

Session 5 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)**

We are continuing in our series on "Growing in Prayer" and looking at John 15 tonight. Most agree that John 15 is the high point in the Scriptures in terms of developing our personal relationship with the Lord. There is no other chapter in the Bible that gives us more practical insight and exhortation on this than John 15. Of course it is appropriate that it was given by the very lips of Jesus, the One who died that He could have this intimate relationship with His people forever and forever. The Bridegroom King, He is not only a King with power, but He is a Bridegroom with desire. He has desire for deep interaction with His people.

We are going to look at a few phrases in John 15. Jesus said in verse 5, "I am the vine. You are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in Him, that person will bear much fruit." In verse 16, He goes on to say, "I chose you that your fruit would remain." Let's read that again, and I will make a couple comments as we read over it.

Jesus said in verse 5, "I am the vine." In effect He is saying, "I am the source of the supernatural life that your heart craves for. I am the source." Then He made a very dramatic statement. He says, "You are the branches." That is, "You are the expression of My supernatural life in a fallen world. I chose you as weak and broken people to be the conduit through which My presence would be ministered in a fallen world. I will touch you, heal you, and restore you to all that My Father intended you to be."

He gives the most simple description of how we can enter into this relationship of Him being the vine—the source of supernatural life—and us being the branch—the expression or conduit of that life into a fallen world. It is so simple and yet so profound. He said, "He who abides in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit." For the phrase "abides in Me," if I had to summarize that in one short phrase, I would use the phrase, "He who talks to Me." Abiding is more than talking to Him, but it starts with talking to Him and then goes beyond that. That is the beginning place of this relationship. Just to make it really simple, He is saying, "If you will talk to Me, I will talk to you, and you will bear much fruit."

Verse 16, "And I chose you"—this is My idea, the devil cannot stop it from happening. It is My idea. I chose you for this reality that you would bear fruit. You are weak and broken people, but you are the apple of My eye—"that your fruit should remain." The idea is your fruit will remain past the grave. It will not remain for a few years or a few decades. Certainly that, but far longer than that. You will do things in this world, in this age, that will impact people in this age and will last beyond the grave is what He is saying. What an amazing statement! That we would have fruit that remains. That is what we long for, is it not? We long to be able to do and say things that matter even past the grave.

Jesus' main biblical exhortation, I believe in the whole of all the gospels, is here in John 15. I do not think there is another exhortation that is more fundamental to His teaching than this one right here, "abide in Me" or "abide in My love." He says that in verse 5 and again in verse 9. This is the highest priority for us to cultivate because this is Jesus Himself teaching right before He would go to the cross, His final private teaching in the upper room. He is saying, in essence, "I am telling you this is the way forward."

The reason I am emphasizing this is because this is not a reality we can afford to neglect. We can't just say, "That is a cool verse," underline it in our Bible, and go on. This is of the highest priority in our lives to cultivate. It is the only way we can cultivate fruit past the grave, the only way we can bear fruit that remains or fruit that impacts people spirituality. You can have the greatest personality and all the natural giftings. You can move people, get them to jump, dance, get excited, give money, and go to the mission field. You can get them to do a whole bunch of activities by your personality, but you cannot move their hearts spiritually by your giftings. It takes supernatural life. It takes a presence of a life—the Holy Spirit—that is more than ability.

Jesus is saying, "You can get people to move outwardly, but you cannot touch them spiritually without Me moving through you." The only thing that is going to last beyond the grave is the way we have touched people and moved them spiritually. We cannot measure accurately how we have done that. You have said simple words to people that have moved them in a way that you cannot measure, that you do not know, and you cannot remember, but He remembers forever. He said, "Even if you give a cup of cold water in My name, I will remember it, and I will reward you even in the age to come." He rewards us for the simplest things. Here He is talking about the ability to bear fruit through our words and through our deeds. By living this life with Jesus, even simple acts of service will move people spiritually. You may not be able to measure it or see it. It moves them and this is what He means by fruit that remains.

- 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.

Being chosen by Jesus to bear fruit that would remain forever is the most glorious reality for weak and broken people. When I say weak and broken, I mean in our flesh. I do not mean who we are in Christ, but just in our natural mindset and our emotional makeup. We are in need of the power of God that we received freely in Christ at the new creation. We need for that power to flow through us. Beloved, we can do things that God esteems and remembers forever. Isn't that amazing? You can say words of encouragement that God will remember forever. You can give someone a cup of cold water in His name and He will remember it forever. That is a remarkable reality.

Our life becomes epic. Honestly our life is epic, knowing that He longs to be engaged with us at this level. He is saying, "I want you to abide in Me. I want this deep interaction." We are talking about the Almighty God, the uncreated God who always was and always will be. He is saying, "I want to abide in you and you in Me." It is the most remarkable invitation that the God of creation calls us to this depth. Our life is epic, knowing that He sees and is moved by the simple words and the things we do. Beloved, when we get locked into this reality, the privilege of abiding and the fruit that comes out of it, then abiding in Him becomes more than a Bible extortion. It becomes the passion of our life, the priority of our life. Whatever else we have to lay aside, we are going to cultivate this reality with Him.

Over the years I have heard some people say, "I do not really care about eternal rewards. I love God. God loves me. That is enough." Well, I teach on eternal rewards. I have taught on them many times over the last forty years. I love the subject of eternal rewards. I want eternal rewards. But it is not just that; it is that Jesus taught more on eternal rewards, meaning fruit that remains forever and His response to it. He taught on the subject of eternal rewards more than any other man in the Bible. Nobody taught as much on that subject as Jesus. That is because He understood it the most. Eternal rewards are not about us being rewarded so we can

strut in front of each other with superiority in the age to come. It is not like God rewards me so I can say, “So there,” to you. That is not what this is about. If that is what you think, then I understand why you do not care about eternal rewards.

Giving eternal rewards is Jesus expressing how He feels about the way you loved Him in this life. By eternal rewards Jesus is responding to you, giving an open expression about you. There are many kinds of eternal rewards. He is saying, “This is how I felt about how you lived on the earth.” Beloved, I want those. I want those declarations of how He was moved and how He was touched. I want to bear fruit. I want to do things that last beyond the grave. Not just the impact on people, but the impact on His heart, that He would remember it forever. Our life becomes epic knowing that He longs for this kind of depth of interaction. That He remembers and is moved so deeply by the simple things we do.

- 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.

He says, “You will bear fruit.” Fruit bearing in the New Testament is twofold. There is an inward fruit bearing: growing in love, growing in purity, growing in humility. There is an outward fruit bearing that is impacting other people in ministry. It is not about how many people respond to our public ministry, how big your congregation is or how many CDs you sell. That is not what He is talking about. He is talking about people being moved spiritually towards Him because of our words and because of our deeds.

Again, we cannot measure the amount of that. I have no idea if people are moved or not moved. They may get excited, and I can see that outwardly. But it is what they do in their heart and interaction with God. Only the Spirit can give that. That is fruit bearing. Simple words spoken to your children, to your family members, to your neighbors, in the marketplace, in the church ministry. Simple words and deeds bear fruit if it flows out of a life that is interacting with Him. Though our interaction is weak, and our interaction with Him is not very deep, that interaction does really matter.

We can release the presence of the Holy Spirit to touch other folks. I’d like to focus on moms for a moment. There is no more dedicated group of people in the world than moms, when I think of all the groups of people in the earth. What I want to tell moms is that, as devoted as you are to your children and as focused as you are, affectionate and affirming, you still cannot move their heart to God by your affection and by your love. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit. I do not mean you can observe that demonstration of power every time, but it is more than focused commitment. The reason I say that is over the years I have talked to moms who say, “I have to do the real stuff with my family, the really practical stuff, I really cannot do that prayer thing.”

I say, “You really want to do the prayer thing. You really do. You do not need to do it at a prayer meeting. You can do it at home. You do not want to lay aside your abiding in Christ life because you have a lot of responsibilities at home. You cannot move your family by the force of your dedication to them. There is more involved in it than that.”

I say this to preachers who may have a big ministry and to business leaders who have a very successful business, and they are a source of great blessing to the people who work for them. We want more than that. We want to move people spiritually. We want to mark their heart and move their heart towards Jesus.

D. Transforming union with God has two elements—we abide in Christ, and Christ abides in us.

Salvation, or you could just call it “Christianity,” is a transforming union with God. That is what Christianity really is. It is so much more than getting fire insurance so that we escape hell. Now, I love the idea of escaping hell. I am really into escaping hell. I am excited by that. I am really into having blessed circumstances. I love Jesus blessing my circumstances. Christianity is so much more than escaping hell and having blessed circumstances. It is a transforming union with a person who lives on the inside of us. Not only are we transformed. That is one part of the union, but we are also used to bring transformation to others by speaking simple words and doing simple deeds through which the Spirit of the Lord marks and touches other people. Even in small ways you cannot measure, He is still doing it through you.

This transforming union has two elements. Jesus mentioned both of them in chapter 15:5, “You abide in Me and I abide in you.” He is not saying the same thing two times. He is saying two very distinct things. Of course there is an overlap, but they are very, very distinct. We abide in Christ. That is what we do. He says, “Abide in Me.” That is the activity of our heart reaching towards Him. He abides in us. That speaks of His activity touching our hearts and mind. That is what He does in us. He is not saying the same thing in these two phrases. These two distinct statements are both very, very significant. We are going to focus mostly on the first one: us abiding in Christ. I will mention ever so briefly the second one tonight. The second one deserves many sessions: Christ abiding in us. I put a few sentences on the notes about that, but that is not our focus tonight.

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 and reaching out to Him as our source of life and leadership.

Jesus says, “Abide in Me.” Abiding in Christ is the foundational activity of growing in God. It is this simple exhortation, “Abide in Me.” It involves three distinct activities that we do. He responds to those three activities. Number one, it begins with—it does not end with this, but it begins with—talking to Him. It is more than that. Number two, it is applying His promises to our heart. Number three, it is setting our heart to obey His leadership. Those are three distinct activities that overlap, but are distinct. You can do one without the other two. Or you can do two without the third one. The point I am emphasizing most in this message, because it is a brief teaching on this very, very important subject, is the point of talking to Jesus. That is core activity of abiding. It is where it begins, but it includes more than talking to Him. That is the foundational reality of these three.

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.

Number one is talking with Him. Abide in Me. Talk with Me. The Christian life is an ongoing dialogue with a person. It lasts forever. It is more than escaping hell. It is more than being blessed in our circumstances. Those are true. I love those truths, but Christianity, at the core of what it is, is an ongoing conversation with a real person. He has much to say.

The amazing thing is that He lets you and me set the pace of the conversation. If we start the conversation, He will continue as long as we stay in it. If we stop the conversation, He will patiently wait until we begin again. He does not want to force you into the conversation. He will not talk to you more than you want to talk to Him.

As a rule we initiate the conversation. He puts this part of the relationship in your hands. You can talk to Him as much as you want. He will continue in the conversation as long as you continue in it.

He will respond to the measure we want to talk to Him. Most of this ongoing conversation is in ten and twenty-second little exchanges throughout the day. Yes, there are those times where you take a half hour or an hour, sometimes two hours. You open your Bible. You are worshipping. You are talking Him in the context of a worship song. You are reading your Bible, you are talking to Him, and you are journaling, those kinds of things. We are going to talk about that in a few moments. There are those focused times that might go thirty minutes or an hour or two, but most of your Christian life is built on flows out of ten and twenty-second little sound bites, short little conversational exchanges with Him. He says, "Talk to Me." That is number one. Develop that dialogue. I will give more on how to do that in a few moments in a practical way.

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).

Number two. This is different than talking to Him. This is applying the promises of His Word to our heart. What I mean is that in His Word, God gives us promises about His love, His power, and His wisdom. The enemy comes as the accuser and attacks our mind and our heart with shame, fear, and rejection. So many things come to challenge the Word of God in our heart. The enemy wants to challenge us, but we are to take a stand on what God's Word says. We are to apply the Word. To the enemy or these lying thoughts, we are to confess the truth of what the Word of God says and we are to resist these lies. When shame comes, we speak the Word of God and say, "I am not accepting this. Romans 8:1, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The accuser will come back again and again with fear. The accuser will come back and get us to be preoccupied with our failures, our fears, our shame, our guilt, and our condemnation. The enemy wants us in that conversation inside our own head and our own heart. Instead of talking to the Lord, he wants us talking to ourselves about our failure. We need to speak the Word.

I know a lot of people who are big into talking with Jesus, but they do not stand on His Word. They live in this internal maze of lies and confusion. They are talking to the Lord, but they are not using His Word nor are they taking Him at His Word. He wants us to apply His Word in the conversation with Him. That is a big subject, but it needs to be a part of talking to Him. Talking is not enough. We need to stand on His Word. It is not enough to stand on His Word. We need to develop the ongoing conversation that lasts intermittently throughout the day.

3. **Obedying 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..."** ²³**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word...We will come to him."** (Jn. 14:21-23)

*Number three. There is a third element of abiding. It is the setting of our heart to obey Him. It is the spirit of obedience. Mature obedience is not even what I am talking about. I am talking about **the setting of the heart to obey**, having the sincere desire, the sincere intention. Jesus spoke in John 14, right before the abiding passage in John 15, just a few moments before, about how the spirit of obedience was an expression of our love for Him.*

*Obedience is not something we do to jump through the hoops, like spiritual gymnastics. Obedience is not something we do to earn His favor. **Obedience is an expression of love.** It is our gratitude for what He has done in His leadership in our lives. We say, "I want to obey You. I want to give my whole life to You." That is a spirit*

of obedience. Jesus defined it in context to an expression of love. There are all kinds of teachings where the enemy will come and try to distort obedience into something where you jump through these spiritual gymnastics, all these kind of outward things, or you are trying to earn God's love. That is all a distraction. We obey Him out of the gratitude for the remarkable truth of who He is and His amazing tender leadership in our life. We just want to honor Him and be as close to Him as we can.

In John 14:21-23, Jesus says, "It is the person who obeys Me"—and I am adding the phrase, "who sets their heart to obey Me."—that is the one who loves Me." There is no loving God that is separated from the spirit of obedience. I do not mean the attaining of obedience because my love is weak and my love is frail, but the truth is my love is sincere. I believe that is true of you in this room as well. I am not talking about mature love right now. I am talking about sincere love. Beloved, weak love is still sincere. We set our heart to love Him.

This idea that some folks are out there talking about "that we love God 'in our own way.'" There is no such thing as that. We love God on God's terms. Loving God is more than enthusiasm in a worship service. Loving God is the setting of the heart to honor His leadership in our life and to honor His will.

We blow it all the time, but when we blow it, when we sin, we admit it. We do not cover it up. We do not rationalize it. We admit, "No, it IS sin." We declare war on it. We renounce it, then receive forgiveness. Beloved, push delete after that. Maybe today you did or said something, and it was wrong, and it was sinful. There was an element of disobedience. Say, "Lord, it is sin. I am not going to try to fake You out." How many of you know you cannot fake out the Holy Spirit? It is impossible to use the Bible on the Holy Spirit and fake Him out. He knows the Bible really well. Just say, "I did it. It is sin. It is weak and broken me." It is not "boys will be boys." It is more than that. "I declare war. I repent. I declare war against it. I set my heart against it. I receive Your forgiveness, Lord. I push delete on the issue. I stand as a first class citizen in Your presence. I love You, God. I am back in business talking to You. I know we are talking together based on the free grace of God, the outrageous mercy of God."

That is the spirit that I mean by the spirit of obedience. I am not talking about earning love, but I am not talking about being casual with our sin either. We take our sin seriously. We wage war against it. We set our heart against it.

- 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)**

We have looked at abiding in Christ. We talk to Him. That is one element. I think that is the biggest. We apply His Word. Do not be shy on that one. Make sure you are diligent on that one. That is a big one. Third, we have the intent to obey. Our obedience is weak, and our love is weak, but it is sincere. Meaning, we are in it for real. That is the essence of abiding in Christ. We do those three things and we will get stronger at it as the years unfold. I do not mean we just steadily get stronger and stronger. I have found sometimes it is two steps forward and three steps back. Three steps forward, two steps back. Over the years the progress is clear. Over the weeks and months it is not always clear, but over the years it is.

- 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.

There is that second dimension, which we are not going to spend time on tonight. I do not want you to miss it. Jesus said, “I will abide in you.” That is, “I will be active in your mind and emotions. I will be active. I will inspire your emotions in a godly way and I will inspire your thinking.” When He talks about abiding in us, He is talking about His activity in our mind and in our emotions as well as through our lives to touch others. You can read that more on your own.

- 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).

Christ abiding in us. I describe it a little bit more here in paragraph I. He teaches us. He inspires us. He empowers us. A little bit more on those ideas. Very, very important, but that is not the subject for tonight. That is a part of that transforming union that Jesus is talking about.

- 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.

Let’s look at some practical ways to enhance our abiding in Christ relationship. How can we enhance this talking to God in a more regular way? Again, I am not talking about an hour at a time. That might happen here and there, but I am talking about developing a dialogue with the Lord that we sustain through the day, intermittently through the day in short ten and twenty-second exchanges with Him.

I have found in my personal life that the more that I talk to Him in a focused way, like for an hour at a time, those kinds of things, if I have focused times, then I sustain the ongoing conversation throughout the day far more consistently. If I have those times where I am really focused for a half hour, an hour, or two hours, I find the twenty-second exchanges are far more regular and sustainable.

The two ways I want to talk about developing this abiding in Christ. This “talking with God” dimension is what I call “pray-reading the Word.” The second reality is fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit. These are really two aspects of diamond. Talking to Jesus is a diamond of the grace of God. These are aspects of the same diamond. You could maybe distinguish them if you wanted to be technical. Really you are in the same vein, encountering God’s heart, and that is the essence of it.

II. TALKING TO JESUS: PRAY-READ THE WORD

Let's talk about this idea of talking with Jesus by pray-reading the Word. It is so simple to pray-read the Word, so simple to do. Those who have been around IHOPKC for a while have heard this over and over. Maybe they are thinking, "Here we go again, pray-read the Word." Well, you cannot say it too many times. There is absolutely no substitute for this, no substitute for this at all. When I look at forty years plus of walking with the Lord, this is the one most significant activity in my life, this simple principle right here. There are a number of things that are important. This is clearly number one in terms of what I do in the activities that I am involved in. There are a lot of other kingdom activities. This is the one that causes other dominos to go down in the positive sense and other things to fall in place.

The enemy will work hard to keep you from talking to Jesus this way. He will give you shame. He will give you despair. He will give you distraction. If he cannot get you with shame, fear, and compromise, if he cannot get you into that ditch, he will push you on the ditch on the other side. He will make you famous and popular so you are so distracted you don't have any time to talk to Jesus anymore because your ministry is getting so big. Satan does not really care which ditch he gets you in as long as you get off the main road.

*A lot of folks will **work for** Jesus, but they will not prioritize **talking to** Him. Sooner or later if you work for Him, but you do not talk to Him, you will get burned out, you will get bitter, or you will get discouraged. It will not feel like it is worth it. "Well, here is what happened to me in the kingdom."*

*The Lord would say, "No, you lived the kingdom ministry. You did kingdom ministry **apart from** abiding in Me. You worked **for** Me, but you did not actually cultivate the conversation **with** Me." As we cultivate the conversation with Him, we then have a way to manage the temptation to burn out and to manage wrong responses, disappointment, and all the negative emotions that hit a sincere believer.*

- 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)

Talking with God—I am repeating—is the core activity of abiding in Christ. What I mean by talking to God by pray-reading the Word is using your Bible study—opening your Bible, and using the material in the Bible—as your conversational material. Meaning, a lot of folks, myself included, say, "Lord, I want to have a prayer time, but I don't know what to say. How are You doing up there? I could always use a little bit more money, a little bit more favor, a little bit more energy, and things like that, Lord. You know. The things everybody else asks You. I need more of those things." I look down at my watch and that is only one minute of dialogue. "Okay, Lord give me a double portion of those things." That is one minute and five seconds. "Okay. Hey, how is it going up there?"

When I discovered I could open the Bible and use the Bible as my conversational material, I found a gold mine. There is no end to it now. The conversation is easy to maintain compared to not opening the Bible, though the enemy will still come and distract us, trying to get us off course.

*What I mean by using the Bible is that we simply speak the Word back to Him in a conversational way. This is what makes prayer enjoyable. I want to say it again because I really want to impress you with this idea. In forty plus years, this single activity is the most significant thing in my spiritual life in terms of my activity towards the Lord. In terms of His activity towards me, it is grace, grace, grace, grace, grace, grace, and mercy. Those things. We need to **talk to a Person**, not only read a Book. When we read the Book, we are dialoguing with a Person.*

B. Talking to God as we pray-read the Word is a practical way to strengthen our abiding in Christ.

²***Take 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)***

In Hosea 14:2, the prophet Hosea said, “Take words with you when you return to the Lord.” Take words. Say things to Him.

You ask, “What words?”

Take the Word of God with you.

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.

It is summarized here so simply. When we read the Bible regarding this subject of abiding in Christ, I identify two broad categories of truth. There are more categories of truth, but in terms of abiding in Christ, two broad categories of abiding in Christ.

Number one. There are the truths that focus on promises we are to believe. There are many, many Bible verses that are promises to believe, something you are supposed to believe. God forgives you. That is something you believe. God will provide for you. That is something you believe. There are many promises to believe. You will live forever. That is a promise to believe.

Number two. There is a whole different category of Bible verses, which are exhortations to obey. There are other categories besides these two, but in terms of abiding in Christ, these are the two categories I look for when I am reading my Bible.

Let’s look at these two categories ever so briefly. It is very, very simple. It is so simple that anybody can do it. Beloved, nobody can do this for you. You cannot get this in a prayer line. I have people say, “Lay hands on me and impart your passion for Jesus and your intimacy with God.” You cannot impart your history in God to another person. You can pray for them and the spirit of grace will touch them and kind of jumpstart them a little bit, kind of get them going. They develop their own conversation with God. You cannot impart your conversation with God to another person. No one can do this for you. It is not a complicated thing to do at all.

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)***

Let’s look at this. Two categories. Promises to believe. Exhortations to obey. Let’s look at the first category and apply it. I am going to use one verse throughout the next few moments here. John 15:9 is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. I think I have taught on John 15:9 more than any other Bible verse in my teaching ministry. John 15:9 starts off with a promise to believe and ends with an exhortation to obey. I will just use one of my favorite verses as an example. There are thousands of verses you could put here as an example.

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.

When you are talking to God, praying the Bible back to Him, you are looking for a promise to believe. John 15:9, Jesus said, “As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Abide in My love.” Here is the promise. “In the same intensity that the Father loves Me I have loved you.” It is like what? I remember when it first hit me, I repeated, “In the way the Father loves You, You love Me? No!” I read it in another translation. This cannot be true. “In the same intensity that the Father loves You, You love me?”

“Yes.”

I have it made. If this is true, I have it made. This is remarkable.

Then He gives an exhortation to obey. He goes, “I want you to abide in this.” That is, I want you to go deep in this reality. I want you to cultivate this reality in your understanding and in your lifestyle.

What do we do when we read a verse that is a promise to believe? We do two things. Number one, we stop for one moment and thank Him for it. Simply, that is it. “Father...Jesus”—go the direction that your heart goes in that moment—“Jesus, You love me the way the Father loves You. Thank You that You love me.”

When is the last time you paused and said to Jesus or the Father, “Thank You that You love me?” I tell you it will be remarkable. As simple as that is, you read a verse, and you pause, “God so loves the world, I am part of the world. Thank You that You so love me.” I tell you, you will feel the Spirit’s presence, though maybe not every time.

It is almost like the Holy Spirit is saying, “I was waiting for you to acknowledge that.” I found the simplicity of pausing for five seconds, ten seconds—and sometimes it will sneak up to you and you will be there a half hour later—“Thank You that You love me.”

The next point, very simple, “Show it more to me.” That simple application, “Thank You that You forgave me. Show me more about Your forgiveness...Thank You that You will direct me. Show me more of Your direction...Thank You that Your eyes are on me. Show me more that Your eyes are on me.” Whatever the promise is, thank Him and ask Him for greater insight.

Beloved, have a notebook there, your laptop, or whatever. You start journaling. I love to journal. I do not like to go to a private prayer meeting or a corporate one without my notepad there. I journal. I say things to the Lord, little simple phrases like, “Thank You that You love me.” I feel His presence, and I write them down. Then I feel it more. Then I feel it more and write it down again. Then I feel it more and write it down again. I say, “Lord, this is amazing.”

The Holy Spirit could whisper back, “I can outlast you. I can give you a touch of My presence way longer than you can stay with it. I will keep talking to you about this as long as you want to keep talking about it.”

- 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)

*Let’s go the other direction, to the other category: *exhortations to obey*. Let’s go to the end of John 15:9. Not the promise to believe, but the exhortation to obey, “Abide in My love.” He said, “As the Father loved Me, so I have loved you.” To abide in this love means to go deep in it. Fill your mind with this. Do not move on quickly*

from this subject is what Jesus is saying. Focus on this. Go deep in it. Embrace it in your life. Meditate on this. This is what it means to abide. It means to lock into this truth.

I will read that verse and say, “Okay, this is an exhortation for me to obey.” This is not just a verse to underline and move on.

He says, “I really want you to abide in this.” That is, “I want you to study the subject of how I love you. I want you to talk about the subject of how I love you. I want you to apply it in your relationship to Me. I want you to tell others. I want you to lock into this truth.” It is an exhortation to obey.

1. First, **we commit ourselves to obey God** in the specific way set forth in a biblical passage. Make declarations of resolve to obey the Word as you read passages about obedience. Declare, “I set my heart to abide in You, to obey You with my speech, time, money, etc.”

First thing you do is commit yourself to it. Pause for three seconds, five seconds, minute or two, it does not matter. I stop and I say, “I commit myself to abide in Your love. I am going to go deep in this. I am going to stay focused on this subject. I am going to study this out. I am going to journal this subject. I am going to talk to you more about it. I am going to do it.” I commit to it.

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.”

Then I ask Him, “Help me. I commit to do it. Help me. I commit to do it. Help me.” Whether it is the exhortation to abide in love, or the exhortation to be faithful in your finances, or the exhortation to walk in purity in your life and in your sexuality, or an exhortation to bridle your tongue, or an exhortation to use your time rightly, regardless what the exhortation is—there are many exhortations to obey—pause. Commit and talk to a Person. Say, “I will do it. I set my heart to do it.” Then ask Him for help. Beloved, if you pause and have that little conversation, that conversation will start growing in you. If you will do that in your private time, then you will maintain the little ten and twenty-second conversational exchanges throughout the day. Your “abiding in Christ” life will increase greatly.

- 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)***

*Fellowshipping with the Holy Spirit is very similar in reality to pray-reading the Word. Fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit is just a different facet of the same diamond of talking with God and abiding with Him. Paul uses the term, **fellowship of the Holy Spirit**. It is a biblical term.*

When we pray, we can focus our mind in one of two directions. We can focus our mind on “our Father who art in heaven.” That is what Jesus said. We go to Revelation 4 that describes the throne. Many times when I pray, I

go right to the throne scene where that rainbow is around the throne, with the twenty-four elders and the myriad of angels. God is like a jasper stone, and a sardius stone, with an emerald rainbow around Him, the sea of glass before Him. That is where my mind goes, to the Father on His throne.

Other times when I pray, my mind goes inwardly to a Person who dwells in me, a real Person called the Holy Spirit. I am not talking about focusing on a deep, inward, black void like the eastern religions or whatever they do. I am talking about talking to a real Person who dwells in you.

- 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)***

The core reality of the new birth is the Spirit of God dwelling in your spirit. The Spirit of God dwells in you. Beloved, it says here, “He who is joined to the Lord”—or born again—“is one spirit with Him.” This is like “Whoa!” God’s Spirit dwells in your spirit.

Your mind and emotions still need to be touched. You can have God dwelling in your spirit the moment you are born again, but your mind is unrenewed and your emotions are in chaos. Having God dwell in your spirit is not the same as your mind and emotions being inspired by Him. The miracle of the new birth, God the Holy Spirit dwells in our spirit. Whether we know it or not, He dwells there in us. I like to use a picture of the Old Testament tabernacle where there was the outer court, inner court, and the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies there was the Shekinah glory of God. Nobody really knows what the Shekinah glory of God looks like. I imagine it, the way I go in my mind, is the burning bush with Moses. Moses is kneeling before the burning bush, and there is this consuming fire. God says, “I am a consuming fire.” He says that later. I imagine that is what the Shekinah glory was like in the Holy of Holies.

Beloved, I have good news for you. The Holy of Holies is in your belly. The Holy of Holies is right here. You have God the Holy Spirit living in you. The Holy of Holies is not somewhere far away in Jerusalem. The Holy of Holies dwells inside of you.

The Holy Spirit is the most neglected person in the kingdom of God. We talk to one another. We talk about one another. We talk for one another, but the Holy Spirit says, “What about Me?” I believe He is the most neglected person living in the kingdom of God, God the Holy Spirit.

- 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.)

We will bring it to an end here in a moment, then we will practice it for a moment. I picture this—again, not that my picture is even right—I picture that glorious, diamond-like Shekinah glory, Moses’ burning bush. I do not know that it is that way. I picture God the Holy Spirit, brighter than the sun, shining in my spirit. I am sure it is not exactly that way. That is not a perfect picture, but I want to talk to a Person. Again, in the eastern

religions, they will focus inwardly on nothingness. They come up with all kinds of deception that way. I am not talking about focusing inwardly on nothingness. I am talking about talking to a real, substantial person who dwells in you.

- 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.

¹⁶I say then: walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)

Paul said, “Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” Beloved, if you walk in the Spirit, that is the way to overcome sexual immorality, bitterness, anger, and all these negative things. Here is the thing. A lot of folks want to overcome lust by focusing on lust. The way to overcome pornography is not to focus on pornography, saying “I am going to stop. I am going to stop.” Yes, you do have to say, “I am going to stop.” But whether you want to overcome lust or to overcome anger, or any “lust of the flesh,” the way you overcome the lust of the flesh is by becoming preoccupied by walking in the Spirit.

You will never walk in the Spirit more than you talk to the Spirit. I want to say that again. You will never walk in the Spirit more consistently than you talk to Him. I want to develop this dialogue with Him that goes on—not every minute of every day. I do not want to exaggerate it— but these ten and twenty-second exchanges throughout the day. We do it more some days than other days. The goal is always to do it more and more. You want to overcome anger? Do not focus only on anger. Focus on talking to the Holy Spirit. You walk in the Spirit and you will overcome lust. You focus on lust; you will not overcome lust. We have to get preoccupied with another Person.

- 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)

What I do is very, very simple. I use the acronym **T-R-U-S-T**—the five letters of trust. I will be in the prayer room or I will be driving in my car. Here I am, the director of the IHOPKC missions base. I go sit in a prayer time. I sit down. I pray, “Okay, I have been doing this for forty years. Lord, my mind is blank. I cannot think of anything to say. I know there is a lot to say, I just cannot think of anything.” That is really true. Not always, sometime. I think, “Hmm,” and I go right to this acronym. I think, “Oh yeah, I will just do **T-R-U-S-T** and jump off from there.”

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.”

T: I turn my attention inwardly and I say, “Thank You.” When is the last time you talked to the Holy Spirit and said, “Thank You that You are in me”? You just recognize that He is there. I tell you, not every time you pray this, but often you will feel His presence.

When I stop and say, “Thank You,”—I love it. I can feel it this second saying it—I say, “Thank You, Holy Spirit.” He loves the recognition of the dialogue. Not always will you feel it, but you will a whole lot more than if you do not say it, if you stay with it.

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)*

Then R: I ask Him to release the revelation of His glory. What I mean by that is the realm of His glory. “Holy Spirit, I want to see that supernatural dimension where You dwell. I want my eyes to open up to the realm of the spirit. I want to feel what You feel and see what You see. I want to see the beauty of Jesus.” Beloved, He knows more about Jesus than anyone on the earth! “Let me see what You see and feel what You feel about Jesus.”

He would say, “I know a lot about Jesus.”

“Teach me, Holy Spirit.” Or, “Show me His glory.” We will talk about this more in a future class.

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.”

U: use me. “Holy Spirit, manifest Your gifts through me. I want to interact with You, and I want You to flow through me.”

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)*

S: strengthen my mind and emotions. God dwells in your spirit the day you are born again, but there are your emotions that need to be strengthened and your mind that needs to be renewed.

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 time, prosper in relationships (in the home, church, office, ministry), and walk in purity and health (physically and emotionally). Ask for Him to order your steps, for new ideas and open doors of opportunity.

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

Then the final letter is T: teach me. You can ask the Holy Spirit to teach you about anything you want to ask Him to teach you about. Beloved, I have good news for you. The Holy Spirit knows everything about everything. He is so brilliant. He knows the Bible really well.

I have this phrase that I pray often. I say, “Holy Spirit, let me see what You see and feel what You feel about...” and then I put one of a hundred subjects in there. Let me say this again. We will end with this, and then we will kind of walk through it for a moment and talk to the Lord. I say, “Holy Spirit, let me see what You see and feel what You feel about Jesus.” I will talk to Him that way, “Let me see what You see and feel what You feel about this subject.” I have asked the Holy Spirit many times, “Let me see what You see about abiding in Christ. You know more about John 15 than anybody. Teach me John 15. Lord, show me how to abide in Christ. You know better than anybody.” I will tell you one of my favorite prayers, “Let me see what You see and feel what You

feel about Mike Bickle.” I mean it. He knows so much more about me than I do. It is one of my favorite subjects. I pray, “I want to know what You see.” We talk to other people and want to know what they think. There is an element to that which can be helpful. A lot of that can be destructive. I want to know what He thinks.

When I drive to a meeting—it’s not the only time I pray about the meeting, but typically when I drive down here, just for the five-minute drive from the prayer room—I say, “Lord, let me see what You see and feel what You feel about the meeting tonight, about the worship service, about the people tonight.” When I drive home after a meeting, not always, but I do this a lot, I say, “Let me see what You see and feel what You feel about my wife, Diane. I want to know what You feel about her.”

I want to know what He sees and feels about my children. About my physical strength. About my diet. About my exercise. About my conversations. About my finances. About my future. About the world economy. About my enemies. He knows everything about everything. I say, “Lord, let me see what You see and feel what You feel about the people who hate me.”

He says, “Well, I like them way more than you do. I want you to know that, and that is good for you because that is the nature of My personality and that is good that I do. Because I like people a lot, I want you to see what I see about them.” Beloved, I really do that. Then I can bless them.

I don’t always get insight, but ask about your future, your money, where the nations are going, ask about the school system, the neighborhood you live in. Every subject you want. Beloved, the Teacher dwells inside of you. Ask Him what He thinks about the Father, what He thinks about the Son, what He thinks about the Bible. It is an endless conversation. The Holy Spirit is probably the most neglected person in the Kingdom of God and He knows the most about everything.

Amen. We are going to take a minute. I am going to lead you in prayer for a minute. Close your eyes. Think of the burning bush, that burning fire dwelling in your spirit. Picture that right in your belly. That is not exactly it though. This analogy is very, very imperfect. Think about the Shekinah glory of God, God brighter than the sun, dwelling in your spirit. Turn your attention there. Jesus said, “Out of your belly flows rivers of living water.”

*Let’s go through the acronym **T-R-U-S-T**.*

“Thank You, Holy Spirit.” Whisper that to Him. Then you pause. You do not do rapid-fire prayer when you do this. Pray slowly. Pause. Whisper the prayer. Do not shout the prayer. Just softy. Talk to Him. I am very intermittent. I like to throw in other phrases. Like every three or four moments I love to say, “I love Your presence...I love Your ministry...Thank You, Holy Spirit...Thank You that You dwell in me...I love Your presence.” Whisper a phrase. Not rapid fire, “ThankYouGodIloveYou,” not that. Pause for five or ten seconds. Say a phrase. “I love Your ministry, Holy Spirit...Thank You that You are in me.” I am actually saying it too fast. I should say it slower than that with a bigger pause in between. I just focus my attention on that Person. I whisper, “Holy Spirit, touch me...Here I am...Thank You.”

Then R. “Show me the revelation of the glory of Jesus...That realm of His glory...The Man with the eyes of fire, I want to see Him...The Father of glory...Paul the apostle called Him the Father of glory...Let me touch that supernatural dimension of His majesty and glory...Open the eyes of my heart...Show me that other realm...Show me the revelation of the realm of Your glory.” I am saying these much too fast!

U. “Use me. Give me phrases to say to people. When I am talking to people, give me a phrase. Right when I am talking, just let that phrase flow out of me. Use me. Give me little short pictures, mental pictures, little flashes, those little moments of inspiration.” Those are how words of knowledge in the most elementary way flow. “Give me a picture. Let me see my wife, my spouse the way You do...my children...my friends...my roommate...my enemies. Use me. Show me about them. Use me to touch them.”

Let's go to S, the fourth letter. "Strengthen my mind. Strengthen my emotions, Holy Spirit. Spring up, O well." God lives in your spirit, but we need Him to touch our emotions and renew our mind. "Touch me. Strengthen me." Paul called it **strengthening us with might in the inner man**. He prayed the Holy Spirit would strengthen you with might in the inner man. The inner man, "Touch my mind and my emotions."

Then T: teach me. "Holy Spirit, teach me about Jesus. Teach me about the Bible. Teach me about my ministry assignment. Holy Spirit, let me see what You see and feel what You feel about my life. Let me see what You feel about me. Teach me about my money, my conversations." I am saying this way, way, way too fast. What I have covered in the last two minutes would take ten or fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes is slow. You stay with it, and this thing will just keep developing. "Teach me about my health. Teach me how to get more energy in my life. Teach me what I do with my entertainment. Show me how to do entertainment in a way that edifies me and builds my life up."

Amen and amen. This could go on and on and on.