



## **Session 9: 'How do we run on full and become fruitful?'**

### **Questions:**

- What struck you, stuck out to you or grabbed your attention in the video?
- Did Aaron's teaching on 'abiding' challenge or expand on your traditional notions of what it means to abide in Christ? How so?
- When we look at Jesus' life, death and resurrection how does it redefine how we see love?
- Pause and try to imagine. What would it look like if Jesus was walking alongside you, in the flesh, in the everyday moments of life: your workplace, your college, your home, your family, your social circle, your neighbourhood, your church community.

Can you share what you imagined? How did Jesus love people in those spaces? How does this challenge you to show the love of Jesus in those spaces?

- What are your honest perceptions of the Father? (How do you expect him to respond to you, for example, when you have used your words to degrade someone, fall into sexual sin, when you haven't prayed, or haven't read your Bible for a while?)

Do you think these perceptions of the Father align with who the Father actually is? How can we think rightly about who the Father is?

- Spiritual practices (i.e. prayer, meditating on Scripture, fasting, sabbath, solitude) can often be perceived as difficult or boring. How do you find incorporating spiritual practices into your life?
- What spiritual practices do you think would be helpful for you to implement? How are you going to do this?

**Here are some helpful tips to get started with spiritual practices (based on teaching by John Mark Comer):**

- **Start small** - start where you are, not where you want to be/ feel you should be (tiny habits) - how do i enjoy God
- **Think subtraction not addition** - the call is to clear your life not to clutter it (netflix, social media, that side project might need to be dropped)
- **You get out what you put in**
- **Remember the J-Curve** (have a look online) - you get worse before you get better (practice and patience) - stay with it, resist the urge to critique
- **There is no formation without repetition** - it is a slow and deep process (compound interest)

**Helpful overview resources for spiritual practices:**

**Podcast** – ‘Practicing the Way’ (John Mark Comer)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/john-mark-comer-teachings/id1592847144>

**Book** – ‘Celebration of Discipline’ (Richard Foster)

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Celebration-Discipline-Path-Spiritual-Growth/dp/0340979267>

## Notes

Back in 2013 in New Orleans, America the crowds were gathering, hype was building it was the final - the Superbowl was finding its climax with the biggest game of the year. The first half had been played the second about to commence when at 13:22 the stadium went black. The power had gone. Small strips of emergency lighting kicked in action subtly illuminating the venue, escalators stopped, card machines halted and viewers back home became confronted with a screen of black with no explanation of why. For 34 minutes this continued before finally the power returned and the restless fans both in the stadium and further afield were eased as the game resumed culminating in a victory to the Ravens 34-31.

I don't really know American football - but here's my point without the energy source the biggest annual sporting event in America was forced to a halt. Everything had to stop, nothing could happen, nothing could be produced when they became disconnected from the source.

Fruitfulness CANNOT be a product of self. It is impossible. It just cannot be. Jesus says it - explicitly and unapologetically "apart from me you can do nothing". In other words do not be deceived you are not the vine. You are not the source of life.

But if you are anything like me you hear these words that I cannot produce fruit and I take offense because of course I can achieve stuff. Look at my achievements do you not see, did you not hear - it was me who got those good grades, it was me who climbed and struggled up the career ladders to here which finally financially provides, it was me who mustered up enough courage to ... and in response Jesus' words remain the same "apart from me you can do nothing".

What I am not saying is Jesus is not interested in my career, or exams or how much washing up I do on a Sunday night no no he is intently interested in every small and miniscule aspect of our life. He delights when we invite Him to be apart of these spaces.

The fruit He is speaking of though is an outworking of an internal reality - of Christ in us. Paul in his letter to the Galatian church describes the qualities of these fruit as the nature of Jesus - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Therefore fruit looks more like actively showing love and being attentive to the colleague who is actively demeaning. Fruit is marked by the Father who as his child breaks the chest of drawers after being repeatedly told "be careful" - notes the similarities of himself and his heavenly Father and shows the gentleness of Jesus disciplining with love. Fruit is marked by the friend who sits with another struggling to express their emotions and

yet is not quick to speak or get frustrated but waits and listens and smiles encouragingly giving them the dignity to express what is brimming on their heart.

Fruit is the outworking of the nature of Jesus who lives in us. Apart from Him it's impossible to bear.

Now when you read this passage you actually can't get away from the repeated refrain intrinsically and essentially linked to fruitfulness. Abide. To be fruitful we abide. We say it a lot in Christian circles, a little bit of a cliché even, but what does it mean?

The Greek word used here in John 15 literally means - to stay, to remain, to dwell, to be present, to continue on

Now here in John 15 Jesus - who often spoke in parables more often than not leaving us perplexed and muddled - here outlines a logical flow of super helpful clarity to what it looks like to Abide in Him.

After 6 moments where Jesus explicitly calls out "Abide in me" in verse 9 Jesus sharpens and clarifies the invite - remain in my love - yes I who am Love - the full embodiment - remain in my love.

And I'm like great Lord that sounds awesome but what does that even look like?

He replies "by obeying my commandments you remain in my love"

And then gently sensing my apprehension at the sheer volume and greatness of the old testament law He answers "this is my one commandment, that you must love others just as I have loved you"

and then as if this isn't enough clarity he speaks of the radical, furious nature of this love that He loves us with

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

I have often thought that the way I abide is to read my bible or to pray and not to say that isn't it or that is not essential but I think Jesus' reply here is more nuance, this is what He hones in on, this is what He shines the spotlight on.

To abide we are to love others.

for to abide, to remain in his love we obey his commandments and this is his one commandment - to love others just with same tenacity and relentlessness that he has loved us with, a life-laying-down love

For yes to love others so outrageously is the fruit of abiding but here Jesus says it is also the pathway to abiding in Him. It is both cause and effect - for in this posture of laying down our self for another we open ourselves up more to remain in, dwell in and know with greater intimacy the love of Jesus, causing even more fruit in our lives. It is an upward spiral. It's like compound interest.

So to abide we are to love others. To abide we are to love others with the same sort of life-laying-down love that Jesus displays in His life and Crucifixion. This love is not abstract or just some theological conception but highly practical.

Brennan Manning in his book with deep conviction and eloquence says

Jesus said you are to love one another as I have loved you, a love that will possibly lead to the bloody, anguished gift of yourself; a love that forgives seventy times seven, that keeps no score of wrongdoing. Jesus said this, this love, is the one criterion, the sole norm, the standard of discipleship in the New Israel of God. He said you're going to be identified as His disciples, not because of your church-going, Bible-totting or song-singing. No you'll be identified as His by one sign only: the deep and delicate respect for one another, the cordial love impregnated with reverence for the sacred dimension of the human personality because of the mysterious substitution of Christ for the Christian.

This is a love that is willing to get uncomfortable.

A love that is willing to become stripped of esteem, honour and reputation.

A love that does not cling to entitlements and rights but gets on there knees and pours out there life.

A love that is not fickle when faced with another's failings or innate differences.

A love that makes space to acknowledge and defend the intense and definitive value of another.

A love that is willing to step into the epicentre of another misery.

A love that is willing to bear eternally the scars of another's suffering.

A love that will go to the extremities of death for the freedom, joy, and flourishing of another.

This breaks in every way my individualism indoctrinated into my core. So often we are told and we say that the purpose of the Christian walk is to know God personally and yes this is true but man it is only half the story. The way of Jesus is not solo and detached from people. For by His life, death and Resurrection we can know Him and therefore participate with Him in bringing restoration in the world and releasing people to flourish by the way that we love them - regardless of whether they choose Jesus as Lord or not - we are to love with this life-laying-down love of Jesus.

And so to love others with this sort of love is not yet my life. This is not yet the reality of how I love people. As the Apostle Paul says "I have not yet reached perfection even though i press forward towards it"

So do not hear me wrong I am not saying that we must attain this perfection of love to abide, to remain. Far from it for i am accepted wholly as I am. For while still there ignorant and stuck in my sin He didn't hesitate, He didn't wait for me to have it all together but died for me to bring me close to Abba Father.

But when we seek to love others with this same outrageous extravagance, we abide. We remain in His love.

This cannot be the product of self. This fruit cannot be me and my self-actualization or my immense determination. No without Him i am as good as a dried up twig.

But oh the beauty and joyful wonder that he is the one who forms in us this love.

STORY - There are some people in my life that i find a lot harder to love than others. A couple months ago I remember interacting with one of these people - I'd defined them by there failures - often based upon flawed assumptions i had made - instead of acknowledging there innate value as image bearers of God - and so when i interacted with them i treated them with coolness. I showed a conditioned love. For they did not meet my standards or expectations. I discounted them worthy of love and hence placed distance.

I remember the moment when God highlighted why. Sat on my bed the revelation hit me this is exactly how i expect God to treat me. That in my failure He would be somewhat repulsed by me and show me coolness and distance - an incredibly false and other picture to the reality of the Divine and glorious God who is LOVE.

1 John 4:19 speaks of "we love because he first loved us".

Of course my love was conditioned if i did not know the love which is unconditioned. He is not fickle and eager to distance Himself self at the first moment of opportunity but highly and radically committed to me. He loves me whether i am in grace or disgrace. Whether i read my Bible or not. His love does not become conditioned by my failings - He actually never defines me by it when I am in Jesus. I don't earn His love.

To love i must know the reality of His love.

So how do i grow into the knowledge of this reality?

One absolutely mental thing i find about this passage in John 15 is that Jesus says that He loves me just as the Father loves Him. This, in of itself, is mental and should be sat on and pondered - but also note the parallel with the one command Jesus gives us.

"Love one another just as I have loved you"

Jesus' life shows a model of knowing the one who is Love and loving others with that love - and this is what He desires for us. Jesus orientated his life around practices which opened his heart up to know the affluent rivers of rushing love that comes in consistent torrents with tidal force from the heart of Abba Father.

For it is the essence of what is in the true vine that ends up in the fruit of the branches.

I don't run on fumes when i am flooded with the reality of love pointed right in my direction. My life runs over.

These practices implanted into the rhythms of Jesus' life opening up his heart to know love and walk in step with the Spirit included - sabbath, prayer, fasting, hospitality, reading scripture, celebration, simplicity, worship, generosity, community and solitude.

each of these could be and have been unpacked with great depth but I don't have time to do that right now but in the notes i have sign-posted you to resources to deep dive on these modelled rhythms of Jesus' life opening his heart to Abbas love.

This isn't new. We've heard it before. But its essential. These practices are the primary means that the Spirit uses that we might know the Godhead more and are made more into the likeness of Jesus.

THIS CAN ALL BE OVERWHELMING. BUT THIS ALL - NEITHER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRACTICES TO KNOW MORE THE REALITY OF GODS LOVE NOR LEARNING TO LOVE OTHERS WITH THIS LOVE - WILL BE GRASPED OVER NIGHT OR OVER ONE DISCUSSION OR CONVERSATION

THIS IS A LIFE LONG JOURNEY OF PERSERERVANCE AND PRACTICE. BUT ONE OF THE THINGS I LOVE ABOUT JESUS IS THAT WHEN HE CALLS US TO SOMETHING IT IS ACTUALLY NOT SOME DISTANT, FANTASY, COMPLETELY UNATTAINABLE - INFACHT HE GIVES COMPLETE GRACE TO DO IT. THIS IS NOT AN OPPORUTNITY FOR STRIVING AND EARNING RUNNING ON THE TREADMILL OF RELIGION NEVER GETTING ANYWHERE; ITS AN INVITATION TO REST IN HIM - AND ALLOW HIM TO BRING THE TRANSFORMATION AS WE DIRECT OUR EFFORTS JUST TO BE WITH HIM. (HEB 13)

As Dallas Willard a wholehearted and thoughtful apprentice of Jesus said "Grace is opposed to earning not effort"

How do i abide and hence become fruitful? Jesus seems to say love others with the same furious, extravagant and outrageous love that i love you with. So come close and know it yourself.