

ABIDING IN THE VINE

There is a lot to learn in walking with Jesus. There is one main secret after you are saved. Do you know what it is? Abiding in the Vine. Jesus said, "I am the Vine. You are the branches and apart from Me you cannot bear any fruit." You might say, "I have been pretty successful all of my life and I have not been a Christian, so I do not know if I agree with that." I am talking about fruit that lasts not only in this life but throughout all of eternity; that is the difference. What you do in your own strength, with your own ability and you in control will only last for this life. You may be a great success. I hope you are, but you know as well as I do that this is not all there is to life. It does not stop here when you die. It only moves you into the real life. In "The Purpose Driven Life" it says, "The life we live right now is only the dress rehearsal for the life we are really going to live." Another place it says, "The things that you do here determine there." You want to be sure that you are bearing a lot of fruit and that fruit remains. Jesus said, "I pray for you that your fruit might remain."

When we get busy doing things for God sometimes it is easy to get so caught up in the excitement of what you are doing, the thrill of it, that you do not even realize that you quit spending time with God that you have to have. That is how you got out there in the first place and were able to do what you are doing. I heard one time that a very, very famous preacher, very famous, had taught so much from the Bible throughout the entire ministry they had that at the end they quit reading the Bible.

This pastor quit reading the Bible every day. That is just the kiss of death. We cannot ever think that apart from Jesus we are going to be able to do anything. It actually gives an open door to the devil. This particular pastor died a real sad death. I have always wondered what in the world made that pastor think that there was no longer a need to abide in the vine through reading the Bible. You can know every verse there is in the Bible; but because the Bible is quick, powerful and it is the Word of God, it can speak to you in a completely different way the next time you read the verse.

Do you know the difference between a rhema word and a logos word? A logos word is the written Word of God. A rhema word is God speaking directly to you, like through the Bible. You read something and it leaps out at you and you know that is God talking to you. Even somebody walking up and saying something to you and you know it is God talking to you. Abiding in the Vine requires things out of you and me. It is not a thing that you just kind of go down the lazy river. It is an active walk with the Lord to abide. Let us talk about it.

God says, "I love you so much. You are very special to Me and I want to spend time with you. I want you to know Me. I know you but I want you to know how I know you. I want to talk to you. I want to make you wise. I want to use you. I want your life to matter. I want you to accomplish what I put you on earth to accomplish." Some of you are older who watch this show. You are so old that you think, "Why am I still here? I am not good for anything. I am not good for anybody. I do not do anything." Oh yes. Even if you are paralyzed and could not move one muscle, could not even talk, you can still think your prayers, you can still talk to God and God listens. He bends down. He listens to what you are saying. For all you know, your greatest days have been your last days when you could not do anything but pray. How did your prayers become powerful? Abiding in the Vine. When you make grape juice or wine out of grapes, where does the juice come from? It comes up through the vine. It comes on out in those grapes. God begins to work on you.

(Look at this picture of a vine. Do you notice how strong that vine looks and how big those grapes look? They look so luscious and rich. That vine looks healthy. Those leaves look healthy.)

The first Scripture today is John 15:1-9, "I am the true Vine and My Father is the Garden. 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 and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain on the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the Vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown in the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you. This is My Father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be My disciples."

The life is in the vine of all plants. If you cut off the branch, it does not matter how the leaves looked. It does not matter if it has flowers or fruit. In a matter of time it all wilts. You are like that too. If you do not stay hooked into Jesus and stay close to Him, it is only a matter of time until you dry up. I have a peach tree in my backyard. I live in a house that was built in 1927. It has a small backyard. Every year I think, "Come on peach tree, I know you have the peaches this year that are going to last." Every year, the number of peaches on that little tree increases. Every year the peaches drop off and die or the squirrels get them. I get down to about five peaches growing and then something will happen. I will get out there and start pruning that thing and the next thing you know I have made a mistake and cut the branch and there goes some of the peaches. Every year I end up with one peach. It happened again this year. That little old peach does not even taste good. I try to let it go and get ripe. I wait as long as I can and I want to eat it. I finally eat it and I think, "You peach tree, why don't you get some good juice in you and get going. Give me some good peaches." There is a lot to do to cause that vine to grow and peaches to grow. It has got to be in the right place with the right things happening.

Look at the second Scripture John 15:16, "You did not choose Me, I chose you and I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then, the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name." Do you realize that both of those verses say that God will give you whatever you ask? Have you ever wondered now how can that be? What if they ask the wrong thing? If you abide in the Vine and Jesus is abiding in you, that Vine is just going all the way through you, you are not going to ask for the wrong thing because you are going to have a pure heart. You are going to have pure desires. You are going to care about the things God cares about. You are going to ask for those things. Fruit does not reproduce itself. The reproduction comes through the vine. God is the gardener. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. The juice going through it is the Holy Spirit. The fruit in a tree can grow bigger and bigger the more it is taken care of and the more that vine is allowed to increase or that tree is allowed to increase. God's plan for you is to keep you flourishing spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically. He wants you to flourish in everything.

One of the biggest mistakes I see people make is they get so disgusted with church. They say, "I see all of those hypocrites and I do not want to be around them." They do not realize God loves the church and God says, "Gather together. I want you to gather together." Sometimes you can go to church and someone will say something that is exactly what you needed to hear. Maybe you will say something to them and it was their answer. We all need each other.

If it is not your own strength and it is not your own desires or plans, it is God's that is making everything happen in this life in the Spirit. What is the fruit? What kind of fruit can you expect to see if you go this way? I am going to name some and I want you to just check your life to see if you are seeing this over the whole course of your life.

Good works. Do you see yourself helping people? One time I was sitting in a church in Austin, Texas, and I was just visiting that church. The pastor said, "What are you doing to help somebody that can in no way help you back?" I thought, "Nothing. Everybody I help can help me back." That really stuck with me. Right after that God called me to a jail ministry. I realized that is a place I can go that they are really not in a position to be able to help me. However, I became good friends with some of them, and I am still friends with them.

What is some more good fruit that God produces through you? Good attitude. Do you not hate a stinking attitude, that stinking thinking? I just hate that negative thinking, self-pity and poor me. None of that is the fruit of the vine. None of it is the vine pouring through the person. The good attitude and the good actions that glorify God is the good fruit.

Another one is the deep intimate relationship with God. Do you have one? If you do not have one you can ask for one. You can say, "Lord, I want to know You like Jesus knew You." Do you not want that? Jesus said, "Everything I do, you can do." How about a holy life? Today, there are a lot of people who have no desire for a holy life. In fact, they will mock it, put it down or be disgusted with it. God is not disgusted with it. He said, "Be holy. Live a holy life."

What does it mean to live a holy life and have this life in the Vine pouring through you? It means to live the way the Bible says to live. Are we perfect? No, we are not perfect but we are sure to move that way. Righteousness is a gift from God, but a holy life is your gift to God. How are you doing on it? Holiness will bring you close to God. A lot of people are looking for happiness and wanting to know why they are not happy. Why can I not seem to find it? Why can I not seem to get it? What is wrong with me? I heard a little saying one time that really meant a lot to me. "Happiness is a by-product of holiness." Think about that. True holiness gets rid of all kinds of bad desires in you, all kinds of wrong thoughts and attitudes. Of course, it will make you happier. Happiness is a by-product

kinds of thoughts and attitudes. Or course it will make you happier. Happiness is a by-product of holiness.

Are there any secrets to abiding in the Vine? Yes there are. I am going to give you four. I learned these from Bruce Wilkinson.

Secret Number One: The first one is God prunes you to get sin out of your life. That is kind of painful. It may be painful but if you do not get it out of life, it is going to be a lot more painful. God has to discipline you. You think, "Well, I am an adult." The Bible says He disciplines us just like a good Father disciplines a child. It is for your own good. In the vineyard, what does the owner do when there are branches that are not doing well, not bearing fruit, something is not right about them and they are dead? He prunes them off.

Secret Number Two: God will prune you, but He has a purpose it in. He is pruning you for greater fruit. You know that. Do you like to work in your yard? Do you like to trim your shrubs and bushes?

One time I was in a Bible study and it felt like everywhere I looked I was being pruned. I talked to my Bible study leader. I said, "I do not have any joy anymore. It is just like everything is being pruned." She said, "You know, Betty, if there is an area of your life that you are really strong in and you are really out there growing in it, all of a sudden God will prune it because He wants a well-rounded bush. He does not want a bush with just one long limb sticking out there. No matter how strong the limb is and no matter how good it looks, He wants a well-rounded bush." That gave me a lot of joy. In fact, my joy came back because I thought that I can handle that. What else does he prune you for? Maybe you have an immature commitment. Do you ever think about that? Your commitment to God has to grow deeper and deeper and deeper as the years go on. You have to also be pruned sometimes because your priorities are not in the right place. They are out of order.

Maybe your work means more to you than your family. Maybe your children mean more to you than God. Maybe your children mean more to you than your spouse. Maybe your ministry is way, way up there too high and God has to prune you. It is not pleasant. If plants could talk, if trees could talk, don't you know that when you have those loppers out and you cut off one of those big branches, you can hear them say "Ouch." It does not feel good. Afterward, the Bible said there is that quiet growth in grace and character. It is only being done for greater growth in your life. You could even ask God, "What is it that needs to be pruned out of my life?" I do that. I say, "Lord what character quality do you need to work on in my life because I want to cooperate with you?" I will tell you about He told me one time. Impulsiveness. If you have my kind of personality, I am very outgoing and very lively. I love to laugh a lot. I love a challenge. I love excitement. I love adventure. Yet, there was an aspect of me that was too impulsive. I did not think enough before I did something and so God had to come to me and say, "I like you the way you are, Betty, but this impulsiveness is not good and I want you to get rid of it." He worked on it. I think it is pretty much gone. The most fruitful Christian is the one who has probably been pruned the most. You can ask them.

Secret Number Three: If your life bears a lot of fruit, then God is going to ask you to abide more deeply than ever in Him. Recently, I was looking at my life and I was just so busy. Everything was fun, wonderful, exciting, spirit-filled and great. God said, "I want you to spend more time with Me." I thought that I am so busy. How am I going to do that? It was hard. It was really hard to slow down and just spend time alone with the Lord. He kept coming to me. The wonderful thing about God is that if you do not get it the first time, He will come around 36 times until you get it. Finally, I began to get it. "Okay, I hear You. I am going to do it, Lord. I am going to do it." It is almost like having to put the brakes on a speeding car but I did it. I am so glad I did it. God calmed me down. He made my spirit quiet. He produced more fruit in me with less effort. I have to add that. If you do not allow God to do that, (secret number three of spending more time with Him) your life becomes a life of just good works. You do not want that. You want a life with Him. If you do not do that, you will begin to see that you have less satisfaction. If you are still doing good works you ought to be happy, but you are not. You have less satisfaction and less relationship with God, that tender, precious, sweet time you had with him on a daily basis has gone by the wayside. God has to come to you.

Secret Number Four: To realize the Christian life is not about you, it is about God. God has chosen you and you have chosen to be with Him. It is not about just doing all of the time. You are not a human doing, you are a human being. Be with Him. It is not about you it is about other people around you. God wants to be with you. He wants to be alone. It just does not mean Bible study and prayer. It means, "God, what do you want me doing? Who do you want me helping?" After you have spent that time alone with the Lord, He is ready to send you out to new levels. None of us, nobody ever gets to the place that they quit growing, that they have finally reached God. How do I know that? How important is somebody that creates a universe and how could we possibly hope to know everything there was to know about Him? It is not possible. You have to ask yourself, "Lord, what is it that you want to do with me? It is not about me. It is about what you want to do through me and how do I do it." Why do people not take time to abide in the vine? It takes discipline. It

me and how do I do it. Why do people not take time to abide in the vine? It takes discipline. It takes time. Sometimes people think, "Why would God want to spend time with me? Look at all that I have done. Look how I have disappointed Him. Look at how I have not helped people. Look how I have wasted my life." God says, "I always want to be with you. I always have a plan for you and I never give up on you. I never quit trying to help you get where you need to be."

In abiding in the vine there is another thing you are going to have to think about it. This is one of the drawbacks that people have in it and that is being fully convinced that God's plan is better than their plan.

How are you in that? Are you one of those people really living your plan, going down the track 90 to nothing, thinking that you have the world by the tail and you are just doing great? I do not want to stop and serve God. It would be dull and boring. No, you have to think about something. Every person who follows Jesus intimately ended up dying a horrible death. Nobody is going to die for a cause unless they really think it is worth it. It would have to be so worth it. Never think that God's plan is more boring than your plan. It is more exciting. It is more fulfilling and that life in the vine is just surging through you.

What are other reasons why people do not abide in the vine? They have never learned to practice the presence of God all day long. The verse we looked at earlier said, "You cannot do anything apart from me." Part of that is practicing the presence of God. Have you ever read that book by Brother Andrew called "Practicing the Presence of God?" This was a month that his job in the abbey was to wash dishes. That was his job and yet everybody made up an excuse to go be around Brother Andrew. Why? They said, "He has something. He has a relationship with God that the rest of us do not have. When you get around him, you feel like you are in the presence of God." He practiced the presence of God. It is a great little book to read.

What are the results of all of that abiding in the vine? It is the relationship with God that everybody would like to have with more fruit than ever and answered prayer. Remember Jesus said two different times, "If you do it, you can ask what you want and I will do it." You will see lots of answered prayer. What is another one? You see God glorified. You are His disciple. You are His partner in the world and God wants to do things through you. Do you know that there are people you could touch that I would never know and I will never see? Nobody else will ever see them. You may be the only Jesus they ever know and they might be people you do not even know are watching you.

For instance, maybe it is somebody at the dry cleaners and you take your cleaning in. You are busy thinking about what you have to do, but you are abiding in the vine. You have that sweet spirit and they notice it. They notice repeatedly that you have it. I will tell you another thing that happens a lot with you. There are people who hear about something you have done. They have never known you, never seen you and never will see you, but their friends told them about you and you touched their life. You have born fruit.

Just remember, an abider is not somebody who comes and goes in his relationship with God. He is not a person who gets into rebellion and does not seek God for a year and a half. He does not just obey God only when it is convenient. He is there in season and out, in good times and in the bad times. That fruit is growing and growing, increasing and bearing even greater results for all of eternity. You are going to be so amazed. You are just going to be so amazed when you get to heaven. There are going to be a lot of people come up to you and say, "I have always wanted to meet you. I heard about you and I wanted to meet you." Abide in the Vine. It will pay off.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What is God's plan for us?
2. Why is it important to get a rhema word from God?
3. How do we continue to abide in the vine?
4. What are the four secrets to abiding in the vine?
5. Why do people not abide in the vine?
6. What is the fruit produced from abiding in the vine?

To watch the video on ABIDING IN THE VINE, Pillar Four, Holy Spirit go to www.bettyswann.com.

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