

I honestly believe that what you think about God is the single most important thing in the world. There is nothing more important than that. How you perceive God is everything. Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" He got back four distorted images. "Well, you're Elijah, or Jeremiah, or John the Baptist. You're one of the prophets. I don't know." Four distorted images. Then He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter just pipes up and says, "You're the Christ, the son of the living God." His name was Simon then but he got his name changed on the strength of what he said, which to me means that when you have a real understanding of God, your whole identity changes. You as a person, your whole persona, your whole character, your whole identity, and therefore your destiny changes.

It's on the revelation of who Jesus really is that the church is actually built. And we're coming, I believe, into the day of a real strong revelation of who Christ really is. And all our warfare will be successful when it's based on the reality of who Jesus really is. And so for me, putting that sense, of who God is, what God is like, and what the heart of God is really like towards us, because the Scripture says in Revelation 19:10 that it's the testimony of Jesus, that is the very spirit of prophecy. In other words, the testimony of Jesus; what He came to do, what He said about Himself, that's part of it. But the bigger part of it is your testimony of Jesus, is the very essence that drives your prophetic gift and your ability to encourage another human being.

So, it (the book) is full of excerpts, full of assignments, full of work shops, full of things to do, which if you do them, will guarantee that you'll come into a radical experience; not only of the prophetic, but I believe, the nature of God. The interesting thing is; one final point. The publisher is from Winston, Salem, so it's actually making its home state debut this weekend. There you have it.

So, what the cross is for Jesus, it cannot be for you. The cross was death for Him and it's life for you. The cross was punishment for Him and forgiveness for you. The cross was judgment on Him and it is freedom for you. So when we come to love the cross and to stand before the cross, the cross is not a symbol of our pain, it's a symbol of his. When Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me," He wasn't talking about pain or suffering. That was his deal with the cross. It's not ours. He was punished so that I could go free. He suffered so that I didn't have to. The cross is a symbol of your freedom, your forgiveness, your acceptance, the love of God, the generosity of God, the

kindness of God, the mercy of God, the beauty of God. When He said "Take up your cross," He said, "Take up everything that's beautiful about me and follow me." "Take up everything that's marvelous about my love for you and come and walk with me. Come follow after me."

You know, the early Christians used to put a cross on their building because it was a sign to the unchurched. If you're in difficulty, if you're in pain, if you're suffering, just turn around on your heel 360 degrees and look on the skyline and wherever you see a building with a cross on it, you can go there and get set free. You can go there and get delivered. You can go there and find yourself. You can go there and discover who you really are.

You know, there is a difference between relationship and fellowship. Relationship is being of the same blood. We are blood bought children of God. We are not legally adopted children, that's not what adoption means in Scripture. It means something totally different. God doesn't want legally adopted children; He wants blood bought, real children. We have a relationship with God. We are his children. Let me read you this from 1 John 3:1-3 (NASB) "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2)Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3)And everyone who has this hope (and hope is always divine expectation, and everyone who has this divine expectation) fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." We can call Him Abba, which means Daddy, because we're real children. We can call Him Father because we are growing up not just to be children, but we are growing up to be sons.

It's a true saying that we are all children of God, we are not all yet sons of God. We are growing from being children into sonship. We are moving from this place where we refer and we relate to God as Daddy, to where we relate to God as Father. That is our journey. That's our process and we are learning how to grow up in all things in Christ. Our relationship is based and built upon unconditional love and relationship is possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus. So in relationship, we stand in His righteousness and He gives us value in the eyes of the Father. So, our relationship with God is never in doubt. We belong to God by issue of blood.

I first taught this to my children when they were small and my son Ben who is my first born son had to learn the difference between relationship and fellowship when he was growing up in my house. He had to learn that no matter what he did, no matter what he became, he would always be my son and my relationship with him is never in doubt, but our fellowship got a little bit sticky on days. I remember him learning this lesson when he was five or six years old and he'd done something pretty awful to his brother and we had to visit about it, which was not a blessing to his back side. I remember him clinging to me and sobbing and saying, "Daddy don't you love me?" and I said "Son, absolutely, you are my son." Trying to teach this five or six year old boy that our relationship was never in doubt, but our fellowship might hit some patchy moments. But, he is my son and then growing up and continually revisiting that whole theme with him as he grew up and became a "monster," oh, oh, "a teenager," and having that same conversation with him when he was eleven, thirteen, fifteen, nineteen. "You're my son."

God takes care of the relationship. We take care of the fellowship. That's our business; to walk with Him. The cool thing about God is, He's always ready for both. You know, when you are having a bad day with God, He is never having a bad day with you and God doesn't get disillusioned with us because He never had any illusions in the first place. He's always known who we are and what we are like and He has so set his heart on loving us. Yeah? He is constant. He never changes. You always know exactly where you are with God because He never changes. He's always the same yesterday, today and forever, relationship.

What changes in the dynamic is nothing that is coming from God. What changes the dynamic for us is our ability to have fellowship with God's unchanging nature and that's where the Holy Spirit has come to enable us to become established in our relationship so that our fellowship is as consistent as our relationship. They are one and the same. He takes care of the relationship; we take care of the fellowship with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jude 21 (NASB) says, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." In other words, know where the line is in relationship and don't cross it. Stay in fellowship, and the whole process for staying in fellowship is called abiding.

That's what we're going to talk about this evening and tomorrow is the whole process of abiding. How do we stay and remain and dwell in our fellowship with God so that in our fellowship with Him and his relationship with us, they are one and the same in terms of their strength. Let me read you that passage in John 15:1-11 (NASB) "I am the true

vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2)Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3)You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4)Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5)I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in Him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6)If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7)If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8)My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9)Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10)If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11)These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."

The word abide in the Greek language is *meno*, and it means to stay in a given place of relationship and expectancy. God has put us into Christ in relationship, the process of staying there and abiding is what we call fellowship. So learning to abide in Christ is a key discipline of discipleship. When we do not consciously abide, we suffer a disconnection in our fellowship with God. Keep yourself in the love of God means, pay attention to dwelling, to remaining, and to abiding in the fellowship of God's love.

So we are on a journey in relationships and fellowship; from "Daddy" to "Father"; from being childlike to being mature. It's a paradox. It's both, and in order to increase your maturity you'll need to become more childlike. Not childish, that's what we've been; but childlike. You see, the more childlike you are, and the more astonished you are about God, the more mature in the Spirit you can become. We're children learning the fellowship disciplines of how to become a fully mature son in Christ and the beauty of this whole process is that the Father's love is unconditional. So our relationship is totally secure. His love is continual. He provides it freely in all of our challenges. Love is always available because He wants us to abide there. Abiding in love means never allowing your conscious state to lose its focus on who God is or what He has provided. It's a wonderful thing just to be able to count on God in every situation you face. So, He never leaves you nor forsakes you. He's always there. He's always present.

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I always find it intriguing, that whole thing when God says, "Seek me." My question is

how do you seek someone who is always present? How do you seek someone who never leaves you nor forsakes you and He's always there? What is seeking about? Maybe it's not seeking as we understand it, if you're looking for something that isn't present. That's not what we're doing. God never leaves us, He is always there. When He invites us to seek Him, what He's saying is "I've got something for you." You need to come and deliberately stand in my presence or look around, spot where I am, come walking over to me because I've got something to say, I've got something to give. So when God invites you to seek Him, it's an invitation to receive something. Yeah? He's not hiding. He's inviting you into a moment with Him that will make an incredible difference to your life in the circumstances that you're in.

So abiding is to stay in a place of relationship and expectancy. So expectancy is like the faith part of abiding. In this relationship in Christ, the fellowship part of abiding has a positive intention because it knows that God will provide. So my question to you right now is, what is it that God wants to be for you now in your current circumstances that He couldn't be for you any other time and what is the gift that is available to you now that maybe you're not seeing. What's available to you right now? Some of us in this room are going through some tough circumstances. So what's God up to? I know God, that He allows in His wisdom what He can easily prevent by his power. So instead of sitting there bemoaning your fate or your current condition, never ask God why, because He's never going to answer you. It's a victim question and you're not a victim. You're in Christ. Truth to tell, you don't live in your circumstances. You live in Jesus. So get over your bad self. Never ask God why; the why question never gets answered on earth.

The two best questions you can ever ask are both found in the Acts of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. Those two questions are What does this mean and What must I do? What does this mean and what must I do? What is this for? What are you doing and what do I need to be doing in order to align myself with who you are? My favorite question is, "Father what is it you want to be for me now that you couldn't be any other time?" Yeah? What is that and I'm so camping out on your doorstep until you tell me, which is what He loves. The why question is a victim question; it's an invalid question that makes you an invalid, and you're not one. You're not an invalid, you just might be a victor in the making. So what's going on guys? What's God up to? Don't you want to know? What's He plotting in that scheming brain of His? What's He up to?

The great thing is that He invites you into a place of prayer that has certainty all the way through it. So you discover that Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). He ever lives to make intercession for us. So there's Jesus at the right hand of God praying for you right now. Wouldn't you want to know what He is praying? Aren't you curious? What if prayer is finding out what God wants to do then asking Him to do it? Then of course, you've got the Holy Spirit who also makes intercession for us. So He's praying. So what's your question there? Well what's He praying and does He agree with Jesus? So you got two members of the Godhead both praying in stereo. Don't you want to know what they're up to? Don't you want to know what that conversation in heaven is all about? What if there is an invitation for you to take part in a conversation in heaven about your life?

It's exactly what Isaiah did in chapter 6. He's in heaven, you know like you are. It's a normal Tuesday. It's a bit of a slow day, go to heaven. Great!!! He listens in to this conversation. It's a little like Frodo in the Lord of the Rings. You know they're in Rivendale and he's listening to a wizard and elves and dwarfs and guys, all talking and they're saying, "Who shall we send to Mordor with the ring? "I'll go." A little hobbit with big feet and hairy. "I'll go." That's exactly it. Conversation, listening in to a conversation. That's what prayer is for me. I want to find out what Jesus is saying.

And so what if prayer is not praying to try and get an answer. What if it's about praying with the answer? What if it's not about praying towards God, but what if it's about praying with God. What does the Bible say about the three-fold chord? It's not easily broken. What if prayer is a three-fold chord? You listening in to Jesus and the Holy Spirit in stereo, praying about you coming to a place of agreement so that when you pray the same thing, something moves. Yeah? There's no doubt in prayer, there's only certainty. Yeah? You're supposed to know what God wants. It is your inheritance, it is your privilege, it is your destiny, it is who you are. We are knowers. Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice." He said it as though it's obvious, "My sheep know my voice, hello?" "It's obvious, my sheep know my voice." "It is their privilege, it is their inheritance, it is who they are."

We are on this earth, not only to know God's voice for ourselves, but to be able to relate the voice of God to people around us. That's why I love the prophetic so much. God's love is unconditional, it's eternal, it's ever present, and the experience of God's love comes out of our fellowship and abiding. You are supposed to live surrounded and

impacted constantly and continually by the love of God, that your heart is melting all the time. That your heart is soft towards God and tender towards people. If I don't abide, I suffer a disconnect. I don't suffer a disconnect from God because I can't get disconnected from God because He's the one holding on to me. The disconnect is where I disconnect from my present moment experience of his love. That's the disconnect. There's no disconnect in relationship, there is a disconnect in fellowship and my ability to experience God gets disconnected. That's the Holy Spirit's job; it's to reconnect us and help us to stay connected to the process of abiding.

So the beautiful thing is that God allows us the privilege of repentance. I love repentance. What a great idea that was eh? Yeah? And you know what, it's impossible to repent unless you first receive the goodness and kindness of God. So even when you get disconnected in your fellowship, God in his relationship showers you with goodness and kindness so that you can get reconnected. So we can repent which is to change our thinking; think again. I love that whole concept behind repentance. So often I'm saying to people who are in a place of disconnect with God, "So all your thinking has brought you to this place that you don't like?" Well, have another thought. I mean what? Think again. That's what repentance is. So dude, that thought's not working out then eh? So how about having another one? It's not rocket science eh? It's not quantum physics. This is the simple message of the Gospel. God give us the freedom to repent. Change our mind. Think something different. Think how God thinks. That's what repentance is. You see, your line of thought is not working out so how about taking my thoughts and thinking those and see where that gets you yeah. Repentance.

So a spiritual principle here is, always to let God love you. Nothing originates in you. You are not the author of your salvation and you are not the author of your experience with God; He is. Nothing originates in you. That's what John says in John 3:27 (NASB) "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven." Heh? The old Baptist boy knew a few things eh? "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven." James' understanding of that concept was this, "Every good and perfect thing comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." James 1:17 Yeah.

Paul's version of it is found in Romans 11:35, "Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?" It's a rhetorical question. The answer is nobody. Then he

says this, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." You see everything comes from God, through God in you and then you give back to God the very thing He gave you. It takes God to love God. Only God can love God, or as John put it, "We love Him because He first loved us." Yeah? Everything originates in God. So everything that God commands of you, He intends to give you because that's how it works. So every command of God is also a promise. Yeah? So when God says something like "Be holy even as I am holy." How do hear that in your spirit? You can hear it like God doing his John Wayne imitation.... Well, it might work for you. It doesn't work for me. Or it might be, (in a whisper) "Be holy even as I am holy." It might just be that. It might be a promise, "Hey, I've got something for you." "Be holy." Every command is also a promise. Why, because everything originates in God.

So He will never command anything of you when He has no intention of giving you something in the first place, because He knows that you cannot fulfill those commandments by yourself. So every command is therefore a promise. Yeah? You will love the Lord your God. Yeah? You will. Hey listen, you, you will love the Lord your God because here it is, whatever He wants from you, He intends to give you. Yeah? Everything originates in God. Only God can love God. So God comes to you and loves you and you give back to God the very thing He gave you.

How many of us who are parents, when it was your birthday, you gave your kids money to buy you a present. So come on, where did you get that from? It's in your flipping DNA. It's in your DNA. God put it, He's the creator. He established that as the principle in your DNA and you just do it naturally. Why, because you know your six year old little Johnny hasn't got enough cash to buy you a present. So the very thing he lacks, you intend to give. Whatever you want to give to God is always preceded by Him giving you something. I love this life.

So a rule of the Spirit then is what? Whatever you need the most, be the first to give it away. If you're sick, go find someone who is more sick and pray for him, because you've got a great chance of being healed if you give something. Yeah? You cannot sow potatoes and reap rhubarb. What you sow, you reap. Yeah? So we're encouraged, "Give, give, give, give. Give and it can be given to you. It's the principle of heaven. God wants love from you. So what? He gives love to you. Yeah? Short of money, too much month, not enough money? Go find someone who is worse off than you and give them something. If you're like me when I grew up learning to live by faith, I

always had like, the English equivalent of maybe fifty bucks. It was always my seed money. If I was like short of money, I would take. Never eat your seed. Never eat your seed. Yeah? You have that seed, you go and find where it is, you take it and you pray for some really hot soil and you go and invest it and see what comes back. It is fun, and it is very funny on days too, just seeing how it comes back. Yeah?

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I love the fact that God is like, so consistent. He is calling us to an adventure of life. Yeah? So at the start of this year, I determined in my heart that I was going to tithe at twenty percent and so the Father comes to me. It's in my heart; I'm going to do it January 1st, so December 31st the Father says to me, "So I hear you've got plans about your giving." I said, "That's not fair, we haven't even talked about it. I was going to surprise you tomorrow," and He's like going, "Is this a piece of your brain? Do you really think you can have a thought I don't know about? So anyway I'd like to ask you a question. What if 20% is not enough?" I got this sinking feeling. He said, "What if I want to do something utterly magnificent and totally outrageous in your life, and what if 20% doesn't cut it for me?"

So I'm thinking, "O.K., talk to me about this utterly magnificent, completely outrageous thing." He said, "I'll talk to you, when you get the right figure in that little head of yours." Great!!! Thanks!!!! Way to mess up my New Year's eh? I sat there running it by all my friends. We're just about to sing Auld Lang Sine (sp???) and all I can think of is, "What's that flipping number?" (Laughter) Because I've got like a minute because then it's going to be January 1st and I'm supposed to be surprising Him, hello. This is what goes on in my weird little brain. I know. Anyway, I got it. So I said, "Uh, so you want me to tithe 50%?" He went, "Yeah, are you up for it?" And I thought, "Are you?" (Laughter) Because He's like, "It's so going to depend on you." (Laughter) "Are you up for it," He said. "You all are not going to change you mind half way through or anything?" And it's been absolutely outrageous, what God has done this year. It's the best decision I've ever made.

So now I'm heading towards tithing at 90%. If He can live on 10%, so can I. Yeah? I want to live really fabulously on 10% and you can have all the rest. I think we're going to have to strike a deal on that. I'm pretty sure. The point I am making here is that I am having so much fun living in the commitment of the father to me in that regard. Yeah? If God calls us to things for our benefit, He calls us to things because He has a plan and a purpose that's way beyond our current level of thinking. When He says, "I am able to

do exceedingly and abundantly beyond all that you ask or even think." Well, what's beyond thinking? Well, that would be dreaming for me.

What if God wants you living a life that is like your best ever dream that you could have. What if that's always been his intention, is that you could live a life that is so powerful, so crazy, that your imagination can't even conceive of it. Eye hasn't seen, ear hasn't heard, that which God has prepared for those that love Him. I wonder what God's got prepared for you in this next season of your life? What if it's a radical adventure? What if it's an amazing lifestyle and what if the only way that you can enter into it and live in it and enjoy it and not get weirded out by it is by learning how to abide in who He is for you. To come into a place of relationship with God, where your fellowship goes up to levels that you didn't think could exist in this life. What if the only true state for a Christian is astonishment? What if astonishment is the norm?

And so when you read the gospels, what do you most often read in terms of crowd reaction? They were astonished. They were amazed. They were sorely amazed. I think that's amazement with pain. They marveled. They marveled. What if marveling is your true state in the spirit? What if that's your real condition? God is so marvelous, you spend all your time marveling.

What if living a life that magnifies God is the only life that you're supposed to live? Do you know to magnify is also in your DNA? You were created to magnify and it is in you, and you can't escape it. You are always going to magnify. Now you're either going to magnify the problem; you know turn a mole hill into a mountain. To magnify means to see something bigger than it is. That's one description of it. But to magnify also means to see someone as big as he is. You are created to magnify and you will always magnify something. So what's it going to be? Are you going to magnify your circumstances? Are you going to magnify the God who allowed the circumstances to teach you to magnify?

You were born to give value to something, to show appreciation. To magnify; it's the only way to live. Twelve spies went out. Ten of them magnified the problems they found and when you magnify something other than God, you are always diminished by it. These are the special forces of their day; tough guys. Hand picked; the best from each tribe. Ten of them came back unmanned. They magnified the problems they saw out there and they became like grasshoppers in their own sight. What you magnify that

is not of God always diminishes you. Two of them went out there with a huge idea of God and saw nothing out there to disturb that revelation and so they came back with, "yeah, we can do it." "Yeah it's going to be tough, but, God's tough." Yeah! "We can do this." "If God is with us, we can do anything." They came back with their revelations not only intact, but actually the problems out there in their correct proportion. You were created to magnify. It's in your DNA, and you magnify all the time. We just have to make sure that we are magnifying the right thing. Yeah?

You see abiding is a spiritual discipline which when practiced constantly will provide us with several critical experiences. One of them is the ability to be present with God, right now, this moment. Another one is the capacity to hold on to the Lord and be embraced by Him no matter the circumstances. The ability to look beyond the circumstance and see Jesus smiling and waving, knowing He's there. Thirdly, the anointing to know God's love, to know God's joy and to know God's peace as permanent emotions.

Do you know the word crying is not in the dictionary of heaven? It's in the dictionary of hell. There are no tears in heaven. There's no sorrow, there's no grief in heaven. You have any interaction with heaven at all and you'll put a smile on your face because heaven is full of laughter. God doesn't say "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the misery of your God." Enter into the joy of the Lord. In his presence there is fullness of joy. In other words, joy so full, there's no room for anything else. Crying is not in the lexicon of heaven; it's in the lexicon of hell. The Bible says that sorrow and sighing shall flee away; they'll run from you. It says that Jesus was acquainted with grief but it wasn't his best friend. It's like, I see ya, don't wanna be ya. I see you grief, get away from me. The Bible says that weeping may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning and kicks it out of the house. So sorrow and sighing, weeping and grieving and mourning; they are temporary emotions. They come to pass, they don't come to stay, and they have a shelf life. Make it short. I'm saying that because some of us right now, our sadness is beyond its sell by date and you need to be restored to the joy of your salvation. I'm serious. You need to be restored to the joy of your salvation. You've got to practice laughing in this life because you'll be doing it forever.

One of the experiences of abiding is that there is an internal anointing in wisdom. You know wisdom is far superior to knowledge. One of the problems I have with mainstream evangelicals is that they are eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and not from the tree of life. Wisdom is more important than knowledge. All knowledge

comes out of wisdom. Wisdom cannot come out of knowledge. Wisdom is the understanding of how God sees, how He perceives, how He thinks and how He likes to do things, so that you align yourself with how He thinks, how He sees and how He likes to work. That wisdom enables us to turn every crisis and every contradiction; to turn it into the will of God, so that the Holy Spirit can generate the faith in us when everything is against us. To know what God wills. Then you just have to stand there and will it with Him. Sometimes victory is simply about being the last man standing. The point is in warfare is that not that we are occupied with the enemy, but that He is occupied with us. We are not occupied with Him. Why would you want to be occupied with the enemy when you can be occupied with Jesus? Yeah?

The Bible talks about three heavens. There's the first heaven, the one that we're living in right now; driving around in day after day. There is the second heaven where principalities and powers live because the devil is the prince of the power of the air, he lives in the atmosphere. So you have the first heaven, you have the second heaven and Jesus lives in the third heaven, far above all principalities and powers. Yeah? So when it comes to warfare, our job is not to pull down strongholds of the enemy, because if you're in the first heaven and your pulling down strongholds of the enemy, who do they fall on? This does not sound terribly exciting to me. Who do they fall on? You!!!

No wonder so many intercessory ministries right now are sick, have problems in their families, their marriages and all kinds of stuff. We don't stand in the first heaven fighting upwards. We stand in the third heaven thrusting downwards. Yeah? Our job is not to bring down the enemy. Our job is to bring down the presence of God, so that He fights for us. So we are wholly occupied with who He is and we serve this one true great original, territorial spirit. That is God. He's the original territorial spirit. If you read Joshua chapters fifteen to twenty-one, you see the territorial spirit in action. What's He doing? He's marking out Israel's territory; marking out the territory of all the tribes. That's a territorial spirit in action.

God understands geography. We are here to bring God down, and when God comes down, He displaces the enemy in our midst. So we are wholly occupied with who He is. Yeah? When we abide, we stay connected to the supply line that is always operational in Christ Jesus. So abiding means I stay connected to the provision that God had released for me and has promised me in those circumstances. I like that. Abiding means I get to become conformed to the image of Jesus because you become what

you behold. So when we are occupied and preoccupied with Christ, we become as He is because when all of our attention is fixed on Him we become intimate, we become worshipful, we become engaged, we become besotted by who He is and He has this way of blotting everything else out.

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Abiding means you get look into the face of Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of faith. Whatever faith you need right now, it's in the face of Jesus. You look into his face and faith will rise up as a consequence. You can't avoid it. You behold Jesus and faith rises. Don't ever try to have faith. Don't try and manufacture faith. Look into the face of Jesus. He is your right. He is your privilege. Intimacy is the place where we find faith, it's the place where we find favor. That intimate connection comes through abiding. You always know God eh? What He starts, He finishes. Yeah? He who began a good work in you will also complete it.

Abiding is a spiritual term that is used more than eighty times in Scripture so it's kind of important. It's actually used about eighty times in John's writings. That's why John was the disciple whom Jesus loved. John set his heart on loving Jesus wholly and Jesus' relationship with John was noticeably different than with the other guys; different enough for it to receive comment in Scripture. Abiding is a continued, uninterrupted relationship with the Lord Jesus and in John 15 we have the essence of what it means to abide. The first thing you've got to note is the language that Jesus uses. He uses the overall God term, I Am. I Am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser. So He's using the constructive I Am that God used in Exodus 14, "I Am that I Am." This term is used eight times by John in this Gospel. John was the friend who laid his head on Jesus' chest because he knew Jesus as I Am.

There are **nine positive outcomes of abiding**.

The **first one** we find in John 15:2 "Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, He takes away. Every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."

The great thing about God is that He prunes us towards increase.

Some of us in this place right now are being pruned right now in our fruitfulness. You know you're being pruned because what used to take you half an hour under the anointing now takes you three days. What you used to be able to get up and like go for something and now it's like you can't even get up. Yeah? A number of people in this room right now who are struggling with what you feel is a lack of anointing, and I know

it's customary to blame the enemy, except I don't think it's really him. I think God is pruning you. Some of you have gone through a place and you've been really incredibly fruitful in your ministry and now you can't even spell fruit, and you feel like everything takes longer. There's a Proverb that says if the axe is dull he must exert more strength who uses it and some you feel like, I'm working harder for less results. You want to blame the enemy because it's got to be somebody's fault right, and I'm not taking the blame.

You see, I don't think it's the enemy. I think that God is pruning you. You see I know when God prunes my prophetic gift because I can't even spell prophecy. It's like for me, when God prunes my prophetic gift, He closes my mouth and He opens my heart. So I have to go all the places that I've got prophetic conferences booked, I have to call them all and say, "Look, guys. I'm being pruned right now in my prophetic gift." Most people think that being pruned is connected with sin. It's not. It's connected with intimacy. God prunes your gift because He wants to be more intimate with you. Yeah?

"So right now I'm being pruned and I can't even spell prophecy. So I can come and do something else. I can come and talk to you about intimacy because that's what I'm learning, or we can just reschedule. Whatever you want, but if I come, don't expect me to prophesy because I'd be making it up and I'll get slapped and you won't like it." He closes my mouth to function and He opens my heart to fellowship and He takes my heart into a deeper place of relationship with Him and He speaks to my heart and He takes me on a journey into his nature that enables me to see people at a deeper level. It enables me to understand myself at a deeper level. Yeah, and so nothing is going out because He's pruned all of that.

So, everything is going in. So pruning is a place of incredible intimacy. Now there have been times when God has been generous and funny and He's just said, "I'm going to prune your prophetic gift but you can still do those two conferences. I'll just switch it back on for you." I guess He can do that. Being the Lord you can pretty much do what you want eh? So I'll go along and just in those two places I'll prophesy, but you get me outside of that meeting and shtump, ain't nothing going on. Catch me in St. Arbucks the next day, you won't get anything. You won't. I'll be sitting there with a great cup of coffee and I'll say, "No, prophecy, what's that. Can't spell it. Can't do it."

But when He restores the gift to me, I'm able to prophesy on a much deeper level, or a

much broader level. Something has changed. Something has increased. God prunes you because He wants to increase you and the way that He increases you is always to take you back to relationship. Yeah? So, who's being pruned right now? Come on. Own up. Fess up. I see those hands. I've always wanted to say that. (Laughter) This is part of your spiritual development. You should enjoy being pruned. Don't force the gift. No point. Go into a place of deeper intimacy. Again just be saying to the Father, "What does this mean? What must I do?" And it's taking time aside. You may get a dispensation to continue in the ministry and you may not. That's at his discretion. It's a time to relax and be at peace. Learn to be with God. Yeah?

Pruning is about relationship, not function. So He's just cutting you back to Jesus. Yeah? So take the time to fall more in love with Jesus. Take the time. You know, your intimacy, if you can do anything in the kingdom, you have to be able to intimidate the enemy and your intimacy with God is the most intimidating thing about you. True intimacy intimidates the enemy. So when God prunes you, that's what He's doing. He's taking you to a deeper place of intimacy and when you come back into fruitfulness in ministry, then you're at a new level where you can affect the enemy and not be affected by him. This season is about being, and not doing.

The **second outcome of abiding** is remaining clean. Look at John 15:3, "You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you."

You know you don't become a new person by changing your behavior. You discover the person you already are in Christ and behave accordingly.

You are already clean. You are already righteous. Live there. Stay there. Abide there. You are already dead and God put you into Christ; He's crucified your flesh. So just agree with God. Stay dead. Dead men don't sin. Stay dead. One of my mentors was a guy who was mentored by Smith Wiggelsworth and he never let me forget it and I used to write off like huge long letters to him. Reams of notes about what I was going through and how awful it was and what I was learning and pray for me. He'd just write back something like, "Dear Graham, stay dead." Love, Arthur." My address was longer than his message. I used to send him a really bulky letter. I'd get a postcard back with like a picture of a donkey on the front or something. I was quite convinced he was sending me a message, "Dude, this is you. You're such an ass and by that I mean donkey." I don't know what some of you were thinking then but I caught that vibe. So Dear Graham, stay dead. Love, Arthur. Love you as well pal. That was it.

I'd get on the phone and he'd listen patiently for like twenty minutes and he'd say, "O.K., time out. Are you dead or not?" "Oh don't play that dead card with me. What are you, the angel of death?" "Shut up!" "I'm talking about death." "Every time I moan. Can I moan for like ten minutes?" "Well actually it's been twenty-seven. Shut up and die will you. For God's sake, give us all a break." Yeah, great mentor that was, eh?

"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."