

Personal Spiritual Growth Lesson 2

A Life Centered on Christ

Welcome back to our personal spiritual growth course. We're continuing with Lesson 2, page nine in your handout. We'll be focused on a life centered on Christ.

This is the hub of the wheel, the Navigator's wheel. This may be the most important aspect of our walk with Christ - knowing our identity, knowing who Jesus is and who we are in Christ and living in an intimate, close relationship with him. Before we start the lesson, let's review the context and a few reminders.

God is infinite. He is all powerful. He is God almighty.

He is transcendent. He is above the creation. He is outside of the creation.

He knows everything. He knows us intimately. Yet, he is also a personal God.

The Bible says that he is also imminent. He is not just with us, but he is in us. He will never leave us or forsake us.

He knows everything about us. He has a deep love for us. In this lesson, we will talk about Jesus being the True Vine and we are the branches that are connected to him. This is taught in John chapter 15.

This teaching takes place at the very end of Jesus's earthly life. It is called the Upper Room Discourse. It is part of John chapters 13 through 17.

This is some of the richest and deepest teaching that Jesus shares with his disciples, before he goes to the cross, followed by the resurrection and the ascension. He is teaching them about the Christian walk, the role of the Holy Spirit in their life once he leaves. He is preparing them to make disciples.

He is preparing them to be the leaders of the church, to carry on the work that Jesus had started over the past three years of his ministry. He has been preparing them to expand the kingdom in his absence. The last words of a dying man are really important.

These are some of the most influential words that Jesus ever taught. We are going to take a look at John 15:1-8. Let me read this passage. We're on page 9.

We'll make some observations and better understand what it means to abide in Christ. What does it mean to remain in him? What does it mean to have a life that's centered on the Lord Jesus? Here is the passage, John 15:1- 8.

“I am the True Vine and my Father is a gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. This is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

John 15: 1 - 8. There are some observations we can make from this passage.

First, who are the characters represented in this teaching?

Well, we know the gardener is God the Father.

Jesus is the True Vine.

The branches are true believers.

We can see that in verse 2, Jesus says, about the branches, any branch **in me**. These are not just people. These are followers of Jesus.

These are people who are **in Christ**. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. 2 Cor 5:17.

It is important to understand the context and the meaning of this metaphor that Jesus is sharing. This passage is focused on bearing fruit. There is an expectation that people who are abiding in Christ, people who are living a life centered on Christ, will be fruitful.

We will bear fruit, more fruit, much fruit, fruit that will last. This will be to the Father's glory. We're not told what the fruit is.

Some think it may be the fruit of evangelism. This fruit might be new converts. It could be the fruit of the Spirit as our lives are transformed and conformed more to the likeness of Christ that we learned about in Lesson 1. We are demonstrating more love and joy and peace and patience and goodness and gentleness and self-control.

This fruit might also be the result of effective disciple-making. Believers are becoming mature and growing in their faith.

As you can see, there are many aspects of fruit. The key is as someone who is living a life centered on Christ, the Spirit of God, will produce fruit, much fruit, more fruit, fruit that will last for the Father's glory as a result of that relationship. Something that we can be sure of too is that as a follower of Jesus, there is not a chance of losing your salvation.

The scriptures are so clear about the security that we have. Salvation is a work that God has done in us. He has saved us. The Bible says that we were lost and now we have been found. We were dead and now we are alive. We were slaves to sin and now we are children of God.

And in verse two it says, he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes. The word used for “cuts off”, some assume this means a believer could lose their salvation. They are cut from the vine and burned up.

Well, the word “cuts off” also means “to lift up” or “to clean”. Remember that this is a metaphor. Jesus is painting a word picture. Our life with Jesus is like a grapevine. A healthy grapevine will have many branches. Over time, some of these branches may need some help. Instead of growing upward, they drag on the ground. They are resting on the dirt. If they remain in the dirt, they have no chance of producing fruit.

So the gardener would lift them up and attach them on a trellis. This is called “training” the branch. The gardener is redirecting the branch so that so that it will do what it is intended to do, produce grapes, bear fruit. The gardener would gently and carefully clean the leaves of the branch. The gardener is God, the father. Jesus says that our Father does the same thing in the followers of Jesus so we will be more fruitful.

Also, branches that are already fruitful, will be pruned so they will be thicker and even more fruitful.

There are a couple of questions at the bottom of the page.

What does it mean to abide or remain in Christ?

Consider Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me.”

This is a key verse as we consider the center of the wheel, a life centered on Christ. Jesus is living through us. We are living his life, his love. His life is being reflected through us.

It's a picture of an intimate relationship, being fully dependent on Christ. It is critical to understand who Jesus is. What does the scripture say about who Jesus is and what he has accomplished for us?

What do the scriptures say about who we are in Christ? When Satan comes to deceive us, to discourage us, when our flesh rises up from within us, we must know what the Bible says. We must know our true identity.

It does not matter if we FEEL like we are walking closely with Jesus or not, or whether we FEEL like our faith is strong one day or weak the next day. We can KNOW based on what the Word of God says, who Jesus is and who we are in Christ.

What is the spiritual position of every believer and what is our purpose? From this passage, our purpose is to stay close to Jesus and be fruitful.

We are to bear much fruit for the Father's glory. We are never commanded to bear fruit. It is expected that fruit will flow out of this intimate relationship with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We talked already about not having to be fearful of losing our salvation.

In John 6, Jesus said, “all that the Father has given me, I'll lose none of them. I will raise them up on the last day.”

In John 10, Jesus says, “I'm the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me, and they're in my hand. No one can snatch them out of my hand. I and the Father are one. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.”

Even in Romans 8:38 - 39, says, “who can separate us from the love of God who is in Christ Jesus. No one, neither height nor depth, angels, demons, powers, principalities, no one, nothing in all creation is able to separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus.”

As a follower of Jesus, we are a branch, a true branch in the true vine. We should live in a way that represents who we truly are. At the bottom of page 9, we can see a few elements of what it means to be a disciple based on John 15, particularly verse 7 and 8.

“If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Here we see a few foundational aspects of being a disciple. A disciple has a love for the Word of God. We do not just read the Bible, but the Bible is in us. We don't just read the Word but we do what it says. The Word of God guides our lives. It is the lamp unto our feet to guide our path.

A disciple has a vital prayer life that is connected to the Father. Our prayers are aligned with his purposes, his kingdom, his glory. Jesus even says, as we ask in his name, asking in his authority, he will accomplish things through those prayers.

There's a focus on growing in love and obedience. This is true love for God, that we obey his commands, and his commands are not a burden. Jesus goes on to say in verses 9 and 10 to follow his example of obedience to the Father which is a demonstration of his love for the Father.

There is also a focus on glory. Not glory for ourselves, but for all glory to be directed toward God.

This gives you a glimpse of the life of a disciple. A disciple is vitally connected to the Word and Prayer, is growing in love and obedience, focused on the glory of God.

At the top of page 10, this diagram may be helpful for you. It's like a spiritual EKG, it reveals our heart, and it gives us a picture of our spiritual journey.

There's a time in our life, to the far left of the diagram, when we were not in Christ. We were lost, we were dead in our sins, we were separated from the love of God, and we were under God's wrath. Then, by the grace of God, our eyes were opened. We heard the gospel. The Spirit of God opened our eyes to see who Jesus is, and we put our trust in his finished work on the cross. We responded to God's drawing near to us, and it says at that point, we were saved. We were placed in Christ. We became a new creation. We became a true branch in the True Vine. We were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We were sealed and marked in him.

There are a number of theological truths that took place at the moment of salvation. Some of them are listed on this page,

We were justified, declared innocent and righteous before a holy God because of what Jesus did.

We were reconciled, once enemies, now brought into a friendship with God because of what Jesus did.

We were once slaves to sin through the blood of Jesus, he bought us out of slavery to sin, he redeemed us.

We were once aliens and orphans and through the blood of Christ, he adopted us into God's family, becoming members of his household, through the blood of Jesus.

We were forgiven all of our sins, past, present, and future.

Through what Jesus accomplished, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit, marked in him, saying that we belong to God, nothing can change that.

We were dead in sin but we were made alive.

We were prisoners to sin but we were set free, baptized into the body of Christ through the Spirit of God.

We were sanctified and made holy and set apart.

These are spiritual realities that took place at the moment of salvation.

Moving upward to the right of the diagram, this is our ongoing life that is being transformed or conformed into the likeness of Christ.

It's not a continual straight arrow up to heaven, it's a series of ups and downs, Two steps forward and one step back. There are times when if we looked at each of our lives, we might not even look like followers of Jesus.

But we KNOW, based on the truth of God's Word, that we are in Christ and that He will never leave us or forsake us. We are secure in him. This is the enduring motivation to be walking more in obedience, knowing that we're being transformed, we're being conformed to the likeness of Christ. God who started his work in us will be faithful to complete it.

We have a desire to be filled with the Spirit, yielding our lives more and more to the control of the Holy Spirit. Walking in step with the Spirit. Not walking in the old nature of the flesh, but walking in the Spirit and experiencing the fruit of the Spirit grow in our lives. The fruit of love and joy and peace and patience and goodness and so forth.

Eventually at the top right of the diagram, there will be a time when we die physically, our spirits will be with the Lord, our bodies will be in the grave. A future resurrection will take place when we will receive glorified bodies. There will be a reunion of our body and spirit. We will be with the Lord forever in his presence in the new heaven and new earth. Knowing the truth of the diagram helps us when struggles come, when trials come into our lives. We must KNOW that even in the most difficult times, God has not left us.

He is still doing a work in us and we need to know what the Bible says about who Jesus is and what it says about who we are in Christ? We are a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come.

The middle of page 10 reminds us of who we were before we put our trust in Christ and who are we now that we are in Christ.

Ephesians chapter 2:1 - 10 gives us a very clear picture of this reality.

Verses 1 to 3 shows us who we were before we were in Christ, as enemies of Christ, as enemies of God. And then verses 4 through 10 give us a picture of who we are today as people who are in Christ, who are followers of Jesus.

If you read through verses 1 to 3, you can see who we were? We were dead in sin. We followed the ways of this world, the ruler of the kingdom of the air. We were disobedient. We gratified the desires of our flesh. We were objects of God's wrath. That's who we were.

Yet in verse 4, maybe it's one of the most important transitions in the Bible, it says, **but because of his great love for us**. There's a contrast here. God's love overcomes our sin, our darkness. It was God who loved us. It wasn't that we loved God. He loved us first and he sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin. He was pursuing us and always has been.

Who am I in Christ? Who are you in Christ?

We are alive in Christ.

We are saved by grace.

We have been raised and seated with Christ.

We are rich in Christ.

You can read about all these blessings in Ephesians chapter 1:3-14.

Ultimately, we are God's workmanship. We are a work in process where God is shaping and molding us. He is transforming us. He's conforming us into the likeness of Christ.

Titus chapter 3 also gives us a clear picture of who we were before Christ and who we are now that we're in Christ.

There is a helpful tool on page 11. I encourage you to begin to read through these references. Memorize them; hide the Word of God in your heart.

When Satan comes to deceive and discourage you, when your flesh rises up within you, when the world system tries to convince you that you are an imposter, you must know these truths about who you are in Christ! There are at least 30 truths listed here.

You may meditate on one of these every day over the course of the month and just keep doing that from month after month to be encouraged, strengthened and edified in your faith. As you read through each truth ...

Underline anything that might be new to you.

Circle the areas that you think you need to discuss, maybe with your pastor, maybe with another believer to understand in a greater way.

Put a star next to things that you really needed to hear today. You needed to be reminded of that truth as you listened to this message.

Pause the recording now to review this list and worship the Lord Jesus!

Let's continue the lesson on page 12.

At the top of the page 12, there are five assurances that we can take away from the Word of God.

1 John 5:11 - 13, points us to the truth that we can have the **assurance of salvation**.

The apostle John is saying, "I write this testimony to you and this is the testimony. God has given us eternal life and this life is in his son. He who has a son has life. He who does not have the son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the son of God. You may know that you have eternal life."

John 16:24 is a verse that shows us that we can have the **assurance of answered prayer**.

When we ask things in Jesus name, not like a magic formula, but in his name and his authority, according to his will, according to the Word of God. Jesus says, I hear what you've asked and you have what you've asked for. It may not be in our timing, but if it is aligned with the Word of God, God will accomplish His will through the prayers that we pray in Jesus' name.

1 Corinthians 10:13, we have the **assurance of victory over temptation**.

Satan is a roaring lion. He will continue to tempt. We have a fallen nature that continues until we are in heaven. Our fleshly nature still battles against our new nature in Christ. God says, "no temptation has seized you except that which is common to man." Temptation is common to everyone. Temptation is not the sin. Sin is how we act upon the temptations that come. God is faithful. He is going to provide a way out for us.

The way out might be the Word of God that we have memorized. Sometimes God removes us from a situation. Sometimes he brings people into our lives. The Holy Spirit is giving us a nudge. There's all kinds of ways for him to provide a way out. It's for us to respond to his prompting in our lives.

1 John 1:9 says, we can have the **assurance of forgiveness**.

We've already received eternal forgiveness of sin at the point of salvation, but there's an ongoing forgiveness that is needed. Not that we have to get saved over and over again. When we sin, we fall out of fellowship with God. He hasn't gone anywhere. We feel like we've drifted from him.

He says, "if you confess your sin, God is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

Lastly, Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us that we have the **assurance of guidance**.

As we trust in God with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding, in all of our ways acknowledge him. He will direct our paths.

There are many more assurances in the Word of God for a new believer. These five are helpful for someone new in their journey with Jesus, as well as for those who have known and walked with Jesus for many years.

On page 12, you we return to the picture of the wheel. We are focused on the hub of the wheel in this lesson. The center of the wheel is a life centered on Christ.

The rim of the wheel is the obedient Christian life, the obedient Spirit-filled life. We will discuss the Holy Spirit in Lesson 3.

Lesson 4 will focus on the two vertical spokes of the wheel where we strengthen our relationship with God through prayer and the Word.

Lesson 5 will focus on the horizontal spokes teaching us how we live out our love for others. First, love for believers through fellowship in the church, and then love for those who don't know Jesus yet through witnessing and evangelism.

These three verses listed on page 12 remind us to stay centered on Christ. Pick one of these to begin to memorize.

John 15:5

"I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing."

Galatians 2:20

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me."

2 Corinthians 5:17

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away and behold, the new has come."

Turn to page 13 and you will see a chart that we will continue to build throughout this course that will highlight the key principles from each lesson. This chart will be a great review for you and it will help you teach others.

In Lesson 1, we focused on the goal of every believer to be transformed, to be conformed into the likeness of Christ.

That's what God is doing in the life of every follower of Jesus. It comes through spiritual training by the grace of God. We're training ourselves in godliness, pursuing holiness, being engaged in the spiritual disciplines by allowing the grace of God to work out our salvation with fear and trembling as the Holy Spirit of God is working in us.

We also introduced the Navigator's wheel in Lesson 1, which is a wonderful spiritual assessment tool.

In Lesson 2, we focused on the first aspect of the wheel, the hub - a life centered on Christ.

It's a life of abiding in Christ. He is the True vine. We are the branches.

We are in him. He has called us to bear much fruit, fruit that'll last, for the Father's glory as we walk in intimate, close relationship, knowing what the scriptures say about who Jesus is and who we are in Christ.

We know without a doubt who we are in Christ based on what the Word of God says, not based on how we feel on any given day. Our faith is based on the unchanging, glorious, encouraging Word of God.

This brings an end to Lesson 2. I encourage you to go back and review each of the Scriptures. If you're listening to this with others, take some time to discuss your key learnings with each other.

We will continue with Lesson 3, that will focus on the obedient, Spirit-filled life.