfeit fruit**.

Father = “the vinedresser”

- “*Success in raising any crop depends largely on the skill of the [vinedresser]. God tends it, waters it, and endeavors to protect it and cultivate it so that it will produce its maximum yield. He is concerned that the vine be healthy and productive. This caring process is a picture of God’s dealings with humans.*” (NIV Bible Commentary)

Us = “the branches”

- We, the branches, are the *main focus of the vinedresser’s efforts* because it is through us that fruit is produced. If we want to produce good fruit, *we must trust the vinedresser’s process.*
- “*Every branch in the vineyard is unique, and when harvest day arrives, each will have produced a different-sized crop.*” (Wilkinson, Secrets of the Vine)

Four levels of fruit bearing

(1) “No fruit” | (2) “fruit” | (3) “more fruit” | (4) “much fruit” (John 15:2,5)

John says there are four different levels of fruit bearing, and the process to go from “no fruit” to “much fruit” is simple: keep abiding in Jesus.

“The Father wants more fruit from us so much that He actively tends our lives so we will keep moving up - from a barren to a productive branch, from an empty to an overflowing basket.” (Wilkinson, Secrets of the Vine)

[APPLICATION]

- Am I connected to Jesus, the True Vine? If not, what/who am I connected to? Repent and reconnect yourself to Jesus.
- Am I resisting You, the Vinedresser, from doing Your work in my life? If so, how? Repent and give Him full access.
- What kind of inner and outer fruit have you seen in your life in the last 3 months? If you’re not sure, ask a few people closest to you.
- Do you seek to honor and glorify God when you’re bearing inner and outer fruit? If not, what are your motivations in producing fruit? Ask God to realign your desire to bear fruit with His desire for your life.

[FRUITFULNESS] WEEK 8 - DAY 2

John 15:2 “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he *takes away*, and every branch that does bear fruit he *prunes*, that it may bear more fruit.”

“God’s strategy for coaxing a greater harvest out of His branches is not the one you and I would prefer. His plan is to prune, which means to thin, to reduce, to cut off.” (Wilkinson, Secrets of the Vine)

PRUNING

We learned about pruning in Week 2 of the devotional, however, this topic needs to be addressed again as we talk about abiding in fruitfulness. If the purpose of bearing fruit is to point people to God and glorify Him, we must embrace the process of pruning so God can yield the maximum amount of good fruit through us.

Pruning is necessary because we, like grapes, are constantly growing in different areas of our lives. Here’s the thing about experiencing growth - **new growth** doesn’t necessarily equate to **good growth**. Wilkinson wrote, “*Left to itself, a grape plant will always favor new growth over grapes. The result? From a distance, luxurious growth, an impressive achievement. Up close, an underwhelming harvest.*” Did you catch that? On the surface it may look like you’re producing some great looking fruit, but if you take a closer look, your branches may be empty or bearing little fruit. This is why it’s imperative that God “*cut away all immature commitments and lesser priorities to make room for even greater abundance*” (Wilkinson).

[WARNING] DISCIPLINE ≠ PRUNING

Because of the uncomfortable nature of pruning, many confuse God’s pruning with His discipline. Even though both discipline and pruning may feel and look similar, their purposes are entirely different.

Discipline is about **sin**. **Pruning** is about **self**.

Wilkinson said that to confuse the two can be “disastrous” to one’s faith: “*Jesus knew that if His future followers misread the Vinedresser’s actions in their lives, they would come to the **wrong conclusions about the Vinedresser’s purpose and plan.***” What goes through your mind when you know you’re living in obedience to God’s word, fighting to stay aligned to Jesus’ will and yet it feels like you’re being disciplined, as if you’re living in grievous sin? Confusing pruning with discipline can lead to anger and bitterness towards God and a warped view of Him. So many (including myself) have fallen into this trap, and as a result walked away from God, which slides us back into being disciplined by God. What a vicious cycle this can become. We’ll go more into God’s discipline tomorrow.

[APPLICATION]

- Are you confusing **new growth** for **good growth**? Are you holding onto unhealthy areas of growth? Ask God to reveal all areas of growth that need to go.
- Are you in a season of pruning or discipline, but you’re not sure which one?
 - Remember, discipline deals with sin and pruning deals with self.
 - Ask God, “*Do I have a major sin that’s causing you discipline me?*”
 - Pray, “*God, if You don’t show me in the next week that this is discipline, then I will take it by faith that you are pruning me.*”
- **Helpful tips:**
 - **Discipline** is usually marked by:
 - Little or no evidence of fruit being produced
 - Feelings of guilt, shame and/or sadness
 - **Pruning** is usually marked by:
 - Evidence of fruit
 - Feelings of relief and trust

NOTES

[FRUITFULNESS] WEEK 8 - DAY 3

John 15:2 “Every branch in me that does *not bear fruit he takes away*”

John 15:4 “Abide in me, and I in you. As the *branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*”

ABIDING DURING FRUITLESSNESS / DISCIPLINE

So, God “*takes away*” those who bear no fruit? It sounds like a line from an old gangster movie when the mob boss wants to kill someone, he says, “Take him away!” Is this God’s desire? To completely cut off, to spiritually kill Jesus followers who fail to produce any fruit? **ABSOLUTELY NOT!**

“Takes away” comes from the Greek word “airo”, which more accurately translates to “take up” or “lift up”. In fact, never in the Bible is the Greek word “airo” used to mean to completely cut someone off. If you are experiencing a (short or long) season of fruitlessness, rest assured that you are not being cut off from God.

“Lifting up”

Wilkinson shares an interaction he had with a man who owns a vineyard in northern California, and this man shared his insights on what it means for vinedressers to “lift up” branches that bear no fruit.

*“New branches have a natural tendency to trail down and grow along the ground. But they don’t bear fruit down there. **When branches grow along the ground, the leaves get coated in dust. When it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless.**”*

“What do you do?” Wilkinson asked. “Cut it off and throw it away?”

*“Oh, no!” he exclaimed. “**The branch is much too valuable for that.** We go through the vineyard with a bucket of water looking for those branches. **We lift them up and wash them off. Then we wrap them around the trellis or tie them up. Pretty soon they’re thriving.**”*

Friends, sin is like the dirt that covers the leaves and grapes and causes it become sick and useless. God, your loving Vinedresser, can not stand by and watch you lying on the ground, sick and not producing any fruit. His process of “lifting you up” from the ground, cleaning and restoring you to a place of fruitfulness, or abundant life, is **discipline**.

“God’s discipline starts because of a major sin problem - an unconforted behavior or attitude that is blighting your life. It ends when the problem ends.” (Wilkinson, Secrets of the Vine)

If you are being disciplined by God right now, take heart for **He only disciplines those He dearly loves** (Hebrews 12:5-6). I’ll say it again, God’s motivation in your discipline is rooted in love, the same love that sent Jesus on the cross to die for your sins so you can have forgiveness and new life in Jesus. On top of that, **God redeems the pain** experienced from the discipline by producing Christlike character (good inner fruit) in you, which in turn produces good outer fruit.

Being disciplined by God is not easy or fun. Trust His process. Turn away from living in sin. Realign your life and follow His ways. If you do, you will bear fruit again!

[APPLICATION]

- *If you’re in a season of discipline, what area(s) do you need to surrender to God?*
 - If you’re not sure, ask God to reveal all areas that are not aligned with His ways. Repent and receive forgiveness from Jesus’ work on the cross.
- *Are there any lies the enemy of your soul is telling you so you will remain in this state of fruitlessness?*
 - If so, bring it into the Light of Christ. Expose it for what it is (A LIE!) and bring it to the cross, where Jesus’ blood broke the power of lies over our lives.

NOTES

[FRUITFULNESS] WEEK 8 - DAY 4

John 15:8 “By this my Father is glorified, that you *bear much fruit* and so prove to be my disciples.

“The vine’s ability to produce growth increases each year, but without intensive pruning the plant weakens and its crop diminishes. *Mature branches must be pruned hard to achieve maximum yields.*” (Wilkinson, Secrets of the Vine)

ABIDING DURING MATURE PRUNING AND FRUITFULNESS

If you are producing good fruit in your life, that’s great! The fruit is evidence that you are Jesus’ disciples, living in alignment with Him and giving Him glory. So, now that you’ve produced some good fruit, what does God have in store for you, oh good and faithful servant? **More pruning!** Wait, what? When does the pruning end? One second before your last breathe on earth.

Wilkinson says the pruning we experience in our early years of faith are mostly about **outward activities and priorities**. As we mature in our faith, the pruning shifts towards our **values and personal identity**. He also adds:

*“In mature pruning, the **pruning will intensify** as God’s shears cut closer to the core of who you are. God isn’t trying to just take away; He’s faithfully at work to **make room to add strength, productivity, and spiritual power** in your life. **His goal is to bring you closer to the “perfect and complete” image of Christ.**”*

Mature pruning can also be described by a common Bible phrase, “**the testing of your faith**”, as seen in James 1:3-4. Tests of faith are trials and hardships that God uses to invite you into a deeper level of abiding and trust in Him. For those who lean into these tests of faith, they experience an expanding of the walls of their soul and faith, which creates more room for God’s strength, productivity and power.

Now, some of you may be thinking, “If I take my faith seriously and really abide in Jesus, am I going to be in this pruning season every single day?” The answer is “NO!” Pruning comes in seasons and all seasons have a beginning and an end. Fruitfulness always comes after pruning. So, if you’re in a time of bearing fruit, embrace it and enjoy the amazing rewards from living in obedience and alignment with Jesus! But also remember, a time of pruning will eventually come because greater level of fruitfulness awaits you and God wants to take you there!

Wilkinson created a list of “Prime Points of Pruning”. These are areas that tend to be difficult for people to surrender to God and keep us from living in an intimate relationship with (and alignment with) Jesus. Here they are:

1. The people you love.
2. Your right to know why God does what He does.
3. Your love for money and possessions.
4. The sources of your significance.

[APPLICATION]

Think of all the ways God has produced good fruit in your life this year. Write them down. Now, give thanks to God for moving powerfully in your life in these ways! If possible, take some time week to CELEBRATE the evidence of these good fruits in your life. If possible, celebrate with other people! Make this into your testimony of God’s faithfulness.

Pray: “Father, I thank you for working powerfully in and through me. I am in awe of the good fruit you have produced in my life (list them one-by-one). I believe there is greater abundance of fruit to be produced in my life and I recognize this will require deeper and more intensive pruning. God, have your way in me. Holy Spirit, help me to align my heart, body and mind to You so that the mature pruning process will accomplish its work in me. Take me to the places of my life that need to be surrendered, redeemed and empowered by Your Spirit so it can yield greater fruit. May all of this be done for Your glory alone. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

NOTES

[FRUITFULNESS] WEEK 8 - DAY 5

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

Friends, God did not choose you to be His disciple so that you will fail to produce any fruit. You were chosen to be fruitful. Receive that powerful Truth today.

YOU WERE CHOSEN BY GOD TO BE FRUITFUL AND GLORIFY HIM.

As you continue in your journey of abiding in Jesus, being pruned and producing fruit, we leave you with a few words of wisdom about this journey:

1. God can use you regardless of what season you're currently in.

- While we usually live in one season (pruning, discipline or fruitfulness) at a time, the different seasons can overlap.

2. God has very unique plans for YOU and they're tailored made for your success.

- Your needs are different from my needs, and your call is different from mine.
- Don't *compare* your level of fruitfulness with others. Bearing fruit is a gracious gift from God.

3. It's never too late to bear fruit.

- Again, don't play the Compare Game with others ability to bear good fruit.
- Until you breathe your last breath, its never too late to bear fruit!

4. You can rest in God's sovereign thing.

- You may be bearing fruit but you're not satisfied with the time it's taking to make this happen.
- God knows what He's doing in your life. Trust His timing.

5. Live in joy

- It's easy to become mired in the painful process of pruning or lamenting over your fruitlessness.
- Remember the promise Jesus gave in John 15:11, “*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*”
- Jesus promised his joy so that our joy will be “full”. A more accurate translation of that word “full” is “complete”. So, the purpose of Jesus downloading His joy in our lives is to **complete our joy**.

Now, as God's beloved children, forgiven and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we bless you in your journey. We bless you with a relentless pursuit for intimacy with Jesus. May nothing deter you from abiding in the Author and Perfecter of your faith. Whether in seasons of discipline or pruning, we pray that God will redeem it all so that only good fruit will emerge. May you celebrate the times of fruitfulness, giving God all the glory. And regardless of the season, may God fill you with His love so you can love others as He did to you.

Go. Abide in Jesus. Bear fruit. Love people.

We can't wait to hear what God is doing and will do in and through you!

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