

A Beautiful Life Lesson 2: A Beautiful Life is Rooted in Our Relationship with God.

For us in the modern world, most of our long-distance travel is via airplane. Some of you, like me, might enjoy looking out the window as we make the ascent or descent. Familiar places take on a different perspective when we do.

Similarly, our last lesson is like one of those views. As believers, we often read familiar Bible stories in isolation. But if we step back, we will see that each of them actually fits in a larger story. God's Story becomes the 10,000-foot view of our lives, giving not only the stories in the Bible, but also our own lives now in the present a new context.

In the last lesson, we looked at where God is going, which also gives us a trajectory for our travel through life here. At present, we are living in the time of the "proclaimed Kingdom"—where Jesus' Kingdom has already broken through into the here and now. This Story is where a beautiful life originates. Like the useful "You are here" marker on a map, it gives us perspective to plot how we can move forward from here to our destination.

No matter how great the view, however, we don't want to stay up in the clouds! No matter how great the view, a plane must slowly descend down through the clouds little by little and touch down on earth. That's what we must do as well. We're going to do that in this session, using four pieces you might have in your kitchen: a pitcher, a cup, a saucer, and a plate. Of course there will be limitations to every paradigm, including this one, but work with me, all right? ☺

In John 15, Jesus uses the imagery of the vine and branches to illustrate the necessity of abiding in Him if we desire to live a life of fruitfulness (vv. 4-5). Apart from him, we can do nothing—nothing towards growing in godliness, nothing towards being a blessing to others. We'll use these four pieces to help illustrate the main point of this lesson, that **A beautiful life requires that we be rooted in a personal relationship with God.** There is no other way. If we want to bring God's Story down into our lives, to connect our lives with His plans, this is not an option. Let me use this paradigm to explain how.

The **pitcher** represents our Trinitarian God as revealed in His Word. He is the king and sovereign over all—over our lives and over the world we live in. As our Creator, he is the source of life. And because He is the creator, He gets to define what true life is and where it's going. He reveals this in His Word. Therefore, He is the foundation of all our understanding of who we are. Here we not only get the overall Story as we talked about in our previous session but also how to live that life for His glory. Without Him, we will fill the vacuum with an alternate and rival Story, a foundation of sand that cannot sustain us through life. In real life, the pitcher has a limited capacity, which is where the paradigm doesn't match reality. On the contrary, God is limitless and cannot be drained.

In His wisdom, God thought it good to create the **cup**. As you might guess, this represents *us*. As a cup is similar to a pitcher in its shape, but smaller and limited in how much it can take. it is very different in its function or purpose. Unlike a pitcher, the cup is made to receive. God created us to be in relationship with Him, just as a pitcher and cup go together. This is not because He was lonely and needed the companionship. It is because He thought this is the best way to showcase His glory. This vertical relationship is the backbone of our identity. The cup is most

blessed when it is set under the pitcher, open to receiving from it. Then it is doing what it is made to do.

So how might this help us understand ourselves? As creatures, we are made in the image of God, but try as we might, we are not the sovereign. That idea is a lie from Satan (Gen. 3:5). If we think about God's pattern, we will remember that as creatures, we are designed to live in dependence. While we are in the image of God, we are not God. We will have our limits. To live in independence and self-sufficiency is a contradiction to our very nature. We are not designed for this. We do not understand enough to do the job.

The only way we will find our deepest satisfaction, purpose, and meaning is when we are living in submission and dependence to the true God. If we do not, we will serve an alternate king, even if it is ourselves. Any other sovereign will leave us feeling dissatisfied and empty because good as it might be, it cannot replace what the pitcher, God, offers.

Third is the **saucer**. This represents *the people in our lives*—from the ones closest to us to the divine appointments with others we cannot imagine. The people on your saucer will be unique to you.

While the pitcher-cup relationship represents our vertical relationship with God, the cup-saucer relationship represents our horizontal relationships with others. We are made to be in relationship with God, and we are made to be in relationship with others. "It is not good for the man to be alone." (Gen. 2:18) The cup and saucer go together even as the pitcher and cup do. God has designed us from the very beginning to live in companionship with Him and one another.

As the branch continually remains or abides in Him, the vine, as He exhorts us in John 15:5, the branch will bear much fruit. In this paradigm, the cup stays under the pitcher's outpouring until it overflows. In this way, our relationship with God will overflow beyond this vertical relationship to extend horizontally, to touch the lives of others. The vertical overflows to bless the horizontal.

Again, this is where the paradigm breaks down. In real life, we would stop pouring into the cup before we overflow. However, here in this paradigm, we *want* to overflow. We want others to be touched by our personal relationship with God.

While He could most certainly pour into the lives of the people in our saucer, He often desires to use us as the conduit instead. In this way, we are blessed as we invest in others, just as they are blessed by us. When we do this, His truth deepens and matures in us—a win-win situation!

One more thing: If we are not abiding in Christ, we will abide in something else—the alternate story and values set by our culture, friends, or family. Life here is not neutral. What we overflow depends on what you drink. So if we desire to be a blessing to others, spending time with God, no matter how busy our lives, is critical, not optional, lest we unintentionally pass on something else.

Lastly, we have the **plate**. These are the *things we do* for the people on our saucer. Depending on our stage in life or our responsibilities, this may also differ and it may change over time. My

plate now is far different than my plate as a college student or a young mother. What is on my plate may be different from what is on yours. We can't compare one plate with another because I am responsible for different people than you are.

What is on our plates should reflect the needs of the people on our saucer—that which is both necessary and important for them. The only way we are going to have the discernment to do this is through staying in connection with God. He will guide us to take on the needs of the people we are to meet—another reason why we need to abide in Him.

When things are lined up, we will be able to live our lives at peace with God, filled by his Spirit. This orienting relationship puts things in perspective. From Him, we are guided into the primary relationships to invest in and how to actively serve them out of the overflow of my relationship with Him. My relationship with God vertically overflows into service to others that blesses them.

Again, a beautiful life is **rooted in our personal relationship with God**. This paradigm reminds us that if we desire to be fruitful in the Christian life, it will be about serving people. And it is not just busy, but it is intentional activity for their good, to bring them to God.

So how does this relate to the Story?

The Story provides the overarching view, and these pieces help us to bring God's overarching big picture down into the cracks and crevices of our daily lives. It connects our relationship with God to our ministry to others.

When we are properly oriented towards God (vertical), He will help us to prioritize the horizontal saucer and plate. As mentioned earlier, if we are drinking from the wrong source, there will be consequences. These four pieces can also show us what happens when we do not abide in Christ as the vine.

One thing that can often happen when we are disconnected from the pitcher is that I end up **living in the wrong Story**. I think *I* am the pitcher and try to take control and pour out onto the saucer myself. That looks silly doesn't it? It isn't what the cup is made to do.

How many times have I ignored God, trying to run on my own efforts? When I am disconnected from the life-giving flow of the pitcher, all I have is what is limited to the size of my own cup. It's not much! On the other hand, if I am sitting in submission to the Lord who fills me, I will always have enough for He will keep me filled, as living water springs up as a well within me (John 4).

Here's another odd arrangement. Sometimes, I **try to find my worth and significance from either my saucer or my plate**. Instead of being filled by the pitcher, I look to other people or my work to fill and satisfy me. If you look at it with these pieces, that looks even more ridiculous, doesn't it? Neither people nor our work are meant to fill us. And even if they did, it will be limited.

How about one more example? How many of us are overworked and busy? If I am honest, sometimes I have the **whole thing upside down**. My plate is on top the saucer and they're both on top of me. Even if God were trying to get through to me, I am so focused on those two things that I do not have time or space for him.

There are many other arrangements possible. But if you get nothing else from this lesson, I hope it is this: **A beautiful life is rooted in our relationship with God**. When we get our cups lined up under the pitcher, we position ourselves to overflow into the lives of others. I hope this helps you to understand how we can begin living out a beautiful life. For this lesson's activity, we're going to take some time to assess and evaluate our own arrangement of these four pieces. Doing so may help you identify where things are out of whack and help you identify ways to start moving back in line.

We're done here so click Complete and Continue and let's move on to the Activity for this lesson.