

FRUITFULNESS AND FRIENDSHIP, JOHN 15:4-5, Ps.42

Lessons from the Vine #3

◆**Intro:** I'd like to tell you a story that happened before the age of the internet. She had long since moved away from their west coast town. But her sister had kept in contact with his brother as a pen-pal (remember those?) That was a novel practice in which two people might start writing letters to each other, across many miles, and be or become friends even without being with each other physically. So he, wanting to follow his brother's adventure, started to write her, the other sister to see what it was like.

◆Those first letters were your typical newsy type: "my sister got braces, the dog gagged all over the shag carpet, the family will be going to the mountains for vacation, he might be mowing a few lawns this summer for extra cash to buy a skateboard" –stuff like that. But as months turned into years, their letters transformed from mere radio news spots to intimate conversations –where secret things; things that you didn't talk about on the sidewalk out in front of the house – could be put down in words through paper and ink. So it comes as no surprise that she began to know him and he her, for they shared much of their insides, until eventually they shared also their hearts. One day he added a little statement to the bottom of the letter that he had never said before. And three days later, when she read those words her heart happily answered, "I think I love you too."

◆That's a love story, a parable about intimacy, closeness that doesn't necessarily depend on physical closeness. These days it's

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even easier to imagine with all we can do on the internet. And this is a parable of what life could be like if you and I would get to know (I mean really get to know) God.

◆ That brings us to the third lesson of the Vine. You will recall that the **first** lesson was that God may often use hardship to discipline, or train, us; to “take us up” to the trellis where fruitful life is possible. The **second** lesson was that God also uses hardship to refine us and increase our fruitfulness, just as a gardener prunes, or a silversmith refines precious metal in fire. The third lesson I want to talk about from John 15 is this:

◆ **1.** All that happens to me is not so much about my fruitfulness as it is about God’s friendship. That is to say, that **fruitfulness is a natural outcome of friendship with God. But friendship with God is the whole point all along.** Now I want to invite you to be philosophical with me, that is, to ask deep questions of life and meaning, and purpose. Why is it that God made you? Did he need a slave to build him a pyramid, or to mow someone’s lawn? Was he not satisfied without having authority over someone? The pagan religions say that we were created by the gods to serve them, and if we do well we may also find some delight in living. Are they right? The Bible proclaims something very different.

◆ **A.** God made me to love me, and to love him back. Toby Mac puts it well...

I was made to love you

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I was made to find you
I was made just for you
Made to adore you
I was made to love
And be loved by you
You were here before me
You were waiting on me
And you said you'd keep me
Never would you leave me
I was made to love
And be loved by you

◆ This is ground zero of your purpose in the Solar System: to love God and be loved by him. That's the nature of "abiding" or some translations, "remaining". To be with. God wants to be with humans. That is our purpose. All the other stuff like joy, peace, kindness, self-control (fruits of the Spirit, Gal.5) are just that: fruit that grows from being with God. Abiding. The two most repeated ideas in John 15, as you probably already picked up on, are "remain" and "love." But "remain" doesn't seem to carry the intimacy our passage exudes. And "stay in touch" lacks the intensity in Jesus' words. And since "hang with me homie as I skate the hood" doesn't quite do it, I'll stick with "abide".

◆ **B.** Know what abide means? Abide means doing whatever it takes to live in the presence of God. Now one thing that helps this is simply obedience to what he commands. Look.

◆ v7 if my **words abide** in you... what? you have a fruitful life.

◆ v10 if you obey my **commandments** you will abide in my love. And...

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◆v14 *you are my friends is you obey my **commands**.*

◆Friendship is intimacy that comes when we care what the other person thinks or says. Love is intimacy. Obedience to what Jesus thinks will help us get there. Obedience will aid us in “knowing” God.

◆**C.** But hang on. When I say “know God” I don’t mean to know about God. The devil knows about God. But i think you will agree the two are not intimate. Likewise when we say obedience it’s got to be a heart obedience. Mere motions will do nothing to get you intimacy.

◆In a few minutes I’ll give some suggestions to aid in finding friendship with God, but you can do all of them without ever even getting close. You can read the Bible two hours a day, and fast three days a week, and be good, and sweet, and kind, and honest, and a fine father, or a Supreme Ruler, er... I mean, or a mother of the house..., and carry a big Bible and be at church whenever the doors are open - but it won’t amount to anything if you heart isn’t looking for God in all of it. Lots of people do all those things and do not know God. Listen.

◆*“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”
John 17:3, NIV.*

◆What do you think of that statement? When I was young I thought, “Well that doesn’t sound like what I was hoping

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eternal life was!" I thought eternal life was, you know, heaven, and beauty, and joy, and love, and satisfaction, and relief from guilt and delight in everything from the simple color of a bird to the intricacy of a molecule. I thought eternal life was good food and never a lack thereof, and fun, and flavor, and music and peace. And you know what? It is! Jesus is saying we'd have all that if we really knew God. If we got to the intimate place, the love-letter place. If we learned to "abide." It's all about abiding. Another word for it is friendship.

◆**D.** Can you believe it? Here, God in the flesh (Jesus) is saying he want to be FRIENDS with people. In the Garden of Eden God put people, and God walked and talked with people. That was the goal! Sin separates God and people, not because God left, but because we did. Jesus came but not to save the whales. He came for people. Are you a people? Well, God wants to be friends with you. He's not interested that way in your cat. (Nobody is friends with cats, not even God. Cats only exist to let you know you aren't as great as you think you are.) But you, yeah, that's what God's after.

◆And why? Back to the philosophical bedrock: Did God make you as a biological appliance, designed to serve a function to make his life better? No. And we can become experts at serving God and still remain novice at being his friends. Did God make you to do

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good things, good fruit? Clearly yes, but what was the point? That he would be known/glorified/loved back.

◆ *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." John 15:8, NIV.*

◆ So friendship with God is the main point of your life.

◆ **2. How can I abide with God?** May I suggest you **become a seeker**? Seek and you shall find, right? The person seeking Morel mushrooms is the person who finds them. (Jer29:13)

◆ I wonder if you've heard of Nicholas Herman. He was the kitchen help in a 17th Century monastery. A friend wrote him a series of letters over time asking about getting to know God. Those letter's became the book *Practicing the Presence of God*. And Nickolas is better known as Brother Lawrence. I highly recommend it. Brother Lawrence's deepest desire was to carry on an internal conversation with God whether he was scrubbing pots, or singing in the sanctuary. He was a seeker.

◆ **A. Devote a time and place daily to God.** Set a time on your smart phone calendar each day where you will not be available because it is devoted to God. Leave your office, go outside perhaps, sit somewhere private but find a place alone and talk with God. Ask him questions. Tell him feelings. Imagine him in the chair across from you and don't talk like people pray in public. Talk like you're talking to your brother.

◆ **B. Devote yourself to God's Word.** Read a little piece. Read until you notice something and then talk to God about it. You'd

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think that every Christian would know this, but it's one of the biggest omissions in the Church. People just don't read God's Word. We own it. But we don't read it. There's no other substitute. God has already talked and it's written down. You want to hear from God, its the fastest way.

◆**C.** In your other activities carry on a conversation with God about them. Imagine what he might respond to what you say based on what you know from his Word. This is seeking. This is listening for God.

◆ One of the most life transforming practices in my spiritual life has been learning to use a journal. All it is is praying with a pencil. I don't fall asleep praying like I once did. It's how I practice talking with God.

◆ Your putting away groceries and the kids are screaming: you could talk to God about it. "Thanks for all this great food in my closet Jesus. And thanks for those kids...I guess."

◆ She says, "My mom and I are best friends." What does she say next? "We talk about everything." Ah. Brother Lawrence puts it...

◆ The most holy practice, the nearest to daily life, and the most essential for the spiritual life, is the practice of the presence of God, that is to find joy in his divine company and to make it a habit of life, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly with him at all times, every moment, without rule or restriction, above all at times of temptation,

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distress, dryness, and revulsion, and even of faithlessness and sin

◆**3. What happens when I abide? Fruit happens when I abide with Jesus.** We're talking fruit you could never produce on your own. Fruit you and I don't deserve. The surprise is that more fruit comes in life when we are abiding than when we are striving. And do know why God does it that way? Because he wants us to know it was him! There it is again: know him.

◆*"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say." Acts 4:13, 14, NIV.*

◆So one of the fruits of abiding is supernatural results. What would you say to someone who asks you why you believe in Jesus? Please don't tell them that it's because that is what you were taught. Lots of people are taught wrong things. People only really believe in something or someone they have experienced as true and real. What have you experienced of God. If not much I suggest you start praying and asking him questions. One of the fruits of abiding is answers of prayer. (v7-8) But what you most have to share with someone else is when you have experienced God, when he clearly answered your prayer or orchestrated the impossible for you, or enabled you to do something (forgive for

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example) that you could not bring yourself to do on your own.

Those are the supernatural results in ordinary people.

◆**Conclusion:** We started out with the pen-pal image to illustrate what abiding is like. Here's an animal comparison to make the point of abiding. Who is "man's best friend"? The dog. Not like a cat. Why? Because Dog wants to be with you even when you don't want to be with him. Dog will follow you. Dog will come back to you. Dog will get in your way just to be noticed. Dog abides. Cat...could care less if you lived or died!

◆In this closing clip by Wendy Francisco, she practices the presence (abides in God) by looking for him in the things around her, in this case her dog. Take a look. [God n Dog video -by Wendy Francisco.]