

Acid Test Series 2 of 8 - the Life That Can Pray

by Al Whittinghill

The sermon explores the essential nature of prayer in a believer's life and the conditions necessary for effective communication with God.

Duration: 1:01:02

Scripture: Psalm 66:18, Matthew 5:23, Matthew 6:33, John 14:23, John 15:4-7, James 5:16

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of focusing on the condition of one's heart. They suggest that instead of trying to fix external behaviors or habits, individuals should prioritize addressing the state of their hearts. The speaker highlights four key points: heaven is full of blessings, God remains unchanged, prayer is effective when offered by a righteous person, and the Lord desires a genuine relationship with His followers. The sermon also mentions the significance of yielding to God's guidance and not relying on personal efforts alone.

Transcript

Several years ago, a missionary and his wife went to Ecuador. He was in the prime of his life, and he had just finished schooling. He was an aspiring young scholar.

Everyone said, you're going to be such a great man of God on the mission field. And they went to Ecuador. They'd been there about two weeks, and after about two weeks, V.R. Edmund was stricken with a fatal disease.

No one had ever recovered from this, the natives said, and as they watched him die, his wife was coming upon a situation of mourning, and she took her only dress, besides her wedding dress, and dyed it black with some berries. And as V.R. Edmund lost pound after pound after pound, the natives put him in a hut. In fact, they had dug his grave.

One night, just as the death rattle was in his throat, suddenly he remembers he was laying there, and it's like the Spirit of God came upon him, and he was instantly revived. And he got up, and he took a shower, and he put on his clothes, and he went out and began to work. The next morning, there was no small stir in the community with a man whose grave had been dug, and you can imagine.

And V.R. Edmund told of how God had raised him from the point of death. Several years later, he was back in the States at a missionary convention, and he was telling about this wonderful time that God had come upon his life and raised him from the point of certain death. And after the meeting, as he had told about this miracle, you know the type of person I'm talking about, a little bent-over, squatty, white-haired lady with a little tattered notebook walked up to the front and kind of tugged on his coat, and he turned around.

Yes, ma'am. She says, uh, Dr. Edmund, could you remember what date that was that that happened to you? Could I remember what date that was? Could you remember what date that was? Of course I can remember what date that was. It was so-and-so, and he told the date.

And she says, uh-huh. And she was going through her little prayer book like this, and she said, could you tell me what time that would be there when, uh, the middle of the night when you were raised from this sick bed, about what time it would be here? Let's see. There's about this many hours difference.

Let's see. It would be about, and the little lady's finger was going down the page, and he says, about, I forget what time he said, but she went, huh, and she looked at it. She says, yes, here it is.

Look. And she said, I was laying in my bed asleep, and the Lord woke me up and said, get down to pray. The devil is trying to kill V.R. Edmund.

You see that check right there to the side? That means victory. I'll tell you something. That woman saved his life because she could hear God, and she slipped out of her bed, and she prayed until the answer came.

What kind of life does it take to have a life like that? Well, it's not a special life. It's available to you. It's available to me, and that little unnamed saint has probably, I would say, half of his reward.

V.R. Edmund went a thousand souls to the Lord almost a year, for years and years, and that little lady is up there getting a share in every one because she prayed for him. She was faithful. I want us to pray as we're returning to John 15 in a moment to go from there.

Let's pray together. Father tonight, O tonight, speak to our hearts and draw us to that well of living waters, the well of the oath that springs up from the smitten rock, our Lord Jesus. That rock is He.

Lord, cause us to drink deep from that smitten rock, and may we realize that whosoever will may come and may pour out our hearts before You. May we realize that there are no such things tonight as special people in Your sight. We're all equal, and You're no respecter of persons.

Draw us to a life of prayer. We pray these things that Your name will be exalted, and we just stand against the devil in Jesus' name. Against all who hear these words, we stand against the devil, that the word of God will come forth in convicting and constraining power, and we pray for Your glory, Lord Jesus, and in Your name.

Amen. John chapter 15, verse 1. I am the vine, I am the true vine, and my father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he takes away, and every branch that beareth fruit he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Now you are clean through the word which I've spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit, for without me you can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he's cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they're burned.

If you abide in me, and my rhemas, my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you. Let me ask you a few questions tonight as we begin. Do you believe that God answers prayer? Do you? Do you? Okay.

On a ten to one scale, with ten being the highest, then where would you put prayer as a priority in a Christian's life? Somewhere between one and ten, where would you put it? Would it be two? Would it be ten? Would it be nine? Just think in your own heart where you'd put it. If you believe God answers prayer, and on a one to ten basis, what priority, with ten being the highest, do you give it? And then thirdly, are you willing then to make the necessary changes to make prayer that priority? Question. If you believe God answers prayer, and if prayer has a priority in your estimation, why aren't your prayers being powerfully answered? Tonight we want to look at that.

We want to look at a life that can pray. Last question. What is it, then, that hinders you from praying? What is it? Answer that question.

What is it that hinders you from praying? You see, that last answer is where you need to begin tonight in this lesson. Everything that stops your prayer life, or hinders your prayer, is your enemy. You need to change it.

You need to adjust it. Now, I'm not talking about family members, and I'm talking about a relationship you may have is out of kilter. You need to change it, because everything that keeps you from praying is less than God's perfect will.

The enemy is going to fight you every step of the way. He's going to put the press of duty on you. He's going to put the force of habit on you.

He's going to dig in his heels and resist you. He's going to raise up a hundred objections and distraction of business, because, you see, he knows, like we said, that one hour of close fellowship in prayer with him can undo years of his work in your life. The enemy doesn't want you to pray.

He doesn't mind you even going to Bible studies if you're not praying. He doesn't mind it at all, as a matter of fact, because knowledge puffs up. But when you pray and have knowledge, it'll break you down, because God will give revelation, and he'll take that information and turn it into transformation.

That'll become revelation in your life. You see, prayer is the acid test of devotion to the Lord. You know, there's no use telling anyone, and really have it be so, that you're filled with the Holy Spirit if you're not praying.

I don't care if you can lay your hands on the stick and see things happen. It doesn't matter what you can see externally. If you claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit, then that Spirit of God is a praying spirit.

He is a holy praying spirit, and if you are filled with him, you will have a life of prayer. He who does not pray is practically denying the Lord who bought him in reality and truth. You see, he is a spirit of prayer.

The prayer life is like the pulse for the body. If you want to see my condition tonight, you come up and you feel my pulse. My pulse may be 110.

That means I'm in bad shape. If it's down about 58 or 60, you could tell I'm a runner. But you see, your pulse reveals your heart physically.

May I say that the prayer life is the same thing about your spiritual heart? When you have an ailment, or if I came to feel your pulse and it was low, I wouldn't try to correct your pulse. I would prescribe things that would change your heart. Get some exercise.

Go out and do some things that will build up your heart, and then your pulse will take care of itself. If your prayer life is weak, we make the mistake of trying to correct the prayer life so often with new resolutions and all the rest. But you see, your prayer life is an indicator of your heart.

Give attention to your heart. It's your heart that needs the therapy tonight. You see, there are four facts that I want to point out.

First, heaven is as full of blessings as ever. That's one point we're going to make tonight. Heaven has never been depleted.

It is as full of blessings as ever. Second point, God has not changed ever. He's the same.

Thirdly, our lives are just as dependent and require as much of the input of God as any living person ever in the history of the world. There are no changes made there. And then, fourthly, prayer is still God's appointed way to receive that heavenly storehouse of his blessings.

So if heaven is as full as ever of God's blessings, and if God has not changed, and if our lives are dependent upon him as much as anyone's ever have been, and prayer is his prescribed way of receiving blessings, then we need to know about prayer. In John chapter 15 that we just read, our Lord is setting forth the conditions to his disciples for fruitfulness. And he talks about prayer and fruitfulness.

He's developing the subject. And in chapter 15, verse 7, there is a tremendous promise. It says these words.

It's almost incredible, but if he hadn't have said it, we wouldn't probably have believed it. He said, if you remain or abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will. It literally says you shall demand as you're due.

And it will be done unto you. It's a promise based on a twofold condition. Twofold condition.

You see, we learn from this that to have an effective life of prayer, to be able to come and ask whatever we wish, there are two conditions that need to be filled out before God by his power, not apart from him, but by him. There are two conditions that are necessary to have a life that can pray. You see, we learn that our lives as Christians pray.

Your life is a prayer to God. What you allow him to do with your life. You see, the stream of your prayer cannot rise higher than the fountain of your life.

The stream of your prayer can't rise higher than the fountain of your life. It's your source. You see, our lives pray.

And our lives are not what others think we are. That's reputation. Our lives are not what we think we are.

That may be delusion. Our lives are what God knows we are. Before him, when we get before him and he begins to search us and know us, and we begin to see ourselves as we are.

May I ask you a question? If God were to take a zipper that you had in the invisible and just undo you and turn you wrong side out, would you be in rags tonight? Would you? Would you take out your heart and hold it up for all in this room to see? Because you see, that is your life. One cannot divorce our prayer life from our personal life. It is a foundation for prayer.

Many people think they can allow indulgences of habitual things in their life or rebellion or bad attitudes to remain or unbelief to remain in your hearts and then come to God in prayer when hard times come and expect him to get you off the hook. You know, he's a merciful God and he answers desperate prayer. But that kind of praying is not what he's after.

That's just emergency bailout kind of prayer. And then these people seem to wonder why there appears to be no answer to their prayers when they come to God in the clutch, when they've neglected him all along. There's no miracles happening.

There's none of the rest. And he says, listen, there's a life that can pray. You see, a man can be very pious without being right with God.

There's a lot of man to man activities that we can carry on. We can teach. That's man to man activity.

We can testify. We can come to Bible studies. We can pray in public.

That's a man to man activity. We can be a deacon. We can go witnessing because it's just man to man.

But may I say that prayer is man to God. And suddenly when we come into that eternal light that no flesh can glory in, that it is the revealer of all things as they are, then suddenly we realize that the prayer closet is different because it's a God to man encounter. And that place is an awesome place.

It's either the best place in the world or the worst place in the world, your prayer closet, one or the other. When I was in Florida down there for a summer, we had some teenagers and we'd send them out to be alone with God. Each week a new batch would come in.

They'd come in like a bunch of wild Broncos. And about the middle of the week, God would get a hold of them. We'd send them out alone.

One of them came back. I'll never forget it. One of the big laughing, happy go lucky people that never, ever got serious about anything publicly.

They may privately, but they never did let anyone see their serious side. They went out to be alone with God. And they came back about 10 minutes later and they went, Ooh, that's scary.

I don't like to be alone like that with God. Let me tell you something. That's the truth about human nature.

Because you see, as you're alone with God, you begin to realize who you are. Robert Murray McShane said, what a man is on his knees before God. That is what he is.

Not a thing more. What you are in your closet, alone with God, when just you and he are there together, that is what you are. That's what's building in your life.

You see, man sees things differently than God. He looks on the outer. God looks on the heart and we don't even know our own heart.

When God opens up his, whose, who, and his book of remembrance, they're going to be a lot of surprises in that day. And many that appear to be first are going to be last. And many of those unnamed, unnoticed David Brainards and others are going to be on a big throne along with him that are so great that they'll have to have strengthened necks to hold their crowns.

We can't pray or write unless our life is right in harmony with God. We've got to have harmony with our lives. Now I want to just give you some proof of this before we get into our text.

We're going to look at a few things, very briefly. I want to give you first the scripture of Matthew chapter five, verse 23, Matthew chapter five, verse 23. You see, it says there's got to be a life that can pray.

Matthew five, 23 puts it like this. It's talking about your heart. When you bring, therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave there your gift before the altar, go your way and get your priorities in order.

First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. You see, he's saying there that the giver must first be accepted. The giver must be first accepted before God, before the gift can be accepted.

I'll never forget the time that this man who I was going out to share the gospel with, he had been resisting the Lord. The conviction was quite hot. He slipped a \$20 bill in my hand and says, Al, put this in the offering for me would you? He turned the Lord away but wanted to give his token a little \$20, you know, token \$20? And the Lord just seemed to whisper to my heart and I said, you put it in yourself.

And I left. Now, that may be hard to you, but see, the Lord wanted the giver before he would take the gift. And that's a principle in the kingdom of God.

If you know that there's wrong relationships, don't come and try to offer your gift to the Lord. Now, in James chapter 5 verse 16, I'll just quote it to you, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Of a righteous man availeth much.

It's not an unrighteous man that can pray, it's a righteous man that can pray. Another scripture, Psalm 66 verse 18, says this, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. If I look on with toleration, is what it means, to look on with favor, to allow it to stay.

If I see iniquity, that means crookedness. If I see iniquity in my heart and don't turn away and don't allow God to change it and I try to pray, then God will not hear me. You know, all the world is praying, all the world, but God only hears one kind of prayer.

It's the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man. There's only one kind of righteousness and there's only one that doesn't have iniquity. Proverbs chapter 28 verse 9 says, he that turneth his ear away from the hearing of the law, he that turns his ear away from the hearing of God's law, even his prayer will be an

abomination to God.

That means if you think you can sidestep God on an issue when he's told you clearly and then come back and try to pray that you are just deceiving yourself, that you are mocking God. He's saying that he that turns his ear away from what God says and then tries to pray, that's what makes God sick. That's what he's saying.

You see, we can try to use prayer for our own means and it's a deception to our own heart. We're just being used by the enemy. You can't use God.

Now, back then in John chapter 15, we're coming and we're going to see very simply that there's a life that can pray. A life that can ask anything of God and God will do it. And the two conditions are these.

Number one, abide in me. That's the first condition. Secondly, and my words, my words abide in you.

Two conditions, but I want to take those two conditions and look at them rather carefully and discussing each one with sub points under each. First of all, what does it mean to abide in the Lord? If you abide in me, he says, well, our Lord has been talking about the true vine. He's been using a figure, our vine and the branches.

He's been talking about a grape arbor and he's been saying, I am the true vine and you are the branches. And he uses a parallel like those branches abiding within that vine and actually being a part of that vine. You see first, there are three then aspects of abiding using the figure of the branch in the vine as a means of teaching us.

He's trying to get us an idea. He's saying, I'm a true vine. My father is the husbandman.

And he's saying, look, it's the same relationship that a vine has to branches. That's what you have to have towards me. Well, what has it got to teach us? Well, there's three things that we need to see characteristically about the branches in relationship to the vine.

First of all, we see that the branch is totally abandoned to the vine. So the first condition of abiding in me is abandonment, abandonment to the purpose of God. That's what the branch is.

You see, what is the purpose of a vine? To bring forth grapes. Isn't that right? To bring forth grapes, you see, and it brings forth those grapes and those branches exist for one reason on that vine, that's to bear the fruit that the vine produces. You see, we don't produce our fruit, we bear it.

We bear fruit, the vine produces it. And that's the same exact relationship. First is abandonment to the purpose of God.

What is his purpose? The Lord Jesus. He came to seek and to save. He came to bear fruit to the Father.

He says that I have this desire that you should bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain. You see, it's clear from the context of this passage that Jesus means this, that we must be abandoned to the purpose of God. The vine is of no use at all.

The branches are of no use at all except for the purpose of fruit. You can't use them, the Bible says, to burn under the altar because the fire would distort everything. It can't be used for sacrifice.

You can't use it to make furniture. It's too crooked to make a steak out of. The only thing that the wood of the vine is used for is to produce fruit, and that is the purpose that we are to be here on this earth.

This is the only justification for existence for these vines, to bring forth fruit. And so outside of bearing fruit for Christ, you have no reason to stay on the earth, not one. He might as well have drowned you when he baptized you, if he had any other reason.

You have a reason to bring forth fruit into him. That's why he left you here. He could have fellowship with you in heaven.

But he left you here that you might be a branch out of the vine and bring forth Jesus' fruit. You see, fruitfulness is a proof of union. Fruitfulness is a proof of union.

In fact, in verse 2, it says, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit. And then it says, in verse 6, it says, if a man does not abide in me, he's cast forth as a branch.

He's withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they're burned. No fruit proves this. You're not abiding in the vine.

You see, normally on a vine, all the branches look alike. But in some cases, there's a big difference, and I want to just describe two kinds of branches to you on a vine. There's two kinds of branches.

You have a vine here. You have a branch coming off with a lot of leaves, so much foliage, lots and lots of little green leaves, and you can just look at it, and it's so beautiful to look at. But you know something? Heavily leafy branches often don't produce much fruit.

You look at all the leaves. You know, Adam and Eve wore leaves too. They had no fruit.

But these leaves were devoid. These leaves are devoid of fruit. And you know something about these branches? They're only connected.

If you were to go up to this branch and to try to take this branch off, you see, you'd find that the difference between this vine branch and then another branch that's kind of thin but has great big old fruits on it, big old fruit, however, whatever you want to say, singular, it's embedded deeply into the vine. It's linked right at the source, whereas the leafy branch is only skin deep. It's connected, that's true, but the union that is there is only skin deep.

There's no vital flow of the inner issues of the life of the vine into that branch, and you can just jerk it off the vine very, very easily. Whereas the other that's fruitful, that branch, it's tough, it's resilient, and it has a deep implantation into the very heart of the vine, and there's a deep heavy flow of the life source of both. One is attached by skin only, just superficial, easy to separate, and a small flow of sap.

You see, our Lord cursed a fig tree that had only leaves, didn't he? Remember? It's the only thing he cursed on the earth, a fig tree with leaves without fruit. That's how a lot of people are. They're superficially attached to the true vine, who is Jesus, and they bring forth a lot of leaves, but there's no fruit.

And the other, maybe not so pretty to look at, but it's deeply embedded in his life and brings forth his kind of fruit in his season. Well, what is fruit? I mean, if fruit is a proof of union, then what is fruit? Well, fruit is very logical. Fruit is the outward expression, it's the outward expression of an inward nature.

That's what it is. That's why Jesus said, by their fruit you'll know them. You can tell.

You can tell what kind of tree you're looking at. You see, the outward expression of an inward nature. When I was in Florida, we would drive across the pike areas down there, and you'd look out to left and right, and you'd see these big fields, or big tree clumps, or whatever they were, lots of rolling hills of orchards.

And you can't, I couldn't tell what they were by looking at them, because I'm just not a good botanist. I couldn't look and see, like that's an orange tree, or that's a grapefruit tree. You can't just tell by looking.

But I tell you what I can tell. If I were to go in the time that fruit was coming forth, I can tell the difference between an orange and a grapefruit. Can you? You see, by their fruits, I can know them.

I can look and I can see what season it is, and in season I can tell what kind of tree I'm looking at. May I say this? If you are vitally connected to the Lord Jesus Christ, and not just skin-deep attached, then you will have His life flowing through you. And His life flowing through you is going to produce fruit, an expression of the vine, an expression of the nature.

An orange tree produces oranges. A lemon tree produces lemons. You see, like the trunk of a tree, so is produced out on the branches.

And if you are vitally connected, totally abandoned to the purpose of God, then His life will be coming up through you in such a fashion that Jesus' fruit will be coming out of your life. Now, it may not be big fruit, maybe little tiny hard grapes, but they'll be recognizable. They'll be there, they'll be Him, and you can tell who they are.

May I ask you this tonight? Are the fruit of the Spirit in your life? Are they? Are you totally abandoned to the purpose of God? Is that your reason for being on earth? Or is God a stepping stone to your own happiness? You see, I just today thought of this. I think it's such an adequate description. He says, apart from me, you can do nothing.

And we describe life on your own, trying to run your own life is like trying to go in there to supper tonight and grab a big handful of wet spaghetti and hold it in your hand. And the tighter you hold on to it, the more loose ends squeeze out. That's how it is, try to run your own life.

The tighter you grab, the more loose ends you get. Try to hold a wet handful of spaghetti sometime and squeeze it. That's what it's like when you try to run your own life.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. You must be abandoned to the purpose of God. That's what it means to abide in Him.

That's part of it. To be abandoned to the purpose of God. But the second aspect of abiding that I want to talk about tonight is not a total abandonment to the purpose of God, but now total attachment.

Total attachment to the person of God. And that's Jesus Christ in this illustration, this particular truth. And let's just say that is a adoration relationship.

This means a total exchange, a total exchange, not just Him patching up my life. Jesus Christ does not want to change your old life. He wants to get rid of it.

If any man is in Christ, old things are passed away. All things become new. It makes you totally new.

And He wants to totally exchange your life for His. You see, the branch must be open to the inflowing Spirit and the Spirit coming into our life. There's no restriction.

There's no knot in the branch. It's an openness that's there to His life coming in. And this means, if this is true, total adoration, total attachment to the person of Jesus, that means that there'll be effortless fruit.

The fruit we were talking about in abandon to the purpose of God will come forth. You won't have to try. Have you ever seen an apple tree out in the field? And they're just grunting and groaning.

And, oh, one more. There it is. And, oh, that's a nice one.

Come on, Joe. And apples out the arm. You've never seen that.

And you never, ever will, because you see, it's effortless fruit. Appetite. When you're totally appropriating His life and looking to Him, may I say this, that the branch's concentration is not upon the fruit.

It's upon the vine. That's when fruitfulness comes. If the branch concentrates upon the fruit, it'll become withering and die.

But if it's totally attached to the person of the vine, then that life comes forth. You need to be occupied with Christ, not how much fruit is coming out of your life. Just adore Him.

Just love Him. Get before Him and give yourself to Him. What is your appetite for today? Is it for Him? There is none upon earth I desire but Thee.

You see, it shouldn't be just results that you're after, but that Jesus Christ Himself be your goal, that you might know Him, to be plugged into Him so vitally, to love Him in such a way. You see, love that's pure is passionate. There'll be a zeal in your life.

Love that's pure will be deep, and it'll be clean, and it'll be enduring. That's how love is described. You see, and service, which is fruit in one sense, is just a by-product.

It's not the goal. It's just the overflow of a relationship to the vine and the branches. Remember when Simon Peter was standing before the Lord in the last chapter of John, and they were talking about service in the future.

Jesus was reconciling Peter with Himself. Peter had denied Him three times, and the Lord says, Simon, do you love Me? Three times. And Simon says, yes, he kind of stammers, and he kind of backs up, and the Lord says, shepherd My sheep.

Feed My lambs, shepherd the lambs. He says those three things to Simon Peter. And you know, it's the funniest thing about it all, talking about fruit bearing, talking about service, people say, I just don't love My neighbor like I should.

I just don't love that person like I should. That may be a factor to you, but may I say that Simon Peter, the Lord never said, Peter, do you love sheep? He said, Peter, do you love Me? Do you love Me? Are you totally attached to the person of God? Because if you're totally attached to the person of God, that will cause you to bring forth the fruit that that relationship will normally result in. We always think we have to

work up things in ourselves, but you know, it says that we work out what God works in.

It is God who worketh in you to will and do His own good pleasure. But then it says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. You see, God works it into us.

We work it out as we trust His life that He's put inside. Isaiah 40, 31 says, they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. And the word renew means exchange.

What a great deal. We don't have any strength. He has it all.

And they that wait upon Him shall exchange their strength and they shall mount up with wings as eagle. An old eagle just sits there on the crag of a pinnacle and just waits until the wind blows. And then it just goes and it just rises up like this because effortless, just on the breath of the Lord.

And they that wait upon the Lord, He'll be putting into you all that He requires out of you. So first of all, going back, are you totally abandoned to the purpose of God? Is that your purpose for being here? Secondly, are you totally attached to the person of God? And then a third aspect of abiding, the first part of our message, a third aspect is our total availability, total availability to the plan of God. That means that for your life today, that you're saying, Lord, I am yours wherever, whenever, however, and with whoever.

And you know something? When you finally get to that point, you have to have a funeral to get to that point. You have to have a funeral. But when you do, there is such rest that comes.

Oh, it's such peace and such joy. You see, many people, though, cannot sleep even at night because they're trying subconsciously to work their way to heaven or try to make up for some guilt that's coming on their heart, you see. But that's not necessary because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin.

May I say this just on the side? Jesus Christ is more concerned with winning all there is of you than you winning all there is of the world. Because otherwise, you'll just spread disease. He wants to get that place back there.

A lot of people who let Christian service be that conscious salve that covers over guilt because they've never really surrendered. I need to do more for God. But they've never given that last room, that last place to him.

And they can't be used of him. God won't use them because they're unclean in his sight. Total availability to the plan of God.

No man can conquer until he's been totally conquered. You know, we should pray, God, make me usable instead of God use me. Because may I say, when he finds someone usable, he will wear you out.

You will pray, oh Lord, may I have a rest. You will have to pray, Lord, would you please use me? But see, we sit back and feel guilty because we're hoarding our own life and say, Lord, would you use me? I'd love to, my child, give me that. No, Lord, please just use me.

That's the way we do. And we can't pray because we're not totally available to the plan of God. Life is not my responsibility.

Life is rather my response to his ability. That's what it means. Responding to the ability and the plan of God.

I want you to imagine a conversation with my guitar as I'm walking into my study and I'm going into my books and I'm sitting down and I hear this over in my closet and I walk over and I open it up and it's lo and behold, it's coming from inside of my guitar case. It sounds like crying. Oh no.

And I open up my guitar case and I say, guitar, what are you doing in there? And it's going, oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I haven't played any tunes for you today.

Well, guitar, I mean, that's okay. I didn't really expect you to play any tunes apart from me. You can do nothing.

No, but you don't understand. I wanted to play some songs for you because, oh, I just love it when you put your hands on my neck and all these things. And it goes on and on and on.

And finally I say, gee, guitar, you are pretty dumb. Because you see, all that's required of you as a guitar, you don't have to work up music by yourself. All you have to do is yield to me.

You aren't expected to make music or bring forth those fruitful notes apart from me. Only when I come and put my hands on you and say, now's the time, is it your responsibility to bring forth music. Before then, just be still and know that you're my guitar.

I mean, that may be absolutely crazy. It may be crazy. But may I say tonight that you're only responsible for what God initiates in your life.

You can rest. Listen, he's not wanting you to go out and jump through celestial Frisbee hoops or whatever to prove your love for him. He wants you to be still and know that I'm God.

Most of us are like a little puppy dog running down the street with a tin can tied to his tail, yipping, and he's running from the noise he's making. If you just stop, be still and know that I'm God. Get along with him and you will discover that the noise will cease and the strife and the turmoil will disappear and you can just be available to what God initiates.

And so that's what it means to abide in him, at least part of it. It means abandonment to the purpose of God, fruit bearing. It means attachment to the person of Christ or God, which is adoration and availability to the plan of God.

And that's just surrender. Those three things are to abide in him. But he goes on.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, there's at least two aspects I want to talk about for this. My words abide in you. We're talking about a life that is able to claim the promise of whatever you ask I will do.

My words abide in you. That doesn't mean in your notebook. It means in you, in you.

So abide in this case means to tarry or to remain or more accurately even to feel at home. Did his words feel at home in you? That's what it means. It's very, very simply then, first of all, the first aspect of his words abiding in us means his words must control us.

His words must control us. May I say that if you would have God in your closet, he must have you in public. If you would have God in your closet, then he must have you in public as friends.

He calls you into a heart agreement where his words abide in you. You see, this means very simply his words controlling us that that I live my life by his word and he can speak to me. He gives me his word and I run my life by his word, not by common sense.

Listen, people say what we need is a little common sense around here. Listen, we have enough of that, but we need a little uncommon sense from the word of God, something that's higher than man, that's higher than his ways. I'm tired of common sense.

I think the Lord would look at and say, it's stinking. It's like flesh to me. All the world is seeking to walk in common sense.

And God says, is there anyone that's willing to walk in uncommon sense that's higher than man? You see, entrust your life to his word to build upon it. Embrace the word totally. Billy Graham says that there was a slight question in his mind about this book for several years, not really in his heart, but in his mind, because of all the questions that have been raised about J, E, P, D and N and Q and all these other jokers that supposedly initiated writing in this book.

And he questioned it. And one day he went out in the woods and says, Lord, I totally throw all that question away. And I accept this book as it is.

This is the word of God. His ministry totally changed from that day. From that day on, his ministry, his life was totally, totally enhanced by the presence of God.

And God just blessed his ministry to begin to take off. May I say, if you're questioning this book, you show me a man that is questioning this book. And he's saying, all those things.

This shouldn't be in here. This should be in here and all the rest. I know there's some real men of God that say things like that.

But I think across the board, you can say this, that if you don't trust this book, I'll show you someone who will not base his life upon it. You will not give your life to rest on something you don't trust. His words to abide in you simply mean that you've got to search this book.

You've got to eat this book. You've got to give yourself to that book. And then let this book judge you.

I heard about a woman that went to the Louvre one time, the French Museum, and she saw the Mona Lisa. And she saw all these other paintings. And she came out and she said, well, I don't see what's so great about all those pictures.

And this guard, this very stately guard was standing there. He never said a thing, but he kind of looked over and says, madam, these pictures aren't judged by people. These pictures judge people.

And that's how it is with the word of God. You see, you don't pass a judgment on this book. This book passes a judgment on you.

I've heard people say, I have a problem with this verse. Oh no, this verse has a problem with you. That's it.

No kidding. This is a rock. It's immovable.

It's the rock of the ages. This book, this word of God, you see, and if you can think, oh, here it is. If you can think of anything in this book tonight that God has showed you and he's brought to your mind, and he's, if there's a command in this book that you are not obeying, you're not on praying ground.

You're not. But if you're just trying to sidestep God, that's what I'm getting at tonight. If we would just be honest with him and let his words abide in us and we abide in him, then we would soon find that, that even the desires of our heart, while we, before we yet speak, he'd be answering because he delights to give us all those things.

You see, either prayer will consume sin in your life or sin will consume your prayer life. One or the other. Either prayer as you pray in faith to him will consume sin in your life or sin in your life will wean you away from prayer.

Because sin and prayer cannot live together in power in the human heart. God designed it that way. And if you are looking at this word and there's something there you're not doing that he said for you to do clearly, then you're just playing.

You're not praying. And you're straying, too. I thought that added that.

You must live to God if you're going to pray to God, you've got to look at first John chapter three, first John chapter three, and you'll see this coming out so clearly. Maybe this is not so much about prayer as we thought it would be tonight, but I'll tell you, this is the foundation of prayer. First John chapter three, verse 19, hereby we know that we are of the truth and we can assure our hearts before him.

If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart. He knows all things. Look, if your heart condemns you, if there's a nagging thing in your heart where you sidestepped him, God's greater than your heart.

He knows this, but look at the next verse. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence towards God and whatever we ask, we receive of him for this reason, because we keep his commandments and we are doing those things that are pleasing in his sight. That's faith, that's the life of faith.

You see, the positive aspect is doing those things that are pleasing in his sight. That's his word abiding in us. You see, scripture memory in your life increases the vocabulary of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

Put the word in there, thy word have I hid in my heart, and if you put his word in there, God's vocabulary is increased in you. He'll bring up a little arrow of the word out of the quiver of your heart and launch it from the bowstring of your lip, right on to the mark that he wishes for it to go, and you'll be walking and his word will talk with you. You see, faith is love in action, that's what it is, and without faith you can't please him and you can't pray if you aren't doing those things that are pleasing.

So first of all, my words must abide in you. Is there an area of your life that you know is away from this book and you're not seeking to repent in? If it's so, then you are not on the kind of praying ground that you can be. What are you sacrificing by keeping that in your life? Think of that tonight.

You ask God to save your husband, you ask God to save your daughter or your son or your business associate, but you're playing games, you're trifling with him in other areas, and what you're doing is you're

forfeiting their prayer answer because of your own sin. His words must abide in you. But the second aspect of his words abiding in you, first is his words must control us.

Secondly, his word must cleanse us. In fact, he says this in John 15, verse 2, the word for cleanse is the word for purge. It's like to cleanse by water, but there's also a figure there, the figure of pruning.

You see, he's talking about pruning on the vine, and let me describe this to you. Every branch, verse 2 in John 15, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. So there's one kind of branch, a branch that bears no fruit.

He takes it away. How does he take it away? Well, he purges it. He takes it away, and every branch that bears fruit, he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit.

Now, there's two kinds of branches, then, that are taken away. The first type is that have no fruit, and he takes them away completely. The second type is the kind that brings forth some fruit, and he prunes it that it may bring forth more fruit.

You see, first there's fruit, and then there's more fruit, and then there's much fruit. You see, this first type that brings forth no fruit, there are several types of branches like that, too. There's dead wood.

A vine. And that dead wood in that vine's existence can create parasites. They have to take it off.

They come along and cut it off. It takes a lot of weight away from the potential of the vine. Let me ask you this.

What kind of things in your life are they that are dead? There's no life at all in them, and they don't produce any fruit. They're just hanging there. They're things that may look like they're just attached to you, but there's absolutely nothing to do with the purpose of God, the person of God, or the plan of God.

They are just non-fruit-bearing things in your life that are encumbrances that God says to cast aside. He wants to remove that. He wants to take it away out of your life and existence.

Dead wood. What is it in your life? Is it a relationship? Dead wood? Is it a habit that you have? Is it a place that you go or something that you love? You see, also, there's in this same kind of no-fruit-producing branch, there's just foliage. Not only dead wood, but there are other non-fruit-producing branches that just produce the foliage.

They're the skin-deep ones I was telling you about. And do you know that it takes a lot of sap to produce leaves? And it's like in our life, you see. There's a lot of energy that's required to produce all the outward form and all the beauty that we think is so beautiful so much of the time.

You see, the husband will come along and clip off that big leafy, leafy branch so that all that juice, all that life that's been going out into that will be sidetracked and cut off and sent off into a branch that'll do the will of a vine. You see what I'm talking about? That he looks at our life and he sees all these things like idols in our life. He sees hobbies in our life that aren't necessarily producing any fruit.

And he sees activities in our life that keep my vital energies away from the Master's hand. Things that may be very lovely to look at and seem very good, but they hinder that perfect will of God, and that's fruit. And God says He wants to take it away out of your life.

Tonight, He does. And obviously, when you put a knife to something that's living, living tissue, it hurts to cut it away. But oh, we go even further than that, because you see, it's not just the non-fruit bearing parts that are pruned and taken away, but then there are those who bear fruit and He purges it for a reason.

Why does He do it? What does it say? More. He wants more. He wants more fruit in my life and in your life.

Now, if you've ever been to an orchard and seen a tree being pruned, if you are inexperienced, you will think it's the cruelest thing you've ever seen. I asked a man once, how far do you prune a big tree, a big mushy tree? He says, we usually prune it until a bird can fly through it without hitting anything. That's a lot.

That is an awful lot. You see, you'll go to an apple orchard and you'll see branches all over the ground and fruit on those branches all over the ground, and all the leaves and all the beauty will seem to be cut away. And you'll see that knobby old tree, stripped, just standing there with a hundred bleeding wounds.

And it'll be just oozing, and you'll say, oh, how ghastly, how horrible. It looks like a coat hanger, that old tree. And you see, you may not think it's too pretty to look at, but I want to say this.

The Father is the husbandman, and He knows what He's doing. He knows how much to cut. He knows when to stop.

He's an expert, and He is not motivated by beauty. He is not motivated by sentiment. He is not motivated by, oh, it hurts.

He is motivated. That is His motive, and He wants one thing, and that is that that tree will become a fruitful tree, and not even size, but the sort of activity that the branch is involved in. You see, branches that escape the knife will get very big, and they'll be so pretty to look at.

And you'll look at them, you'll admire them, and you'll say, isn't it wonderful? But there won't be any fruit. But a fruitful branch, you can look at it, and you see, oh, look at that wonderful, wonderful fruit. Isn't it lush? Isn't it beautiful? And as you get a little closer, and you pull back those branches, and you look inside, you see hundreds of scars, back in the vital parts that nobody else can see, until you bother to look on the inside.

Listen to this. Wherever you ripe fields behold, waving to God their sheaves of gold, it's a grain field, be sure some corn of wheat has died, some soul has there been crucified, someone has wrestled, wept, and prayed, and fought hell's legions undismayed. There is no gain without a loss.

You cannot save but by a cross. You've got to face the knife tonight. You know what the knife is? The knife is the Word of God.

The Word of God is living and active. It's a sword. It cuts down between the thoughts and the intents of the heart, down between the soul and the spirit.

You see, a fruitful branch is to be examined and you will see scars. I bear in my body the marks of Christ Jesus, Paul could say, and he was a fruitful branch. Joseph is a fruitful bow.

He bore scars from pruning. He went down, down. He went down into the pit.

He went down into Egypt. He went down into the dungeon. He went down into the lowest part of the dungeon.

How far down? How much pruning? Until you quit resisting the knife. Up, up, and one day he came, a fruitful bow. God blessed him.

The Word of God, the pruning and purging of persons. You see, often these are good things that God takes from your life. Maybe it's golf.

Maybe it's fishing. Listen, don't bother to say to me you don't have time for prayer if you have time for leisure, because God says that you should put first things first. Our leisure reveals our priorities.

You see, these things like golf and all the rest, they're not bad. Of course they're not. I mean, it's perfectly fine.

But I'll tell you this, that if you aren't praying, you don't have time for them. Give all and take all. Such a one will ask, what'll happen to me if I do that? Doesn't matter, because the husbandman knows.

You can demand as you do, whatever you say, if you allow him to let his words abide in you and you abide in him. You can come to the throne room. You can run right into the throne room.

You can put your, with perfect reverence, your head in his arms and say, Father, this is what I want. May I ask you one question? What is there that is now in your life that is worth forfeiting that promise of prayer? Think of it in eternal terms. What is it in your life that is worth forfeiting whatsoever you ask? I will do.

Think of what that would mean to you tonight. Whatsoever you ask, I will do. I mean, I can ask some biggies.

You can too. And whatever you ask, only in the path of abiding will we find the joyful place of God's constantly answering prayer. Joy will come.

It'll be the result. Prayer is a result of your life with God. You can never rise higher than your life from the place of prayer.

You can't. You've got to let your life abide in him and his words must abide in you. There's a life that can ask whatever it wishes, whatsoever things you desire when you pray, believe you have them and you shall receive them that's available to you tonight.

It really is. But God wants us to get serious about those little things he put his finger on as we were going through our time together. What does it mean to you? If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you can ask whatever you will.

Oh, think what it means. What what's keeping you from that tonight? Do you really believe in prayer? I'm making an appeal tonight to come to the master's feet and let him prune you, let him purge you, let him strip off all the old dead bark and get honest with him. What things are keeping you from prayer? They're your enemy.

You've got to deal with them tonight. And I want us to pray about it together. I want us to be dead honest.

Let's do prayer. Father, we ask your blessing on this time we're going to have. We ask your blessing that as we look at the promises of God on one hand and in our life on the other, that the two will come into agreement.

There are many, Lord, who seek to pray and not being on praying ground. Father, by the spirit of God tonight, would you convict us of sin? We don't want emotions necessarily. We want a resignation in every heart to get before you in the power of God, in the plan of God, for the purpose of God, just that we might know you and be able to pray in power.

We just thank you now for what you're going to do. And we don't dismiss ourselves out of your presence, but we dismiss ourselves from this room. For those that wish to leave, we do.

And we thank you that you're going to do mighty things as we get on it. And as we say, Lord, I'm ready for the night, cut away that relationship. Cut away that activity.

Cut away that ambition. Cut away that opinion. Cut away that habit.

Cut away that reading material. Cut away that indulgence. I want to bear fruit.

Lord, in Jesus' name, glorify yourself now. Do it for Jesus' sake, we pray.

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