

Watch

*Refer to this viewer guide as you watch the video for session 4.*

Yahweh is God's authoritative, relational name.

When you cultivate the relationship underneath the rule, God shares more of His authority.

Jesus says He wants Christians to be fruitful and productive.

### **Three Characteristics of Fruit**

1. Fruit always bears the character of the tree.

The first thing you will discover under the rule of Jesus Christ is that you're becoming more like Him in your attitudes, actions, character, and conduct.

2. Fruit is always visible.

You cannot be a disciple if you are an invisible follower of Christ.

3. Fruit always benefits somebody else.

Jesus wants other people to spiritually benefit from your life.

Your spiritual ability to take the information and utilize it in the decisions of life turns you into a meat-eating Christian.

You will become a kingdom disciple when you consistently learn to look at the spiritual in front of the physical.

Abiding is the key to fruit. Fruit is the key to development. Development is the key to discipleship. Discipleship is the key to kingdom authority.

The tangible proof that you are abiding and growing as a kingdom disciple will be answered prayer.

*Discuss the video with your group, using these questions.*

Dr. Evans said when we pray in Jesus' name, we're piggybacking on Jesus' authority. How is prayer a means to bring God's authority to bear in the here and now?

Read John 15:1-16. The key word in this passage is *fruit*. What does this word mean in the context in which Jesus used it?

In this session Dr. Evans said, "If you are a kingdom disciple, you are rubbing off on others. If you are a disciple, you are making disciples." Why do you think many Christians aren't actively engaged in replicating the life and love of Christ in others?

Who taught you what it means to follow Jesus?

Whom could you begin to disciple to follow Jesus?

Read Hebrews 5:11-14. What's the difference between a milk-drinking Christian and a meat-eating Christian?

Using Paul's life as an example, Dr. Evans suggested that in five years a believer can reach stable spiritual maturity. How have you matured in your past five years of walking with the Lord?

Read John 15:4-7 and 1 John 2:24-27. What does the word *abide* mean? What's the connection between abiding and become a fruit-bearing Christian?

What makes abiding in Jesus different from trying to increase your intimacy with God through effort and willpower?

How is your relationship with Jesus bearing fruit in your life now?

## **Personal Experience**

### Kingdom Intimacy

To know someone intimately encompasses much more than just knowing about the person. To truly know someone intimately involves engagement, interaction, and understanding that go above and beyond cognitive realities.

Have you ever seen a married couple who has been married for four or five decades? Each one can finish the other's sentence. Or consider two dancers. They spend hours, days, weeks, and months practicing together to know each other's moves and moods just by being close to them. They not only anticipate the next step but also know how to bring out the best in their dancing partner.

The best linebackers in the NFL are those who've worked so closely together that they can predict one another's moves simply through a shift in weight or a change in the placement of a hand. With the crowd roaring and tensions high, these linemen don't have time to talk to the others to find out what they're thinking.

In John 15 when Jesus teaches us to intimately abide in Him as His disciples, He's imploring us to enter an experiential connection with Him. As His disciples, we're to know Jesus so deeply, fully, continually, and intentionally that our every move aligns with His in an unplanned cadence of connection. That's what it means to know Christ. It's more than simply talking with Him or about Him. That's a start. But intimate fellowship is much deeper than that. And only intimate fellowship leads to a productive, fruit-bearing life as a disciple.

For example, no wife can get pregnant by having a discussion of sex around the breakfast table with her husband. Yes, she can talk about it with her husband every single day, and he can even make some pretty powerful points. In fact, both of them can talk about it for years. The length of time they talk makes no difference at all because no wife is ever going to get pregnant from a discussion of the subject or from her knowledge of sex. There has to be an accompanying level of intimacy, an experiential knowing, in order to bear new life.

Similarly, abiding in Christ calls us to a depth of intimacy as His disciples that Jesus illustrated through a branch and a vine. This week let's discover more about this relational connection with Christ and the fruit it produces.

## Day 1

### Knowing God Fully

The apostle Paul gives us insight into the way our abiding (or remaining in deep intimacy) in Christ and our relationship with God determine our productivity for the kingdom:

... so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

### Colossians 1:10

This passage makes a direct connection between bearing fruit and knowing God intimately. The Greek word used in this verse for knowing is epignosis. It means “to have full knowledge of.” So far, so normal, right? To know God means you should read your Bible. Say a verse a day to keep the devil away. Go to church. Say a prayer. Take an online course on Scripture or theology. Join a small group. That’s typically how we interpret what it means to know God. And that’s also typically why so few of us truly produce fruit in and through our lives.

The reality is that knowing God goes much deeper than informational knowledge alone. It’s not about content. It’s about so much more. Let’s travel back to the beginning of measured time to get a deeper glimpse into what it means to fully know someone and what that knowing can produce. In Genesis we read another instance of a word we translate as “knowing”:

Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.

### Genesis 4:1, KJV

The word translated “knew” in this passage is the Hebrew word yada. Yada simply means “to know, to know by experience, to perceive.” When Adam knew Eve, it didn’t mean he had information about her. No, he slept with her. In other words, there was a level of intimacy that produced fruit. It bore new life.

Just as Adam knew (yada) Eve and she bore life, you're to know (epignosis) God in such a way that you produce life as well. In Him you have all the wisdom you need to walk in the work He has for you to do (see Col. 1:9-10). God longs to produce something in you that's beautiful, enjoyable, and edible—fruit that demonstrates we know God and He knows us. God wants your experience of knowing Him to give birth to luscious fruit in your character, conduct, and contributions to His kingdom. But that fruit comes about only through abiding intimacy with God Himself—through truly knowing Him, not merely knowing about Him.

What's the difference between knowing about God and knowing God intimately?

Why do you think God wants you to know Him intimately?

List four things you do with or for someone when you're seeking to grow close to him or her.

How can those actions be incorporated into your relationship with God?

Intimacy is one of the greatest delights and blessings that two people in a close relationship can have. The capacity to draw close to another person and share your lives in such a way that you know each other through and through is part of the image of God we bear as emotional, relational human beings.

If God designed us with a deep need and a deep desire for intimacy in our human relationships and if intimacy reflects God's image in us, you can expect God to look for intimacy in His relationship with you. Yet unfortunately, God is far too often the jilted love in our one-sided relationships with Him. But He desires the intimacy of a close relationship with us more than He desires our performance for Him.

God dearly loves you. When you place Him first relationally, you experience a level of intimacy you may have never known before. In addition, you'll discover that as you abide with Him closely, your life is more spiritually productive.

What dangers threaten a believer who's disconnected from true intimacy with God?

Read 1 Peter 5:8. What strategies does Satan use to distract you from developing your intimacy with God and from abiding in Christ?

Satan seeks to interject himself between you and God as he did with Eve in the garden of Eden. If he can cause you to distrust God or turn your attention from Him, He knows the relationship you're capable of having with Him will suffer division. Sin always brings about separation. And separation leads to a lack of fruit in the lives of disciples.

When God wanted to describe what fully knowing Him would produce in the lives of believers, He used the concept of fruit. Fruit is God's spiritual reference to what our lives produce when we're in an intimate relationship with Him.

In more contemporary terms God wants us to maximize our productivity for Him through our connection with Him. In business we would call this generating a healthy return on investment. In sports it's known as a winning game or season. In music it's a platinum album. And in your personal life, producing fruit means leveraging all that's at your disposal to grow spiritually, minister to others, and exalt the glory of God. This goal applies even to what you choose to think and say:

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

Hebrews 13:15

What are some ways kingdom disciples can bear fruit for God?

List two areas in which you've personally borne fruit from your relationship with God or hope you'll one day bear fruit.

The rest of God's creation performs for Him, but the intimacy of a relationship with Him is reserved for those who confess Christ as Lord and know Him personally.

God yearns for an intimate spiritual relationship with you. One of the beautiful things about true intimacy is that it motivates you in all you do. When you truly love your spouse, your spouse doesn't have to ask you to call, take out the trash, do the laundry, pick up your socks, or cut the grass. You do it naturally. Not only that, but two people who know each other intimately are free to be themselves around each other. They feel no pressure to prove anything by trying to meet a performance standard or by trying to be someone they aren't.

Such is our relationship with God as His bride. We obey, but our obedience isn't perfunctory, nor is it a performance. Our obedience stems from a deep, abiding relational intimacy with the Lord. If the desire of your heart is to live victoriously in your destiny as a kingdom disciple, begin developing an intimate, rich, spiritually satisfying love relationship with God Himself.

In what ways are you performing for God instead of obeying in response to His love for you?

### Prayer

Lord, I want to know You more. Open my heart to knowing You fully. Teach me how to let go of lists, expectations, demands, and duties and to exchange all of these for the precious presence of You. In Christ's name, amen.

## Day 2

### Good Works and Good Things

Jesus spoke the words of John 15 while in the upper room with His disciples just before His crucifixion. This is probably the most intimate setting depicted in Scripture. With His disciples close around Him and with John leaning against Him (see 13:23), Jesus said:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

John 15:1-2

Jesus used a familiar illustration to make His point. The disciples knew all about vines and fruit. The question, then, was how they were to produce the fruit that God desired. To begin to answer that question, we first need to look at some of the qualities of fruit itself.

Read Matthew 5:16 and Ephesians 2:8-9. What are some ways fruit can represent the good works we're called to do?

Is fruit something you're responsible for producing yourself? Why or why not?

What are two ways good works or fruit glorifies God?

Fruit is characterized by three distinctions.

1. **VISIBILITY.** You've never seen or eaten invisible fruit. Fruit is always something you see. You can see an orange, a pear, an apple, or a banana. Similarly, if your relationship with Jesus Christ produces results that aren't visible to others or even to yourself, not much of a relationship exists. Fruit is always visible.

2. **AUTHENTICITY.** Fruit always bears the character of the tree of which it's a part. You won't find pears on apple trees or oranges on pear trees because fruit authentically replicates the nature of the tree from which it grows. When disciples resemble anything other than the character and qualities of God, they aren't relationally attached to Him. They may be eternally saved through Christ's atonement on the cross, but they've neglected the process of being sanctified, growing in conformity to Jesus. For example, if they reflect the values of the culture, then the culture is the source they tap into. Or if a combination of culture, entertainment, self-interests, or even a social circle is reflected in their thoughts, words, and actions, those are the things to which they're attached. This is because fruit authentically resembles what it's attached to.

3. **AVAILABILITY.** Fruit never exists for itself. Fruit is always available for the consumption of someone else. The only fruit you ever see eating itself is rotten fruit. Think about it. When fruit rots, it begins a process of eating away at its own existence, shriveling into only a shell of its once wondrous beginnings. The very purpose of fruit is for someone to bite it, be nourished by it, enjoy it, and grow from it.

God wants you, as a kingdom disciple, to bear much fruit. Jesus said:

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

John 15:16

What does it mean for your fruit to remain?

List three ways God-produced fruit is different from good works done for ourselves?

Can you identify any good works in your life that you're really doing for yourself instead of for the glory of your Father in heaven?

Kingdom disciples are to maximize the reflection of God's glory as well as the expansion of His kingdom through the impact of what we do in Him, by Him, and through Him. These are called good works. Good works can be defined this way:

Biblically authorized activities that benefit people for time and eternity and give credit to God

If you're a Christian, whatever you're called to do will achieve both of those goals. To fulfill your destiny as a disciple means God's presence is being manifested to a greater degree in the world because of your fruit.

There's a major difference between good works that glorify God and good things we do for the sake of doing them. People can do a lot of good things for their own honor. They can feed the hungry, build hospitals, and visit the poor. But good works are rooted in an intimate, abiding relationship with God that's motivated by love for Him and the desire to reflect and expand His glory and will on earth by positively affecting others.

Sometimes it's hard to discern even our own motives because we can't always be good judges of our own hearts (see Jer. 17:9). Despite a lot of effort on earth, some believers will weep at the judgment seat of Christ when they see their own good deeds burned up while other believers receive their full kingdom inheritance (see 1 Cor. 3:13). That's why the foundation for fruitfulness as a kingdom disciple is found in cultivating a loving, abiding, intimate relationship with God.

Identify a time in your life when you did something good but were motivated by something other than bringing glory to God or expanding His kingdom. How easy is it to get caught up in bringing glory and honor to ourselves rather than God?

Read John 3:30. Why does fruit come more abundantly in our lives the less we focus on ourselves?

An intimate relationship with God is critical to your motivation and manifestation of good works for His glory. Make it a point this week to examine your choices at the level of the heart. Ask yourself questions like these:

Would I still do this if no one else but God knew about it?

Am I more interested in hearing “Well done” from God or from others?

In what way does this choice bring glory to God and benefit to others?

Let the answers to those questions guide you to live more fully for and with God in an abiding intimacy.

## **Prayer**

Dear Father, I want to reflect Your glory and expand Your kingdom rule on earth as it is in heaven. Increase my love for You and deepen my intimacy with You so that You become my primary motivation in all I do. May my life be pleasing to You and my thoughts bring You joy as I seek to serve You in humility and gratitude from a heart of love. In Christ’s name, amen.

### Day 3

#### Sharing the Good and the Bad

Intimacy definitely involves passion, of which physical passion is just one component. That's usually the aspect of intimacy we think of first, but it's not as important as spiritual intimacy. Our relationship with Christ as His disciples should be marked by a never-ending passion to know Him better and draw closer to Him. This is my definition of passion:

An all-consuming drive to be closer to and know more fully the person with whom we wish to be intimate

Paul had that kind of passion to know Christ intimately. The apostle described it in his classic statement of relationship versus performance in Philippians 3:4-14.

Take a few minutes to read Philippians 3:4-14.

A fact that's evident throughout this passage is that Paul gladly left behind his pursuit of superstardom in Judaism because of his passion to know Christ with the kind of intimacy that transcended every other relationship. He let go all of it in order to have what he highlighted in verse 10:

... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.

#### Philippians 3:10

A lot us would like to put a period after "the power of His resurrection" in that verse. But if we're going to know Christ with the kind of intimacy that draws us close and gives us power, we must know Him in "the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

Kingdom disciples are called to share in Christ's sufferings. For Paul, fellowshiping with Christ in His sufferings meant severe persecution, numerous hardships, and finally martyrdom. But it also meant a special kind of intimacy and authority with the Lord that can't be known any other way.

If you've ever suffered deeply with another person, you know what I'm talking about. We'll never be truly intimate with someone if we say to that person, "I want to share only the good times with you. Keep your suffering to yourself."

How does the act of suffering or going through hardship with someone often draw you closer together?

Our contemporary culture doesn't have an abundance of persecution as was the case in Paul's day. How can kingdom disciples share in the sufferings of Christ today?

Does giving up your personal desires or sacrificing your ego or wants in order to devote yourself to Christ's lordship equate with suffering? Why or why not?

Paul once made a very interesting statement in regard to his knowledge of Christ:

Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer.

#### 2 Corinthians 5:16

Before his conversion Paul knew about Christ in the sense that he had heard about this man Jesus and perhaps had even seen Him once. But after becoming a Christian, Paul truly came to know the Lord, and his previous casual knowledge was erased because he died to his old way of life and became a new creation (see v. 17). Jesus was "a man of sorrows" who was "acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). Paul found that in order to become like Jesus, you end up learning about sorrows and grief. Paul came face-to-face with resurrection power because he was also willing to come face-to-face with the sufferings of Jesus Christ for His name's sake.

The apostle gave a résumé of his suffering in 2 Corinthians 11:25-28. Paul described all he endured in his pursuit of knowing Jesus. Yet through these sufferings Paul more clearly saw the grace of God. Walking through hardship led Paul to know more of Jesus than he would have known without hardship. Paul went on to speak of “a thorn in the flesh” (12:7) that taught him about the intimacy with Christ that comes through suffering. His pain served to conform him to the image of Jesus.

Have you ever identified with Christ by suffering for doing what you knew was right or what you knew He wanted? What impact did that experience have on you?

Read each verse and record the approach, attitude, or result that should be tied to our suffering with Christ.

Acts 5:41

Romans 8:17

2 Corinthians 1:7

2 Timothy 2:12

1 Peter 2:20

Why do some Christians have victory while others are defeated? The answer isn't in their circumstances, because victorious Christians and defeated Christians face basically the same kinds of trials. The answer isn't found in who goes to church more often or who reads the Bible more either.

The answer is that victorious Christians know Christ more intimately and identify with Him more fully in the good and the bad, thus experiencing His resurrection power. Intimacy with God, in the fullest complexities of the term, unleash His kingdom authority and power in the lives of kingdom disciples.

### Prayer

Loving God, identifying with You in a relationship isn't only about the blessings I can gain and ways You can help me. You want me to know You on a deep level, where we're united in shared empathy and compassion. In identifying with Your sufferings, I discover the power of Your redemption in my own. I need You in my life to help me face trials, challenges, obstacles, and fears. In Christ's name, amen.

## Day 4

### Abide in Christ

We introduced the term abide earlier this week. Today we're going to explore this concept more fully. Abiding in Christ is another name for intimacy with Christ. Christ wants to express His life through you. That comes through your attachment to Him. Abiding means just what it says. It means to remain, to stay, to keep the connection strong. It means you can take a deep breath and just get to know Jesus. Abiding in Christ takes away all self-induced struggle to produce fruit on your own.

If your prayer life is just a matter of shooting up panicked emergency petitions when you're in trouble, you're missing the intimacy God intended for a relationship with Him. If you have your devotions in the morning so that you can get them out of the way and get on with your day, you don't understand abiding. If church is just your weekly time with God, you won't bear fruit for the kingdom.

List three ways you can intentionally abide in Christ.

Read John 15:1-5. How does abiding in Christ relate to your role as a kingdom disciple?

Here's the picture Jesus painted for us in that passage. There's a great vineyard, a vine, a gardener, and branches that may or may not bear fruit. God is the gardener. Christ is the vine. You're a branch. Every branch that abides in Christ bears fruit. In fact, he or she bears much fruit. Conversely, no branch can bear fruit in and of itself. If and when a branch lacks an abiding presence in the vine, it also lacks fruit. Spiritual truths rarely come more simply put than this one:

Abide in Christ, and you'll bear fruit. Live apart from Christ, and you won't bear fruit.

Bearing fruit entirely depends on your relational intimacy with Jesus Christ. You can't omit that reality. You can't force fruit to grow. You can't study it into existence. Fruit bearing comes down to one very critical yet simple thing: abiding in Jesus Christ.

Have you ever seen a pear or an apple struggling and straining to become a pear or an apple? Or how about grapes on a vine? No, because the simple act of abiding brings about the growth of the fruit. It's your closeness to Christ that creates fruit both in and through your life.

Read John 15:4-10. How many times does the word abide (your translation may use the word remain) appear? Record the phrases in which it appears.

This principle is so important that this one word shows up ten times in only seven verses. Evidently, Jesus really wants us to know about abiding. The sole purpose of the branch is to abide in the vine.

What does it look like to abide in Christ? A number of years ago my wife and I took a trip to the great grape-growing countryside in California. People come from all over America and around the world to taste wine and see the miles and miles of vines blanketing the hills in scents of sweetness.

In a vineyard the branches are always hoisted up and tied to the post so that the grapes don't drag on the ground. If the grapes drag on the ground, they'll never grow because they'll become stuck in the dirt, unable to absorb any sunlight or receive a steady flow of nutrients. So the gardeners gently lift the grapes off the ground so that they can grow to their potential.

One reason so many believers fail to produce fruit during their lives is that they spend too much of their time settling in and around too much dirt. A lot of people are saying, "God, make me fruitful," but He won't do it because they don't want to be taken away from the dirt. You must repent of unaddressed sin in your life if God is going to lift you up and out of the dirt. You can't hang out in the dirt and also live in the sunshine; those two things are mutually exclusive.

Read Proverbs 28:13. What are we to do with the sin in our lives?

According to 1 John 1:7-9, what are we missing if we say we're without sin?

James 4:17 sheds additional light on what sin is. Describe some omissions that could fall into this category.

Not all hindrances to producing fruit in a person's life occur in the dirt, though. Some of these hindrances are caused by things that are seemingly good and beneficial in and of themselves. The illustration in John 15 goes into greater detail:

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

John 15:2

Pruning is cutting away whatever siphons off life.

Sucker shoots are little branches that show up on the vine that take away nutrients designed for the fruit to expand to its fullest potential. Simply put, a sucker shoot is a diversion. It doesn't produce anything in and of itself. It just consumes nutrients with no intention of developing anything from them. A sucker shoot takes from you what belongs to you, thus limiting what you need for a vital, growing relationship with the vine. It siphons off from you what you need to keep flowing Godward.

In our personal lives anyone or anything can be a sucker shoot. It can be a person, but it can also be television or a hobby. Although there may be nothing wrong with that person, TV show, or hobby, when it starts to rob you of what you need to develop your spiritual intimacy with Jesus, it has transitioned into a sucker shoot. That's why moderation is important. You have to create boundaries in your life that allow yourself the opportunity to abide in Christ. Abiding requires your time. It requires your attention.

What are some sucker shoots in your life that prevent you from fully abiding in Christ?

Are you willing to let go of any of these distractions? If so, describe some things you can do to shift your focus to an abiding relationship with Jesus.

Abiding can be compared to two types of tea drinkers. Some people like to dip their tea bag up and down in the hot water because they don't want their tea to get too strong. Others drop the tea bag into the water and leave it there. That way the water can fully absorb all the tea bag has to offer. When a tea bag abides in hot water, the tea becomes strong.

When you abide in Jesus Christ, your spiritual power, insight, and development become strong. You grow. Just as a baby in a mother's womb gets nutrients through the umbilical cord, the abiding connection produces growth. If a breach occurs in the umbilical cord, life itself shrinks. It's the ongoing connection with the mother that keeps the baby growing and developing. The same is true of our abiding relationship with the vine.

Over the next week commit to eliminate one hindrance that keeps you from abiding more fully in Christ. Record your choice and pray that God will help you eliminate this distraction.

### Prayer

Lord, I want to abide in You. I want to know You in fullness. I seek You in my heart, mind, and soul. I choose to turn from the distractions in my life and to repent of the sins I've committed as I seek an intimate, ongoing relationship with You. Help me hear Your voice, feel Your presence, and enjoy the depth of our abiding love together.

## Day 5

### The Art of Abiding

If you've ever dated someone you were in love with, you've got a good idea of what it means to abide in an intimate relationship. It's not a matter of a text message here or a phone call there. When people date, they don't just connect once a week for a few hours and be done with it. When two people are deeply in love, they abide in each other's presence on the phone way past the point of having anything meaningful to say. They simply don't want to hang up. And as soon as they do, one or the other will text to say how much they're missing the other.

We know that's true in human relationships, yet we often fail to transfer that reality to our relationship with Jesus Christ. Far too many believers assume that a two-hour visit on Sunday morning is enough. Or perhaps they add on a Wednesday night, a verse in the morning, or a quick prayer when trouble pops up.

But try applying the way you relate to Jesus to the way you relate to other people in your life and see what happens. You might lose a few friends and family members. Try making every conversation you have with a romantic partner, family member, or friend about you and what you want them to do for you, and you might find yourself alone very quickly. But that's what most people do with Christ. They toss up a quick prayer—a wish list of sorts—and then wonder why they're living fruitless, powerless, empty lives.

Jesus wants a relationship with you, not your religious activity. Sometimes abiding in Him will be a five-second prayer just to let Him know you're thinking about Him. Other times it will be a five-minute prayer. Sometimes it will be deep. Other times it will be light. But the essence of abiding is that you're threading Jesus Christ—His presence, desires, and thoughts—throughout all you think, do, and say.

What do you think would happen if you applied the way you relate to Jesus in your communication, time spent, and topics of discussion to your other relationships in life?

In what ways do you often take your relationship with Jesus for granted? How can you make Him a part of your regular conversations and everyday life?

Many people want a microwave experience of God when He's offering a slow-cooker experience. They want to go to church and push a button for quick results. But the truth about microwaved food is that it can get really hot really quick, but it can also get really cold really quick. That's because the food didn't abide in the presence of the heat source. Only by abiding in Christ can you produce fruit.

How can an abiding relationship with Jesus reduce your worry, doubt, and struggles?

Are radical shifts in your schedule required to abide in Christ? Why or why not?

You may feel busy and overwhelmed, and your schedule might support those feelings. But look for gaps in your schedule and see them as gifts to cultivate your abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. Abiding in Christ is a habit that requires time, but you can begin by looking for gaps in your day. You probably have more time in the day than you realize because you're filling the gaps with things that don't matter.

Instead of choosing what's secondary, use the gaps in your day to focus on what's supreme. Seize those moments and guard them fiercely. He's worth it. You're worth it. And the fruit that's produced both in you and through you to influence others for good is worth it. Don't waste your days in a perpetual state of busyness, allowing the gaps to be filled with distractions. Rather, embrace the gaps life has to offer and discover a depth of intimacy with God that you never even imagined was possible.

God longs for you to know Him that way. He longs for your company, your voice, your presence, and your conversations. The fruit will come as a by-product of tapping into and staying connected with Jesus Christ.

Read Ephesians 5:16. How can you make the most out of your time to abide in Jesus?

List two time stealers you could potentially do without.

A bulldog and a poodle were arguing one day. The bulldog was making fun of the poodle, calling him a weak little runt who couldn't do anything. Then the bulldog said, "I challenge you to a contest. Let's see who can open the backdoor of his house the fastest and get inside."

The bulldog was thinking he would turn the doorknob with his powerful jaws and open the door, while the poodle was too small even to reach the knob on his backdoor. But to the bulldog's surprise, the poodle said, "I can get inside my house faster than you can. I accept the challenge."

So with the poodle watching, the bulldog ran to the backdoor of his house and jumped up to the doorknob. He put his teeth and paws around the knob and tried to turn it, but he couldn't get a firm enough grip on the knob to turn it. He finally had to quit in exhaustion.

Now it was the poodle's turn at his backdoor. "Go ahead. You can't do it either," the bulldog growled, trying to soothe his wounded pride. The poodle went to the door and scratched a couple of times. The homeowner opened the door, lovingly picked up the poodle in his arms, and carried him inside.

The difference was in the relationship. Some of us are bulldog Christians, grunting and growling and striving when Christ wants us to come close to Him and abide in Him. Get close to Christ as His disciple, and He will amaze you with what He will do both in and through you.

Describe the difference in a relationship when love rather than law is the overarching theme.

By identifying with Christ through an intimate, abiding relationship of fellowshiping in His sufferings, conforming to His character, and abiding in His Word, you can live as a victorious kingdom disciple. And not just for a day or two. Or a week. Or a few months. But for always.

What difference do you notice in your relationship with Jesus when you regularly read the Bible and pray?

Although we may come up with any number of strategies to abide in Christ, the most time-tested methods of abiding in Jesus are to read the Bible and pray. Do you have a plan for Bible reading and prayer? When will you do this?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for helping me understand the importance of abiding in a relationship with You. Abiding in Jesus is the most important thing I can do. I want to experience a deep, meaningful relationship that brings me love and care. Encourage me throughout the day by reminding me of Your presence so that I can keep growing in my connection with You. In Christ's name, amen