

Abiding in Christ: Cultivating Union with God (Jn. 15:5)

I. THE CALL TO UNION WITH GOD

- A. John 15 is a highpoint in the Scripture in terms of our relationship with God. Jesus is the vine, the source of life, and we are the branches, the expression of His life. Jesus' main biblical exhortation was to "abide in Me" (v. 5, 9c) so that we may bear fruit that remains forever (v. 16).
⁵***"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me [talks to Me], and I in him [I talk to him], bears much fruit...¹⁶I chose you...that your fruit should remain..." (Jn. 15:5, 16)***
- B. Jesus chose us to bear fruit that would remain forever (v. 16). This is a most glorious reality for weak and broken people, that through the activity of the Spirit in us and through us, we can do things or bear fruit that God esteems forever. Our life becomes epic as we diligently press into a lifelong journey, knowing that He longs to be deeply engaged with us and that He sees, is moved by, and remembers all that we do in our quest to commune with Him in obedient love. Eternal rewards are about Jesus expressing how He feels about the way we loved Him in this age.
- C. ***Bears fruit:*** We bear fruit inwardly in our character and outwardly in our ministry and service to others in the grace of God—godly character (Rom. 6:22; 7:4-5; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9; Heb. 12:11; 13:15; Jas. 3:18) and ministry and service (Jn. 4:36; Rom. 1:13; 15:28; Phil. 1:22; Col. 1:5-6). Fruitfulness includes possessing love, humility, and purity and then inspiring others to the same.
- D. Transforming union with God has two elements—we abide in Christ, and Christ abides in us.
- E. ***Abiding in Christ:*** The main activity of a believer related to growing in God is abiding in Christ. It involves three things: *talking with God*, *applying His promises*, and *obeying His leadership*. Talking with God is the core activity of abiding. It starts here, but includes more. Abiding in Christ includes drawing on Him, reaching out to Him, as our source of life and leadership.
1. ***Talking with Jesus:*** The Christian life is an ongoing dialogue with a real Person. He has much to say, but He allows us to set the pace of the conversation with Him. If we start the conversation, He will continue it as long as we do. When we stop it, He stops it and waits until we begin again. Abiding in Christ involves an ongoing conversation that consists of many 10-20 second exchanges, strengthened by longer prayer times.
 2. ***Applying His Promises:*** Applying the promises of His Word empowers us to bear fruit. Shame, fear, and rejection rise up to challenge what He says about loving, forgiving, healing, providing for us, etc. We must apply the promise of the Word to our hearts by *confessing the truth* and *resisting lies* against it when feeling shame (Rom. 8:1; 10:10).
 3. ***Obeying His leadership:*** Jesus promises to manifest His presence to those who obey Him (Jn. 14:21-23). Only in the context of obedient love does He reveal the deep things of His heart. We must love God on His terms. Obedience is an expression of our love for Him.
²¹***"He who...keeps [My commands], it is he who loves Me...I will manifest Myself to him..."²³If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word...We will come to him."*** (Jn. 14:21-23)

- F. Our spiritual capacity to feel and experience God’s love increases as we obey Him (Mt. 5:8). We do not *earn* God’s love or blessing by our obedience. However, we *position ourselves* to receive, express, and experience more grace by setting our heart to walk in obedient love.
⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Mt 5:8)
- G. **Christ abiding in us:** There are two aspects to Christ abiding in us. First, He abides, or lives, in our spirit *instantly* at our new birth. Second, He abides in our hearts *progressively* as He manifests His presence in our soul, or heart, renewing our mind and emotions.
- H. Paul spoke of Jesus “dwelling in our heart,” abiding in us by His manifest presence, (Eph. 3:17), and of Christ being formed in our hearts (Gal. 4:19). We are to open our heart to God (Rev. 3:20).
¹⁶...that He would grant you...to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... (Eph. 3:16–17)
- I. **Christ abiding in our hearts:** This involves at least three activities of the Holy Spirit in us. The indwelling Spirit *teaches us* about Jesus’ heart, Word, and will; *inspires us* with courage to keep diligently seeking God; and *empowers us* by renewing our mind and emotions to live in obedient love. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would flow like a river out of our hearts to inspire, direct, and transform our mind and emotions and to minister to others in power (Jn. 7:38).
- J. Some only emphasize our *legal position* with Christ—our *justification* by faith (Rom. 3:21-31). Others emphasize our *living condition* with Christ—our *participation* with His indwelling life. Our *legal position* before God is based on us freely *receiving Jesus’ righteousness* (2 Cor. 5:21). Our *living condition* (our behavior) is based on our *response to the Spirit’s leadership* (Jn. 15:5).
- K. Practical ways to enhance our “abiding in Christ” relationship with God is to talk to Jesus by pray-reading the Word and by fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit.

II. TALKING TO JESUS: PRAY-READ THE WORD

- A. Talking with God is the core activity of abiding in Christ. Bible study is to lead us into conversation with God by giving the “conversational material” for our prayer life. It is simply speaking the truths of the Word back to Him as we read it. This makes prayer enjoyable.
(For free notes on How to “Pray-Read” the Word, see mikebickle.org)
- B. Talking to God as we pray-read the Word is a practical way to strengthen our abiding in Christ.
²Take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips [words of obedient love]. (Hos. 14:2)
- C. There are two broad categories of truth related to pray-reading the Word.
1. Scriptures that focus on promises **to believe** in God’s Word are passages that *declare* truths such as God loves, forgives, leads, protects, provides for us, etc.
 2. Scriptures that focus on exhortations **to obey** God’s Word are passages that *command* us to walk in purity, bridle our speech, serve others, give time and money to God, etc.

- D. We dialogue with God as we read the Word by praying back to God *promises to believe*.
⁹*“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)*
1. First, *we thank God* for a particular truth. We turn these truths into simple declarations of thanksgiving or trust. Say, “Thank You that You love me as the Father loves You, and that You forgave me.” Or declare, “I trust that You will lead, provide, and protect me.”
 2. Second, *we ask God to reveal or release* more about a specific truth to us. For example, pray, “Jesus, reveal to me how much You love and forgive me and the certainty of Your provision,” or, “Father, release Your promised guidance, provision, and protection,” etc.
- E. We dialogue with God as we read the Word and pray back to God *exhortations to obey*.
⁹*“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)*
1. First, *we commit ourselves to obey God* in the specific way set forth in a biblical passage. Make declarations of resolve to obey the Word as you read passages about obedience. Declare, “I set my heart to abide in You, to obey You with my speech, time, money, etc.”
 2. Second, *we ask God to empower us to obey* a particular truth seen in Scripture. Ask God for help by giving you wisdom, motivation, and power to obey in specific areas. For example, pray, “Father, help me to abide in You, to control my speech, to use my time and money in obedience.” “Lord, strengthen me to love You even as David did.”
- F. We will pray-read the Word ten times more if we schedule time for it. If we pray-read only when opportunity presents itself, then we will not do it nearly as much. Pray-reading the Word does not earn God’s love; it positions us to receive more. One way of fitting more scheduled times of pray-reading the Word into our schedule is to forego some activities that take up our free time.

III. FELLOWSHIPING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

- A. In prayer, we can focus our mind on God in two ways—on the Father who sits on His glorious throne (Rev. 4) and on God the Holy Spirit who lives in our spirit (Rom. 8:9). Paul referred to the blessing of fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit who dwells in us (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1).
¹⁴ *... and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor. 13:14, NAS)*
- B. Our fellowship with Him includes talking to Him. He will not force us into the conversation. But once we begin the conversation, He will talk back to us in various ways, including giving us subtle impressions (1 Kgs. 19:11-13) or sensitizing our emotions to feel His nearness, etc.
- C. The core reality of the new birth is that the Spirit comes to live in our spirit as a real person. The Holy of Holies is now in our spirit. The Spirit flows from within us (Jn. 7:38). It is translated as our *belly* (KJV) and, more accurately, as our *heart* (NKJ) or *innermost being* (NAS).
¹⁷ *But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. (1 Cor 6:17)*
³⁸ *“He that believeth on Me...out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (Jn. 7:38, KJV)*

- D. The language of our mind is images. Scripture describes God as light (1 Jn. 1:5). Thus I think of the Spirit as the Shekinah glory of God dwelling in my spirit. When I talk to Him, I picture a bright, diamond-like glorious person shining in my spirit. (I am sure that is not exactly how it is.)
- E. We *walk in the Spirit* only to the measure that we *talk with the Spirit*. Therefore, we will not obey the Spirit or walk in the Spirit any more than we talk to the Spirit. The *only* way to overcome lust is by dialoguing with the Spirit. This is the same truth as abiding in Christ.
- ¹⁶*I say then: walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)*
- F. One of my favorite prayers that I use most often is asking the Spirit to let me *see what He sees and feel what He feels* about my life, my family, and many others, as well as what He sees and feels about Jesus, the Church, the great harvest, the nations, the end times, etc.

IV. T-R-U-S-T

When talking with the Spirit, I often use the acronym: **T-R-U-S-T**. In talking with the Spirit, take time to linger, speaking slowly and softly with short, simple phrases, occasionally whispering affectionate statements of your love for Him, while praying in the spirit gently and intermittently (as you journal). (*For free notes on Fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit and T-R-U-S-T, see mikebickle.org*)

T- Thank You: We turn our attention inward to recognize the Spirit’s presence simply by thanking Him for His indwelling presence. Pray, “Thank You, Holy Spirit, for Your bright presence in my spirit.”

R- Release revelation of Your glory: Ask the Spirit to release revelation of the realm of God’s glory and heart. Pray, “Holy Spirit, open my eyes to see the realm of Your glory and to encounter Your heart.”

¹⁷*...Father of glory, may give to you the spirit...of revelation in the knowledge of Him... (Eph. 1:17)*

U- Use me: Ask the Spirit to use you more in the spiritual gifts to minister to others (1 Cor. 12:7-9). Pray, “Holy Spirit, release a greater manifestation of Your gifts and power through me to help others.”

S- Strengthen me: Ask the Spirit to strengthen your mind and emotions with His might or power.

¹⁶*...be strengthened...through His Spirit...¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts... (Eph. 3:16-17)*

T- Teach me: Ask the Spirit to teach you about God’s Word, will, and ways by giving you wisdom and creative ideas for every area in your life, including how to steward your money, manage your schedule, prosper in relationships (in the home, church, office, ministry), and walk in purity and health (physically and emotionally). Ask Him for new ideas, to order your steps, and open doors of opportunity.

²⁶*“The Holy Spirit...will teach you all things...” (Jn. 14:26)*

V. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

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