



living waters

AbideTM
MINISTRIES

ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY

Enjoying Exceptional Marriages/Exceptional Lives

Retreat/ Group Companion WORKBOOK



ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY
ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL MARRIAGES
AND ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL LIFE

Group Companion
WORKBOOK

RICHARD T. CASE



ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY - ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL MARRIAGES AND ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL LIFE RETREAT/ GROUP COMPANION WORKBOOK

PUBLISHED BY ALL FOR JESUS—ABIDE MINISTRIES

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To my wife, Linda, who has always had the desire and heart to Abide in the Vine! She is an incredible Intercessory prayer warrior, and she has always made it a priority in our marriage—to walk in Unity together with God and walk together with one another underneath God's faithful guidance. This blessing of partnership and dedication to hearing God's words has continually led us to God's best and none better! What a joy and a privilege to have a mate who believes this, lives it out every day, and encourages me to live it out every day. Our life is truly exceptional; and we have continually been on one grand adventure, step by step—in Christ!

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ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY

ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL MARRIAGES
AND ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL LIFE



SESSION ONE: ABIDING IN THE VINE



SESSION 1:

ABIDING IN THE VINE



Read through John 15:1-5 and answer the following questions to understand the depth of this analogy and how critical this is to our daily Christian life in HIM:

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:1-5, ESV)

- Who is The Vine?

- What does a vine do/provide?

- How important is this to our own spiritual growth?

- Who is The Vinedresser?

- What does a vinedresser do?

SESSION 1:

ABIDING IN THE VINE

- How significant is this to the process from grapes growing to maturity and ultimately being transformed into wine?

- Who is The Branch?

- What does a branch do?

- Why do we try to become the Vinedresser and take charge?

- What kind of branches does the Vinedresser prune? What does pruning really mean?

- Why is it necessary to prune?

- Why does the Vinedresser not leave the pruned branches on the ground but rather carry them off and burn them?

SESSION 1:

ABIDING IN THE VINE

- Why is it difficult for us to be pruned back?

- If this whole process works properly, what is the result?

- Who defines the fruit?

- Can the vine produce fruit by itself?

- Why not?

- Can the branch produce fruit by itself?

- Why not?

- What, then, is necessary for fruit to be produced?

- Why?

SESSION 1:

ABIDING IN THE VINE

- What choice do we have to make?

- Does abiding happen automatically just because we are believers? Why or why not?

- Why do you believe Christ puts it on us to make this choice?

Look at Christ's very strong statement in John 15:5:

⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5, ESV)

- Apart from Me, you can do_____.
- If you believe this (and since He says it, it is absolutely true), then what should our next question be?

SESSION 1:

ABIDING IN THE VINE

Re-read John 8:28–32, and 36 and answer the following questions.

²⁸So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. ²⁹And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” ³⁰As he was saying these things, many believed in him. ³¹So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
(John 8:28-32, ESV)

³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36, ESV)

- How did Jesus operate while He functioned as a man in relation to the Father?

- How significant is that to how we are expected to operate or behave?

- Share your thoughts about whether you think it is possible for us to operate this way? Why or why not?

- What is the “if” part of this condition?

SESSION 1:

ABIDING IN THE VINE

- What will the result be?

- What does this mean to you?

- What does verse 36 mean?

- Based upon John 15:1-5, what do you think this means?

- If we meet this condition, what will we know?

- What does the word "know" mean?

- How significant is that to us?



ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY

ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL MARRIAGES
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SESSION TWO: GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES



SESSION 2:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES



Read through Genesis 1:26–31.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man^[a] in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1:26-31, ESV)

SESSION 2:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES

- Who is "Us"?

- Why is it significant that neither Christ nor the Holy Spirit are created, but are eternally God?

- What fellowship have they always enjoyed eternally?

- Man and woman are made in whose image?

- What does that mean, and thus why are man and woman unique over all over creatures?

- If we are in His image, what characteristics do we then have of the Creator?

- What did they, the Trinity, give to man and woman?

SESSION 2:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES

- What does dominion/authority mean?

- What does it mean to have the dominion/authority over the world?

- What else was provided to man and woman?

- What did that mean for their everyday living?

- Did they have to worry about provision or ever needing resources to farm, create, or build something?

- Why not?

- For us, in this day and age, what does provision look like?

- Does God still want to be our provider?

SESSION 2:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES

- If so, what must have to happen?

- In verse 31, as He looked at all that He had made and provided, including man and woman, how did He describe it?

- How exceptional is that?

Read through Genesis 2:8–25.

⁸And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat^[a] of it you shall surely die."

SESSION 2:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for^[b] him." ¹⁹Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed^[c] every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam^[d] there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made^[e] into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."^[f]

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:8-25, ESV)

- How large was the Garden of Eden?

- How long were they likely there?

- In verse 15, what were they (said to Adam, but implied also for Eve) asked to do?

SESSION 2:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES

- Why?

- What does that mean for us?

- Then, God said it is not good for man (also thus, implied for woman) to be what?

- Why?

- God thus, created a partner, a mate, for each other, in order for them to become what?

- What does this mean?

SESSION 2:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES

- How then are we to live in relationship with our spouse, or a close friend?

- Why?

There are even more wonderful parts of exceptional living that Adam and Eve experienced:

- In the Garden, did Adam and Eve ever get sick or diseased?

- Describe what living like that must have been?

- Did Adam and Eve understand that they were created by God—that they were given all this provision and privilege?

- Did they fully embrace these privileges? Why?

- Who did Adam and Eve have communion with every day?

- Was their communion with God uncertain or fuzzy?

SESSION 2:

GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVES AND MARRIAGES

- Why was this one of their more wonderful privileges?

- In addition to the instructions to tend the garden, name the animals, etc., what instructions did they receive about the Tree of Good and Evil?

- Why?

- Was this tree something awful per se?

- Since it is not in God's nature to want us to fail, why did God allow the tree to be put in the garden at all?

- Why did God allow this test?



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SESSION THREE: CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL



SESSION 3:

CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL



Read Genesis 3:1–7.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You^[a] shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,^[b] she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (Genesis 3:1-7, ESV)

SESSION 3:

CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

- What were the tricks of the enemy that he used to deceive Adam and Eve?

- How did Adam and Eve respond to these tricks?

- What was God's original instruction to Adam and Eve?

- What was the consequence if they disobeyed this instruction?

- Knowing that they did fail the test, and that they lost direct access to God, what was the real mistake that they actually made?

- What died?

SESSION 3:

CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

Read John 10:10:

¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10, ESV)

- Describe the characteristics of the nature of the enemy.

- Think about these characteristics as they apply to the world, and describe the impact to the world we are now living under.

- How does the enemy use his demons to impact your life and personal world?

Read Luke 4:5–8 for further Biblical evidence of this:

⁵And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸And Jesus answered him, "It is written,

"You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" (Luke 4:5–8, ESV)

- Was this a real temptation of Jesus?

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CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

- If they weren't real, what would Jesus have said?

- What did Satan have to offer Jesus?

- Satan stated that he was given the kingdoms of the world. Who gave him these kingdoms?

- Understanding that the kingdoms of the world are under the nature of Satan (steal, kill, and destroy), how did Jesus respond to this real temptation?

In 1 John 5:18-20, which takes place about 60 years after the resurrection and after Christ has established His Kingdom (A Spiritual Kingdom) on Earth, the world continued to function under the kingdom of the enemy. So now there are dual kingdoms.

¹⁸We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

¹⁹We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

²⁰And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:18-20, ESV)

SESSION 3:

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- What does John say about whose authority is controlling the world?

- What does that mean to us?

In our lives, one of the enemy's biggest tactics in marriages and/or in our friendships or relationships is division/separation. Read Proverbs 6:16-19.

¹⁶There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him:

¹⁷haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil,

¹⁹a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16-19 ESV)

- Sowing discord, causing strife (being in constant disagreement) is amongst this list of the enemy's tactics. What does God say about things on this list?

- How strong is this attitude of God toward us when we are in constant disagreement?

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CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

- Therefore, are we to take this lightly or continue to live this way? Why?

To understand why and how the enemy keeps us in discord and strife, read Romans 8:5–8.

⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:5-8, ESV)

- There are three consequences when we operate this way. What are they?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Read James 4:11 to understand the work of the enemy better.

¹¹Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.^[a] The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. (James 4:11, ESV)

- When we judge each other, what actually are we setting ourselves up as?

SESSION 3:

CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

- Who do we tend to judge the most?

- Why?

- In what ways do we judge them?

Read James 5:9 to see what this really means.

⁹Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. (James 5:9, ESV)

- When I judge another person in this way, what then actually happens to me?

The consequences of setting yourself up as judge (I am right, and you are wrong, or I don't care what you think) is further defined in Galatians 5:1-4.

¹For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

²Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified^[a] by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (Galatians 5:1-4, ESV)

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- As I set up one law or rule (I am right, and my decision is right, and I do not care), I then am required to keep the entire law, which we know is impossible. Once I am back under the law, there are two consequences. What are they?
 1. _____
 2. _____

Read John 10:10.

¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10, ESV)

- What does Christ say He has come to do?

- Exactly how does He describe this life?

- When?

Let's look at the detail of how Christ defines this super abundance. Read Luke 4:16–21 for Christ's first public statement of His ministry, His purpose of why He has come.

¹⁶And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.
¹⁷And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

SESSION 3:

CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."
(Luke 4:16-21, ESV)

- He was handed Isaiah 61, and He read verses 1–4. He read these and then sat down. When He sat down, what did He say?

- Why is this significant to us today?

Let's go through this phrase by phrase. Read Isaiah 61:1–4.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;^[a]
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;^[b]
²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to grant to those who mourn in Zion—

SESSION 3:

CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.^[c]

⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:1-4, ESV)

- The good news (Gospel) means what?

- How important is this in our lives today? Why?

Let's go through these one by one from Isaiah 61:1-4:

- Broken hearted: What causes people to be broken hearted?

- What does that do to our hearts, particularly, over time?

- What does Christ promise to do? What does that mean for us?

SESSION 3:

CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

Captive/Bound: What causes people to be held captive or bound up?

- What does Christ promise to do? What does that mean to us?

- Mourn/mourning: What causes us to mourn?

- What do we tend to believe about what we have lost?

- What does Christ promise to do? What does that mean to us?

- Ashes: What do we do with ashes?

- What does Christ do with ashes?

SESSION 3:

CHRIST PROVIDES A REMEDY FOR HUMANITY'S FALL

- Consider how powerful that is. What does that mean to us?

- Spirit of Heaviness: What causes us to live in a spirit of heaviness?

- Why?

- What does Christ promise to do for us in this state?

- What does that mean to us?

- He will rebuild old ruins/former desolations/ruined cities. In light of all that He has promised, what does this summary mean to us?



ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY

ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL MARRIAGES
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SESSION FOUR: FORGIVENESS



SESSION 4: FORGIVENESS



Let's explore this by reading Romans 8:1-2.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.^[a] ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you^[b] free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.
(Romans 8:1-2, ESV)

- What does the word *condemnation* mean?

- What does that look like for us if we are living in condemnation?

- For those who are in Christ Jesus, what does He promise?

- What does that mean to us?

- If the Bible says that Christ does not condemn us, who else would that leave to condemn us?

SESSION 4: FORGIVENESS

- Why do others tend to condemn us, and why do we tend to condemn others?

- Why does this lead us to stay in un-forgiveness toward others?

- What are the key reasons we confuse forgiveness with reconciliation?

- Why?

1. Read Matthew 5:21–26.

²¹“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother^[a] will be liable to judgment; whoever insults^[b] his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell^[c] of fire. ²³So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:21-26, ESV)

SESSION 4: FORGIVENESS

- When we realize we have hurt, angered, or come against someone in a harsh way, what are we to do?

2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:12-21.

¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. ^[a] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling^[b] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:12-21, ESV).

- What is our primary role toward others?

SESSION 4: FORGIVENESS

3. Read Philippians 3:11–15:

¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. (Philippians 3:11-15, ESV)

- What key principle of life does this state for us to live out? Why?



ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY

ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL MARRIAGES
AND ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL LIFE



SESSION FIVE:

UNITY



SESSION 5: UNITY



Read Psalm 133.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!^[a]

²It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!

³It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore. (Psalm 133, ESV)

- What does the Psalm say about dwelling in unity?

- What does unity mean?

- When you reach unity “there,” what does God promise?

- How strong is the word “command”? What does that mean to us?

SESSION 5:

UNITY

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–12.

⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, ESV)

- Ecclesiastes says two are better than one and lists the reasons why. What are they?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- As you consider these reasons, what perspective should you then have toward your spouse or significant other regarding being for them instead of working against them? Why?

- These verses also state that a three-cord strand cannot be broken. Who is the third cord?

- What does this say in terms of who are you to be in unity with? Why is this so important?

SESSION 5:

UNITY

Read Ephesians 4:1–6.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
(Ephesians 4:1-6, ESV)

- What do these verses say about who you are to be in unity with?

- What kind of effort does it take to ensure your unity with the Spirit? Why?

- What is the difference between being in unity with the Spirit and just negotiating with your spouse or significant other?

- On what basis can you get to unity with your spouse or significant other every time, all the time?

- So, is it okay that the two of you, when processing things, can be in disagreement?

SESSION 5:

UNITY

- Is it important to respect that the other party disagrees and has not yet come to agreement with you in the Spirit? Why?

- What are the three possibilities for the Spirit to bring you to agreement when you disagree?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Read Philippians 2:1–6.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,^[a] ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped . . .

(Philippians 2:1-6, ESV)

- What does it mean to be like-minded, being of one accord and one mind?

- As verse 4 ponders the potential for disagreement, two important points are revealed to us. What are they?

1. _____
2. _____

SESSION 5:

UNITY

- Why are they both important?

Read Acts 15:1–6.

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.^[a]⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

⁶The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. (Acts 15:1-6, ESV)

- When Paul had a very sharp disagreement with Jewish Christians who believed, according to their understanding of new life in Christ, that they must be circumcised in addition to receiving Christ as Savior to be considered saved, the two came to a crossroads. Wasn't circumcision critical as a sign of the Covenant and thus, needed to be followed per the Old Testament prescription, or was just a relationship with Christ Himself enough? The two could not decide. With this disagreement (which was termed as “rather sharp”), what did they do?

SESSION 5:

UNITY

- As they, who were in disagreement, walked together in fellowship to Jerusalem what did they do?

- After the apostles heard both sides of the disagreement, in verse 6, what did they do?

Read Ephesians 4:15–16 and 25–32.

¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16, ESV)

²⁵Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil.

²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4: 25-32, ESV)

SESSION 5:

UNITY

Let's review the steps:

- In verse 32, what is always to be in our heart?

- On what basis are we to forgive?

- Though we usually do not overtly lie to each other, how do we subtly lie to each other? Why?

- Why do we remain silent about what we think or simply give into the other's solution even though we disagree?

- Since it is important to reach unity while still allowing for the other party's disagreement, why is it important that we create a safe space for the other party to speak up?

- When it says to speak the truth in love, what truth are we to speak?

SESSION 5:

UNITY

- Why is it important for both parties to be able to speak this truth?

Read 1 Kings 3:5–9.

⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you."⁶And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. ⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" (1 Kings 3:5-9, ESV)

- Even though Solomon was quite skilled and educated, how did he say he would approach every decision?

- For our decisions, why should we approach everything in the same way?

SESSION 5:

UNITY

- As we are seeking answers from God, what kind of heart are we to ask for? Why?

Read Proverbs 8:32–35.

³²“And now, O sons, listen to me:

blessed are those who keep my ways.

³³Hear instruction and be wise and do not neglect it.

³⁴Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors

³⁵For whoever finds me finds life

and obtains favor from the Lord . . . (Proverbs: 8:32-35, ESV)

- As we then seek more information on this decision, there are three things we are to do:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- As we are seeking answers, practically, how do we do this?

Read Proverbs 11:14 and 15:22.

¹⁴Where there is no guidance, a people falls,

but in an abundance of counselors there is safety. (Proverbs 11:14, ESV)

²²Without counsel plans fail,

but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22, ESV)

SESSION 5: UNITY

- What does it say about the significance of receiving help? Why?

Read Psalm 4:4–5.

⁴Be angry,^[a] and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah
⁵Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the Lord. (Psalm 4:4-5, ESV)

- In these verses, is anger sin? Why or Why not?

- When would it become sin?

- When it is about to become sin, what are we called to do?



ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY

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SESSION SIX: LED BY THE SPIRIT/ ANSWERS TO PRAYER



SESSION 6:

LED BY THE SPIRIT/ANSWERS TO PRAYER



Read Romans 8:12–17.

¹²So then, brothers,^[a] we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons^[b] of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:12–17, ESV)

- What does it mean that we are not indebted or obligated to live by the flesh any longer?

- Why is that significant to our view of how we live?

- As a child of God, what is our privilege?

SESSION 6:

LED BY THE SPIRIT/ANSWERS TO PRAYER

- If the Spirit is leading, what are we to be doing? In what way?

- In verse 16, what is one of the Spirit's primary roles?

- As a child, whose child are we?

- And since we are His, we do not carry the spirit of fear to bondage but the Spirit of what? And, by which, we cry out what?

- What does that truly mean to us?

- What kind of life does a toddler (who says "Daddy") live?

- How are we to live the same kind of life? Why?

SESSION 6:

LED BY THE SPIRIT/ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Let's look at how the Spirit leads us into this life. Read John 16:13–15.

¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

(John 16:13-15, ESV)

- What are the roles of the Spirit in our lives?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

- Practically, how does He do these for us?

As He guides us into His will, He answers prayers.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:18-22.

¹⁸As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. ¹⁹For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. ²¹And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²²and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 1:18-22, ESV)

- What does it mean that all the promises are yes in Christ Jesus?

SESSION 6:

LED BY THE SPIRIT/ANSWERS TO PRAYER

- Who does this apply to? Is anyone left out of this?

- What is to be our response?

- What does Amen truly mean?

As we understand He will provide promises, how do we then access these promises through the power of answered prayer? Read John 15:7-8.

⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. (John 15:7-8, ESV)

- What are the two concurrent conditions to answered prayer?

1. _____
2. _____

- If we meet these conditions, what is promised?

- How does this then change our prayer lives?

SESSION 6:

LED BY THE SPIRIT/ANSWERS TO PRAYER

One of the wonderful answered prayers arising from the abundant life is God fulfilling the desires of our hearts. Read Psalm 37:3–8.

³Trust in the Lord, and do good;
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.^[a]
⁴Delight yourself in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
⁵Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
⁶He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,
and your justice as the noonday.
⁷Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices!
⁸Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!
Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. (Psalm 37:3-8, ESV)

- What do these verses say that delights God?

- If we delight God, what does He promise?

- Where are these desires?

SESSION 6:

LED BY THE SPIRIT/ANSWERS TO PRAYER

To confirm these promises as you pray, remember that we have the privilege of confirmation with others through the Spirit. Read Matthew 18:18–20.

¹⁸Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed^[a] in heaven. ¹⁹Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (Matthew 18:18-20, ESV)

- As you gather together in prayer, how are you to gather?

- What does this truly mean?

- As you seek His will, two of you are then to come to what?

- What does that mean?

- When you understand and receive His will, what does God promise?

SESSION 6:

LED BY THE SPIRIT/ANSWERS TO PRAYER

- What power do you then receive?

- What does it mean to bind and loose?

- How powerful is that? What dimension are you then operating in?

When needing further insight from God, we are to continue to pray. Read James 1:5–8.

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8, ESV)

- When you lack wisdom, what do you do?

- Why do you always lack wisdom?

SESSION 6:

LED BY THE SPIRIT/ANSWERS TO PRAYER

- What does God promise?

- What, though, is the condition?

- What must we believe?

- If we do not believe it, He will not give it to us. Why not? What is the practical reason for this?



ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY

ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL MARRIAGES
AND ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL LIFE



SESSION SEVEN: HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?



SESSION 7:

HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?



Read Luke 10:38–42.

³⁸Now as they went on their way, Jesus^[a] entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,⁴²but one thing is necessary. ^[b] Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42, ESV)

- If we were to ask Martha what she was doing, what would she say?

- From her perspective, would she consider what she was doing to be the very best thing possible? Why?

- She thought it so important that she asked Mary to help her. Mary stayed put, so what did she ask Jesus to say to Mary? Why?

SESSION 7:

HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?

- How did Jesus respond to her? Why?

- What was Mary doing?

- What key word did Jesus use about what Mary had done?

- Why is this significant for us?

- Would there have been a time later for Mary, Martha, and Jesus to join in fellowship and assist Martha with some of her tasks? Why is this also important to understand?

- When you put all this together, what is the key point of the story regarding abiding?

- How, then, should we personally respond to this?

SESSION 7:

HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?

Read Proverbs 4:1–7 and 20–23.

Hear, O sons, a father's instruction,
and be attentive, that you may gain^[a] insight,
²for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching.
³When I was a son with my father,
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
⁴he taught me and said to me,
"Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live.
⁵Get wisdom; get insight;
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.
⁶Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.
⁷The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever you get, get insight. (Proverbs 4:1-7, ESV)
²⁰My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.
²¹Let them not escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.
²²For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their^[a] flesh.
²³Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life. (Proverbs 4:20-23, ESV)

- What do these verses say over and over again to pay attention to?

- Where do these words have to be kept?

SESSION 7:

HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?

- How do you do this?

- As you accept the words into your heart, how do you then receive understanding and wisdom (application to your personal life circumstances)?

- What is the difference between doing a daily devotion of different verses day after day versus staying in a section of Scripture for a period of time until an application of those words sink into your heart?

Read Proverbs 22:17–21.

¹⁷Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge,

¹⁸for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips.

¹⁹That your trust may be in the Lord,
I have made them known to you today, even to you.

²⁰Have I not written for you thirty sayings
of counsel and knowledge,

²¹to make you know what is right and true,
that you may give a true answer to those who sent you?

(Proverbs 22:17- 21, ESV)

SESSION 7:

HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?

- These verses reiterate that the words have to get where?

- They add an indicator that you will know they are within your heart when you can do what?

Read Jeremiah 15:16.

¹⁶Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16, ESV)

- What did Jeremiah do with the words he received?

- This is a picture of rumination. What does that mean?

- As he ate these words, ruminated on them, and processed them, what did he experience? Why?

SESSION 7:

HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?

- What does this speak to you regarding what we are to experience, as Jeremiah did, as we abide with God, and as we receive His words for us?

Read Luke 2:41–52.

⁴¹Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. ⁴³And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, ⁴⁴but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, ⁴⁵and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸And when his parents^[a] saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." ⁴⁹And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"^[b] ⁵⁰And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. ⁵¹And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

⁵²And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature^[c] and in favor with God and man.
(Luke 2:41-52, ESV)

- As Jesus was sitting with the teachers, He was in a learning mode (abiding). What three things was He doing?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- How might we do the same in our abiding time with Him?

SESSION 7:

HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?

Review the Instructions on Abiding in the Vine and Thoughts on Journaling:

ABIDING IN THE WORD

1. Pursue your interest. What interesting Word or thought has the Spirit used to pique your interest; what do you already know God is laying on your heart?
2. Write out the specific Scriptures using a good Cross Reference Study Bible with helps and concordance: NKJV (Spirit Filled Life Bible is particularly good, as it includes translations of Greek and Hebrew words); NASB; NEV; Amplified. Do not use a paraphrased work as a primary Bible, only as some additional help. Go to www.biblegateway.com or www.crosswalk.com for different translations. Spend some time understanding the context of the specific Bible Book from which the verse is taken. Also, do not read just the specific verse, but read the entire paragraph for context.
3. Cross reference specific verses by using your Cross Reference Study Bible, which will take you to other truths about that particular revelation; and perform Word studies using the concordance at back of your Bible or www.biblegateway.com or www.crosswalk.com. As you spend time in the cross-referenced or Word study verses, let the “quickenings” of the Spirit lead you regarding whether this is something He is speaking to you; and only then spend time further processing. If it does not strike your heart much, do not spend any further time on it and continue to cross reference other verses that strike your heart or go to another verse from your Word study.
4. Write out your thoughts about:
 - a. What this says about the character of God?
 - b. What God has done, is doing, or promises to do?
 - c. Are there any conditions to what God promises? (If...then)
 - d. What are my responsibilities or responses?
5. Go deeper into Hebrew and Greek meanings of the Words He is speaking to you. At www.studylight.org go to: Study the Interlinear Bible. Put in your Bible Book and then Chapter; then click on Study. The chapter will come up, and then you click on the word you wish to know. On the next screen, all of the Greek and Hebrew word definitions for your word will be displayed. If you wish to go deeper, you can go to Word origins and click on that number and further definitions will be offered.
6. Memorize the verses (word for word)—carry 3x5 cards with you.

SESSION 7:

HOW DO WE ABIDE? WHAT IS THE KEY TO RECEIVING THIS FRUIT?

7. Journal your thoughts:
 - a. Do I believe this in my heart (is it settled)? Why or why not? (What do I struggle with, and what experiences in my life work against what I am receiving in the Word?)
 - b. How do these words apply to my situation and me?
 - c. How is God calling me to adjust my life to Him and His will?
 - d. What thoughts come to me about all this?
 - e. Dialogue with the Father your thoughts. Ask for clarity, understanding, wisdom, faith.
8. Pray the promises: Ask God to fulfill what He has said to you.
9. Commit time with friends of accountability or your spouse and share your journal. What is God saying to you?
 - a. Discuss feelings, reactions, and insights. Process why this is important to you.
 - b. Study specific verses that each is sharing.
 - c. Pray verses together.

THOUGHTS ON JOURNALING

Reasons for Journaling:

- What God speaks to you is important to record—write it down for further processing
- You can then continue to review for insight and further revelation—and see where God is leading you; this will also provide spiritual markers and direction that will become clearer and clearer.
- God will often speak to you ahead of what is coming and prepare you today for what He knows you will face down the road.
- Journaling holds you accountable. If God gives you instruction, He is calling you to obey follow. It is ok to struggle through it, but He wants you to stay with it to receive clarity and then for you to make your commitment of obedience. When you write these in your journal you can go back to see what you promised God you would do.
- Journaling helps you see patterns in your walk with God. He will bring these to your understanding as He wishes to bring healing or further understanding as to the impact on the freedom and joy these are having on your life.
- Journaling helps you measure your spiritual maturity. Is God still telling you the same things He was telling you two years ago? Is there

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a greater depth to your walk with God? Is He bringing you new revelation and a new level of excitement to your walk with Him?

- Writing all what you are hearing and understanding will bring clarity and answers—you will be amazed at what you write and then receive as He continues to lead and guide you into His best. His words to you is life and it will be joy—always exciting as you receive this life and enjoy the wonderful relationship that this brings to you.

Tips for Journaling:

- Always have your journal ready when you are abiding and spending time with HIM.
- When you journal, write down what you say to God. You need to be able to review both what God said to you as well as what you say to God—this should include your authentic thoughts and feelings, and particularly all the questions that you will have and need answers to. Let it always be a dialogue as you enjoy the relationship of receiving from the God of the Universe who deeply cares about and enjoys being with you—and wants to provide the covenant life—His will—best and none better.
- Make sure you do not let writing in your journal become more important than hearing from God—it is not a program but a relationship—always enjoy the dialogue.
- Develop a simple method to review and find things in your journal. It can be a helpful resource to you if you can go back and find things.
- Make your journal personal. It is not a religious exercise. It is a means for you to enhance your personal relationship with Christ. Write in the first person. This is YOUR relationship and journey. It further is not be openly shared so you can be deeply authentic and real. You can share “out of it” with your spouse or friend, but do not give it to another so you are never on guard to be careful what you write. It is your heart with God.
- Regularly review your journal to make sure you followed through on everything God told you. It would be tragic to forget or neglect a word God spoke to you. Keep writing what you understand and what He “dots” He is connecting for you as you grow. He will ask you to believe by living out what He reveals so that you experience Him fully—this is not Bible study or an intellectual exercise, but a way of living that is exciting, a joy, a wonder.

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Note: The next session is going to include an exercise that requires each person to have a center cross reference Bible. (Cross reference Bibles are essential for the exercise to work well. If you do not have this kind of Bible, please purchase one of the following from a Christian book distributor):

<https://www.christianbook.com/esv-reference-bible/9781433561917/pd/561917?event=ESRCG>

<https://www.christianbook.com/esv-reference-bible/9781433561924/pd/561924?event=Bibles|1001356138>

<https://www.christianbook.com/nkjv-comfort-reference-center-columnleather/9780785217565/pd/217566?event=EBRN>

<https://www.christianbook.com/nkjv-ultrathin-reference-bible-brown-leathertouch/9781433615054/pd/615054?event=EBRN>





ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY

ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL MARRIAGES
AND ENJOYING EXCEPTIONAL LIFE



SESSION EIGHT: EXERCISE IN ABIDING:

WHAT DOES THE FATHER
HAVE TO SAY TO YOU?



SESSION 8:

EXERCISE IN ABIDING: WHAT DOES THE FATHER HAVE TO SAY TO YOU?



For this last session, you will need to schedule a total time of two-and-a-half hours for the entire group to complete together.

PART 1:

INDIVIDUAL TIME IN THE WORD:

Now that each of you has learned the wonder, the life, and the joy of Abiding in the Vine—in the vital relationship of Christ through the Spirit as you serve as a Branch and allow the Vinedresser to direct the steps of your life—we wish to end this curriculum by offering a personal experience of abiding. This will be a time of personally hearing from God that will launch you into where the Father wishes you to begin in the Word—your own deep abiding. Remember, this will be a commitment to daily time with Him. It isn't something to rush through or some must-do activity, but a time to receive what He wishes to produce in your life (fruit!). We have been blessed to discover this wonderful process using a place in Scripture. This Scripture is one He uses to speak to each of us personally so that He might reveal all that He has planned for us. Please turn to Ezekial 34, verse 11 in your center cross reference Bible, which is critical for this exercise, for this work.

In Ezekial 34, God is speaking to the nation of Israel, His beloved children. The leaders of Israel have not been faithful in shepherding His people—they have been misleading them, not teaching them truth, and leading them astray—away from following God. He tells the leaders to step aside so that He Himself could shepherd the people directly. He would lead them and be their provider, their teacher, and fulfiller of Covenant promises. In verses 11-30, there are 22 "I wills" where God expresses the promises that He is making directly to His children with no conditions. The only implied condition as is always true in Scripture is that we are to hear what He is speaking to us, to receive what He is speaking to us personally, and then believe what He is speaking. (This has proven to be a wonderful place to experience God speaking to us about His promises. Over the years, we have had over 2,000 people go through this exercise. What is truly remarkable is that every single person has received a personal Word from God.)

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Now, each of you should go through each of the 22 verses of “I will” and choose as many as strike your heart. Pay attention to your heart as something that God wants to speak through, and skip over any that do not have this quickening of the spirit. Do not over analyze or try to figure it out intellectually; or worry about whether or not it or they are the “right one(s).” Simply notice which one(s) strike you. Then go back through all the ones you have checked and choose one that particularly strikes your heart at the moment—something that you believe God wishes to speak to you today.

Based on the one you chose, write out that verse longhand. Then write what you believe it means to you personally in the context of your life. Do not look it up on the internet, or read what a theologian has written in a commentary about it, or even the notes at the bottom of your Bible. The key is to ask what the verse says to you, in your heart? This is about what you are receiving and understanding—the key to abiding—not about being “right.” It should be the beginning of a dialogue with the Father and receiving what you see and perceive (realize this is just the beginning).

Then go to the cross references in the center column from that verse. See where that takes you elsewhere in the Scripture and read the entire paragraph of that cross reference. As you read that entire paragraph, you again choose a verse that is speaking to you. It may or not be the exact verse that was listed in the cross reference, but one that strikes your heart. Write out that verse longhand; and then again, as you did with the first verse, write what it means to you personally in the context of your life.

Then go to a third cross reference in the center column from the second verse that you received. Go to where that takes you in the Scripture and read the entire paragraph of that cross reference. As you read that entire paragraph, you again choose a verse that is speaking to you. It may or not be the exact verse that was listed in the cross reference, but one that strikes your heart. Write out that verse longhand; and then again, as you did with the first verse, write what it means to you personally in the context of your life.

You will return to the group with three verses that you have written out longhand, along with what you wrote about how each verse spoke to you personally in the context of your life.

Now, each privately, begin the exercise.

PART 2: **Now that you have done this exercise individually, come into the group to interpret what God is saying to you. The group should break into small groups of 4–6 (no more). Allow 60–80 minutes for this exercise.**

GROUP HELPS INTERPRET
WHAT GOD IS SPEAKING:

Once the groups are gathered, each of the 4-6 people should read what they have written. Since each of you has the Holy Spirit, the group is equipped

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to help interpret what the Spirit is speaking to the person who is sharing. First, what does the person sharing believe the Spirit is speaking? How does he/she interpret, in context of their life, how these three Words from God are speaking to his/her life right now. Have them talk freely about anything that is on their heart and what is speaking to them.

As you go through this, relax and pay attention to the leading of the Spirit. Be prepared for the unexpected where the Father brings to mind a person, a situation, or event in your life that He wants to deal with. For example, unforgiveness (self and others), past unresolved hurt He wants to heal, a promise for your current situation, your family or someone in your family such as your children. This is an exciting time where anything can happen (we even have experienced supernatural events such as a gust of wind dropping a bird's nest outside a sliding door that was a message for someone in the room) and is a chance to experience the beginning of a lifetime of hearing from the Father and experiencing the branch life. Understand that the Father is wanting to launch you into where He wishes to bring fruit (His fruit) into your life. He has much to say and promises to be clear in speaking to you.

The rest of the group should pay attention to which words are repeated in the verses or in what the person is speaking. What insight does the Spirit give anyone in the group? Everyone in the group should feel free to ask questions, probe further, give insight where revelation is received from God, and help him/her understand what promise, what encouragement, what instruction, what area the Father is speaking. Remember, this is a launching place where God would have you camp out next as you go home and begin to abide in the Word further. This may mean additional word study, additional cross referencing, or deeper study in the verses you already have received. Perhaps someone in the group has other verses that you can write down that will act as the starting point to spend time in as you abide further through journaling or further cross referencing, etc.

Before moving onto the next person, ask the person sharing if they have clarity regarding what the Father has spoken to them today and if they now know where to begin their abiding in the Word. Here, they should renew their commitment to spend at least 20 minutes each day camping out journaling, in prayer, in the Word in this area. The Father has spoken to them to receive this truth, so they should remain in this truth until it has been fully received (not to intellectually study it and move on but to stay with it until it is experienced in their hearts and incorporated into their lives).

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- CONCLUSION:**
1. Now that you understand and have experienced hearing from God on a personal level, continue abiding in the Word that God has spoken to you a minimum of 20 minutes a day, every day. Continue to journal, and cross reference, always writing down what you are hearing, what questions and issues you have about this specific issue in your real-life circumstances, or how you are experiencing the truth of what HE is showing you and what you understanding/discern, etc. Stay with it! Do this day after day, step by step until you fully experience this beautiful promise that He has spoken to you. Remember, He does not want you to just learn intellectually about this but to be transformed fully or to realize in the circumstances of your life the promise that He has given you. Do not move on to something else or only do a devotion each day. Instead, “camp” out, even if just 20 minutes a day, abiding with Him as you experience life with HIM. You will see Him working, begin experiencing peace, joy, and freedom along the way. It will feel truly remarkable as He fulfills what He has personally spoken to you.
 2. Also, since you learned how wonderful and blessed it is to live in “Unity” (for there He commands blessing and because there you discover His will, which is best and none better) continue to practice seeking God’s will together with your spouse or another trusted, Godly friend (if you are single) as you begin to seek God’s will for all your decisions and issues of life. You will learn not to go to selfishness, debating, and arguing (division), but to enjoy processing together (even when you disagree, which is normal and good) until you reach unity and see clearly how to confirm God’s will. Enjoy your adventure to the fullest!
 3. If you ever have a question or something you need some help on, please free to contact us and we will get back to you with some assistance on your personal questions.
 4. May you fully enjoy living as branches abiding in the Vine!

