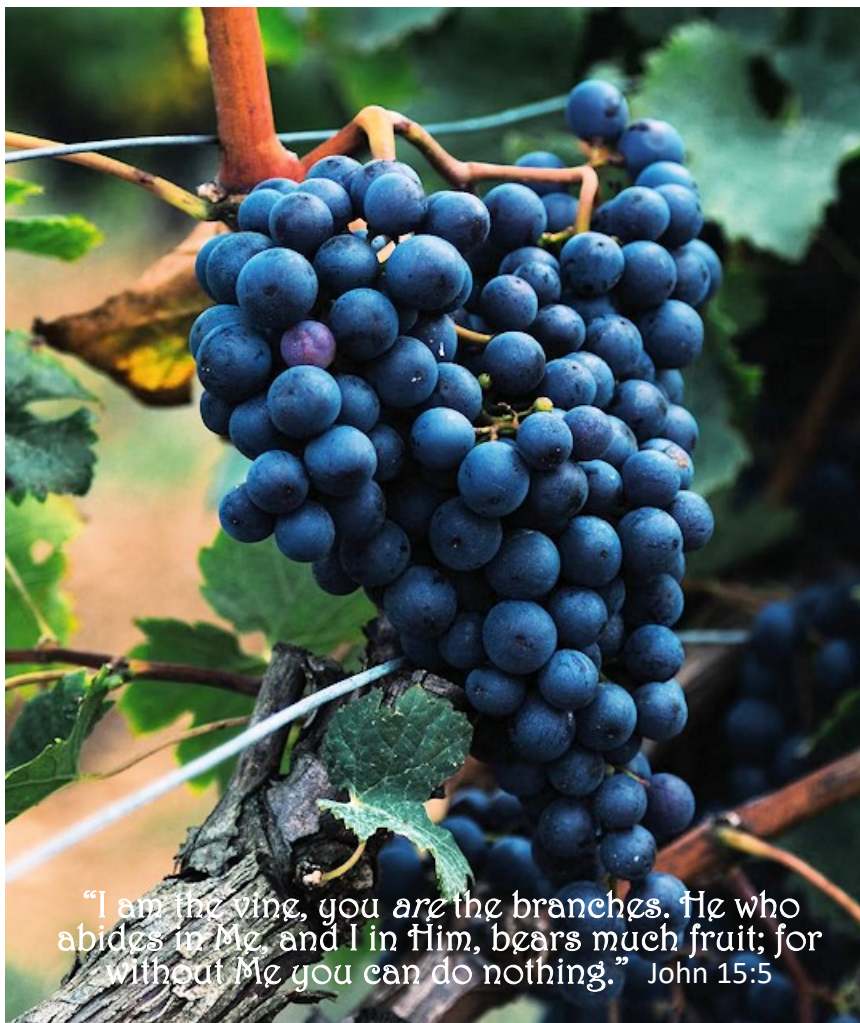


To Be Like Jesus

Another Way to Look
at the Christian Life

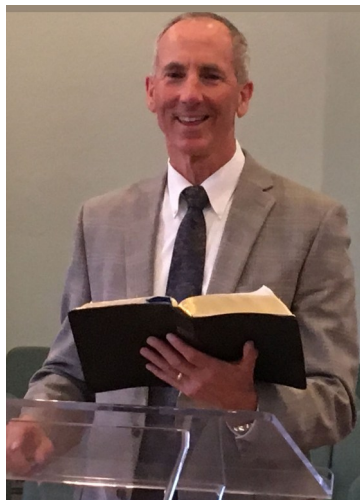
Book 1



Alaska Christian Ministry to Seafarers

Foreword

I have observed two places where it would seem God's people err. First, there are those who are so focused upon the content of spiritual growth, that they forget there is meant to be a practice of the Christian Life which is compelling to others. Then there are those who seek to live a *saintly* life, apart from the actual knowledge of what God intends for that to be!



I do not mean to be critical. Rather, my simple goal, in teaching a series entitled *To Be Like Jesus*, is that the rich content we regularly enjoy in our studies would lead to the result that the lost in our periphery would see the life of Jesus—in us. And, I do indeed mean His actual life, and that they really do see it on display right in the midst of our tragic and fallen world. I trust such a lofty goal is more than enough reason to read on!

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin', written in a cursive style.

Kevin

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NIV (1984 edition) or the NKJV (1982 edition).

Vistoso Community Church
Publication: October 2024

Introduction

As we begin an investigation of what it means *To Be Like Jesus*, I think you are going to be surprised at how this study challenges you to reconsider the Christian Way of Life and provides a revitalizing perspective. To that end, I would like to begin by asking and then answering three introductory questions, and then providing a structure for this booklet. The questions are:

- Is this study Biblical?
- Is it even possible to be like Jesus?
- Is such a study meant to be theological theory or personal experience?

Is This Study Biblical?

It would seem this is an easy question to answer: It is quite clear that God intends for us to be like His Son—just like Him!

For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29

But when? How does this occur? Consider the following verse:

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. II Corinthians 3:18

This is a wonderful verse to memorize and to bring to mind as an encouragement to persevere in daily devotions. For, when we open the Word of God, we are beholding the *glory of the Lord!* To be sure, it is not as perfectly as it will be when we see Him face-to-face in the future, but we can come to know the glorious One through His Word—now and on a daily basis!

As we do so, consider what happens: We are transformed into the very image we regularly observe! In fact, we will be transformed from glory to glory. The Greek construction of this verse is meant to convey the fact that we will be transformed from that which is glorious to that which is even more glorious! Do you see the nature of the ongoing process as we intently come to the written Word that we might fellowship with the *Living Word*? We can become like the object of our affection.

Consider, is this something we accomplish ourselves? Oh no! On the contrary, it is *by the Spirit of the Lord*!

I believe we have answered our first question. It is most definitely Biblical to take up a study of what it means to be like Jesus, for to become like our Savior is most certainly God's intent for His Church. Further, this is not just something that is going to occur in the future, but it is an ongoing process that is meant to be occurring right now—day-by-day.

To make the timing of this very clear, consider what it means to be like Jesus in the context of salvation as portrayed in our familiar diagram of all three aspects of God's so-great salvation.

I am wanting to make sure that this idea of being like Jesus is not something that we conveniently push off to the future. It is certainly true that it is going to come to its fullest realization in the future, but consider the following:



This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. I John 2:5-6

Is it possible to relegate the above solely to the future? Of course not! Our walk refers to our time as followers of Jesus on this earth—the second phase of our salvation. Thus part of redeeming the time, of denying self, and following after Jesus, includes being like Him! And, that means right now and every day from now on!

Is It Possible To Be Like Jesus?

To answer this question, let's begin with a powerful statement of principle:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness ... He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

II Peter 1:3-4

If we are going to be like Jesus, there are two things that must occur:

1. We are most certainly going to have to separate ourselves from the corruption of both the world without and the sin nature within.
2. We are going to have to find a way to participate in His nature!

Doesn't II Peter promise that God has provided what is necessary to do exactly these two things?

Now, let's press on to get our first glimpse of those *great and precious promises* that God has provided. Consider what Paul wrote in Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ and 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 for me.

Galatians 2:20

The truth of our identification with the death and resurrection of our Savior will be covered later in more detail. For now, we are simply seeking to answer the question: *Is it possible to be like Jesus?* If we have His life, and the above passage makes it very clear we can, Then it would most certainly be possible to be *like Him*.

Is a Study of *Being Like Jesus* Meant to be Theological Theory or Personal Experience?

I am going to take the time to more thoroughly develop the answer to this question because I want to really challenge your thinking. So, let's begin by going back to the Garden:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness ..." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:26-27

The truth that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God is an astounding statement! No wonder the Word of God places such a premium on human life. I will leave it to you to study further the relationship between God and that which He created in His image and likeness in Genesis Chapters 1-3.

Observations and Application. After studying the Genesis chapters, we can make some observations and application. First, the Creator/creature distinction is very clear! For the Creator gave man his life, his purpose in life, and boundaries by which his life was to be governed. God's fellowship with His creation would seem to be limited to the one creature made in His image and likeness—Man. Further, the pattern for the fellowship appears to have included daily interaction.

Second, it is quite evident that God intended for mankind to live in an ongoing status of:

Dependent trust → willing obedience → ongoing life!
rather than

Independence → knowledge of good and evil → death!

So, here is a key question for us to consider: *Did God scrap His plans for mankind following man's rebellion?* (Of course, by rebellion I mean Adam and Eve choosing to listen to and act upon the lies of Satan rather than choosing to live in dependent trust upon the Word of God! To answer this question consider the following two verses of Scripture:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ...

Ephesians 1:7

... who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father ...

Galatians 1:4



It was the Father's will for the Son to give Himself to redeem fallen mankind and provide forgiveness for sins. Clearly, God has not given up on those He created in His image and likeness. On the contrary, He has gone to enormous lengths to redeem them from their lost estate! So if God has not scrapped His plans for mankind, what does He have in mind for those whom He has re-deemed? Specifically, I am asking:

- *Does God still want fellowship with those created in His image and likeness?*
- *Does He still want a relationship of dependent trust leading to willing obedience?*
- *Does He still want redeemed mankind to have life?*

Let's look to the Scriptures and see what they have to say about each of these questions.

Does God still want fellowship with those created in His image and likeness?

**"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden ...
Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me ..."**

Matthew 11:28-29

"Abide in Me and I in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me."

John 15:4

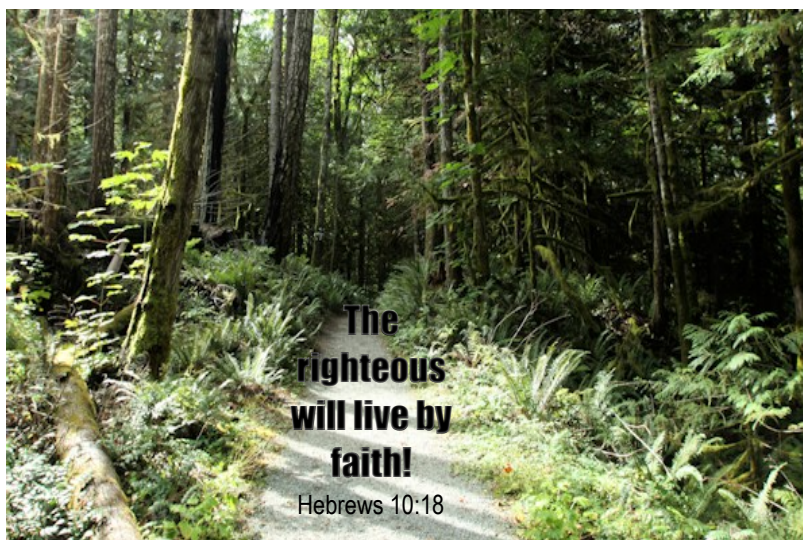
We have Jesus calling the lost to come to Him and, once we come, to take up residence and remain! If we do so, He promises to remain with us. That certainly sounds as if the salvation God has provided includes ongoing fellowship!

Does God still want a relationship of dependent trust leading to willing obedience?

"The righteous will live by faith." Habakkuk 2:4,
Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38

"If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." John 15:10

Old Testament or New, God's people are called to walk by faith! What is the easiest way to test whether or not we are in an abiding relationship with our Savior? The answer is obedience to His commands. Are we living in obedience to His revealed will? If we are doing so, we are simply following the example of our Savior, Who set the standard for us. To be sure, the world will constantly seek to lead us astray. So, *trust and obey* may be a difficult challenge, but it is not complicated!



Of course, if, as a believer in Jesus Christ, we choose not to live in dependent trust, we will be living in a spiritual wilderness of our own making. We will be living far below the blessedness of the *abundant life* God intends. We will be putting ourselves in a position with the potential for divine discipline!

Does God still want redeemed mankind to have life?

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

John 10:10

... reckon yourselves ... alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:11



ROMANS 6:11 WEB

*Thus also consider
yourselves also to be
dead to sin, but alive to
God in Christ Jesus our
Lord.*

Jesus came to save, and that includes that we know Him and share His life! In fact, eternal life is defined as knowing the Father and the Son! With that being the case, we can dogmatically state that you will never find life in what the world has to offer. Life is found in only one place—*in Christ Jesus!*

So, I have just established for you from the Scriptures that, not only did God create us for an ongoing relationship of dependent trust, but also that trust is meant to lead to obedience and life in Him.

The redemption that we have in Christ Jesus is a return to that for which we were originally created!

One more question. Now, let us ask: What does this have to do with a study of what it means to *Be Like Jesus*? To answer that, consider the Scriptures below, and you will see that Jesus lived a life in communion with His Father, entrusting Himself to Him and in perfect obedience!

"I and My Father are one."

John 10:30

... He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly."

I Peter 2:23

"For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent me."

John 6:38

Jesus has modeled for us exactly what we were created to be! In the salvation that God has so graciously provided, we are called to be just like our Savior—following His example, as you will see in the Scriptures below!

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:3

... present your bodies as living sacrifices unto God

...

Romans 12:1

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6

God's call upon the child of God is in reality a calling to the same intimate relationship with Jesus that He had with the Father. It is a call to the same subordination to the Father's will and the same walk of faith. In other words, God's call us to *Be Like Jesus*—to follow His example!

A final thought. In closing my answer to the introductory questions, let me leave you with this final thought from the text of Romans 5:10:

For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Romans 5:10

Without mankind giving Him reason to do so, God provided a way of redemption from Satan's dominion and reconciled to Himself all those who will put their faith in Christ. But that is not the end of our redemption story, it is just the beginning. For the new life we have in Christ is meant to be *saved* from the point of our initial faith and forward! That means that throughout our Christian life, we are to return to that for which we were created: *dependent trust, ongoing obedience, and fullness of life, which is really intimacy of relationship with our Creator.*

In order to grow into the full promise of our new life in Christ, we must follow Jesus' example and, in doing so, *Be Like Him!* As we continue, we'll investigate the means of doing so!



Commit your way
to the Lord, Trust
also in Him, And
He shall bring it to
pass. He shall
bring forth your
righteousness as
the light ...

Psalm 37:5-6

Start Here!

Having challenged you regarding the possibility and desirability of being *like Jesus*, you undoubtedly think you know what is coming. You are most likely expecting us to turn to Biblical examples of His character and behavior followed by an admonition to "*Get out there and do likewise!*" I am going to do nothing of the sort! The Bible does provide many wonderful examples of Jesus' actions and character which we would do well to emulate. But here is the problem: No matter how much resolve we muster and no matter how we dedicate ourselves, we don't have a prayer of being like Jesus from the source of self!

As the Book of Romans makes clear, the direct approach is not going to work:

For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

Romans 7:19

I dare say, we all have to learn this very frustrating lesson and, once we do, we are ready to do things God's way. Let me tell you it to you straight: The only way we are ever going to make progress in being *like Jesus* is if we do it God's way!

Now, God's way is somewhat unexpected, and it will take some effort to understand. Let me summarize it for you and then, in the rest of this booklet, we will look more closely at each part. Rather than directly taking up the challenge to *Be Like Jesus*, we need to start with an indirect approach that involves these steps:

1. Begin to *Be Like Jesus* by understanding our position in Him.

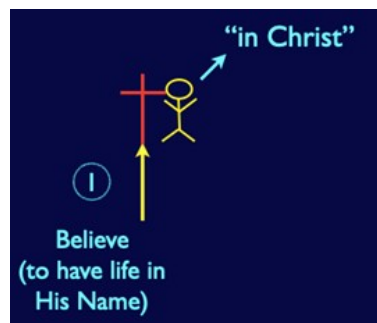
2. Then, as we understand the need to bring our walk into alignment with who and what we are in Christ (our position), we are ready to add the one way by which we can make consistent progress: Learning to abide in Him!
3. Finally, there is the need to add a particular component of prayer to our regular prayer life.

Understanding Our Position in Him

This is going to be a challenge for us. We are much more accustomed to looking at things from the standpoint of our walk—the life we live—than from the standpoint of our position. When we say that someone is *good* or *bad*, we typically are speaking from the perspective of what he or she has done. In contrast, when we say someone is bad through and through, we are speaking of their intrinsic nature, which is apart from their behavior of the moment.

The Truth

So let me show you the amazing truth of every believer's position in Christ. First, at the very moment we put our faith in the person and work of Christ, not only do we receive eternal life but also we are placed *in Him*. The ramifications of this are so significant, that it has prompted at least one theologian to declare that *in Christ* is the most important prepositional phrase in the Bible.

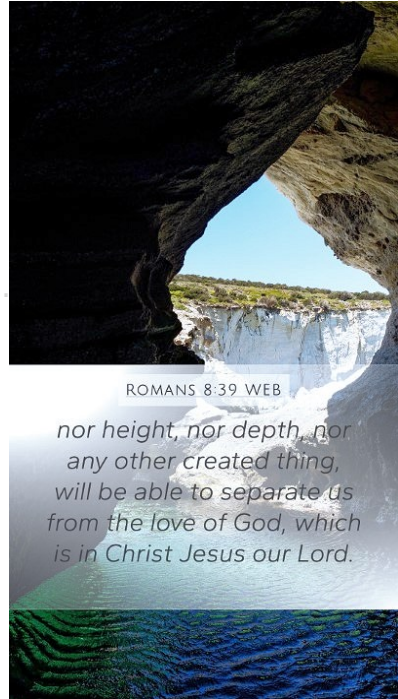


Now is the time to start thinking deeply about this, and aligning our thinking with what the Scriptures clearly portray. For example, not only do we have a share in the life of Christ as the result of faith in who He is and what He accomplished on the cross, we also share in His righteousness.

... even the righteousness of God through faith in Christ to all and on all who believe. Romans 3:22

Now, we may ask: Is this righteousness that we receive through faith in Christ absolutely real? Of course, it is! It is the basis of our justification—as God has made clear in the remainder of Romans Chapter 3.

But, is it speaking of something that is true of our walk—our behavior—or is it speaking of something that has been imputed to us and is, therefore, an aspect of our new identity in Christ—that is our position? Let me ask it this way: When the thief on the cross trusted in Jesus unto eternal life, and received the very righteousness of God—as the above passage declares he did—was the thief righteous in his behavior (walk) or in his new-found position in Christ? The answer should be obvious: The thief had no time left to improve the quality of his life; nevertheless, he was now positionally made righteous *in Christ!*



The extent. Amazingly, positional truth goes far beyond our righteous standing before God. Consider the following:

But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ ... And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus ...

Ephesians 2:4-6

The above is true of every single believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. But, have you yet experienced being seated with Christ in the heavenlies? Although this is not yet our experience, the above is absolutely true if you have trusted in Christ. We are *in Him* right now positionally. This aspect of truth is of fundamental importance for every child of God, for it gives a solid foundation from which nothing can move us!

Notice Paul's application of positional truth as part of the message to the church in Corinth:

It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

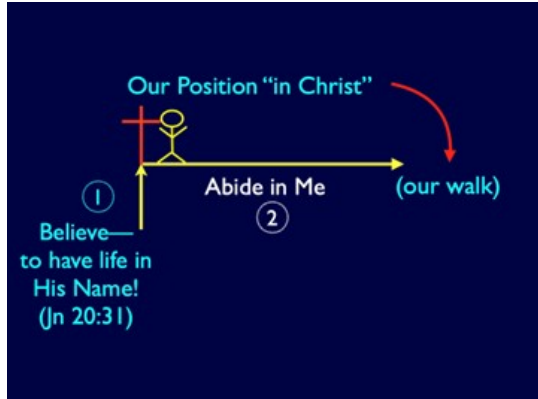
I Corinthians 1:30

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly, mere infants in Christ. I Corinthians 3:1

The first passage makes it clear that because they are *in Christ Jesus*, a reference to their position, they share in His righteousness and holiness and they are redeemed. Yet, shockingly, in their walk they are said to be carnal. Note carefully that even in the midst of their carnality, they are still said to be *in Christ*! It is quite clear from this Scripture that our walk and our position in Christ may not necessarily match. To be as clear as possible, this dichotomy is absolutely outside of the will of God for His Church but possible for the individual Christian.

In fact, Paul's entire reason for writing the Book of I Corinthians was to bring the walk of the Corinthian church into alignment with who and what they were *in Christ*!

Illustration. We can illustrate the relationship between our *position* and our *walk* as follows: From the very moment we come to faith in Christ and change our eternal destiny forever, we begin to live out the second aspect of our salvation—the Christian Life in time. This time is meant to be an



ongoing walk of faith as we abide in our Savior. Every day the Lord graciously gives His children on this earth is meant to be lived in such a way that our position in Christ impacts our moment-by-moment walk. Our righteous position in Christ is meant to lead to a righteous walk! This is God's will for those who have trusted in Christ!

Distinction. Since there is a distinction between our walk and our position, in order to rightly divide the Scriptures we have to carefully determine to which a particular passage refers—our walk, our position, or occasionally both. Consider the following:

... by one sacrifice, He has made perfect forever, those who are being made holy. Hebrews 10:14

Do you see the apparent contradiction in the above? If we have been made perfect, why do we need to be made holy? If we consider this passage in the light of both our position and our walk, it should make perfect

Sense. The apparent contradiction is readily resolved. For each and every individual who trusts in Christ unto eternal life is forever *perfect in Christ*, perfect because of his or her position in Him. But, the need of a sanctified life in terms of the believer's walk remains. Spiritual growth is really the bringing of our daily walk into conformity with our glorious position. Thus all believers should see their need for continually being *made holy*. This is called progressive sanctification.

The effect. Now let me leave you with a firm understanding of what our position in Christ has done for us. Ephesians 1:5-6 is a glorious picture of the salvation that God has provided for everyone who believes.

... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:5-6

Faith in Christ leads to a family relationship with God Himself! It was the pleasure of God to bring us into



such a relationship—not because we were deserving, but because of His grace! Now, look and rejoice in the result: We are *accepted in the Beloved*!

The Beloved is none other than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we are accepted by God because we are *in Him*. But wait! This needs to be refined. The word translated *accepted* is the word for grace. To be *accepted in the Beloved* is really to be a *recipient of grace in the Beloved*. This makes for a somewhat awkward translation, so let me suggest an alternative to improve our understanding. Those who have been adopted into the family of God, through faith in the person and work of Christ, are *highly favored in the Beloved*.

This is true on our best day and on our worst day. It is meant to be the firm foundation from which we navigate the ups and downs of our Christian Life. Should you wonder how this could possibly be true; my answer is that our position in Christ is such a magnificent provision of God's plan of salvation precisely because it does not depend upon us. We are *highly favored in the Beloved* because, as saved individuals, we are so intimately related to Christ that it could be no other way!

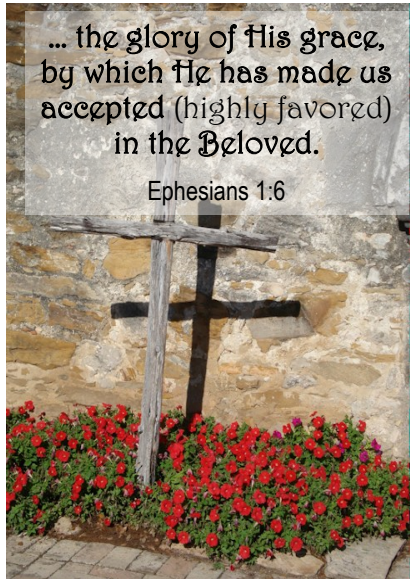
Personal Testimony

Let me give a bit of personal testimony, and then provide a point of application for you to consider. As a motivated new Christian, it was very difficult for me to get over failure. When I failed, I would resolve to try harder, and the harder I tried, the more I failed. This caused me to feel unworthy before God. Believe me, unworthiness leads to self-pity and deep discouragement with the Christian Life. At this point, Satan had me where he wanted me as a new Christian—sitting on the sidelines,

too discouraged to grow. So, how did I get past this dreadful condition? In large part, by first learning of my position in Christ, and then learning to rest in it!

You see I had forgotten that I came to faith in Christ as an unworthy sinner. Now, as a new creation in Christ, God wasn't asking me to somehow make myself worthy in His sight. He was asking me to trust that because of my position in Christ I was already *highly favored* in Him! My position before God was a settled matter! I could begin to learn what God had provided to bring my daily walk into conformity to who and what I was in Christ! Or, in keeping with our study, I was ready to begin to *Be Like Jesus!*

So, from that point forward, when I failed, I stopped focusing upon my unworthy walk, and instead believed in God's declaration of my highly-favored position in the Lord Jesus! Of course, I also needed to confess my sin so that God could continue to bring my walk into conformity with my exalted position. No more sitting on the sidelines for me. Rather, I began trusting God to transform my life as only He can do!



... the glory of His grace,
by which He has made us
accepted (highly favored)
in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:6

Point of Application.

Perhaps this seems too good to be true! Perhaps you are skeptical that this is what God has in mind and wants you to apply in your life, or you are dealing with guilt for walking away from God for a portion of your adult life.

Are you now wondering how God really feels about you after your less than stellar record?

Upon the authority of God's Word, I can tell you how He feels about you and what He wants you to do:

- God wants you to give thanks to Him because He rescued you out of Satan's dominion and brought you into the kingdom of His Son.
- He wants you to return to Him because He has dealt with your sins and redeemed you.
- He wants you to stand in awe that He has given you an eternal inheritance together with all those who have believed.

... giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:12-14

I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to Me for I have redeemed you.

Isaiah 44:22

Most amazing of all the Father wants you to know that He sees you as *highly favored in the Beloved* because you are *complete in His Son!*

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form ..., And you are complete in Him, who is the Head of all principality and power ...

Colossians 2:9-10

This is the glory of our position in Christ and the first thing we must understand if we are going *To Be Like Jesus!* It is not about our starting from scratch to be like Him. It is all about bringing our daily walk into conformity to what we already are in Christ!

Learning to Abide in Him!

In the midst of a study on what it means to *Be Like Jesus*, we have not yet looked at a single incident of His character or behavior. That's because we are not trying to learn to imitate Him. Rather, by taking an indirect approach, we are trying to learn what it means to participate in His life. Participation is so much better than imitation! Thus, after beginning with our *position in Christ*, we now continue on with what it means to *abide in Him!*

The Key Passage

Let's begin by taking a look at the key passage on this subject in John 15.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."

John 15:1

Jesus is going to unfold an incredible intimacy of relationship by making use of a wonderfully descriptive metaphor in which Jesus is portrayed as the vine, the Father is the vinedresser and scripture tells us that those who have trusted in Christ are the branches.



"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away (or lifts up); and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me ..." John 15:2-4

Understanding *takes away*. Let's clear up some confusion that often arises in seeking to understand Verse 2.

First, Jesus is speaking to the 11 believing disciples—Judas has already left. Jesus clearly states in Verse 3 that His audience is *already clean*, in other words, they are saved. Furthermore, as the text continues, Jesus is calling those who believe to remain or continue in Him—that is what abide means. Only believers are called to abide! First, unbelievers need to believe, before they can be called to ongoing relationship.

Second, Jesus most certainly is teaching on fruit-bearing, for He wishes to bring glory to the Father (see Verse 8). To this end, look at the way Jesus develops His message to those who are already clean because they have trusted in Him. There are those who:

- don't bear fruit (Verse 2)
- bear some fruit (Verse 3)
- bear much fruit (Verse 8)

Obviously, it is most desirable for those who have trusted in Christ to *bear much fruit*—for this brings glory to our heavenly Father. I think we can understand that for those who bear some fruit, God is going to be at work in the life to promote greater production. As followers of Jesus, I trust that, although we understand pruning may be unpleasant, we welcome it from the hand of our heavenly Father because we know it will lead to greater glory for our Father! But what about the branch that bears no fruit? What does it mean that it is *taken away*? Let me suggest that any confusion here is

caused by a misleading translation. Is this descriptive of a believer who have lost his or her salvation? Is this an unbeliever pretending to be a branch? If it referred to the loss of salvation, then our salvation would be dependent on the production of fruit (works). That is heresy. And, to force the unbeliever into this narrative completely violates the context. The explanation for this apparent dilemma is very straight-forward. The Greek word translated *takes away* also means *to lift up*. In fact, the word is more commonly translated to lift up than to take away in the KJV. For a clear example of this meaning see Matthew 16:24.

Now, we can better understand what is going on in these verses:

- The Vinedresser lovingly lifts up a branch that has been beaten down, that it might start to produce.
- Branches bearing some fruit are pruned that they may bear even more fruit.
- Branches that bear much fruit are right where the Vinedresser desires!

Doesn't that sequence perfectly fit our loving heavenly Father as Vinedresser?

Having established the context and cleared up any possible confusion, we can now consider the two verses most pertinent to our study in abiding:

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

John 15:4-5

After calling us to come to Him for *rest* in Matthew 11:28, Jesus is now inviting those who answer His call to remain—to take up residence and enjoy ongoing fellowship with Him. Should we do so, He promises to remain with us. The Creator-Savior of our souls is inviting us to an ongoing intimacy of relationship with Himself that He promises will lead to fruitfulness. You will never find anything like this—anywhere else!

The Crucial Nature of Abiding.

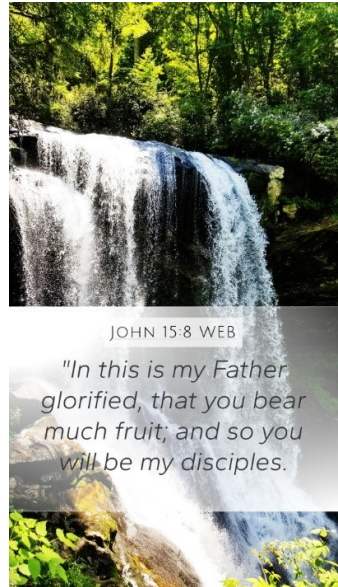
Apart from abiding in Christ, there is no possibility of bearing any fruit in the Christian Life—at least none that will be acceptable to God!

You and I can create a cloud of dust all right, and we can act as if we have done something great for the Lord. But then, we bump up against the firm declaration of Jesus that *without Me you can do nothing!*

Here is a distinction of which we must take note:

Religion pushes to produce fruit; God calls us to bear the fruit that He alone can produce!

Far too often Christians are duped into thinking that if they try hard, they can produce fruit. This is simply not the case. God produces, and we are to bear what He alone can produce. Let me expand that statement further: Our job is to abide in the True Vine, the Lord Jesus Christ,



JOHN 15:8 WEB

"In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so you will be my disciples."

that His life would be manifest in us. That life is meant to function through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The Son and Spirit in concert produce fruit in our lives as we abide, which in turn is on display to the watching world. I trust that you can understand that what comes from the life of Christ and the Spirit of Christ is vastly superior to that which comes from the source of ourselves! (By *the source of ourselves* I mean by willpower, personal commitment, or anything else that originates from ourselves) Further, and pertinent to our subject, this is the only way we can have any hope of *Being Like Jesus!*

Points of Application

Let's pause for a moment in order to make some application on the crucial nature of abiding.

- How do we handle failing to manifest, in our daily walk, the supernatural quality of the Christian Life we find in the Scriptures? Our first response, especially as a new believer, is to try harder! This is to mistakenly believe that we are able to live the Christian Life from the source of ourselves.
- The correct diagnosis when we fail, is related to a failure to abide. We don't need to try harder, we need to moment-by-moment abide in the new life that is ours in Christ and walk by the Spirit. That abiding will lead to the beautiful outcome so clearly portrayed in the Scriptures.
- The reason we so quickly seek to improve the quality of our Christian walk from the source of ourselves is because of all of the *arm-twisting* that often emanates from the pulpit and can be found in so much of Christian literature. Rather than teach a life of abiding in Christ and walking by the Spirit, there is endless pressure to surrender, commit, and produce.

- But God's plan calls for us to share the life of our Savior, and live by means of the same power that raised Him to the right hand of the Father. Would that we are taught what it means to *abide in Christ*, and then regularly encouraged to do so.

The Perfect Illustration

The steady decline of the church in America has given us an unfortunate means of illustrating what I am trying to say. For there are many voices correctly recognizing the failing nature of the church: Like the churches in Revelation Chapters 2-3 they have left their first love, followed Jezebel, and become luke-warm!

Too often the solution of the churches in America to this problem is to preach sanctification by surrender and commitment! Because the clear distinction between changing our eternal

destiny and the life we live once saved has not been well taught, the Church has become mired in confusion. Desirable elements of the Christian Life, such as commitment, have been wrongfully made part of changing our eternal destiny.

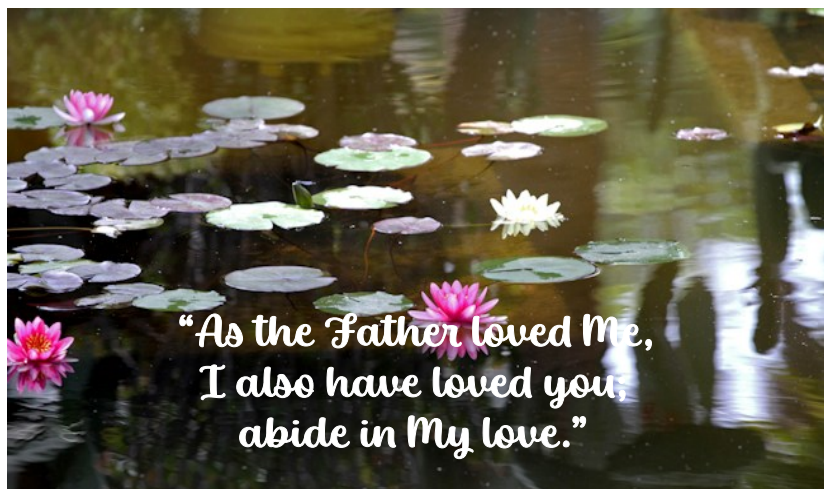


Yet the Scriptures are ever so clear on this subject:

1. We are saved by faith in the person and work of Christ and nothing else! (John 3:36 and I John 5:13)
2. Then our lives, as saved children of God, are most certainly to have the characteristics of commitment and surrender, but only as we abide in Christ and never from the source of self.

There is nothing more committed and more surrendered to the will of the Father than the life of the Son. As we abide in Him, we will be *Like Him!*

Hear me plainly: If you have left your *First Love*, the Lord Jesus Christ, you don't need more commitment or surrender from your puny resources. You need to be reunited with the One you have left. You need more of Jesus and the power of the Spirit whom He has sent. The life of Jesus solves everything. We all need to learn what it means to abide and then consistently do so in the power of the Holy Spirit. When we do, each of us will see a committed and surrendered life, because the life of Jesus is perfectly surrendered to the will of the Father!



*"As the Father loved Me,
I also have loved you;
abide in My love."*

Nothing Automatic

As you can imagine, there is absolutely nothing automatic about abiding in Christ. Everything found in the world without and associated with the sinful nature within conspires to move us away from a position of *abiding in Christ*. If we are not continually alert to those things which are seeking to draw us away and sensitive to our moment-by-moment walk with the Lord, we can be certain that we will spend very little time abiding in the life of the Vine!

I hope by now I have brought you to the point of wanting to know as clearly as possible what it means to *abide in Christ*! Let me share with you my own working definition as a place to begin, as we seek to respond to the call of our Savior *to Abide*!

To abide in Christ is to:

- *By faith, see myself in Him where He is and, by faith, know He is in me where I am.*
- *Think His thoughts, share His affections, engage in His purposes by means of knowing His mind—the Word of God.*
- *By faith, trust the Spirit of Christ to put to death the misdeeds of the flesh while at the same time manifesting the fruit of the Savior's life in me.*

Our task is to stand firm and unwavering in the One and only Source of life as a new creation, such that every failure is a reminder that we need more of Jesus and less of self!

Truly, it will take us a lifetime and then right on into eternity to grow into the fulness of what it means to abide in our Savior.

I have discussed four elements to consider:

1. Faith in our position in Christ and faith in Him doing what He has promised to do—reside in us.
2. The essential nature of our fellowship with the Lord through His Word.
3. Learning to walk by the Spirit so that we trust Him to separate us from the desires of the flesh while producing godly fruit.
4. Realizing that failure is a wake-up call that we have either turned or trusted in self and, following confession, simply need to heed our Savior's call to abide.

A New Testament Example

Let me give you a powerful illustration of our great need to abide and walk by the Spirit. Remember, that Jesus' audience is the 11 saved disciples. What happened to them following the arrest of Jesus? How did they manage during the trial and crucifixion of their Savior? They deserted Him, and Peter's denial, after his bold assertion that he would never desert Jesus, stands out as a monumental failure of commitment from the source of self!

It is true at this point, that they could neither abide in Christ as described in John 15 or walk by the Spirit. These are very particular blessings that God has provided for His church following Pentecost. But the disciples did have a personal relationship with the Lord and, when that was broken, they fell to pieces. How much more, in the day in which we live, do we need take God up on His offer to abide in Him that He might abide in us? How clearly we need the enabling power of the Holy Spirit if we are going bear fruit to God's glory. We are going to fail just as spectacularly as Peter if we seek to follow Jesus in our own strength. We need His life, His Spirit—and God has promised to provide them both.

An Old Testament Example

Before we continue, I want to show you that the essential elements of living in obedience to God and fulfilling whatever He has called us to do have always been pretty much the same. To do so, we are going to look at an Old Testament example. Now, you might think that is a strange place to turn when it comes to the subject of abiding in Christ and walking by the Spirit. Shouldn't this be something much more relevant to the New Testament? But I think you will be surprised at what we find, and I think it will help reinforce the principle that, if we desire to *Be Like Jesus*, we must set aside self and learn to take up what God has provided!

So, we are going to turn to I Kings Chapter 18 and take a look at the life and ministry of Elijah.

Before we continue, I would encourage you to read I Kings 18:16 through I Kings 19:18 in its entirety in order to familiarize yourself with the narrative, as I am only going to refer to highlights.

First, we see the dramatic victory for the Lord at Mt. Carmel as He uses Elijah in such a powerful way to draw the people back to Himself. Picture what it must have been like, after a full day of intense drama, for thousands of people to turn to the Lord and cry out.



"The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"

I Kings 18:39

Revival is under way among the people of northern Israel, and what do they need most of all? They need someone to teach and guide them in the way of truth that they might grow and walk with the Lord! Who would be the best man for the job? Why, Elijah!

Second, we see by I Kings Chapter 19 that things have gone terribly wrong. Take a close look at the text of Chapter 19 to note what went wrong and how God responded. There is much to be learned by way of application in our own lives which is very germane to our study. How did Elijah, the faithful servant of God in Chapter 18, become the failure of Chapter 19?

- In I Kings 19:1-2, Queen Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah. Is there anything shocking about this? Absolutely not—Elijah's life has been at risk his entire ministry life. In fact, you and I need to know:

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. II Timothy 3:12

- Jezebel's threat was not the problem: Self's response was the cause of his failure. What do I mean by *self's response*? I mean Elijah, the very same man who had faced off against 850 false prophets, now feared for his life and ran for the hills! He saw one woman as more significant than the God who had rained down fire on the altar the day before. He left without a teacher the thousands who had turned to the Lord the day before. Elijah got his eyes off the Lord and onto circumstances and himself. He had forgotten the basic principle of walking by faith!

You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

Isaiah 26:3

There was no peace for Elijah because his mind was on himself rather than on his God—and so he ran!

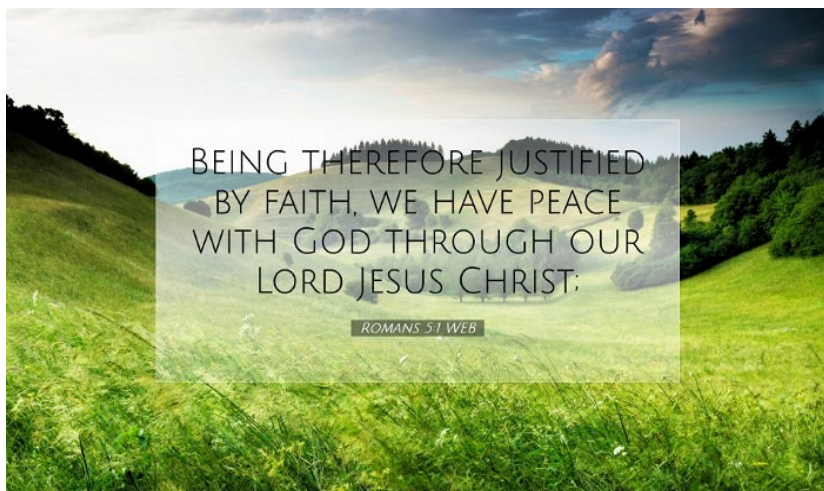
- Even a great man of God like Elijah, when focused on himself, has nothing more than a meager reserve of strength. Read through the text of I Kings 19:3-14 and you will see. Elijah is absorbed in self-pity (Verses 3-4), and even goes so far as to intimate: *After all I have done for You, Lord, how could You let this happen?* (Verse 14) Whether it is Elijah or us:

If you faint in the day of adversity, how small is your strength. Proverbs 24:10

Elijah failed, and we have too. That is simply because, in and of ourselves, our strength is so small! Or perhaps you see yourself as a more devoted man of God than Elijah? I suggest you get ready to learn the same lesson he did!

How God Responds. We have arrived at the part most pertinent to our study! Let's consider carefully how God deals with Elijah's failure.

First, notice what God doesn't do! He doesn't *question* Elijah's salvation. He doesn't admonish Elijah to *surrender* and be more committed. He doesn't even *discipline*



him! I think this is very important for us to see, because we have a number of theologies in our day that do all three! It is so very important for us to draw our theology from the Word of God and not from the mind of man.

Instead, we are going to look carefully at how God deals with Elijah so we can understand both the mind of God and how to make application to our own failures. Notice that God does just two things in order to get Elijah back to his calling:

1. He provides supernatural sustenance that lasts for 40 days of travel. (I Kings 19:5-8)
2. He counters the dramatically visible with the unseen voice of the Spirit. (I Kings 19:11-15)

What is God doing? He is pointing Elijah back to the Word of God and the Spirit of God!

Perhaps this response by God does not seem that significant to you. Let me see if I can clarify. God is telling Elijah:

It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Matthew 4:4

This was originally a message from God to the nation of Israel, and then quoted by Jesus when He faced temptation by Satan.

Elijah had turned from the truths of God's Word and focused on circumstances instead. When God provided Elijah with sustenance that lasted him for 40 days of travel, He was demonstrating for us all the nourishment that comes from His Word as revealed by His Spirit. God is also telling Elijah:

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.

Zechariah 4:6

There was no need for Elijah to worry about his life or spend time in self-pity—not while the Spirit of God was available to accomplish the will of God.



Do you see what we have uncovered? God's provision for an Old Testament saint was the Word of God and the Spirit of God! Thus, what did we just learn about abiding? Abiding is meant to be a walk of faith in the Word of God and a walk of faith in the Spirit of God. Such a walk allows our God to do what we cannot—produce fruit in our lives that glorifies Him!

We can be sure that when we fail to *Be Like Jesus*, it will be because self has gotten in the way and we have failed to steadfastly trust in the Word of God and walk by the Spirit! Let me suggest that we do not waste time in the wilderness as Elijah did, but instead confess our sin and realize we need more of Jesus and less of self—much less. Better still—none at all!

In Conclusion. Let me conclude our short look at Elijah by asking this question:

How should Church-age saints take the way in which God addressed Elijah's need and make application in our day from the much greater resources at our disposal?

Now, let me give you some answers. First, this is such a powerful reminder of the need to constantly recall our position in Christ. For our *claim to fame* is not that we are more worthy than others, but that we are *new creations in Christ* and *highly favored in the Beloved*! We need no other status!

Further, we need to realize that we don't need an absence of difficulties in our lives. We just need the life of Jesus—and praise God it is ours!

... Christ lives in me ... Galatians 2:20

... your life is now hidden with Christ in God.
Colossians 3:3

"Abide in Me and I will abide in you. ..." John 15:4

We must learn to trust that it is not our strength that will win the day, but the strength of the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead!

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... His incomparably great power for us who believe.
Ephesians 1:18-19

When we are feeling pressured by this world, on the edge of turning from what God has called us to be and do and running for the hills as Elijah did, pause!

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Colossians 3:2

You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.
Isaiah 26:3

"... the battle is the Lord's ..." I Samuel 17:47

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature ... Romans 7:18

And, always remember:

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

To Be Like Jesus, Add This to Your Prayers!

I have suggested and developed what I have called an *indirect approach* to *Being Like Jesus*. This means that rather than suggesting that you get out there and be compassionate and loving as He was, you first consider the three essential things we have discussed that provide a foundation from which the Spirit of Christ can produce the life of Christ in you: Understanding our position, learning to abide, and now praying like Jesus.



Let me say it plainly: I don't think any other approach has the least chance of success.

Before we begin to look at the character and deportment of Jesus as portrayed in the Scriptures, I have one more element to add to our indirect approach. I think it will catch you by surprise, for it is the role of prayer in *Being Like Jesus*! Consider the following verse of Scripture, which I think would be very easy to overlook in a study like

ours, but I believe is an essential component!

But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

Luke 5:16

Notice that this wasn't a one-time occurrence, but something that Jesus would often do.

Let me suggest that it would be very natural to ask:

- What was Jesus praying about?
- What was His prayer life like?
- If He was God incarnate, why did He need to pray?

Three Observations

These are good questions. Allow me to make three observations on this topic.

Observation #1: Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, He very consistently stepped away from circumstances for a time of prayer.

After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. Matthew 14:23

It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. Luke 6:12

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there. Mark 1:35

He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." Matthew 26:42

Observation #2: These moments of separation for prayer seem to occur in association with very busy or intense times of ministry. If you look at the context of the above verses, you will find this to be true. For example, you know the Garden of Gethsemane context of Matthew 26:42 well enough to know that it was just prior to the crucifixion. This was a very intense time in the life of Jesus in which we find Him again setting aside time for prayer.

Observation #3: As we have seen above, one aspect of the life of Jesus was a consistent prayer life, here is another aspect to which I want to draw your attention:

"I and the Father are one." John 10:30

"... the Son can do nothing By Himself ... only what He sees His Father doing ..." John 5:19

"For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me." John 6:38

"... not My will but Yours be *done*." Luke 22:42

If we put all three observations together, what do we have? Jesus' single-minded devotion to the will of the Father was clearly evident at times of great pressure, right alongside Jesus' commitment to prayer. What are we to make of this?

Prayer and Being Like Jesus!

Let me suggest a simple yet powerful relationship:

Prayer was a part of Jesus' oneness with the Father, and His steadfast devotion to His Father's will! Thus, if we seek to be like Jesus in His devotion to the will of the Father, we need to have a prayer life like His!



As we consider this requirement, the first question to ask is what does our prayer-life look like? Let me suggest it likely includes: Praise, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and supplication. Let me also suggest that in desiring to *Be Like Jesus*, our prayer life is likely missing something.

To *Be Like Jesus*, we need to:

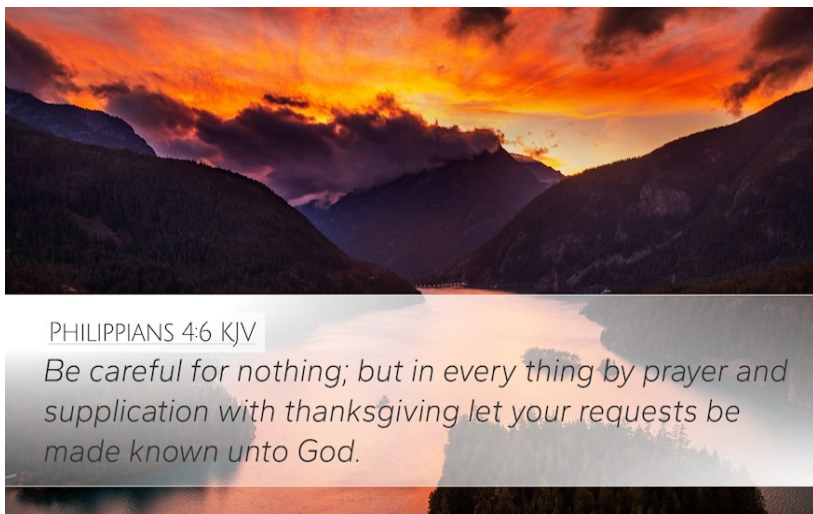
Slip away often, and make sure to: Delight in Our Position and evaluate the quality of our Abiding in the True Vine.

Do you see what I am suggesting? You and I do not have the least chance of consistently being like Jesus, unless we are standing firm in our position in Christ and steadfastly abiding in Him. And, in order to ensure that is the case, we are going to have to regularly step away from the demands and circumstances of this life and allow the Lord to speak to us about how we are doing.

Specifically, we need to consider such questions as:

- Has sin crept in at any point in my walk?
- Are there things my life that are hindering my abiding and need to go?
- Are there areas of unbelief or areas in which I am trusting in self?

Then, as the Lord reveals our shortcomings, we are at the same time going to need to stand firmly upon our



PHILIPPIANS 4:6 KJV

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

unchanging position in Christ! This kind of prayer is a recognition of great vulnerability.

It is so easy for us to get caught up in our failings like Elijah—victorious one moment and afraid or exhausted the next. What is the solution? Abiding in the Vine and standing firm in our position! How do we make sure that is the norm for our Christian walk? The answer is we must take time in prayer to check in with the Lord and listen to what He has to say! Specifically, we need to talk over with Him the quality of our abiding relationship and mentally review our wonderful position in Christ.

Our going to prayer as suggested above recognizes that the things that matter the most in our spiritual lives are things that only the life of the Vine and the Holy Spirit can do! We are never going to *Be Like Jesus* apart from His life and the enabling power of His Spirit!

If Jesus needed to slip away and pray regularly, how could we ever think we could get away with less! We saw Elijah's great failure after the victory of I Kings 18, and I am suggesting that getting away for a time of prayer, with respect to one's position and the need to abide in Christ, could prevent a similar failure on our part.

Another Scriptural Example

Let me give you an example which I think illustrates this truth. Let's consider another failure in Numbers Chapter 20. The nation of Israel was in the wilderness without water. In Verse 11, Moses struck the rock twice, and water flowed from it to meet the peoples' needs. The problem is that Moses was told by God to speak to the rock. It was his disobedience in this situation, despite decades of faithful service, that kept Moses from entering the Promised Land.

Much as we might like to blame this on the Israelites, I don't think we can do so. It is true that the Israelites complained and grumbled against the leadership of Moses—but they always did that. This was no different than many other occasions. But there was something different that occurred right before Moses sinned.

Right at the beginning of yet another time of testing for the Israelites we find this verse:

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin ... There Miriam died and was buried.

Numbers 20:1

Miriam was Moses' big sister. It was she who kept watch over him when he was hidden in the reeds of the Nile. It was she who convinced Pharaoh's daughter to allow Moses' own mother to care for him. Let me suggest that Moses was dealing with the loss of his sister, and in a moment of vulnerability, he sinned—a very costly sin as it turned out!



What is the lesson for us?

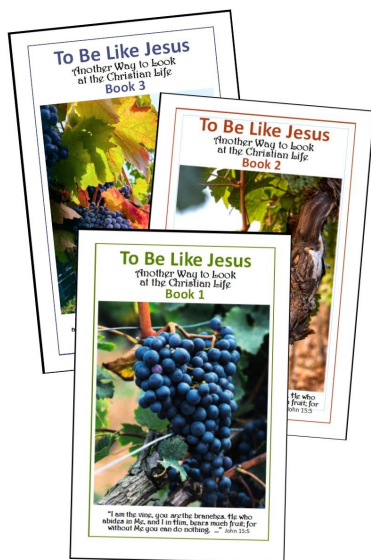
We saw Elijah's great failure after the victory of Kings 18. We discussed the sin of Moses after a life of service. Let me suggest that as circumstances seem to conspire against us and heartbreaks or victories pile up, if we are going to *Be Like Jesus*, we desperately need to withdraw to a lonely place and pray!

Our prayer could be something like:

Lord, I give you both this success and this heartache. Don't let anything distract me from steadfastly abiding in You—walking by faith in Your Word, Your promise of life, and the enabling power of Your Spirit. I stand firm upon my position in You, that Your life would be manifest in me. Keep me firm, steadfast, and I immovable in the face of trial!

Two More Books

Now that we have laid the foundation, we are ready to take the next step and begin to look at the life of Jesus as recorded in the Scriptures that we might observe His character, behavior, and thoughts. As we do so in the next two booklets, we will be wonderfully challenged in our goal to *Be Like Jesus* in time and for all eternity!





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