



living waters
AbideTM
MINISTRIES

ABIDING IN THE VINE: UNITY
COURSE WORKBOOK



Also used as
Small Group Leader Guide

ABIDING IN THE VINE:
COURSE WORKBOOK

Leader Guide

WORKBOOK

RICHARD T. CASE



Dedication

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!


We together also wish to honor our children; Michelle, Peter and his wife, Shara; and their children—our grandchildren: Joshua and Aidan. They too have learned to Abide and walk with God and go to unity as they receive and follow God's will. We as a family get to see God at work, and how wonderful it is to experience this process of life together. They are all such an inspiration. Seeing Joshua and Aidan thrive in their walk with God as young adults has been exciting and fun to participate in.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank all of the leaders of our Ministry: **All For Jesus—Living Waters!** These leaders daily and faithfully abide and then live out what God continually teaches and shows us step by step – day by day. The privilege we have is to freely share and give away what we ourselves experience. Their dedication and faithfulness have meant so much to the growth of the ministry and to Linda and I; It has produced endless testimonies and encouraging stories of transformation and lives being effected through what they “walk out” themselves and what they in turn give away as what we have termed “faithful sheep dogs”. Together as a leadership team we have walked along side one another and we have put this material together to now give away to a broader audience than just to our retreat participants.

These leaders are:

Jake and Mary Beckel
Caden and Lauren Cardie
Colton and Alicia Cardie
Heath and Rebecca Cardie
Rich and Janet Cocchiaro
Larry and Sherry Collet
Katherine Cornell
Scott and Kristen Cornell
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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this foundational journey into what it means to abide in the Vine. This material is designed to move us beyond simple Bible study and into a dynamic, 24/7 relationship with Jesus Christ, connected to Him through the Holy Spirit just as a branch is to a vine. We will explore in depth what it means to hear His voice, receive what He wants to speak into our lives, and be transformed by His presence. We will also learn how to discern God's will in our decisions, moving from a life of striving to a life of abiding.

The truths we discuss will provide a new context for the real-life situations you face. To make this journey as practical as possible, the first step is to bring your current circumstances before the Lord.

INITIAL REFLECTION

Before we begin, take a few quiet moments to reflect and write. This is a private exercise between you and God, or you and your spouse. It will not be shared with the group.

1. **Decisions and Issues:** What significant decisions or unresolved issues are you currently facing in your life, work, or relationships? List them below.

If you'd like to know more about
Abide Ministries,
please see our pages
at the back of the workbook

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2. **Areas of Conflict:** What areas of conflict, disagreement, or friction exist in your key relationships right now?

- Now, before we begin the study, perform the following evaluation of your marriage or of your life if you are single. This is to be entirely confidential, not to be shared with the group—only with your spouse or with a trusted friend if you so desire. This will provide context for the study and reveal areas in your life where God may have to speak to you as you prioritize your life for Him to bring healing, restoration or continued growth.

COUPLES: What is the truth about your marriage currently? Rate the following from 1 to 5 (1 being best and could not be better, 5 being worst).
CURRENT EVALUATION OF MARRIAGE:

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Emotional life (Excited just to be together) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Physical life (Intimacy, sexual enjoyment) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Spiritual life (Growing in Christ, together) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Communications (Listening, talking, connecting) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Caring/compassion (Each best cheerleader) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Sharing life together (A priority) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Exceptionalness of our marriage | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

SINGLES: What is the truth about your life currently? Rate the following from 1 to 5 (1 being best and could not be better, 5 being worst).
CURRENT EVALUATION OF LIFE:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Emotional life (Excited about daily life) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Physical life (Purity, exercise) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Spiritual life (Growing in Christ) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Communications (Good listener, communicator) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Caring/compassion (Empathy, support for friends) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Sharing life with family/friends (a priority) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Exceptionalness of my life | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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- Now, let's perform an evaluation of how well you make decisions at the moment. For couples, evaluate your spouse—how well does he/she work at unity with you as you process things together to deal with issues or make decisions. Again, this is confidential not to be shared with the group. It will also keep you on track to both seek the same page as you both seek God's will to make decisions and learn to use unity as a wonderful tool in the process.
- As a single, rate your own ability to process and seek God's will and make decisions with a significant friend, family, or small group. This provides context for your own ability to process things well and seek God's will and make decisions—as you learn to do this with a friend and use unity as a wonderful tool in the process.

COUPLES: Rate the characteristics of unity in your marriage on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being best and could not be better, 5 being awful and could not be worse).

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Level of unity with spouse | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Spouse's ability to process: | | | | | |
| Ability to listen | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ability to share emotions/feelings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Encouraging you to share emotions/feelings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not getting defensive during discussion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Willingness to change position (not be stubborn) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ability to discuss calmly versus argue/debate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ability to discuss creative solutions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ability to still enjoy your day | | | | | |
| during disagreement/difference of opinion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Spouse's heart's desire to seek the will of God | | | | | |
| with you | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Desire/frequency to pray together and seek | | | | | |
| God's will | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Desire/frequency to be in the Word | | | | | |
| together as you seek God's will | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

INTRODUCTION

SINGLES: Rate the characteristics of unity in your relationships. On a scale of 1 to 5 rate your close friends, family, significant other (1 being best and couldn't be better, 5 being awful and could not be worse):

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Level of unity with others who are close | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. My ability to process: | | | | | |
| Ability to listen | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ability to share emotions/feelings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Encouraging others to share emotions/feelings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not getting defensive during discussion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Willingness to change position (not be stubborn) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ability to discuss calmly vs. argue/debate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ability to discuss creative solutions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Ability to still enjoy your day in middle of disagreement/difference of opinion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. My heart's desire to seek the will of God with others: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Desire/frequency to pray together and seek God's will | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Desire/frequency to be in the Word together as you seek God's will | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

If you rated something average or poor, what would that mean?

- If you both rated something low as a couple, what would that mean?

- Think about your rating. An average or poor rating simply highlights an area where God desires to bring growth and improvement. If you are in a couple and your ratings differ significantly, it may reveal a gap in communication or perception—an opportunity to understand each other more deeply. This workbook will help you process these very things in the light of God's truth.

LESSON 1

THE ABUNDANT LIFE



SECTION 1: THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND THE ABUNDANT LIFE

This course is not simply about Bible study. It is about developing a living, ongoing relationship with Christ—hearing his voice, following his lead, and learning to receive the life he has promised. We begin with the foundational question: Is it really possible to hear God’s voice? And what kind of life does the Shepherd have in mind for his sheep?

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

What does a shepherd do? What does a shepherd care about?

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:11, ESV

- What kind of shepherd does Jesus describe himself as—and good for whom?

He is not a demanding shepherd. He is not a harsh taskmaster. He is a servant-shepherd whose entire purpose is to provide a good life for the sheep. His commitment is total—he lays down his life for them. And that quality of goodness defines exactly what his sheep can expect to receive.

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THE PROMISE OF ABUNDANT LIFE

What does Jesus say his coming was meant to accomplish? What do the words he uses actually describe?

¹⁰ The 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 specific words does Jesus use to describe the life he came to give? What does “abundantly” actually mean?

Jesus doesn't offer survival. The word “abundantly” describes something superabundant—exceedingly spectacular, over-the-top, far more than we might ask or imagine. This is the quality of life the Good Shepherd has come to deliver. And notice: there is an enemy directly opposed to that life. The thief's agenda is to steal, kill, and destroy. Understanding that contrast helps us recognize where the resistance to abundant life comes from—and Who is for us.

As we go through this course, you'll begin to recognize that the abundant life isn't a vague spiritual concept. It has specific ingredients—things God always intended for you. We'll define those as we go. For now, let this settle: the Good Shepherd came to deliver something extraordinary to you personally.

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HEARING HIS VOICE

If Jesus is the Shepherd and we are his sheep—what is our amazing privilege in that relationship?

³To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. [...] ²⁷My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

John 10:3–5, 27, ESV

- What does Jesus say about the relationship between his sheep and his voice? What does “he calls his own sheep by name” tell you about the nature of this relationship?

- What other voices compete with God’s voice in your life? Make a list.

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Our privilege as his sheep is that we get to hear his voice. And this isn't a one-way broadcast—it's a personal dialogue. He calls us by name. He knows each of us individually. The way he guides you may look quite different from the way he guides the person sitting next to you, because it is personal to you and personal to them.

The other voices competing for our attention are real: the enemy, self-centered people, well-meaning friends, teachers, preachers, pastors—and your own voice. That last one is often the hardest to sort out. As you're learning to hear God's voice, one of the most common questions you'll face is: "Is that me, or is that God?" Jesus says: spend time with him, and you will learn to tell the difference.

Think of a newborn infant. By six months, that baby can recognize the parent's voice with certainty—not because of formal study, but because of consistent exposure. The parent has been speaking, and speaking, and speaking. When the parent calls the baby's name across a room, the child turns. That's exactly what abiding is about. Consistent time in his presence, until his voice becomes unmistakably recognizable. And just as a stranger's voice would not cause that baby to turn, Jesus promises that as you learn his voice, you will not follow another.

One important observation about that analogy: the baby can't talk back. All it can do is listen. And sometimes that's precisely the posture God is asking of us—not a formula, not a program, but simple, practiced, patient listening. Don't fret about missing it. He says: if you just spend time with me, you will recognize my voice. It becomes easier and easier.

As you hear his voice, he does something specific with it. He leads and guides you. He shows you the way to abide, to be in his Word. He speaks what is called *rhema*—personal, living words drawn from the *Logos* (the written Scripture), spoken directly into your specific situation. He gives you insight about God's will for your life. He is the Good Shepherd, and he wants you to receive the super abundant life. It all begins with hearing his voice.

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SECTION 1 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

1. In John 10:10, Jesus draws a sharp contrast between two agendas. What does the thief come to do, and what does Jesus come to do? What does the word “abundantly” suggest about the kind of life Jesus is offering?

2. In John 10:3–5, what specific details describe the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep? What does it mean that the sheep “know his voice” and will not follow a stranger’s voice?

3. John 10:27 is brief but rich: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” What three things does Jesus state in that one verse, and how do they together define the nature of our relationship with him?

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For Deeper Understanding

4. Hearing God's voice is described as something that "tends to be a foreign concept in a lot of Christian churches" but is supposed to be "normal and beautiful." Why do you think it has become foreign? What prevents believers from expecting a personal, ongoing conversation with God?

5. The baby-and-parent analogy describes how we learn to recognize God's voice through consistent time in his presence. What does this say about the process—and the posture? What does it say about the fear of "missing it"?

6. Several voices compete with God's voice: the enemy, self-centered people, well-meaning friends, teachers, preachers, and your own voice. Which of these presents the greatest challenge for you personally, and why?

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For Personal Application

7. When you honestly reflect on your relationship with God, does it feel more like studying a subject—or more like a living conversation? What would it look like in your daily life to move toward genuine, two-way dialogue with him?

8. Think of a time when you sensed God speaking to you personally. How did you recognize it? How did that experience shape the way you approach hearing his voice today?

9. The baby analogy invites us to simply listen—before we can even respond. In your current season of life, what would it practically look like to create consistent, unhurried time to listen for God's voice?

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THE ABUNDANT LIFE

SECTION 2: THE VINE, THE VINE DRESSER, AND THE BRANCHES

Jesus is in the Upper Room. It is his last evening with the disciples before Gethsemane and the cross. He is summarizing everything he has taught them. He has been preparing them to understand that he is going away—but not really going away, because he is going to put himself within them through the Holy Spirit. And he reaches for an analogy from the world he knew firsthand.

As a boy in Nazareth, Jesus worked vineyards. He made wine. He understood the process from the soil up. The mechanics of viticulture he knew 2,000 years ago haven't fundamentally changed—which is exactly why this analogy still holds. It isn't something that has been automated away. The vine, the branches, the vine dresser, the pruning, the fruit: it's still the same process.

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

As you read this passage, identify the three main players in this analogy. Who are they, and what does each one do?

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every 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. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide 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. ⁵ I 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 the vine do—what does it provide?

➤ Who is the vine dresser? What is his role—what decisions belong to him?

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- Who are the branches? What does a branch actually do on its own?

- If a branch must simply stay connected to receive everything it needs—who do we tend to try to be instead?

The vine is the source of all life. Every nutrient, every bit of sustaining energy flows from the vine to the branches. Jesus says: I am that vine. The life you need—spiritually, circumstantially, in every decision—is coming from me.

The vine dresser makes every single decision: what variety of grape to grow, when to water, how to prune, when to harvest. No two vineyards are alike. No two years in the same vineyard are the same. Even in an identical vineyard, year after year, the vine dresser creates a different quality of wine—because he determines everything. Nobody else makes a decision. The workers do the labor, but the vine dresser determines it all.

That is God the Father in this analogy. He is saying: I am in charge of your decision-making. Let me be the vine dresser. I will make all of your decisions, big and small, and I will do something remarkable with that. The problem is that we want that role ourselves. We make our own decisions—good, well-intentioned decisions—and then ask God to bless them. He says: that’s not how this works. You need to learn to be a branch.

And what does a branch do? It stays connected. That’s it. It doesn’t produce the fruit. It doesn’t design the fruit. It just stays connected to the life, and the life flows through it. The word Jesus uses for this is abide—stay in me, remain in me. And he says it is a choice. He doesn’t force you to abide. But if you do, here is what he promises: fruit. More fruit. Much fruit.

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THE PRUNING

Now consider the pruning, because this is one of the more surprising elements of the analogy. Which branches does the vine dresser prune?

The vine dresser prunes the healthy, fruit-bearing branches—not just the dead ones. Why would a vine dresser prune a branch that is already bearing fruit?

A dead branch is simply cut off and discarded—it isn't connected to life at all. But the healthy, growing branches? Those get pruned too. Here's why: if a branch grows too large, it consumes all the sap and the energy never reaches the fruit. If you've ever seen a vineyard that has been left entirely to itself, it's magnificent—lush and sprawling and beautiful. But there is no fruit. Not even the beginning of a grape. Because without pruning, the branch consumes everything, and the sunlight can't get in, and the fruit never forms.

- What does God's pruning look like in a person's life? What is he cutting back—and why?

The analogy for us is this: God says, I've got to prune you back. It's not changing who you are. It's cutting back what you're doing. And if you could sit and honestly assess your life, one thing that is likely true is that you are doing too much.

Why do we tend to do too much—particularly as American Christians? Because our culture has taught us that busyness is a virtue. If I'm busy, if I'm producing, if I'm active and involved and engaged—I must be doing something right. But God says: I've got to create margin in your life. I've got to have space. In a vineyard, the vine dresser has to allow sunlight to come in. Too much growth, clumped together, and the sun and the water can't reach what they need to reach. It's beautiful, but it doesn't produce fruit.

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Think about what this looks like practically. As a young couple, you are going to have a constant flow of decisions ahead of you: housing, finances, children, work, where to invest your time and energy. And if you keep adding and adding and adding without pruning, what suffers first? Your relationship with Christ. Then your relationship with each other. You get up in the morning and you're off and running, and the most important things quietly get pushed to the bottom. God says: I need to create margin for what matters. So let me be the vine dresser. Let me decide what to cut back so that what I'm calling you to can actually grow.

And the fruit he produces through all of this? It is the super abundant life—transformation within you, becoming more loving, more kind, more like Christ in your character. And then circumstantially, the decisions that are made well, the relationships that are thriving, the life that is moving in the direction God always intended.

And then this: "apart from me you can do nothing." That word is absolute. Zero. We look around and think, well, I can see people doing things without God, and they seem to be producing results. And God says: yes, things happen. But it's not the fruit I have for you. It's not translating into the super abundant life. We look at fruit as quantity—how many people am I influencing, how large is my business, how much have I accomplished. Jesus looks at fruit differently. Are you enjoying it? Are you and your spouse having a good life together? Are you growing in friendship and fellowship? Is your life moving toward the abundant life I intended? That is the fruit he means.

- If you really believe "apart from me I can do nothing"—what does that make your most urgent question about your daily life?

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SECTION 2—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

10. In John 15:2, the vine dresser both removes unfruitful branches and prunes fruitful ones. What does this dual activity tell us about the Father's involvement in our lives? Why would a good vine dresser prune something that is already growing and bearing fruit?

11. Verse 4 uses the word “abide”—meaning to remain or stay. Based on the vine-and-branch picture, what does abiding actually describe? What does it require of the branch—and what happens when a branch fails to do it?

12. Verse 5 ends with the statement: “apart from me you can do nothing.” How absolute is that? What is Jesus saying about the source of real, lasting fruit—and what does it imply about our attempts to produce it independently?

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For Deeper Understanding

13. We tend to want to be the vine dresser—making our own decisions and then asking God to bless them. How does that differ from genuine abiding? What does it actually look like to let God be the vine dresser in your everyday decision-making?

14. Pruning is described in terms of creating margin—making space so that fruit can form. Where do you see the pressure of “virtuous busyness” operating in your own life? How is it affecting your capacity to stay connected and bear fruit?

15. The vine dresser’s decisions are unique year to year, vineyard to vineyard—they can’t be reduced to a formula. How does this help us understand why God’s guidance for you is personal, not a program? What does it say about why the “three steps to a better life” approach falls short?

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For Personal Application

16. In what areas of your life do you most naturally try to be the vine dresser—making plans and asking for God’s blessing afterward rather than seeking his guidance first? What would it look like to genuinely hand that role back to him?

17. Where might God currently be pruning you? Is there something you are doing—or doing too much of—that he may be calling you to cut back, so that something better can grow?

18. The fruit of abiding includes both internal transformation (becoming more like Christ) and circumstantial fruit (decisions that lead toward abundant life). Which of these do you most long for right now—and how does the concept of abiding speak directly to that longing?

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SECTION 3: ABIDING IN THE WORD—AN IF/THEN PROMISE

Jesus didn't just teach abiding—he lived it. He operated in complete dependence on the Father. We see this even in his first miracle, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The setting is important: a traditional Jewish wedding in a village about a two-to-three-hour walk from Nazareth. In that culture, a wedding wasn't a one-evening affair—it was a week-long celebration. All the guests stayed. The bride's family provided the wine, and running out was a serious social problem.

When Jesus's mother came to him and said, in essence, "take care of it"—his first response was a refusal. "Woman, this is not my time." She knew what he was capable of. This wasn't a new power to her—she had seen it at home. But more importantly, she knew the protocol: she pointed the servants to him and said, "Do whatever he tells you." And what did Jesus do? He paused. He went to the Father. And when the Father confirmed it—yes, this is how we begin—he acted without hesitation. He gave instruction, the servants obeyed, and the water became wine. The result? The disciples observed it, and they began to believe.

The entire miracle unfolded as a direct result of Jesus doing nothing apart from the Father's authority. Even his initial reaction—"it's not my time"—wasn't the deciding factor. What mattered was what the Father said. That is the model of abiding in action.

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I DO NOTHING ON MY OWN AUTHORITY

How did Jesus describe his own operating standard—his relationship to the Father’s authority? And what does he then promise to those who follow the same pattern?

²⁸ So 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. ²⁹ And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” ³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him. ³¹ So 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.” [...] ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:28–32, 36, ESV

- How did Jesus say he operated with the Father? What was his standard for making a decision or taking an action?

- Verses 31–32 are structured as an if/then promise. What is the condition—and what are the two specific results that follow?

- What is the difference between being “free” and being “free indeed”? What kind of freedom is Jesus describing?

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“I do nothing on my own authority.” That is the standard Jesus held for himself. He said: the reason you can be in that same place is because you have me within you—and that’s how I functioned. I only did what pleased the Father. I only moved when he directed. So you have me within you through the Holy Spirit, and I can guide you the same way I followed the Father.

Notice the structure of the if/then promise: IF you abide in my word—THEN you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. The condition is abiding. The results are truth and freedom. And verse 36 intensifies it: if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. Not partially free. Not free in some spiritual theoretical sense. Actually, genuinely, completely free.

Now here is a critical distinction about the word “word” in verse 31. There are two concepts at work:

- Logos—the written Word of God, the Scripture as we have it
- Rhema—the living, personal word God speaks directly to you in your specific situation

When Jesus says “abide in my word,” it isn’t simply a call to study Scripture as a set of universal principles. That is valuable—but it is not abiding. Abiding means receiving the rhema: what Christ wants to personally speak into your life right now. As you stay connected to him, he takes the Logos—the Bible—and speaks rhema to you. He gives you his insight about your specific situation, your specific decision, your specific season.

The “truth” in verse 32 is not abstract theological truth. It is the truth about what you are facing. About the decision in front of you. About the conflict you’re in. About the direction you’re trying to discern. He says: if you abide, I will show you all the truth about that. I will guide you into the answer. And your role is simply to abide—to stay connected, to listen, to receive. And the result is freedom: freedom from the burden of trying to figure out your life on your own.

This is why we write down our decisions and issues at the beginning of the course—because abiding is not hypothetical. The truth God speaks, and the freedom that follows, are meant to be received in the actual circumstances of your real life.

LESSON 1

THE ABUNDANT LIFE

SECTION 3—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

19. In John 8:28–29, Jesus makes a specific claim about his own operating standard. What does he say about his authority and his decision-making? What did it require of him to live that way—and why does it matter for us?

20. Verses 31–32 are structured as a conditional promise. What is the condition, and what are the two specific results? What do those two results—truth and freedom—suggest about what abiding actually produces in a person’s life?

21. Verse 36 takes the promise a step further. What is the distinction between being “free” and being “free indeed”? What does it tell us about whose power is required to produce this kind of freedom?

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For Deeper Understanding

22. The “truth” in verse 32 is not primarily abstract theological truth—it is the truth about what you are personally facing. How does that reframe this promise? What does it mean practically for how you bring your decisions and challenges to God?

23. The distinction between logos (the written Word) and rhema (the personal word God speaks to you) is introduced here. Why is this distinction important? How does it change the way you approach reading Scripture—and the way you approach hearing from God?

24. Jesus himself had an initial reaction at Cana that resisted acting—but then sought the Father and followed his confirmation. What does this tell us about abiding? Does abiding mean we have no opinions or instincts of our own?

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For Personal Application

25. Bring to mind a specific decision or challenge you are currently carrying. What would it look like to bring that before God and wait to receive his truth about it—not just principles from Scripture, but personal direction spoken into your specific situation?

26. Jesus said he never acted apart from the Father's guidance. How closely does your day-to-day decision-making resemble that standard? What would need to change for it to look more like what he described?

27. The promise is freedom—specifically, freedom from the weight of navigating life alone. What burden are you currently carrying that you would most like to hand over to the vine dresser?

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SECTION 4: CREATED FOR ABUNDANT LIFE— GOD’S ORIGINAL DESIGN

To understand the full scope of what Christ came to restore through abiding, we need to understand what God originally intended. The story of Genesis is not primarily a cautionary tale about failure—it is first and foremost a picture of extraordinary, intentional goodness. This is where God’s vision for your life began.

MADE IN HIS IMAGE

In verse 26, God says “Let us make man in our image.” Who is “us”—and what is the significance of that?

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man 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.”

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

²⁸ And 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.”²⁹ And 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.”³⁰ And 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.³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:26–31, ESV

- “Let us” reveals the Trinity present at creation—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Why does that matter for our understanding of abiding?

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- ▶ Humanity was created in God’s image. When God looked at Adam and Eve, who did he see reflected? What was God’s purpose in creating them?

- ▶ What did God give humanity in verses 26–28—and what does verse 31 say about everything he made?

“Let us”—the Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all present at creation and are all eternally God. Christ was not created. The Holy Spirit was not created. They are God. This matters enormously for abiding, because when Christ lives within us and the Holy Spirit enables us to hear the Father’s voice, we are not using a communication system that was invented to manage a broken world. We are participating in the eternal nature of God in relationship with his creation.

Created in God’s image, Adam and Eve were the visible, physical representatives of the invisible God in the physical place he had made. God created them so that, when he looked at them, he would see himself reflected in his creation. And his purpose in creating them? Fellowship. Relationship. To enjoy life together.

That’s why abiding matters so deeply to him. He doesn’t need you to go off and study about him. He says: how about if we walk together? I enjoy being in fellowship with you. The super abundant life and abiding are connected because fellowship is his original intention.

He gave them authority and dominion over all the earth—rulership, as his physical representatives of the invisible God. And he gave them provision: every resource already created and given. Everything they needed was already there. Even today, everything a computer is made of, every material, every principle—it was all present at creation. We have only discovered how to apply it differently. All provision was given by God from the beginning.

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And then verse 31: he looked at everything he had made and called it “very good.” Notice: that is the same word-category as the super abundant life Jesus promised in John 10. What God always originally intended was this. The Good Shepherd is not offering something new—he is restoring something that was always meant to be.

THE GARDEN AND THE LIFE WITHIN IT

How big was the Garden of Eden? What was its character—and what did God place within it for Adam and Eve?

⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And 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.

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

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

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed 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. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So 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. ²² And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said,

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“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.”

²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife,
and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked
and were not ashamed.

Genesis 2:8–25, ESV

- God gave Adam work—the word used is “occupation.” What does this tell us about God’s intention for how we spend our daily lives?

- In verse 18, God says “it is not good that man should be alone.” What does he do about it—and what does that action say about the importance of relationship in God’s original design?

- Verse 24 describes a man and woman becoming “one flesh.” What does oneness mean in the context of a marriage that abides in God? For those who are single, what does the principle of oneness look like in this season?

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The garden was not a small patch of land. It was massive—hundreds upon hundreds of miles, stretching across four great river systems. The Tigris and Euphrates were real, identifiable rivers. Adam and Eve were placed in this enormous, beautiful, abundant place—and they were there for a long time. We tend to picture it as ten minutes before the Fall. It wasn't.

God put Adam in the garden “to work it and keep it.” Work was part of the original design, not a consequence of the Fall. God's intention from the beginning was for humanity to have purposeful, enjoyable occupation—work that matches who you are, work that you get up in the morning glad to engage with. The question for each of us is not just “do I have work,” but “am I enjoying what I'm doing? Is it productive? Does it align with how God made me?” That is the abundant life in the area of work.

Then he created the woman. “It is not good that man should be alone.” He made a helper fit for him—not identical to him, but suited to him. And the result is oneness: “they shall become one flesh.” The principle of marriage is unity—not sameness, but oneness. And the oneness isn't just two people becoming one. It is two people walking with God together, letting him be the vine dresser of their life together. For those who are single, this principle applies to the richness of deep friendship and community: God never intended you to navigate life in isolation.

And Adam and Eve knew who they were. They had identity. They stepped into it naturally—they were made in God's image, placed in authority over his creation, walking in uninterrupted communion with him every day. That clarity of identity is part of the abundant life too. Think of someone who marries into royalty: they don't go on living as a commoner just because that's where they came from. They step into the new identity they've been given. God says the same to us as his children: don't think of yourself as a pauper. You are a child of the King. Step into that.

And did they experience sickness? No. There was no illness in the garden. Wholeness—health and healing—was the natural condition of life as God designed it. And they walked with God himself, speaking to him and hearing him speak back, in uninterrupted dialogue. That communion was not occasional. It was constant.

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THE SEVEN ELEMENTS OF ABUNDANT LIFE

In your workbook, record the following seven elements of the super abundant life—the life God originally created and always intended for humanity. These are what the Good Shepherd came to restore. As you write, reflect on where each of these is present in your life today—and where you most long to see it grow.

1. **Authority**—Dominion over the earth as God’s physical representative; the privilege and responsibility of ruling in concert with him.

2. **Provision**—Every resource already created and given; income greater than expenses; nothing lacking for the life he has called you to.

3. **Work**—Enjoyable, purposeful occupation fitted to who you are—work you get up glad to do, producing something meaningful in the world.

4. **Marriage/Relationship**—Oneness with a mate; for singles in this season, exceptional friendship and fellowship—not isolation, but genuine community.

5. **Identity**—Knowing who you are as a child created in God’s own image—stepping fully into that identity rather than living as a pauper.

6. **Health and Healing**—Wholeness as the original and intended condition of life; God’s desire to provide and restore health.

7. **Communion with God**—Uninterrupted, two-way dialogue with the Father—not a lecture, but a conversation; the living heart of what abiding looks like.

In the lessons ahead, we will look at what went wrong with God’s original design—and then what Christ, as the Good Shepherd and the true vine, does about it. But first, let this settle: this is what was always intended for you. This is the life he is inviting you back into.

LESSON 1

THE ABUNDANT LIFE

SECTION 4—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

28. In Genesis 1:26–28, God says “let us”—revealing the Trinity’s active presence at creation. What does it mean that humanity was made “in our image”? Based on the passage, what specific privileges and responsibilities came with being made in God’s image?

29. Genesis 1:31 says God looked at everything he had made and called it “very good.” How does that declaration connect to Jesus’ promise of abundant life in John 10:10? What does the consistency of that language tell us about God’s character and his original intention for your life?

30. Genesis 2:18 records God saying “it is not good that the man should be alone.” What does this tell us about how God views human relationship and community? How does this connect to the broader picture of abundant life God intended from the beginning?

LESSON 1

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For Deeper Understanding

31. Looking honestly at your life today, which of the seven elements of abundant life are you most naturally receiving? Which seem most out of reach or most diminished right now?

32. Authority and dominion were given to humanity—but they were always meant to be exercised in relationship with God as vine dresser. What goes wrong when we try to exercise authority without abiding? How does that tension define what genuine abiding looks like?

33. Adam and Eve knew who they were—they had identity, and they stepped into it. How does a clear sense of identity as God's child affect the way you approach decisions, relationships, and daily challenges? What does it look like to live from that identity rather than defaulting to a lesser one?

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For Personal Application

34. Of the seven elements of abundant life, which one do you most long to see more fully expressed in your own life right now? What do you believe is standing between you and that?

35. God's original design included meaningful, enjoyable work—occupation fitted to who you are. How does your current work align with that design? Where do you sense God calling you to step more fully into what he made you to do?

36. Communion with God—uninterrupted, personal dialogue—is the seventh element of abundant life. Based on everything covered in Lesson 1, what is one practical step you could take this week to begin cultivating that kind of ongoing conversation with him?

LESSON 1

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CLOSING—LESSON 1 REVIEW

Before moving to Lesson 2, spend some time reflecting on the three foundational truths this lesson introduced. These will become the framework for everything that follows.

- You can hear God’s voice—not as something strange or unusual, but as the normal, personal dialogue of a sheep who knows its shepherd. You were made for this conversation.
- There is a privilege in abiding—and fruit will come of it. The vine dresser is at work, producing something in you and through you that cannot be manufactured by your own effort or your own decision-making.
- There is an original intention for your life—authority, provision, work, marriage and relationship, identity, health and healing, and communion with God. The super abundant life the Good Shepherd promised is not a new offer. It is a restoration of what was always meant to be.

In Lesson 2, we will look at what went wrong with God’s original design—and begin to understand what Christ does about it. Come prepared to continue the conversation.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS



...the vine cannot produce fruit by itself, and the branch cannot produce fruit by itself.

In Lesson 1, we established the foundation: God’s original design for abundant life—authority, provision, work, marriage and relationship, identity, health and healing, and communion with God. We learned what it means to abide in the vine, to hear the Shepherd’s voice, and to let the Father be the vine dresser.

In this lesson, we face a question that every honest believer eventually asks: If all of that is true, why does life so often feel like the opposite? The answer requires us to understand three things: where the enemy came from, what he actually did, and what Christ has come to do about it.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM— SATAN, THE FALL, AND THE SIN NATURE

To understand the world we live in, we have to understand the enemy—not to be consumed with fear of him, but to understand accurately what he is and what he is not. One of the mistakes believers make is to overestimate Satan’s power. He is a created being, just as we are. He is not God. He is not omniscient. He is not omnipresent. He is not omnipotent. He was a fallen angel—once in the presence of God, once a leader among the heavenly host, but cast out because of his own choice.

What did Satan decide he wanted? To be God. To have the power and position of God. But because he was not God, he didn’t have the power to take it—and so he was cast out. Now here’s what that tells us: Satan had free will. And free will, we’ll see, is not a curse. It is part of the very image of God. God honors free will because without it, love is not possible.

After Satan was cast out, God turned to the remainder of the angels and gave them a choice. A third followed Satan. The other two-thirds remained. Revelation 5 speaks of a hundred million angels worshipping God—which means, if a third fell, there were once 150 million. Fifty million demonic. A hundred million angels. And those angels have a purpose:

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THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

What is the purpose of angels—and who directs them?

Angels exist to minister to us. And who directs them? God—the vine dresser. He makes all their decisions, and they follow him, directed toward serving us. The numbers are in our favor. But Satan still has access to the earth, and he had access when Adam and Eve were in the garden.

THE FALL

Satan had been waiting. When he finally approached Eve, what was his first move—and why was it so effective?

¹ 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 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, 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

- Satan’s first words were “Did God actually say...?” What was he trying to introduce—and what does that tactic still look like today?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- ▶ Notice that Eve added something God never said: “neither shall you touch it.” What does that tell us about the danger of fuzzy knowledge of what God has actually said?

- ▶ What did Adam and Eve fail to do that they had every privilege and opportunity to do—right in the middle of that conversation?

Satan’s first move was doubt: “Did God actually say...?” Adam and Eve had been in that garden for a long time—possibly years. God had given them clear instruction. But notice: they had accepted the truth without ever fully understanding the consequence. They knew they weren’t supposed to eat of that tree, but when Satan said, “You surely won’t die,” they didn’t actually understand what dying meant. They had never pursued it. And so when the challenge came, the foundation cracked.

The tree itself wasn’t dark or unique. It looked like any other tree. It was designated by God—that was the only thing that made it different. And Satan knew that. He appealed to what looked desirable: good for food, beautiful to look at, able to make one wise. Then he added his own promise: you’ll be like God. The same ambition that drove him out of heaven, he now dangled before Eve.

Here is the critical missed moment: right in the middle of that conversation, they had the privilege of going back to God. They could have said, “We’re getting a different story from what You told us. Can you help us understand this again?” They were used to talking with God. But they didn’t. And when they didn’t return to the vine dresser, they made the decision themselves—exercising their free will in the wrong direction.

And free will matters. Why? Think about what love requires. If God had forced them to obey—if it were all automatic, robotic—it wouldn’t be love. It would be a forced relationship. And a forced relationship is no relationship at all. God wanted free, open relationship based on their choice to walk with Him. The test was always real. The choice was always genuine.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

WHAT DIED—AND WHAT WAS RESTORED

When Adam and Eve disobeyed, what specifically died?

Their bodies were still there. Their souls—their ability to think, feel, and understand—were still functioning. But their spiritual connectivity died. The Holy Spirit’s presence was lost. And without that connection, what remained was a sophisticated, self-centered creature operating on its own instincts and desires. That is what we call the sin nature. And every person born since has been born with it.

You won’t have to teach your children to be self-centered. They’ll arrive that way. As a parent, you’ll spend years helping them understand that life doesn’t actually work when you’re completely self-centered. But the remedy—for them and for all of us—is not better behavior. It’s what Jesus described to Nicodemus in John 3: you must be born again.

When you are born again, the Holy Spirit literally re-enters and resides in you. What Adam and Eve lost, we regain. We are recreated—reconnected to God the way it was originally designed. But there’s an important distinction: we still carry the sin nature. It doesn’t disappear at salvation. Which means the question for every believer becomes: Are you going to learn to hear God’s voice, abide with Him, surrender your will, and follow the Spirit? Or are you going to default back to the flesh?

THE NATURE OF THE ENEMY’S AGENDA

When Adam and Eve handed authority over to Satan, what did that mean for the nature of the world? What quality defines everything the enemy does?

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10, ESV

- ▶ Three words describe what the thief comes to do. What are they—and where do you see them operating in the world around you today?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- What was the condition of the world before Adam and Eve handed authority to Satan? What changed—and what does the word “entropy” describe about that change?

When Adam and Eve surrendered their authority to Satan, the nature of the world changed. The word “entropy” describes it: left alone, everything moves toward destruction. An unpainted house deteriorates. An unattended relationship fractures. An unmanaged marriage drifts toward conflict. This is not because something catastrophic happened—it’s because the nature of the world, under the enemy’s dominion, is kill, steal, and destroy. And inanimate things obey that same law. Bridges collapse. Buildings fail. Not because of a dramatic event—just because entropy, unaddressed, wins.

This is why 60% of Christian marriages end in divorce. Not because those people stopped being believers, but because two self-centered people, operating in the flesh, eventually decide it’s more comfortable to be alone than to keep fighting. And that is kill, steal, and destroy at work. The enemy doesn’t need to do anything dramatic—he just needs to keep you operating in self-centeredness long enough.

This is also why we shouldn’t be surprised when culture deteriorates, economies become unstable, or the school system teaches things that horrify Christian parents. It’s not a new development. If you could step back to the 1800s in Europe, or to the time of Christ—it was awful in different ways. The world has always been this way. What changes is not the world’s nature, but whether we know how to walk with God inside it.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

SECTION 1—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

1. In Genesis 3:1, the serpent’s opening line was a question about what God said. What was the strategy behind that question? What does it tell us about how the enemy approaches believers today?

2. Eve’s response in verse 3 added something God never actually said. What does this reveal about the risk of secondhand or fuzzy knowledge of God’s Word—and how does it connect to the importance of abiding and hearing God’s voice directly?

3. Verse 6 describes the tree as appealing in three ways: good for food, a delight to the eyes, and able to make one wise. What does this tell us about how the enemy works—and why God’s instruction was given in the first place?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

For Deeper Understanding

4. Adam and Eve had access to God at any moment. Their critical failure was that they didn't go to Him when the pressure came. Why do you think they didn't—and why do we tend to make the same mistake?

5. Free will is described as part of the image of God—not a curse. Why is free will essential to genuine relationship with God? What does it say about the nature of the love He is looking for from us?

6. The sin nature doesn't improve after salvation—it has to be dealt with daily. What does that mean practically? How does understanding this change the way you think about spiritual growth and following God?

For Personal Application

7. Where in your life are you most vulnerable to the enemy's first move—doubt about what God has actually said? What are the "Did God actually say...?" questions that tend to undermine your confidence in His voice?

8. Think of a recent situation where you faced a decision or a temptation. Did you bring it to God, or did you handle it in your own reasoning? What would it have looked like to go back to the vine dresser in that moment?

9. The sin nature is a daily reality. What patterns in your own life do you find yourself returning to—not out of dramatic rebellion, but out of default self-centeredness? What does abiding as a daily choice look like in light of that?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

SECTION 2: THE WORLD UNDER THE ENEMY’S AUTHORITY

We established that Adam and Eve handed the authority of the earth to Satan. Now the question is: how far does that authority actually extend? And how long has it been in effect? The answers are more serious than most Christians recognize—and understanding them removes a great deal of confusion about why the world is the way it is.

THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD

When Satan tempted Jesus with the kingdoms of the world, he made a specific claim about who owned them. Was that claim true—and what does Jesus’ response tell us?

⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and 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. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”⁸ And Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.’”

Luke 4:5–8, ESV

- Satan said “all this authority has been delivered to me.” Was that true? If it wasn’t, what would Jesus have said—and what does His silence on that point tell us?

- Jesus refused the shortcut. What does that tell us about how the kingdom is to be reclaimed—and what it cost Him to do it the right way?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

This was a real temptation. Jesus didn't dispute Satan's claim about the kingdoms—because it was true. Adam and Eve had handed that authority over when they chose to follow the enemy rather than God. Satan legitimately controlled the kingdoms of the world. And he offered them to Jesus—no cross required. Just one act of worship.

Jesus refused. Not because the offer wasn't real, but because He would only move according to the Father's direction. That is abiding in its most costly form. The shortcut was available. He said no to it. And He won back the kingdoms through the cross—the vine dresser's way, not a shortcut.

THE WORLD LIES IN THE POWER OF THE EVIL ONE

John wrote this letter roughly sixty years after the resurrection of Christ.

What does he say is still true about the world—and what does he say is true about those who belong to God?

¹⁸ We 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. ¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. ²⁰ And 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

- Sixty years after the resurrection, the world still “lies in the power of the evil one.” What does that tell us about what the resurrection did—and didn't—change about the world we live in?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- ▶ Verse 20 says the Son of God has given us “understanding.” What specifically are we now able to understand—and how does that understanding change how we navigate a world still under the enemy’s influence?

Sixty years after the resurrection of Christ, John writes: the whole world still lies under the authority and dominion of the evil one. The resurrection didn’t eliminate Satan’s control of the world’s systems. It broke his power over death and over those who are in Christ—but the world itself remains a place of kill, steal, and destroy. And we are not exempt from that.

This is not a reason for despair. It’s a reason for clarity. When couples fall into contention, when relationships fracture, when cultural values collapse, when economies become unstable—none of it should surprise us. It is the nature of the world under the enemy’s dominion. The question is not: Why is this happening? The question is: How do I walk with God inside it? How does He deliver the abundant life in the middle of this world?

The prayer that makes sense is not “God, remove me from this world”—it’s “God, show me how to walk with You in the world I’m already in.” That’s what Jesus modeled. That’s what abiding is about.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

SECTION 2—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

10. In Luke 4:6, Satan says the kingdoms of the world “have been delivered to me.” Jesus does not dispute this claim. Based on what you know from Genesis 3 and Lesson 1, who delivered them—and how? What does that tell us about the real-world consequences of Adam and Eve’s choice?

11. In 1 John 5:19, John uses the phrase “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” How sweeping is that statement? What does it tell us about the systems, structures, and cultures of the world—and why things are the way they are?

12. Verse 18 says “the evil one does not touch him”—referring to the one born of God. But verse 19 says the whole world is under the evil one’s power. How do these two realities coexist? What is the distinction between being “in the world” and being under its control?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

For Deeper Understanding

13. The concept of entropy is introduced: left alone, everything moves toward destruction. How do you see this principle operating in your own relationships, marriage, friendships, or family? What does it mean that maintaining these things requires intentional, ongoing investment—not just a one-time commitment?

14. Jesus refused a shortcut that would have avoided the cross. How does that refusal model abiding for us? What shortcuts are we tempted to take that avoid the vine dresser's process in our own lives?

15. The teaching suggests that a lot of Christian disappointment with life comes from not understanding what the world actually is. Does this shift your perspective? How does knowing the world is under the enemy's dominion change the way you pray, plan, and respond to difficulty?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

For Personal Application

16. Where in your life are you most tempted to be surprised or demoralized by the world's brokenness—in culture, economics, relationships, or your own circumstances? How does understanding the nature of the world reframe those disappointments?

17. If the question isn't "God, remove this" but rather "God, show me how to walk with You through this"—what specific situation in your life right now needs that reframing?

18. John says we now have understanding—we know who is true and we are in Him. How does being "in Him"—abiding—change the practical reality of living in a world under the enemy's dominion? What does that actually feel like in a normal day?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

SECTION 3: HOW THE ENEMY WORKS—STRIFE, JUDGMENT, AND THE FLESH

We now understand what the enemy is, what he’s not, and the authority he holds in the world. The next question is: how does he actually work in the life of a believer? He’s not omniscient or omnipresent—so he can’t be everywhere at once, managing every detail. His strategy is more targeted and more observable than that. And once you understand it, you’ll start to see it clearly.

WHAT GOD HATES

These verses list things that are an “abomination” to God. What does that word mean—and which item on the list is most directly relevant to how the enemy attacks relationships?

¹⁶ There are six things that the Lord hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
¹⁹ a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers.

Proverbs 6:16–19, ESV

➤ What does “abomination” mean? Why is sowing discord specifically named as something God calls detestable?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- Think about your closest relationships. What does discord look like in practice—and what is its typical starting point?

An abomination is something detestable—something that provokes deep revulsion in the one who sees it. And God places “one who sows discord among brothers” at the top of that list. This isn’t an accident. The enemy’s primary tactic in the life of a believer is to get you into contention—with your spouse, your friends, your family, your church. If he can get you sowing discord, he has you on the path toward everything he came to do: kill, steal, and destroy.

Unresolved contention always follows the same pattern. It starts as disagreement. If it doesn’t get resolved, it becomes friction. Sustained friction becomes distance. Distance becomes “this relationship isn’t worth the effort.” And eventually, whether it’s a marriage, a friendship, or a church community—it’s gone. This is why the enemy loves strife. It doesn’t require anything dramatic. Just enough friction, long enough, unresolved.

THE FLESH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Paul is writing to believers in Romans 8. What does he say about the consequences of living according to the flesh—and how does that connect to what the enemy is trying to accomplish?

⁵ For 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. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:5–8, ESV

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- ▶ Three specific consequences are described for living according to the flesh. What are they—and what does each one mean practically?

- ▶ Paul says the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God—“it cannot” submit. How does that help explain why self-effort to change our own patterns always falls short?

Paul is writing to believers. This isn't about people who have rejected God—it's about Christians who have drifted back into operating according to the sin nature. And he identifies three consequences of living in the flesh:

- Death—Not physical death, but the same dynamic that happened to Adam and Eve: you put to death the power of the Holy Spirit operating in you. You still have the Holy Spirit, but you're functionally operating as if you don't.
- Hostility toward God—You are at enmity with Him. His will for you is the abundant life. But when you're operating in the flesh, you're moving in the opposite direction. Not intentionally, not dramatically—just away from Him.
- Unable to please God—Not because He's withholding, but because you've walked away from the place where He can deliver what He wants to give you.

This is exactly what the enemy is trying to accomplish. He doesn't need to touch your eternal destiny—that's settled. He just needs to get you into the flesh. And because he's been observing you—your patterns, your triggers, your weaknesses—he knows what causes you to default there.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

Think of velociraptors in Jurassic Park. They systematically test the fence—hit it here, hit it there—until they find the weakness. Then they go through it. The enemy works the same way. He observes cause and effect in your life. He knows: when this happens, you go to the flesh. And so he stimulates it. Not dramatically—just enough to pull you out of abiding and back into self-centeredness.

For example: if you tend to be driven by your schedule—overscheduling, running late, feeling pressured—the enemy doesn't need to do much. Just make every stoplight red. Just have someone send an irritating message at the wrong moment. Cause, effect. You're in the flesh. And once you're in the flesh, you can't please God, and He can't deliver to you what He wants to give you.

THE TRAP OF JUDGMENT

When we decide someone else is wrong—a spouse, a friend, a family member—and begin trying to convince them of it, what role are we stepping into? What does James say about that?

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. 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 you decide you are right and the other person is wrong, what do you naturally do next—and why is that the problem James is describing?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- Judging someone else means you've appointed yourself to a role that belongs to God. What does that do to your own spiritual position—and to the relationship?

Here is a pattern that plays out in nearly every relationship—marriage, friendship, family. I decide I'm right. Once I've decided I'm right, I stop listening for whether I actually am right. Now my only objective is to persuade you that I'm right. I don't care what your perspective is. I've already judged the matter. Now I'm going to convince you.

The other party, of course, does the same thing. You're both in the flesh. You're both at enmity with God. You're both operating in self-centeredness. And the result—if nobody yields—is escalating discord. Exactly what the enemy came to produce.

Rich shares from his own marriage: he grew up in a home where argument was the norm. He was good at debating. Linda grew up as a pastor's kid who learned that little girls should be seen and not heard—so she didn't even enter the argument. He would "win" every time. And eventually she just stopped engaging entirely: whatever you want. He thought that was fine. It wasn't. He was crushing her spirit. He was in the place of judgment, and the consequences were quietly devastating.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

THE CONSEQUENCE OF GRUMBLING

⁹ Do 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

- James says that when you grumble or judge one another, you yourself come under judgment. What does that mean—and how does this connect to what Romans 8 said about being at enmity with God?

When you step into the role of judge—deciding you’re right and the other person is wrong—you have placed yourself under judgment. God says: you’re in the flesh. The power of the Spirit is functionally put to death. You’re at enmity with Me. You can’t please Me. And now you’re actually being judged by your own choice. This is a spiritual law. You can’t argue your way out of it. You can’t say, “But I love her” while simultaneously crushing her in judgment. God says: you say you do—but you’re still operating in that place.

SEVERED FROM CHRIST, FALLEN FROM GRACE

Paul says there are two specific consequences for those who try to justify themselves by their own rules and standards. What are those two consequences—and what do they actually mean?

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. ² Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³ I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴ You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

Galatians 5:1–4, ESV

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- The word “severed” means cut off. In the context of the vine and the branches, what does it mean to be severed from Christ—especially for a believer who is still saved?

- “Fallen away from grace”—grace is described as God’s ability to deliver the super abundant life to you. What does it look like to fall away from that? Have you experienced seasons where you felt that distance?

Paul’s context is people who are setting up their own rules and saying: you have to follow my rules to be right. I’m right. You’re wrong. You should. When Rich told Linda “I’m right and you’re not”—he was setting up his own law. And Paul says: when you do that, two things happen.

- You are severed from Christ. Cut off. Not eternally—but functionally. You are no longer abiding. You are a branch that has disconnected from the vine. The power that can give you freedom and abundant life is not flowing. You’ve cut yourself off from it by choosing to live in judgment.
- You have fallen away from grace. Grace, in this context, is God’s ability to deliver the super abundant life to you. He wants to give it. He is ready to give it. But you have walked away from the place where He can do that. And the longer you stay in that place, the more you begin to accept it as normal: I guess this is just how life is. I guess I’ll never have that. And that acceptance of mediocrity as normal is one of the saddest outcomes of the enemy’s strategy.

The good news—and we are about to get to the good news—is that this is not permanent. The vine dresser is still there. The vine is still there. The branch can reconnect. And when it does, the flow of life begins again.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

SECTION 3—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

19. Romans 8:6 says “to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” These are described as outcomes—not just attitudes. What does it mean for your daily life that the direction of your mind has real, practical consequences?

20. James 4:11 says that speaking against or judging a brother means you have appointed yourself as a judge of the law itself. What does that mean—and why is it such a serious overreach? What role does that usurpation play in breaking down relationships?

21. Galatians 5:1 begins: “For freedom Christ has set us free.” Yet by verse 4, Paul describes people who have fallen away from that freedom. What is the mechanism by which someone loses the experience of freedom even while still being in Christ?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

For Deeper Understanding

22. The “velociraptor pattern” describes the enemy systematically testing your weaknesses until he finds what causes you to default to the flesh. What are your most predictable triggers? When those things happen, what does your default response look like—and where does it lead you?

23. Rich describes being a skilled debater who always “won” arguments with Linda—but discovered that winning the argument was destroying the relationship. Can you identify a pattern in your own life where being “right” has come at the cost of something more important? What did that cost?

24. The teaching describes many believers accepting a diminished life as normal—“I guess I’ll never have that.” How does this happen? How does the enemy use accumulated discouragement to make people give up on the abundant life God actually has for them?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

For Personal Application

25. Where are you most prone to stepping into the role of judge in your key relationships—deciding you are right and beginning to persuade rather than listen? What would it look like to catch that moment and bring it back to God instead?

26. Reflect honestly: are there areas of your life where you have “accepted it as normal”—resigned yourself to a level of relationship, peace, or provision that is less than what God describes as abundant life? What would it take to re-engage with the possibility of more?

27. Grace is described as God’s ability to deliver the super abundant life to you. “Fallen from grace” means you have moved out of the position where He can do that. What would it look like this week to re-position yourself—to return to abiding and receive what He wants to give?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

SECTION 4: THE GOOD NEWS—CHRIST COMES TO RESTORE

We have looked honestly at the problem. The enemy is real. The Fall had real consequences. The world is under the dominion of a kill-steal-destroy agenda. The flesh is a daily reality. And the enemy knows how to exploit it. None of that is exaggerated or pessimistic—it's simply accurate.

But now: the good news. Not just the gospel as a transaction—a prayer prayed, a sin forgiven, a heaven secured. The good news that Christ himself stood up to describe when He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth.

TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED

Jesus reads from Isaiah in the synagogue and then makes a stunning declaration. What does He claim—and what does it mean that “today” this is fulfilled?

¹⁶ And 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. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

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,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And 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. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:16–21, ESV

- Jesus claims to fulfill Isaiah 61—right now, in their hearing. What does that tell us about when the restoration He offers is available?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- The word “gospel” means good news. How is what Jesus describes here bigger than the gospel as it is often presented—as simply forgiveness of sin and eternal life?

Jesus knew this passage. He had grown up in Nazareth, and the synagogue was part of His life. He unrolled the scroll with purpose—He found this specific place. And then He read it, sat down, and said: this is about Me. Today. In your hearing. It is fulfilled.

When is the good news available? Now. Not eventually. Not after you’ve cleaned up your life. Not after things get easier. Now. Regardless of your age, the mistakes you’ve made, the mess you’re in, or the things that feel permanently ruined—the good news is “how about now?” Right now, God can begin to restore it.

This is not the gospel as a transaction—receive Christ, secure heaven, manage life on your own. This is the gospel as total restoration. Seven exceptional things were lost in the Fall. Christ says: I’ve come to give them back. Let me show you what that looks like.

WHAT THE RESTORATION LOOKS LIKE

Isaiah 61:1 describes four specific things Christ is anointed to do. What are they—and which one speaks most directly to something you are currently experiencing?

¹The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;

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;

Isaiah 61:1, ESV

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

- What does it mean to be “brokenhearted”? What breaks a heart—and what does God’s response to that brokenness look like?

- What does it mean to be a “captive”? What are the patterns, fears, and habits that function as prisons in people’s lives—and why can’t we free ourselves from them?

The good news is available now—regardless of what you’ve done or what’s been done to you. A man who had been quietly committing fraud in a church ministry position came to understand this. He had tried to manage the cover-up himself, digging deeper and deeper until he had committed an actual crime. When he heard “how about now?” and asked if God could restore even that—the answer was yes. God would, and He did. Completely. The condition was one: he had to stop hiding the truth. If he abided in Christ, he would know the truth—and the truth would set him free. It did.

To be brokenhearted is to have lost something—a relationship, a dream, a season of life that didn’t go the way you hoped. Disappointment hardening into despair. The gradual loss of enthusiasm for what might be possible. God says: I will heal that. Don’t live in your disappointment. Bring it to Me and let Me restore it.

To be captive is to have patterns you cannot break by willpower alone. Impatience. Fear. Anxiety. Unforgiveness. Things that trigger you and pull you back into the flesh no matter how many times you resolve to do better. God says: I will free you from those. You can’t produce that freedom yourself—but I can deliver it. The overscheduling, the arrogance about time, the patterns that drove Rich back into the flesh at every red light—those weren’t fixed by trying harder. They were fixed by bringing them to God, identifying the root (in that case, pride), and letting the vine dresser address what was actually there.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

BEAUTY FOR ASHES

What does God give in exchange for mourning—and what is the significance of the image of ashes? What are we doing when we try to hold onto our ashes?

² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
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;

Isaiah 61:2–3, ESV

- What do we do with ashes? If God says He'll give beauty for them—what does that require us to do first?

- What does it mean to mourn the loss of your own soul—to not even know what you think or feel anymore because it's been suppressed for so long? How does God restore something that intangible?

What do you do with ashes? You throw them out. They're worthless. There's nothing to be done with them. And yet God says: even those—the things you've actually ruined, the things that are genuinely gone and worthless—I will create something beautiful from those. I am that powerful.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

Linda had lost her soul in the years when Rich operated in constant judgment. She stopped knowing what she thought, because thinking what she thought served no purpose—it would just be overruled. When Rich began to understand what he had done and asked her to share what she thought—she genuinely didn't know. Her sense of self had been suppressed for so long she had mourned it without even naming the loss. God said: let Me restore that. And He did. That restoration became one of the most beautiful things in their marriage. Beauty for ashes—from something that looked like nothing could be salvaged.

REBUILDING WHAT WAS RUINED

That they may be called the oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord,
that he may be glorified.
They 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 61:3–4, ESV

- God says He will rebuild what you have ruined—but it's implied that this takes time. What does “walk with me and I'll rebuild it” look like in practice? What is your role in that process?

- The passage speaks of rebuilding “the devastations of many generations.” That implies some of what we carry wasn't even created by our own choices. What does it mean that God's restoration reaches back even that far?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

"I'll rebuild." That is the promise. Not just repair—rebuild. Not just restore to what it was—make it more beautiful than what you had originally. The things you've ruined because you thought they were good ideas and they weren't, the decisions that dug you deeper when you were trying to fix things, the messes that feel too far gone—God says: walk with Me, and I will rebuild all of it. It will take time. But I will do it.

The oaks of righteousness. The planting of the Lord. Ancient ruins rebuilt. Devastations of many generations repaired. This is not small language. God is describing a comprehensive, multigenerational restoration. And the engine of it is not your effort—it is the vine dresser, working through branches that have chosen to abide.

CLOSING REFLECTION

As this lesson closes, the invitation is to be specific. Not hypothetical. The decisions and issues you wrote down at the beginning of Lesson 1 are the starting point. Take time now to write out your honest answers to these questions:

What are you brokenhearted about?

What have you lost, or mourned, or given up hoping for? Where has disappointment hardened into resignation?

What are you captive to?

What patterns, fears, habits, or triggers keep pulling you back into the flesh—things you've tried to fix by willpower and can't?

What is difficult or ruined—or feels like it is?

What in your life do you look at and think: this is too far gone. God couldn't rebuild this. Be honest. Bring it out into the light.

These are not items to be ashamed of. They are the raw material of restoration. In Lesson 3, we begin to look at the fruit—starting with the foundational issue of forgiveness. Come prepared to take the next step.

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

SECTION 4—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

28. Luke 4:21 records Jesus saying “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” What is the significance of the word “today”? How does the immediacy of that word reframe how we think about when God’s restoration is available to us?

29. Isaiah 61:1 lists four specific things Christ is anointed to do: bring good news, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives, and open prisons for the bound. Which of these four do you most need to receive right now—and what would it look like to receive it?

30. Isaiah 61:3 describes God giving “a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.” These are three specific exchanges. What does each exchange suggest about how God responds to loss, grief, and spiritual exhaustion?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

For Deeper Understanding

31. The teaching distinguishes between the gospel as a transaction (forgiveness and eternal life) and the gospel as total restoration (the seven elements of abundant life, fully recovered). How does this fuller picture of the gospel change the way you relate to God day to day?

32. The story of the megachurch ministry leader illustrates “how about now?” even in the context of a crime and a cover-up. What does this story reveal about the limits—or lack of limits—of God’s restorative power? What condition did the restoration require?

33. Rich describes Linda losing her soul over years of being shut down in judgment. This is a slow, quiet kind of destruction—not dramatic, but devastating. Where do you see this kind of gradual erosion happening in relationships around you, or in your own life? What does restoration of something that subtle even look like?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

For Personal Application

34. Bring the “how about now?” question directly to your own life. What is the situation, relationship, or circumstance that feels most beyond restoration? What would it look like to actually believe that God can address it now—and to begin walking with Him toward that?

35. The captive patterns described—impatience, anxiety, unforgiveness, fear—are things that self-effort cannot fix. God addresses them at the root. What is the captive pattern you most want to be freed from? Have you brought it to God as a specific request, or have you accepted it as “just who I am”?

36. Isaiah 61:4 speaks of rebuilding “devastations of many generations.” Some of what you carry was handed to you—family patterns, wounds from childhood, inherited ways of seeing the world. How does it change your perspective to know that God’s restoration is designed to reach back that far?

LESSON 2

THE PROBLEM, THE ENEMY, AND THE GOOD NEWS

CLOSING—LESSON 2 REVIEW

In this lesson, we covered the full arc of the problem—and the beginning of the solution. Three things to carry forward into Lesson 3:

- The enemy is real, but not omnipotent. He works through observation, pattern, and the flesh—not through unlimited power. Understanding his strategy removes his ability to work through surprise.
- The world is under the enemy’s dominion, and that will not change before Christ returns. The question is not “why is this world so broken?” The question is “how do I walk with God and receive abundant life inside this broken world?”
- Christ has come to restore—now. Good news for the poor. Healing for the brokenhearted. Freedom for captives. Beauty for ashes. Rebuilding for ruins. All of it is available. All of it begins with abiding.

Before Lesson 3, spend time with the Closing Reflection questions above. Write out honestly what you are brokenhearted about, what you are captive to, and what feels ruined. These are the specific areas where God wants to begin His work of restoration.



LESSON 3

THE FIRST FRUIT: FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION



**God's original design
was a blueprint for
the superabundant
life.**

In Lesson 2, we closed with an invitation to be specific: write out what you are brokenhearted about, what you are captive to, what feels ruined or lost. That exercise was not abstract—it was preparation for this lesson.

We have established that if we abide, fruit will come. The vine dresser produces it; our role is simply to stay connected. But what does that fruit actually look like? What are the first and most practical results of choosing to abide?

Lesson 3 begins where most of us need to begin: with the fruit of forgiveness. Not because it is the easiest fruit—it is arguably the most demanding. But because without it, almost everything else is blocked. Bitterness builds a wall between you and the abundant life God is trying to deliver. And the conflicts that create bitterness? They are never going away. We are surrounded by self-centered people, and we are self-centered ourselves. The only path through is learning how forgiveness actually works—and how it is completely different from what most of us think it is.

SECTION 1: NO CONDEMNATION— THE FOUNDATION

We begin with a question almost every believer wrestles with: the weight of guilt. Whether it comes from what others have done to us, what we have done to others, or what we have done to ourselves—condemnation is one of the primary tools the enemy uses to keep believers from the abundant life. Before we can understand forgiveness toward others, we have to understand what God has already declared about us.

LESSON 3

THE FIRST FRUIT: FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

FREE FROM CONDEMNATION

What does the word “condemnation” mean—and what does it feel like to live under it?

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1–2, ESV

- Who does Christ say does not condemn you? Now think about the other sources of condemnation in your life—who else tends to condemn you?

- He says “no condemnation from any source.” What would it actually feel like to live in that freedom—not just intellectually, but practically, on a difficult day?

Condemnation means coming against someone—deciding they deserve punishment because of what they did. It feels hopeless. It produces a sense of worthlessness, a weight that says: I deserved this. And interesting enough, the hardest person most of us have to forgive is ourselves, because we know exactly what we did and exactly what we are capable of.

But Christ says: if you are walking with Me, there is no condemnation. Not from Him. Not from the enemy. Not from other people who judge you. And not from yourself. He is not saying that what was done was not wrong, or that it had no consequences. He is saying: I have already dealt with that. We do not start there anymore. We start from freedom.

LESSON 3

THE FIRST FRUIT: FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Three sources condemn us. Christ does not. Other people do—and in today’s culture, condemnation is often the first response, before anyone has even examined the truth. And we condemn ourselves—we carry guilt, sometimes for years, about things that Christ has already resolved. He says: if you are in Me, none of those sources gets the final word.

This is where forgiveness has to begin—not with the person who hurt you, but with receiving the freedom Christ has already declared over you. If you are living under condemnation, you cannot extend genuine forgiveness. You have to know you are free first.

SECTION 1—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

1. Romans 8:1 says “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The word “therefore” connects this to what came before in Romans 7. What is the “therefore” referring to—and why does it matter that no condemnation is available now, not eventually?

2. Verse 2 describes two laws in contrast: “the law of the Spirit of life” and “the law of sin and death.” How do these two laws describe the two ways of living that have been described throughout this course—abiding vs. living in the flesh?

3. The passage declares freedom from condemnation on the basis of being “in Christ Jesus.” What does being “in Christ Jesus” mean—and how does that connect to the vine-and-branches picture from Lesson 1?

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For Deeper Understanding

4. Three sources of condemnation are identified: the enemy, other people, and ourselves. Which of these is hardest for you to resist? Why is self-condemnation—guilt—often the most persistent and the hardest to release?

5. The teaching makes the point that the person we find hardest to forgive is often ourselves. Why is that? What does it reveal about our understanding of what Christ actually did at the cross?

6. What is the difference between conviction—which leads us back to God—and condemnation, which keeps us stuck? How do you tell the difference between the two in your own experience?

For Personal Application

7. Is there an area of your life where you are currently living under condemnation— either from others, from the enemy, or from yourself? What would it look like to actually receive the “no condemnation” declaration over that area?

8. How does guilt about past failures affect your willingness to come boldly back to God when you’ve fallen into the flesh? What does “no condemnation” mean for how quickly you can return to abiding?

9. If there is no condemnation for those in Christ—what does that free you to do in your relationships? How might living from that freedom rather than from guilt change the way you approach conflict?

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SECTION 2: WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE— THE BASIS FOR FORGIVENESS

Now that we understand what Christ has declared over us, we need to understand what He actually did at the cross that makes that declaration possible. Forgiveness is not a concept or a feeling—it is grounded in a specific act, a completed transaction. And the way Christ has forgiven us becomes the basis for the way we are called to forgive others.

GOD’S CHARACTER: MERCY AND STEADFAST LOVE

The Psalmist says “forget not all his benefits.” As you read this passage, what are those benefits—and what do they tell you about the character of the God you are being called to walk with?

- ¹ Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
- ² Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
³ who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
⁴ who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
⁵ who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.
- ⁶ The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
- ⁸ The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- ⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
- ¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

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¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

¹⁴ For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;

Psalm 103:1–15, ESV

- Verse 10 says He does not deal with us according to our sins or repay us according to our iniquities. Does that mean He ignores the fact that we sinned? What does He actually do instead?

- Verse 12 says He has removed our transgressions from us “as far as the east is from the west.” What is the significance of that direction—east to west—as opposed to, say, north to south?

- God says we deserve His wrath—He doesn’t deny that. But then He doesn’t deliver it. What does that tell us about how we are to approach people who have wronged us and deserve our anger?

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The word translated “steadfast love” in this psalm is the Hebrew word *hesed*—and it means loyal commitment to the covenant. God has promised to bless His people and make them a blessing, to give them the super abundant life, to deliver to them everything He originally gave Adam and Eve. *Hesed* means: He is committed to that, regardless of what we have done. He doesn’t deal with us according to what we deserve. He deals with us according to who He is.

This is the basis for forgiveness. Not our feelings. Not whether the other person deserves it. Not whether they have apologized or changed. God’s forgiveness was given on the basis of His own nature—and He calls us to forgive on that same basis. This is why genuine forgiveness is not something we manufacture by willpower. It is something we receive from Him and extend to others from that same place.

THE CROSS: ONCE FOR ALL

What did the old system of sacrifice require—and what did Christ do that made that system no longer necessary?

¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord:

I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds;”

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¹⁷ then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Hebrews 10:10–18, ESV

- Verse 12 says Christ “sat down.” The priests in the old system were always standing—their work was never finished. What does it mean that Christ sat down after His offering?

- Verse 17 says God will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. At the cross, did Christ forgive everybody—including Hitler, murderers, adulterers? On what basis?

- If everybody is forgiven—does that mean everybody is reconciled with God? What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?

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Under the old system, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year—behind a curtain eighty feet high and eighty inches thick [Editor: Rich stated “80in thick” in the transcript—please verify this measurement before publication]—to offer sacrifice first for himself, then for his family, then for the nation of Israel. They tied a rope around his leg so that if something happened to him inside, someone could pull him out, because no one else could enter. It was repeated, year after year, because those sacrifices could never permanently take away sin.

Christ became both the high priest and the sacrificial lamb. He went to the cross willingly, on our behalf. And when it was finished, He said—“It is finished.” Completed. Done once and for all. And then He sat down. The priests stood because their work was never done. Christ sat down because His was.

At the cross, He forgave everybody. Not because they deserved it. Not because they asked for it. Not conditionally. He forgave on the basis of His own nature. That includes every person who has ever hurt you. He has already forgiven them. So when God calls you to forgive someone, He is not asking you to do something He has not already done—He is asking you to join Him in the place where He already stands.

But forgiveness is not reconciliation. Everyone is forgiven. Not everyone is reconciled. Reconciliation requires a response—it requires two parties processing truth together. God has done His part completely. Our part is to receive it, surrender to Him, and step into the relationship He has prepared. Those who never do remain forgiven but unreconciled—separated from God eternally by their own choice. He does not force reconciliation, because He cannot change the truth.

This distinction is the hinge on which everything in this lesson turns. Forgiveness is what God does—and it is already done, for everyone. Reconciliation is a process that requires two people willing to process truth together. Confusing the two leads to either resentment (“If I forgive them they get away with it”) or false peace (“I’ll just accept their behavior and call it forgiveness”). Neither is right. They are two completely different things.

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THE FIRST FRUIT: FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

SECTION 2—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

10. Psalm 103:10 says God does not deal with us according to our sins. But He does not deny that we deserve His wrath. How does He resolve that tension—and what does that resolution tell us about the nature of grace?

11. Hebrews 10:17 records God saying “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” What does it mean that God chooses not to remember? How is that different from God simply ignoring what happened?

12. Hebrews 10:12 says Christ “sat down” after His offering—in contrast to the priests who always stood. What is the significance of that posture? What does it declare about the completeness and permanence of what He accomplished?

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For Deeper Understanding

13. Christ forgave everyone at the cross—on the basis of His own nature, not their response. Yet not everyone is reconciled. Explain in your own words the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. Why is that distinction so important practically?

14. If the person who hurt you has already been forgiven by Christ—what does that mean for how you approach forgiving them? What shifts when you realize you are not extending something new, but joining something God has already done?

15. Hesed—steadfast love, loyal commitment to the covenant—is how God operates toward us regardless of what we have done. How does understanding that God’s forgiveness is grounded in His character (not our behavior) change the way you think about forgiving others?

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For Personal Application

16. Is there someone in your life you have been reluctant to forgive because it felt like letting them “get away with it”? How does the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation address that concern?

17. Christ extended forgiveness on the basis of His nature—before anyone asked for it, before anyone changed. Is there a relationship in your life where you are waiting for the other person to earn forgiveness before you give it? What would it look like to forgive on Christ’s basis instead?

18. God cannot force reconciliation—He allows people not to be reconciled. What does that tell you about the limits of your role when you extend forgiveness and the other person refuses to engage? How do you live in peace when reconciliation is out of your hands?

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SECTION 3: THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

We now understand what forgiveness is grounded in. The next question is practical: How does it actually work? What does it look like in a real conflict, with a real person, in a real relationship? And how do we move from forgiveness—which is between us and God—toward reconciliation, which requires both parties?

We need to start with something important: it is right to be angry. God says so. When someone crosses a line of justice—when they hurt you, disrespect you, lie to you, or treat you as less than you are—you should feel anger. Anger is the appropriate recognition that something wrong has happened. The question is never whether the anger is legitimate. It usually is. The question is what you do with it.

WHEN YOU ARE THE ONE WHO HAS OFFENDED

Jesus is describing a scenario where you are at the altar—worshiping, doing the right thing—and you suddenly realize you have offended someone. What does He say to do, and how urgently?

²¹“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.²⁵ Come 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.²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Matthew 5:21–26, ESV

- Jesus says to stop—leave your gift at the altar—and go be reconciled first. What does that priority tell us about how seriously God takes unresolved offenses between people?

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- What is your role when you are the one who has offended someone? What does the process look like—and what happens if the other person refuses to engage?

When you are the offender—and sometimes God will show you that even before the other person says anything—the path is clear. First, forgive yourself. You are not exempt from the “no condemnation” promise. Then go to the person you have hurt. Acknowledge what you did, acknowledge the impact it had on them, and ask what it would take to restore things. Then process toward a solution together.

The process looks like this: you have hurt someone. You go to them and say: I offended you. I am truly sorry. What would it take for us to restore this? If they receive that, you work through it together until you arrive at a real solution—not just an apology, but an agreement on how things move forward differently. When both parties say yes to that solution, you are reconciled.

Here is the encouraging part: if you make the effort in honesty and humility and they refuse to engage—the burden shifts entirely to them. You cannot force someone to reconcile. You can only offer it. And if you offer it genuinely, out of a heart of forgiveness and with a willingness to process truth, and they say no—you are done. That is not failure. God sees what you did. The weight that was on you is now on them.

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WHEN YOU ARE THE ONE WHO WAS OFFENDED

When someone has hurt you, Christ has already forgiven them. What does He now call you to do—and what role does He give you in the process?

¹² We 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. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and 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. ¹⁶ From 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. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For 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 does it mean to be an “ambassador for Christ” in a conflict? What does an ambassador do—and where does the truth they carry come from?

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- An ambassador does not compromise the truth just to reach an agreement. How does that apply when you are processing a conflict? What are you not allowed to give away in the process of seeking reconciliation?

- What are the three possible outcomes of the reconciliation process—and can you live with all three? Why or why not?

When someone has offended you, your first step is the same as it always is: forgiveness. Not toward them—with God. You bring the hurt, the anger, the sense of injustice to God, and you receive His forgiveness toward them. That forgiveness is already in place at the cross. You are not manufacturing something new. You are stepping into what Christ has already done.

The evidence that you have arrived at genuine forgiveness is specific: you can talk about what happened with honor and respect. Not performance—not gritting your teeth and pretending. Actually, genuinely, able to speak without the energy of bitterness or the drive to punish. If you cannot do that yet, you are not there. And God says: that is fine. Just keep working with Me until you get there.

Once you have forgiveness, you become what Paul calls an ambassador. An ambassador represents the one who sent them. Your truth comes from God, not from your wound. You go to the person who hurt you—or you are ready to go when they are willing—and you offer to process truth together. Here is what happened. Here is how it felt. Here is the impact. And then you work toward a real solution, one that both parties can actually say yes to.

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A concrete example: Rich was supposed to pick Linda up from the mall at five. He showed up at six without calling or texting. She was rightfully angry. Before she could talk to him, she needed to go to God first—bring the hurt, receive forgiveness, and arrive at a place where she could speak with honor and respect. Then she could say: you disrespected me. You didn't honor what you said, and you didn't even give me the courtesy of a call. That hurt me. And then she could offer a real solution: if you are going to be late, text me so I can do something productive rather than stand here feeling forgotten. When Rich agreed to that—they were reconciled. Simple. Honest. Specific. Grounded in truth.

Three outcomes are possible—and you can live with all three:

- Full reconciliation: both parties process truth and arrive at a genuine agreement. The relationship moves forward on a new foundation.
- Partial reconciliation with a boundary: truth cannot be fully processed—perhaps because the other person is unwilling or unable to engage rationally—but you can still define a healthy way to be around them. This is what God showed Rich with his mother.
- No reconciliation: the other person refuses to engage. You have extended forgiveness and offered to process truth. They have declined. The burden is entirely on them. You are free to move on.

There is one important exception: marriage. As a couple called to oneness, you do not have the option of simply moving on. God calls you to stay with it—to keep pursuing forgiveness, keep processing truth, keep working toward reconciliation. That is the calling. And the promise is that if both parties have a heart to pursue it, God will bring you there.

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SECTION 3—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

19. Matthew 5:23–24 says to stop worship and go be reconciled to your brother first. What does this priority reveal about the connection between our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationships with people? Can the two be fully separated?

20. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says God was “not counting their trespasses against them.” This is the basis on which we are called to engage with those who have hurt us. What does “not counting trespasses” mean in practice—and how does it differ from pretending the offense never happened?

21. Verse 20 calls us “ambassadors for Christ.” An ambassador speaks the truth of the one who sent them and does not compromise it just to achieve agreement. How does that shape the way you approach a difficult reconciliation conversation?

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For Deeper Understanding

22. The evidence of genuine forgiveness is described as the ability to talk about the offense with honor and respect—without the energy of bitterness or the drive to punish. By that standard, is there a relationship in your life where you have said you forgave but probably have not arrived there yet?

23. Why is it significant that forgiveness happens between you and God—not primarily between you and the person who hurt you? How does making forgiveness a transaction between you and God, rather than between you and the offender, change the process?

24. The three outcomes of reconciliation are: full reconciliation, partial reconciliation with a boundary, and no reconciliation. In each case, the person who has done the work of forgiveness can live in peace. What makes that possible—and why does it require that forgiveness comes first?

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For Personal Application

25. Think of a current conflict or unresolved hurt in your life. Which step are you at: Have you genuinely arrived at forgiveness—the place where you can speak with honor and respect? Or do you need more time with God before you attempt reconciliation?

26. Is there a relationship where you have been waiting for the other person to come to you before you do anything? Based on what you've learned, what is your responsibility—and what is not yours to control?

27. For married participants: Where in your marriage is there an unresolved conflict that keeps surfacing because it has never been fully processed through forgiveness and truth? What would it look like to commit to staying with it—not avoiding it—until you arrive at genuine reconciliation?

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SECTION 4: LIVING WITHOUT RECONCILIATION— PRESSING FORWARD

What do you do when you have done everything right—gone to forgiveness, offered reconciliation honestly, processed truth as far as the other person would go—and they still will not meet you? Or when they are a family member you cannot simply avoid? Or when the situation is complex enough that you cannot even attempt reconciliation right now?

God does not leave us without guidance for those situations. And the guidance He gives is both freeing and deeply practical.

FORGETTING WHAT LIES BEHIND

Paul is in prison when he writes this. He has been falsely accused, beaten, shipwrecked, and abandoned by people he trusted. What is his posture—and what does he say the secret is?

¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not 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. ¹³ Brothers, 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, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let 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

- Paul says “one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind.” This is not suppression or denial—it is a decisive release. What is the condition that makes that release possible?

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- What does it mean practically to “forget” someone who has hurt you—to release it so completely that you can be in the same room with them and genuinely not be troubled? Have you experienced that kind of release?

Paul has learned what to forget. That is one of the most quietly powerful statements in the New Testament. Not naive amnesia—he knows exactly what happened to him. But a practiced, deliberate release. He has taken the hurt as far as it can go, done his part, and then genuinely let it go. And he can press forward without the weight of unresolved bitterness dragging behind him.

This is the final test of forgiveness: not that you never think about the person, not that you feel warmly toward them, but that when you encounter them—even unexpectedly, in the same room—it genuinely does not trouble you. That is release. That is what God is building in you through this process. And it is not something you manufacture. It is something He gives you when you have stayed with the process long enough.

TWO STORIES OF FORGIVENESS IN PRACTICE

These principles are not theoretical. They were worked out in specific, difficult situations—and they produced results that could not have come from any other approach.

A Dominant Mother and a Christmas Disaster

Rich grew up with a mother who was—in his own words—a dominant diva who was always right, irrationally so, and would fight anyone who challenged her. For years he tolerated it. Then came a Christmas gathering where things exploded. He went home and told Linda: we are never spending time with her again. I’m done.

But God began to work on his heart. Have you gone to forgiveness? No, he said. I don’t want to. God pressed: remember, forgiveness is separate from reconciliation. For your own benefit, you need to get there first. It took weeks—months, actually, given how deep the bitterness had built up over a lifetime. But eventually he arrived at genuine forgiveness. He could have talked to her with honor and respect.

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Then he said to God: all right, now should I go reconcile? And God said: that's not a good idea. She is irrational. If you bring truth into the room, it will trigger her and make things worse. You cannot process truth with her. What you can do is honor her and set up a healthy boundary.

So they designed a plan: visit for two nights and three days, without the children, a couple of weeks before Christmas rather than during the holiday itself. They agreed in advance not to join the fight—to let the provocations go off their backs. Linda was assigned to kick Rich's shins when he looked like he was about to engage. He had sore shins by the end of the weekend. But they made it through.

Over time, something changed. Without anyone to fight with, his mother gradually became sweeter. She began to actually like Linda. The relationship never reached full reconciliation—they never sat down and processed the full truth of decades of pain. But it reached a healthy, livable boundary, and it stayed there. She died without that deep reconciliation. And Rich was at peace. Because he had forgiveness, and he had done what he could do.

The Church Executive Who Stormed Out

An acquaintance from church—a senior executive at a Fortune 500 company—called Rich and said he had heard Rich could help people discern God's will. They agreed to meet for lunch. At the table, the man explained that God had told him to quit his job and become a pastor. Rich asked God whether that was true. The answer was no. So Rich said: I cannot confirm that is God's will. I would urge you to keep processing until you receive a clear answer.

The man stood up, threw his utensils down on the plate, and walked out the door. Three days later, a four-page handwritten letter arrived: You are an infidel. A blasphemer. I'm going to bring you before the church board. I don't even believe you're a real Christian.

Rich started writing a rebuttal. God said: what are you doing? I'm setting him straight. Have you gone to forgiveness? No. That's where we start. So Rich went to God with it—and it took a day or two, because the man had pushed real buttons—and he received forgiveness. Now he could speak with honor and respect. Then God said: call him and offer to reconcile. Rich called. The man said: I will never speak to you again in my life. And hung up.

Rich was done. Not because he gave up. But because he had done everything that was his to do. He offered forgiveness—it was not about the other person. He offered reconciliation—the other person declined. The burden had shifted entirely. Rich let it go. Completely. He would see this man at church and feel nothing but ordinary goodwill.

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A full year later, the man called. Would you be willing to meet for lunch? I've tried to be a pastor for twelve months and God blocked everything I tried. I think I understand what you were saying. I'm so sorry. Would you forgive me?

Rich said yes—because he was already in forgiveness. He had never left it. When the man was ready, Rich was ready too. They met. They processed truth. And what God had been trying to do with this man—it turned out he was called not to be a pastor but to lead Celebrate Recovery ministries, which he then started in twenty churches and eventually in a prison in Africa, where it sparked a movement that planted one hundred churches. None of that would have happened if Rich had retaliated. None of it would have happened if the man had not eventually come to the truth.

You will need to practice this—all of it—every day for the rest of your life. You are surrounded by self-centered people in a world of entropy. Conflicts will come. The only question is whether you know what to do with them. If you have learned forgiveness, God will show you what to do every single time. And every single relationship issue is resolvable—either to reconciliation, or to a boundary, or to release. All of it is in God's hands. All of it begins with forgiveness.

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SECTION 4—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

28. Philippians 3:13 says “forgetting what lies behind.” Paul is not denying that painful things happened to him. What does “forgetting” actually mean in this context—and what is the condition that makes that kind of release possible?

29. Verse 14 says Paul presses on “toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” How does the forward orientation—pressing on toward what God has ahead—enable the release of what is behind? What is the connection between those two movements?

30. Verse 15 says “let those of us who are mature think this way.” Maturity in this context means: I have learned what to forget. What would mature handling of conflict and hurt look like in your life—and how does it compare to how you currently handle it?

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For Deeper Understanding

31. In the story of Rich’s mother, reconciliation was never fully achieved—there was never a truthful reckoning with what had happened. Yet the relationship was restored to a healthy, livable state. What made that possible—and what does it say about the different levels at which forgiveness and reconciliation can operate?

32. In the story of the church executive, Rich had to wait a full year—living completely at peace and untroubled—before the other person was ready to engage. What does that story reveal about the relationship between forgiveness and patience? And about God’s timing in the reconciliation process?

33. The teaching says you will need to practice forgiveness all the time, every day, for the rest of your life. That sounds exhausting. But what does it actually look like when forgiveness has become a practiced habit rather than a crisis response? How does it change the experience of conflict?

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For Personal Application

34. Is there a relationship in your life that you have simply stopped investing in—not because you worked through forgiveness and arrived at peace, but because you withdrew to avoid the pain? What would it look like to bring that relationship before God and begin the process honestly?

35. The teaching describes three possible outcomes for every conflict: full reconciliation, partial reconciliation with a boundary, and release without reconciliation. Pick a specific relationship where you are currently struggling. Which outcome does God seem to be leading you toward—and what is your next step?

36. Paul says he pressed on because “Christ Jesus has made me his own.” The security of belonging to Christ is what frees him to release everything behind and move forward. How does your sense of security in Christ affect your ability to forgive? What happens to the process of forgiveness when that security is shaky?

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CLOSING—LESSON 3 EXERCISE

Before moving to Lesson 4, take time to work through the following exercise. This is not optional—it is the practice that makes the lesson real.

Step 1: Write them out.

Make a list of the people toward whom you are carrying anger, hurt, unforgiveness, or bitterness. Include the specific offense—what happened and how it affected you. It is all right to be honest. It is good that you are naming it.

Step 2: Sort them.

For each person on your list, consider: Is this someone from the past—perhaps someone you are no longer in contact with, or someone who has died? For those, there is nothing left to do but release it. Go to forgiveness and let it go. For current relationships, move to Step 3.

Step 3: Go to forgiveness first.

Work through these scriptures with God. Stay with them until you genuinely arrive at a place where you can speak about the person with honor and respect—without bitterness, without the energy of punishment. If you are not there yet, that is fine. Keep going. Do not rush this step.

LESSON 3

THE FIRST FRUIT: FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Step 4: Ask God about reconciliation.

Once you have forgiveness, ask God: Is it good to pursue reconciliation now—or would it make things worse? If yes, go to them. Acknowledge what happened, offer to process truth together, and work toward a real solution. If no, ask God about a boundary that honors the relationship while protecting your health. In either case, release the outcome. You are the ambassador. You carry the truth. The response is not yours to control.

If you need help working through a specific situation, Abide Ministries is available to walk alongside you. Reach out at info@abideministries.com. Do not let this remain theoretical. The abundant life God is promising you runs directly through this process.

LESSON 3

THE FIRST FRUIT: FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

CLOSING—LESSON 3 REVIEW

Three things to carry into Lesson 4:

- Forgiveness is not reconciliation. Forgiveness is between you and God—it is releasing the requirement for the other person to do anything. Reconciliation is a process that requires two people willing to process truth together. Confusing them either produces resentment or false peace.
- The basis for forgiving others is the same basis on which Christ forgave you: His nature. He did it once for all at the cross—for everyone, including the person who hurt you. You are not creating something new when you forgive. You are joining what He has already done.
- All three outcomes—full reconciliation, partial reconciliation with a boundary, and release without reconciliation—are resolvable. If you are in forgiveness and have done your part honestly, you can live in peace regardless of what the other person chooses. In marriage, you are called to keep pursuing reconciliation. In all other relationships, you can release the outcome to God.

In Lesson 4, we move to the next fruit of abiding: making good decisions together. Come prepared to discuss how God guides us into the choices that shape the abundant life He has promised.

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER



**Sowing discord is
an “abomination” to
God.**

In Lesson 3 we worked through forgiveness and reconciliation—the first and most foundational fruit of abiding. If you have not yet completed the Closing Exercise from Lesson 3, set aside time to do so before continuing. The work of forgiveness is ongoing and practical; do not leave it theoretical.

Now we move to the second fruit of abiding: unity. This is the fruit that transforms how we make decisions—individually, as couples, and in community. We live in a culture that is becoming increasingly self-centered, where the message is to trust yourself, honor your own instincts, and take the selfie. God’s way is the opposite. He calls us toward unity—not passive agreement, not caving to someone else’s will, but the active, disciplined pursuit of His will together with the people He has placed in our lives.

Unity is not about compromise. It is about confirmation. When you arrive at genuine unity—unity with the Holy Spirit—God does something specific and remarkable.

SECTION 1: THE BEAUTY AND POWER OF UNITY

We begin with a statement so straightforward that it is easy to pass over too quickly. What does God actually promise when people dwell in unity?

WHEN YOU GET TO UNITY

He says dwelling in unity is “good and pleasant.” What do those words mean here—and what is the specific thing God promises to do when people arrive at unity?

¹ Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!

² It 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!

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³ It 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

- “There”—when you get to unity—the Lord commanded the blessing. What does it mean that He commands it, rather than simply offers it or makes it possible?

- What does dwelling in unity mean—not just arriving at agreement once, but dwelling? What does that ongoing, active orientation look like in a real relationship?

The word “good” here is the same Hebrew category as God’s declaration over His creation in Genesis 1—spectacular, remarkable, the very best. And “pleasant” means enjoyable, delightful. God is not describing duty. He is describing something genuinely wonderful.

And then that word: commanded. Not suggested. Not occasionally available. He commands the blessing—because when you get to unity with His will, you are stepping into what He has already planned and prepared to give you. The blessing is already there. You just have to get to the place where He can release it. Unity is that place.

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

Rich and Linda learned this when their marriage was not going well. Rich was doing what he wanted, and Linda had learned to accept it because she couldn't win the argument. It wasn't unity—it was domination on one side and resignation on the other. Then they found this verse. And they made a simple decision together: we want to live there. We're not good at it yet, but let's learn.

Once you have lived in unity and experienced what it produces, you do not want to leave it. Not because it is always easy—it isn't. But because you know what it feels like when you are not there, and you know what God releases when you are. The more you practice it, the more you realize: why would I want to live any other way?

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

This passage gives three specific reasons why two people working together are stronger than one person alone. What are those three reasons—and what do they have in common?

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

- When your partner is struggling—edgy, frustrated, not at their best—what is the instinctive self-centered response? And what does this passage call you to do instead?

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- The passage ends with “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Who are the three strands—and why is the third strand the most important one?

If one falls, the other lifts up. If one is cold, the other provides warmth. If one is attacked, the other stands alongside. In each case, the role of the partner is not to agree, not to fix, and not to demand better behavior—but to be for the other person. That is what unity looks like in the daily texture of a relationship.

When Rich is edgy and irritable, the self-centered response from Linda would be to become edgy herself—to say, I don’t like being treated this way, shape up. But because they have learned to be for each other, her response became: something is bothering you. Tell me what’s going on. Let me help you get back to a place of peace with God. Not: I will fix it. Not: you owe me better. But: I am for you. I will lift you up.

You cannot fix each other. Apart from Christ, she can do nothing for him—and he can do nothing for her. But what she can do is get him reconnected to God, where the real resource is. That is the work of the threefold cord. The third strand is not one of you. It is Christ. And when He is the center—the one both people are being oriented toward—the cord does not break.

Linda had a vision that captured this: a long banquet table, with Rich at one end and Linda at the other, both of them eating alone, trying to solve their own problems by themselves, not satisfied. Then Jesus appeared at the center of the table—and they got up and sat together on the same side of the table, across from Him. And He began to feed them. Same side of the table. Same direction. Receiving together from the same source. That is unity.

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

SECTION 1—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

1. Psalm 133 says that where people dwell in unity, the Lord “commanded the blessing.” What is the significance of the word “commanded”—as opposed to “offered,” “made possible,” or “provided”? What does it tell us about God’s relationship to the outcome when unity is genuinely reached?

2. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says “woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up.” What kind of falling does this describe—and what does “lifting up” look like in a real marriage or friendship? What prevents people from actually doing this for each other?

3. Verse 12 says a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Who are the three strands—and what happens to the cord when the third strand (Christ) is removed? How does this connect to everything we have learned about abiding?

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THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

For Deeper Understanding

4. The banquet table vision pictures two people on opposite ends of a long table, eating alone and dissatisfied, then moving together to the same side across from Jesus. What does the shift in position represent—and what changes when two people orient themselves toward Christ together rather than toward each other?

5. There is a difference between unity and uniformity, and a difference between unity and simply caving to the other person's will. Based on what you've heard so far, how would you define genuine unity? What is it—and what is it not?

6. Rich describes the early years of his marriage as a situation where he did what he wanted and Linda resigned herself to it. That is not unity—but it might have looked like peace from the outside. What is the difference between genuine unity and the appearance of agreement?

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For Personal Application

7. In your closest relationship right now—marriage or deep friendship—which side of the banquet table are you on? Are you eating alone and trying to solve things independently, or are you genuinely on the same side, oriented together toward Christ?

8. Think of a time when someone who cared about you “lifted you up” when you were struggling—not by fixing things, but by helping you get reconnected to God and to peace. What did they do, and what impact did it have?

9. God commands the blessing when you arrive at unity. Knowing that—knowing it is a command, not a possibility—what would it change about how urgently and consistently you pursue unity in your key relationships?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

SECTION 2: PURSUING UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Unity is not just a pleasant idea. It is a goal that requires disciplined, active pursuit—especially when you disagree. And disagreement is normal. It is not a sign that something is broken. It is often a sign that God is at work.

EAGER TO MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Paul calls us to “walk worthy” of our calling. What qualities does he say are necessary for doing that—and then what does he say to work really, really hard at?

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

Ephesians 4:1–6, ESV

- Paul says to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.” He does not say unity of opinion or unity of decision. Why does it matter that the unity he describes is specifically unity with the Spirit?

- He names humility, gentleness, and patience as necessary qualities. Which of those is most difficult for you personally when you are in a disagreement—and why?

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The Greek word translated “eager” here literally means to work really, really hard. This is not gentle encouragement to try your best. It is an urgent call to make the unity of the Spirit the thing you are actively pursuing in every disagreement.

Notice what kind of unity Paul is calling for: not unity with the other person—unity with the Spirit. Two people can negotiate to a solution. Two people can both cave a little and arrive at a settlement they can both live with. That is not what God is talking about. He is talking about two people working hard together until they both can say: I believe this is what the Holy Spirit is saying. This is His will.

And here is why that matters: the Holy Spirit that is in you is the same Holy Spirit that is in your spouse or your close friend. He cannot tell you two different things. If you are genuinely disagreeing, it simply means that one of you has not seen His will yet—or both of you haven’t. It is not a crisis. It is an invitation to keep seeking.

ONE MIND—WITHOUT CAVING

Paul says “do nothing from selfish ambition” and “count others more significant than yourselves.” The church has often interpreted this to mean: give in to the other person. Why is that actually not what Paul is saying—and what is the risk if you do give in just to end the disagreement?

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Philippians 2:1–6, ESV

- The goal is to be “of the same mind.” When you disagree and neither caves—what are the three possible things God may be doing?

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- Why is caving—just agreeing to end the tension—actually not a holy or humble thing to do? What does it prevent?

The church has often taken verse 4—“look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”—and turned it into a call to surrender your perspective in order to preserve peace. But that cuts the verse in half. The full instruction is: look to your own interests and to the interests of others. Both matter. Your perspective is not to be abandoned just to resolve tension.

If you cave—if you agree simply because the disagreement is uncomfortable—you short-circuit God’s process. He may have been using your perspective to hold the door open for something He was about to reveal. When you close that door prematurely, you both step into an answer that was not His—thinking you’ve arrived at unity, but you haven’t. You’ve arrived at settlement.

When you are in genuine disagreement and both of you maintain integrity, three things may be happening:

- God is showing your partner that your perspective is actually His will—and He needs your partner to see it and receive it.
- God is showing you that your partner’s perspective is actually His will—and He needs you to see it and receive it.
- Neither of you knows yet—because something is about to happen, or new information is coming, and God is using your disagreement to delay so that His timing works out perfectly.

When you know these are the only three possibilities, disagreement loses its power to ruin your day. You can say: we don’t have God’s will yet. That’s fine. Let’s keep going.

A couple in Chicago had been looking for months for a home in the suburbs, going out every weekend, finding nothing they both liked. They called, frustrated: this unity thing isn’t working. Rich told them: there’s a timing issue. Stay with it. Two weeks later, the husband was called by his boss and offered a major position in St. Louis. Had they bought a house, they couldn’t have taken it. God had been using their disagreement to hold them in place until His will was ready to be revealed. Best and none better.

LESSON 4

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WHEN THE DISAGREEMENT IS SHARP

Paul and Barnabas had a sharp, significant disagreement with Jewish believers over whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised. What did they do when they couldn't resolve it—and what were they doing on the way there?

¹ 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.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."⁶ The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

Acts 15:1–6, ESV

- "No small dissension"—this was a sharp disagreement. What does the phrase "gathered together to consider this matter" tell us about the right posture when disagreement reaches an impasse?

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THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

- ▶ While they were traveling to Jerusalem to resolve the dispute, what were Paul and Barnabas doing? What does that teach us about living with joy while a disagreement remains unresolved?

“No small dissension and debate”—this was not a gentle difference of opinion. This was a sharp, significant theological argument that neither side could resolve on its own. So they did exactly the right thing: they brought it to a wider community of people who could help them seek God’s answer together.

And here is the detail that is easy to miss: while they were on the way to Jerusalem to resolve the disagreement, they were sharing what God had been doing—and bringing great joy to everyone they passed through. The dispute had not yet been resolved. They did not yet have the answer. But they were not letting that stop them from walking in joy and celebrating God’s work.

That is the mature posture. We don’t have His will yet. It may take a while. And that is okay—it does not have to ruin our day, our night, our weekend, or our relationship. We can keep going, keep living, keep finding joy in what God is doing, while we stay in the process of seeking His answer.

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

SECTION 2—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

10. Ephesians 4:3 says to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” What is the difference between unity of the Spirit and unity between two people? Why does that distinction matter for how you approach a disagreement?

11. Philippians 2:2 says the goal is to be “of the same mind.” But verse 4 says to look not only to your own interests. How do these two instructions work together—and how does holding both of them prevent either domination or passive caving?

12. Acts 15:6 says the apostles and elders “gathered together to consider this matter.” What does “consider” imply about the posture they brought to the disagreement—and how does that differ from each side defending its position until someone gives up?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

For Deeper Understanding

13. When you are in a disagreement and both people maintain integrity, three things may be happening: God needs you to see the other person's perspective, God needs the other person to see yours, or neither of you has His answer yet. How does knowing these are the only three possibilities change the emotional experience of disagreement?

14. Rich drove a Ferrari at 140 miles per hour and came home wanting to buy one. God confirmed to Linda and then to Rich that the Ferrari was not the answer—but God's desire to thrill Rich was genuine. How does this illustrate the difference between pursuing what you want and pursuing what God wants to give you? What did Rich lose by going to unity—and what did he gain?

15. Paul and Barnabas were walking in joy and sharing God's goodness even while their disagreement with the Jerusalem believers was still unresolved. What does that say about the relationship between unresolved disagreement and personal peace? What has to be true about your heart for that to be possible?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

For Personal Application

16. Is there a current disagreement in your life—with a spouse, a close friend, or about a decision—where you have been either pushing your answer or caving to avoid tension? What would it look like to maintain integrity, stay respectful, and genuinely wait for God’s will?

17. Think of a time when you settled for agreement rather than pursuing genuine unity of the Spirit. Looking back, can you see what God might have been trying to show you through the disagreement that you short-circuited? What happened as a result?

18. The three outcomes of disagreement give peace in the process: one of you will be shown God’s will, or a timing issue is at work. How would actively believing this shift the way you handle the next disagreement you face?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

SECTION 3: SPEAKING TRUTH IN LOVE—THE PROCESS

Knowing that we should pursue unity is one thing. Knowing how to do it practically—especially in real conflict with real emotion—is something else. God gives us a specific process, and it begins not with finding the solution but with understanding the person in front of you.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Paul says to “speak the truth in love.” But what kind of truth are you actually supposed to speak—God’s theological truth, or something else? And what does it mean to speak it in a way that “gives grace to those who hear”?

¹⁵ Rather, 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. [...]

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let 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. ²⁹ Let 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. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:15–16, 25–32, ESV

- Verse 32 says forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you. Before you can process any issue with honor and respect, what has to happen first—and how does Lesson 3’s teaching connect directly here?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

- ▶ Verse 29 says let no corrupting talk come out but only what builds up and gives grace to those who hear. What does corrupting talk look like in a disagreement—and what does its opposite, grace-giving talk, look like?

The truth you are called to speak in love is not God’s theological truth—you don’t have that yet. Do you know God’s will on this issue? Not yet. That is the whole point of the process. The truth you are called to speak is your truth: what you think, feel, and believe right now about this situation. That is the raw material God will use to bring you both to His truth.

And verse 32 is not a conclusion—it is a prerequisite. Before you can process an issue with honor and respect, you have to have forgiveness toward the person you are talking to. If you carry bitterness or energy into the conversation, you will not be speaking the truth in love—you will be prosecuting a case. Go to forgiveness first. Then talk.

THE THINK-FEEL-BELIEVE PROCESS

Here is the practical process for speaking the truth in love toward God’s will:

Step 1: One issue at a time.

Do not bring in past grievances or related issues. Tackle one thing and process it fully before moving to another. Old unresolved issues will surface—but those are signs that prior things never got resolved. God does not want you building up a running list; He wants resolution one issue at a time.

Step 2: One person shares—“What do you think, feel, and believe?”

One person begins by sharing what they think, feel, and believe about the issue. Not the solution. Not a defense. Not a case. Simply: here is what I see and experience right now. This is your truth—as honest and complete as you can make it.

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Step 3: The other person reflects back.

“What I heard you say is this, this, and this. Did I get it right?” Most of the time—especially early in learning this—the answer is no. Not quite. You missed something. You attributed a motive that wasn’t there. You heard the words but not what was underneath them. That is not a failure; it is the work. Keep going until the person says: yes, that’s it. You understand me.

Step 4: Reverse—the listener now shares their truth.

Now the other person shares what they think, feel, and believe—without being shaped by what they just heard. Not a response or a defense: here is my truth, as independently as I can offer it. And the first person reflects it back. Did I get it right?

Step 5: Understand first. Solution second.

The temptation—especially for problem-solvers—is to jump straight to solution. God says: you don’t understand what is going on here yet. Stop talking about solution. First understand. Narrow the actual disagreement down to what it really is. Often you will find there is more agreement than you thought, and the real question is much smaller.

Step 6: Move toward a solution together.

Once both people feel understood, invite a solution: what do you think is a good next step? If neither knows the full answer yet, you can agree on partial steps—go get more information, do some investigation, ask for input. You do not have to have the whole answer in one conversation. What do we do right now to move in the right direction?

Rich and Linda have found that when they do this well, the issue narrows significantly. What seemed like a large disagreement often turns out to be one specific concern—a particular risk, a particular fear, a particular uncertainty—that is actually quite manageable once it is clearly named. The process is not about winning the argument. It is about genuinely understanding each other well enough that God can work through both of you to reveal His will.

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

THE HEART REQUIRED: NEUTRALITY

God appears to Solomon and says: ask what I shall give you. Solomon is already highly educated and accomplished. What does he ask for—and what does the way he asks for it reveal about the heart posture God requires?

⁵ At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.”⁶ And 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.”⁷ And 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.⁸ And 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.⁹ Give 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

- Solomon was educated and experienced—yet he approached God as “a little child” who does not know how to go out or come in. What does that posture look like in practice? What is it called in this teaching?

- Neutrality does not mean having no preferences. What does it mean? And why is neutrality a prerequisite for arriving at genuine unity of the Spirit?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

Solomon had every human resource available to him—education, experience, a lifetime of observing his father David’s wisdom. Yet when God asked what he wanted, he said: I don’t know what I’m doing. I approach this as a child who needs to be taught. Give me an understanding mind—literally in the Hebrew, give me a hearing heart—so that I can discern good from evil, the best from what is merely acceptable.

This posture is called neutrality. Not the absence of preferences—you still have a view, you still have instincts, you still have your truth. But neutrality means: I am willing to be wrong. I am open to having my mind changed. I want God’s answer more than I want my answer to be right. I approach this as a little child who does not yet know.

This is what Linda had to arrive at before the condo decision could be resolved. Rich heard God say: sell the condo. Linda heard nothing of the sort, and she was not neutral—she loved the condo, and she had good reasons. Rich said: are you neutral—meaning, are you willing for the answer to be yes, sell it? She said: no, I’m not there yet. He did not push. He said: go spend time with God and get to neutral. I’ll do the same. A couple of weeks later, she came back. God told me the same thing you heard—sell it.

They listed it in April. They sold it and closed on July 7, 2008—two months before the financial crash. Had they not sold it, they would likely have been holding a property with heavy negative cash flow for years. God knew. And He always knows more than we do. When we get to neutrality and follow His will, we always get the best. Best and none better.

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

SECTION 3—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

19. Ephesians 4:15 says to speak “the truth in love.” In the context of processing a disagreement, what kind of truth is being referred to—and why is it significant that it is your truth, not God’s final truth, at this stage of the process?

20. Verse 29 says let only what is “good for building up” and “gives grace to those who hear” come out of your mouth. What does grace-giving speech look like in the middle of a real disagreement? How does it differ from corrupting talk—even the subtle versions?

21. In 1 Kings 3, Solomon asks for a “hearing heart”—the ability to listen and discern. What does that suggest about the primary activity required in the unity process? Is it speaking or listening—and what is the role of each?

LESSON 4

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For Deeper Understanding

22. The “think-feel-believe” process separates understanding from solution—you must fully understand your partner’s perspective before moving to answers. Why is the impulse to jump to solution so strong—and what damage does it do when you do it prematurely?

23. Rich said that when he reflects back what Linda has shared, she usually says “not quite.” What does this reveal about how well we actually hear each other—and why is the discipline of reflecting back and checking for accuracy so important to the process?

24. Neutrality means being willing for your answer not to be the answer, while still maintaining your integrity about your actual perspective. How is that different from either stubbornness or caving? What does the condo story reveal about what genuine neutrality costs emotionally—and what it produces?

LESSON 4

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For Personal Application

25. Think of a current disagreement or unresolved decision in your life. Have you genuinely arrived at neutrality—meaning you are willing for the answer to be one you would not naturally choose? If not, what is holding you back from getting there?

26. Practice step 2 right now with your spouse or a close friend: ask them “what do you think, feel, and believe?” about one specific issue you have been navigating together. Then try to reflect it back accurately. What did you notice—about their perspective, and about your own listening?

27. The condo sold on July 7, 2008, two months before the financial crash. Rich and Linda had no way of knowing that—but God did. What does this story stir in you about the trustworthiness of God’s will, even when it does not look good from where you stand?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

SECTION 4: WHEN YOU ARE STUCK—LISTEN, WATCH, WAIT

You have gone through the process. You have spoken the truth with honor and respect. You have arrived at mutual understanding. And still you do not have God's will. You are stuck. What now?

God does not leave you without guidance in that moment. He gives you a posture, a practice, and a resource.

LISTEN, WATCH, WAIT

These verses describe how a wise person positions themselves when they do not yet have the answer. What three postures does the passage call for—and what is the promise attached to them?

³² "And now, O sons, listen to me:
blessed are those who keep my ways.
³³ Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
³⁴ Blessed is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the Lord.

Proverbs 8:32–35, ESV

- What does it mean to "listen" when you are stuck and waiting for God's direction? What might His voice sound like in that season—and how do you position yourself to hear it?

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- What does it mean to “watch”? This is not passive sitting. What are you actively looking for as you wait?

- “Wait” does not mean do nothing. What does active waiting look like—and what do you not do while you are waiting?

When you have gone as far as you can and you still do not have God’s will, the instruction is threefold: listen, watch, wait. And none of these is passive.

Listen: be genuinely open to hearing. God may speak to you through scripture, through a quiet impression, through a conversation you were not expecting, through something a friend says. Stay in an attitude of receptivity. Do not close down.

Watch: pay attention to what happens next. God often reveals His will through circumstances—a door that opens, a door that closes, new information that changes the picture, timing that resolves what seemed like an impasse. You are actively looking for what He is showing you.

Wait: do not act until you have unity. Not passively, but actively. Do your due diligence. Do your investigation. Ask questions. Research. Gather information. Move down the path in every way you can—just do not make the final decision until the unity comes. Often it is through the investigation that God reveals what He was waiting for you to discover.

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

GET HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

When should you bring in outside counsel—and what two types of counsel are most valuable?

¹⁴ Where there is no guidance, a people falls,
but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

²² Without counsel plans fail,
but with many advisers they succeed.

Proverbs 11:14; 15:22, ESV

- What is the difference between a spiritual counselor and a technical counselor—and when do you need each?

- The spiritual counselor's role is not to tell you what to do—it is to help you get to God's will and confirm it. What does that kind of counsel look like practically? Why is that more valuable than someone just giving you their opinion?

Do not be afraid to get help. It is not a sign of weakness that you cannot figure this out alone. It is wisdom. God built the need for counsel into the design of community.

Two kinds of counselors are most valuable when you are stuck. The first is a spiritual counselor—someone who knows how to help you pursue God's will rather than simply offering their opinion. The right spiritual counselor will not say "here is what you should do." They will say: tell me where you are in the process. What do you think God has been showing you? Let's go further together. And when you arrive at an answer they can confirm with the same Holy Spirit—that confirmation is powerful.

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The second is a technical counselor—someone with expertise in the specific domain of your question. Legal, financial, medical, engineering, construction—whatever the nature of the decision requires. You do not need them to be a believer. You need them to know more than you do about the specific thing you are navigating. Their input is the raw material God may use to show you something you couldn't see on your own. Be willing to receive it.

WHEN THE ENERGY GETS HIGH: SEPARATE AND RETURN

You are in a disagreement and the emotional energy is rising. What does this passage prescribe—and what is the one critical thing you do in the separate room?

⁴ Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah
⁵ Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the Lord.

Psalm 4:4–5, ESV

- The instruction is: be angry, and do not sin. Anger is legitimate. What is the sin that tends to follow anger in a heated disagreement—and what does “be silent” guard against?

- What is the one thing you are supposed to do when you separate—and what are you explicitly not supposed to do?

Sometimes the emotion in a disagreement gets ahead of the process. The energy starts to rise. Voices go up. The drive to persuade overtakes the willingness to understand. And God says: stop. Separate. Go to your own room, your own space, get quiet, and get your heart right with God.

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What does “get your heart right” mean? Strictly forgiveness. Just release the energy toward the person. Not change your mind about the facts. Not rehearse your arguments. Not soften your position. Just release the emotional charge toward the person so that you can return and speak with honor and respect.

And here is what you do not do while you are separated: you do not go build a stronger case. You do not make a list of everything you want to say. You do not gather more ammunition for the argument. You go to forgiveness. That is all. And when you come back, the question is simple: can we talk nicely now? You both know the answer. If yes, pick it back up. If not, give it more time. That is okay. It can even be tomorrow. The issue will still be there. But you will both be in a much better place to handle it.

Rich and Linda had to learn this the hard way. Rich’s instinct was always to press through: come on, let’s just settle this. Linda had to give herself permission to say: this is not going to go to a good place right now. We need to stop. And Rich had to honor that—even when he didn’t want to. Over time, they both got better at it. The emotional cycle gets shorter. The return to honor and respect happens faster. And the discussions, when they happen, are genuinely productive rather than simply exhausting.

PRACTICING THE PROCESS

Here is the full cycle, when you are working through a real decision or disagreement:

- Start with forgiveness—you need to be able to speak with honor and respect.
- Share what you think, feel, and believe—one issue, one person at a time.
- Reflect back and confirm—do I understand you correctly?
- The other person shares their truth—independently, not as a response.
- Work toward understanding before moving to solution.
- Move toward solution together—partially if needed, and seek further input.
- If emotion rises and the energy gets unhealthy—separate, go to forgiveness, return.
- If stuck, listen, watch, and wait. Stay active. Do due diligence.
- Get help if you need it—spiritual counsel or technical expertise.
- Do not act until you have unity with the Spirit.

You are not going to be good at this when you start. There is too much flesh in the way. That is normal. But if you practice, it gets easier—and eventually it becomes the most natural and enjoyable way to navigate decisions together. The disagreement stops being a threat and becomes simply a sign that God’s will is still coming. And when you arrive at unity and see what He had in mind—you will want to do it again.

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THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

SECTION 4—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

28. Proverbs 8:34 says “blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.” This describes a posture of attentive, daily, expectant waiting. What does that look like in practice for a person navigating an unresolved decision? What habits or disciplines does it suggest?

29. Proverbs 11:14 says safety comes in an abundance of counselors. What does “abundance” suggest—and what is the risk of having only one advisor, even a very good one? How does having multiple counselors protect the process of seeking God’s will?

30. Psalm 4:4 says “be angry, and do not sin”—then says to be silent and ponder in your heart. What is the connection between anger and silence here? What does the silence protect—and what does it allow to happen?

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THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

For Deeper Understanding

31. The teaching describes two types of counselors: spiritual and technical. What makes each one valuable—and why are they both necessary? Can a spiritual counselor substitute for technical expertise, or vice versa?

32. When you separate in the middle of a heated disagreement, you go strictly to forgiveness—not to build a stronger case. What is the temptation in that moment, and what makes the “ammunition gathering” approach so counterproductive to genuine unity?

33. The full cycle—from forgiveness through listening, watching, and waiting—is designed to be practiced and learned, not perfected immediately. What does it look like for a couple or close friendship to commit to practicing this process, even badly at first? What would you need to give each other permission to do?

LESSON 4

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For Personal Application

34. Where in your current life are you in a “listen, watch, wait” season—a decision or situation where you have done what you can and you are now waiting on God to reveal the next step? What does actively waiting look like for you right now?

35. Do you have a spiritual counselor—someone who will help you pursue God’s will rather than simply give you their opinion? If not, who in your life could serve that role? What would it look like to cultivate that kind of relationship intentionally?

36. Think of a recurring argument or tension in a key relationship that seems to come up again and again without resolution. What step of the unity process might be getting skipped or short-circuited? What is one specific thing you could do differently next time it surfaces?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

CLOSING—LESSON 4 EXERCISE

Before moving to Lesson 5, take one real issue or decision you are currently facing and work through the unity process with your spouse or a close friend. Use the steps below as your guide.

The Issue or Decision:

Step 1—Forgiveness check.

Can I speak about this with honor and respect? If there is emotional charge, go to God first and release it. Return when you are genuinely ready.

Step 2—What do you think, feel, and believe?

One person shares. The other reflects back. Keep going until the sharer says: yes, you understand me.

Step 3—What does your partner think, feel, and believe?

The other person shares independently. First person reflects back and confirms understanding.

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Step 4—Narrow the real question.

Where do you agree? What is the actual, specific area of disagreement? State it as clearly as you can.

Step 5—Move toward a solution or next step.

What does each of you think is a good next move? Do you agree? If not, what can you do right now to move toward God's answer—investigation, due diligence, counsel?

Am I neutral?

Write an honest answer here: Am I genuinely willing for the answer to be something other than my current preference? If not, what do I need to bring to God before I can arrive at neutrality?

LESSON 4

THE SECOND FRUIT: UNITY AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER

CLOSING—LESSON 4 REVIEW

Three things to carry into Lesson 5:

- God commands the blessing when you dwell in unity with His Spirit. It is not a possibility or an occasional reward. It is a command. When you arrive at genuine unity—you get the best, and none better.
- Unity is not agreement, negotiation, or caving. It is two people working hard together—with humility, patience, and integrity—until the Holy Spirit confirms His will to both of them. Disagreement along the way is not a problem. It is often the process.
- The process has a sequence: forgiveness first, then understanding, then solution, then listen-watch-wait if you are still stuck. Do not skip steps. Do not rush. And get help when you need it—both spiritual and technical.

In Lesson 5, we continue learning more about how to go to unity in the Spirit—deepening the process and exploring what it looks like as life becomes more complex. Come prepared to keep practicing.

LESSON 5

BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT



The Holy Spirit is not a vague force; He is our personal guide.

In Lessons 3 and 4, we worked through two fruits of abiding: forgiveness and unity. We learned that forgiveness is between you and God and must precede every attempt at reconciliation. We learned that unity with the Spirit—not just agreement between people—is what God commands blessing upon.

In this lesson, we go deeper into the engine that makes all of it work: being led by the Holy Spirit. Everything we have learned about abiding—hearing God’s voice, letting the vine dresser make the decisions, speaking truth in love, pursuing unity, listening and watching and waiting—all of it is the lived experience of following the Holy Spirit’s lead. And this, God says, is not supposed to be strange or exceptional. It is supposed to be normal.

We will also look at two related topics: how prayer works when you are being led by the Spirit rather than presenting a wish list, and how God loves to give you the desires of your heart as you delight in Him.

SECTION 1: LED BY THE SPIRIT— SONS, NOT SLAVES

The Christian life is often described as a constant struggle—you are going to fail, you are going to fall back into the flesh, and the best you can do is pick yourself up and keep trying until you get to heaven. Paul has a very different picture. He says you are not obligated to live in the flesh. He wants you to reverse your default.

LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Paul says “we are debtors, not to the flesh.” What does that mean—and how does it reframe the normal Christian expectation about spiritual failure and growth?

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For 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. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit

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BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT

of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For 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!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and 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

- Paul says we have received “the Spirit of adoption” by which we cry “Abba! Father!”—Daddy. What does that cry tell us about the relationship God intends—and what does a toddler’s relationship with their father look like practically?

- Verse 14 says “all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” What is the condition for experiencing the full blessing of sonship—and what does being led actually require of us?

- The Spirit “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” When have you experienced that internal witness—that settled knowing that God is speaking to you or confirming something to you? What did it feel like?

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Paul's instruction is to reverse your default assumption. Typically we think: it is normal to be in the flesh, and once in a while I will have a spiritual moment. He says: no. Make it normal to live in the Spirit. Once in a while you will notice that you have drifted into the flesh—and when you do, the remedy is simple. What is it?

Repentance. Not fixing. Not punishment. Not a long program of self-improvement. Just turn around and come back. He says, don't fix it—just come on back. Walk in the Spirit, and the Spirit will lead you into life. And he is clear: this is normal, not abnormal. The church often teaches that spiritual maturity is the exception for a few unusually devoted people. Paul says it is the birthright of every child of God.

What does living like a child of God look like in practice? Think of a toddler with a loving parent. The toddler is not worried about their retirement account, their career trajectory, or how they will pay for college. They wake up and ask: what are we doing today? They trust completely. They hold the parent's hand and go. That is the picture. Trust the Spirit who is leading you today. He will resolve your issues. He will guide you through the decisions. Your role is to follow.

Rich met a president of a large, well-known ministry who admitted he was not enjoying what he was doing. Too heavy, too burdened, doing it for God but not experiencing joy. Rich began teaching him to abide. In their third meeting, the man confessed he was addicted to pornography—had tried everything to fix it, nothing worked. Rich's response was not: you need to quit. His response was: do you want to be led by the Holy Spirit? Do you want to be healed? You've already proven you can't do this yourself. But if you have a heart to go, the Spirit will guide you into freedom. He did. And over time, the Spirit transformed him—because transformation is what the Spirit does when we follow His lead.

LESSON 5

BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT

SECTION 1—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

1. Romans 8:12 says “we are debtors, not to the flesh.” What does it mean to owe something to the flesh—and what does it mean to say we do NOT owe it that? How does this reframe the way we think about spiritual failure?

2. Verse 13 says “if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” The Spirit is the agent—not your willpower. What does this say about why self-effort to overcome sin patterns always falls short—and what is the alternative?

3. Verse 15 contrasts “the spirit of slavery” with “the Spirit of adoption.” What is the difference between relating to God as a slave and relating to Him as a child? How does that difference show up in how you approach daily decisions, prayer, and spiritual struggle?

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For Deeper Understanding

4. Paul says the Spirit “bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” This internal witness is one of the ways we recognize God’s voice. What does that witness feel like—and how do you distinguish it from wishful thinking or self-deception?

5. The toddler image describes a child who is fully dependent, fully trusting, fully present to what is happening today—not anxious about tomorrow. How does that image challenge the way you currently relate to God? Where do you most struggle to live as a child rather than a self-sufficient adult?

6. The pornography story illustrates that the Spirit transforms what willpower cannot. What does this tell us about the relationship between abiding, being led by the Spirit, and genuine character change? Why is “try harder” not the answer—and what is?

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For Personal Application

7. What is your default assumption about which is normal—the flesh or the Spirit? Do you expect to mostly be in the flesh with occasional spiritual moments, or mostly in the Spirit with occasional drift into the flesh? What would it look like to genuinely reverse that expectation?

8. When you have drifted into the flesh—into self-centeredness, anxiety, anger, or independence from God—what has been your typical response? How does “just turn around and come back” land differently than the way you have usually approached it?

9. Is there a pattern in your life that you have tried repeatedly to fix by willpower and cannot change? What would it look like to bring that to the Holy Spirit and ask to be led out of it—not through effort but through following?

LESSON 5

BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT

SECTION 2: THE HOLY SPIRIT AS GUIDE— INTERACTIVE AND PERSONAL

The Holy Spirit does not drop a book on your table and say: all the information you need is in there, good luck. He is a guide. And guides are interactive. They take you somewhere, they explain what you are seeing, they respond to your questions, they stay with you until you understand—and then they take you to the next thing.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH WILL GUIDE YOU

Jesus says the Spirit will guide you into “all the truth.” What kind of truth is He referring to here—and what does the word “guide” tell us about how that truth is delivered?

¹³ When 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. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All 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

- ▶ The Spirit will not speak on His own authority—He speaks what He hears from the Father. How does that connect to the whole picture of the vine, the vine dresser, and abiding? Who is ultimately directing all of this?

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- He says He will “declare to you the things that are to come.” This is not fortune-telling—it is a heads up. What is the difference, and what does it mean practically when the Spirit alerts you to pay attention to something ahead?

- Verse 15 says “all that the Father has is mine.” The Spirit transfers to you everything that belongs to Christ. What does it mean to be an heir who has access to all of that—and how does being led by the Spirit make that access real?

Think about what it means to have a guide at a museum rather than wandering on your own. You could read every placard, follow every map, and still miss most of what is actually there. A guide takes you to the first thing, explains it, waits for your questions, responds to what you are actually curious about, and then moves you to the next thing at your pace. That is what the Holy Spirit does.

The truth He guides you into is not abstract theological knowledge. It is the truth about your situation—your decisions, your relationships, your circumstances. He takes the questions you are actually carrying and leads you into His answers for those specific questions. Step by step. He is not on a one-hour tour where he has to rush you through everything. He stays with you until you get it, and then He takes you to the next thing.

And He does give heads-ups. When the ministry was starting to grow, the Spirit said to Rich and Linda: pay attention—it is about to expand, and you will need a new retreat house. That was not a complete picture. It was not a detailed plan. It was a signal: something is coming, keep space open for it, and watch for what I am about to show you. It changed how Rich responded to invitations from other ministries, because he knew God had told him something that required him to keep margin available. The heads-up made the difference.

LESSON 5

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ALL THE PROMISES OF GOD ARE YES

Paul says God’s word to us is not “Yes and No.” What would it mean if God’s promises were sometimes yes and sometimes no—and what does it mean that they are always Yes?

¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. ¹⁹ For 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. ²⁰ For 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. ²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and 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

- “All the promises of God find their Yes in him.” The response we give to that is “Amen.” What does Amen mean—and what posture does it describe when you receive a promise from God?

- The Spirit is given to us as a “guarantee.” A guarantee of what—and how does that change the way you carry a situation that is not yet resolved?

LESSON 5

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God's promises are not variable. He does not say yes to some people and no to others depending on their spiritual standing, their luck, or their worthiness. All of His promises are yes. If He says it, He will deliver it. You may not know the when. You may not know the how—and He may actually surprise you with a how that you never would have predicted. But if He says it, it happens.

Rich received a letter from the IRS in 1998: you owe \$500,000 in unpaid payroll taxes from a company board he had served on years earlier. He had no knowledge of the unpaid taxes. He had no cash available in that amount. His attorney told him the assessor assigned to his case was the toughest in the country—had never once reversed an IRS determination. Rich and his family went to God. Specific scriptures came: I will resolve this for you. Do not fret. His family received those promises clearly before he did. They kept drawing him back: God said He is going to do this. Trust it.

Over time, Rich arrived at genuine peace. He did not know the how—he assumed God would provide the money somehow. That was not the how. The phone call from his attorney came while his family was at the pool: the assessor had let him off completely. No payment. No legal battle. Case closed. The attorney—who knew Rich was a believer—said: I think your prayers are working. I have never seen this happen. The promise had been yes. The amen had been prayed. God had delivered it—in a way none of them had imagined.

The family's confidence strengthened Rich's faith. This is the power of unity in prayer—when others who have the same Holy Spirit receive the same confirmation, it builds the faith of everyone involved. Unity is not just for decision-making. It is the environment in which God's promises become real and unshakeable.

LESSON 5

BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT

SECTION 2—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

10. John 16:13 says the Spirit will guide you into “all the truth.” The same word “truth” appeared in John 8 (“the truth will set you free”). What kind of truth is this—and how does the word “guide” shape the way we are meant to receive it? What would “guided into truth” look like differently from “told the truth”?

11. Verse 13 also says the Spirit “will declare to you the things that are to come.” Based on the teaching, what is the purpose of this foreshadowing—and what does it require of you in response? How is it different from simply knowing the future?

12. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says “all the promises of God find their Yes in him.” How does this statement reframe the way you have typically thought about whether God will answer a specific prayer? What does “all” actually mean—and what is the only thing that determines whether a promise applies to your situation?

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For Deeper Understanding

13. The museum guide analogy describes the Holy Spirit's guidance as interactive—He takes you to the first thing, explains it, waits for your questions, and then moves you to the next thing. How does that image differ from the way you have typically approached Scripture and prayer? What would it look like to engage with God the way you would engage with a knowledgeable guide?

14. Rich's family received the promise clearly before he did—and they kept drawing him back to it when he was struggling to believe. What does this tell us about the role of community in receiving God's promises? Why does it matter to process God's word with others rather than alone?

15. Rich assumed God would deliver the promise by providing \$500,000 through an investment. God's actual "how" was completely different. What does this story reveal about the danger of trying to predict how God will fulfill His word—and why does He not typically reveal the how in advance?

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For Personal Application

16. Is there a current situation in your life where you need a specific promise from God—not a general assurance, but a clear word about this specific thing? What would it look like to go to God and ask Him to speak to this situation, then stay in the Word until He does?

17. Has God ever given you a heads-up—a sense that something was about to change, or that you should pay attention to a specific area of your life? Looking back, how did you respond—and what would you do differently now?

18. What promise of God do you most struggle to believe is “yes” for you personally—as opposed to “yes for other, more spiritual people”? What would it look like to sit with that promise and let it truly abide in you until faith comes?

LESSON 5

BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT

SECTION 3: ABIDING, ASKING, AND THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART

We come now to two of the most personal and practical aspects of being led by the Spirit: learning to ask with confidence as you abide, and discovering that God genuinely wants to give you the desires of your heart.

ASK WHATEVER YOU WISH

Jesus gives two conditions and then makes a sweeping promise. What are the conditions—and what does it mean for a word to “abide in you”?

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

John 15:7–8, ESV

- What is the difference between hearing a promise and having it abide in you? What does it take for a word to truly get into your soul?

- Verse 8 says the Father is glorified when you bear much fruit. For God to be glorified, what does that require the fruit to look like—why does the answer need to be supernatural rather than natural?

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Two conditions: abide in Me—meaning you are in the relationship, walking with Him, being led by His Spirit, not just occasionally checking in. And let My words abide in you—meaning they settle into your soul. You memorize them. You pray them. You sit with them and keep asking: what does this mean? How does this apply? You do not hear a promise and immediately move to the next thing. You stay with it.

In the IRS situation, the family received promises and stayed with them. They memorized the specific verses. They prayed them repeatedly. They talked through what they meant. They kept asking God to help them understand and believe. The promises had to get from their heads into their souls—and that took time and consistent engagement. But when they had truly abided in those words, the asking became confident prayer, and the answer came.

When the answer does come—and it is clearly supernatural, clearly something only God could have arranged—the Father is glorified. Not because you quoted the right verse, but because what happened cannot be explained apart from God. That is what brings Him glory. And that is what builds faith—not just in the people directly involved, but in everyone who hears the story.

HE GIVES YOU THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART

He says “delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” What does delighting in the Lord mean—and does He censor or spiritualize the desires He promises to give?

³ Trust in the Lord, and do good;
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.

⁴ Delight yourself in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

⁵ Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.

⁶ He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,
and your justice as the noonday.

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⁷ Be 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!

⁸ Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!
Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

Psalm 37:3–8, ESV

- What does “delight yourself in the Lord” mean practically? What does someone who genuinely delights in God look like—and how does that become the condition for receiving the desires of your heart?

- He says “commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” What is your role—and what is His? What does it mean that He will “bring forth your righteousness as the light”?

- “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not.” What is the opposite of fretfulness—and why is fret specifically described as tending toward evil?

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He will give you the desires of your heart. He does not censor them. He does not require that they be sufficiently spiritual. You have desires—things that would thrill you, things you dream about, things that are just part of who you are. He wants to give those to you. If something needs to be refined—like wanting a Ferrari when what you really love is driving fast—He will adjust it. But He starts from: I know the essence of you, and I want to give you that.

The List of 100 Desires

Years ago, Rich and Linda were encouraged to write out the desires of their hearts—one hundred of them—without censoring or spiritualizing. They wrote things like: I would like a condo in downtown Chicago. I would like to live on a golf course. I would like to do retreats in castles in Europe. I would like to have a private dinner at the White House. They wrote it down and put it in a file. Then they forgot about it.

Twenty years later, while clearing out files to move, Rich pulled out that list. He sat down and went through it. Fifty-four of the one hundred had been fulfilled. The condo. The golf course. The castle retreats—that was actually how the ministry started. The White House dinners—three of them, by that point. They had not chased any of these things. They had delighted in the Lord, committed their ways to Him, and trusted Him to act. And He had. Item by item.

There was still one on the list: attend a Final Four NCAA basketball game. Rich noticed it and asked God: should I just buy tickets? No. I'll give it to you. So Rich let it go. Two years later, through a ministry assignment involving Henry Blackaby and a discipleship program for CEOs, Rich was randomly paired with Greg—the CEO of Learfield Sports, the company that manages marketing and events for the NCAA. Greg invited Rich and Linda as his guests for the full Final Four weekend: the Friday party with players and coaches and celebrities, midcourt suite seats for all the games, all expenses covered. God's "how" was, as always, far better than anything Rich would have purchased on his own.

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A Grandson and a Foul Ball

Rich's grandson—twelve or thirteen years old at the time—was a baseball player who loved the Rockies. They were invited to watch a game from a suite. His grandson immediately calculated the physics and declared he did not want to go to the suite: the overhang and the trajectory made it impossible to catch a foul ball there, and catching a foul ball was the point.

Rich told him they were going anyway—but suggested they pray that God would give him the desires of his heart. They settled into their third-base-side suite. Second or third inning, a left-handed batter lined one toward them. The ball tracked exactly as the grandson had predicted—it drifted downward below the overhang. And then it reversed. Defied gravity. Came up and into the suite. Rich put his hand up. The ball landed in it. Everyone in the adjacent suites saw it. The whole section was buzzing: did you see that? It reversed. Rich handed his grandson the ball. The grandson understood immediately. He told the story. He is in college now. The ball still sits in a glass case next to his bed.

You will have seasons of life, and each season will have its own desires. Children, grandchildren, where you want to live, what work you want to do, what experiences you want to have. Do not censor them. Do not worry whether they are spiritual enough. Write them down. Bring them to God. Don't chase them. Delight yourself in Him and commit your way to Him. Watch what He does. He loves to give good things to His children—and His version of your desire is always better than what you would have arranged yourself.

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SECTION 3—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

19. John 15:7 gives two conditions before the promise “ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” What does each condition require—and why is the sequence (abide in Me, then let My words abide in you) important? What does each one add that the other does not?

20. Verse 8 says this brings glory to the Father. For something to glorify God, it must be visibly supernatural—not explainable by ordinary circumstances. Why is the supernatural outcome necessary to the whole picture? What does it say about the kind of life God intends His children to live?

21. Psalm 37:5 says “commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” Who acts, and who commits? How does committing your way differ from simply asking for what you want—and what does genuine commitment look like when you do not yet know what He will do?

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For Deeper Understanding

22. The promises must “abide in you”—not just be heard. What does that process look like over time? What is the difference between a promise you have memorized and a promise that has settled into your soul, reshaping what you actually expect?

23. Rich found his list of 100 desires twenty years later—54 fulfilled, none of them chased. What does this story reveal about the relationship between desire, trust, and God’s timing? What does it say about the kind of life God is trying to build for you when you delight in Him?

24. The foul ball story ended with a twelve-year-old boy who understood immediately what had happened and who still keeps that ball next to his bed in college. What does it mean for faith formation—in children and adults alike—to actually experience God doing something clearly impossible? Why does it matter that this kind of thing happens in ordinary life, not just in ancient Bible stories?

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For Personal Application

25. Take a few minutes right now and write down some desires of your heart. Do not censor them. Do not require them to be spiritual or serious. What would thrill you in the next five years? What do you dream about?

26. Is there a promise God has spoken to you—through Scripture, through a strong internal impression, through confirmation from others—that you have not yet fully believed? What is keeping you from arriving at genuine faith that it is yes for you?

27. “Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him, and He will act.” What does it mean to commit rather than control? In your current season, what is one area where you are still trying to make things happen rather than trusting God to act?

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SECTION 4: PRAYER—AGREEING WITH GOD’S WILL

Most of us learned to pray as children: tell God what you want, and hope He agrees. The prayer list. The wish list presented upward. And then we wonder why so many of those prayers seem to go unanswered. Jesus has a completely different model.

WHATEVER YOU BIND AND WHATEVER YOU LOOSE

Jesus says that if two agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done by the Father in heaven. Why does this promise confuse people—and what does “agree” actually mean in this context?

¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again 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. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

Matthew 18:18–20, ESV

- People have tried to use this verse by agreeing with another person that they want something—and then it does not happen. What is the misunderstanding? What does “gathered in my name” require that makes this work?

- If prayer is not about presenting your wish list, what is the actual work of prayer—and what is the majority of prayer time meant to be spent doing?

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Jesus says: gather in My name. Gathered in His name means you come to seek His will, not to present yours. The agreement He is describing is not two people deciding together that they both want something. It is two people who have both, through prayer and the Word, arrived at agreement with God—who have heard what He is saying about this situation and come into unity with Him about it.

That is why prayer is mostly listening. It is asking God what He has to say. Reading His Word and staying with it until it speaks. Discussing with your spouse or your community: what are you hearing? What does this passage say about our situation? What do you think God is showing us? Processing until you both arrive at the same place—not because you convinced each other, but because the Holy Spirit has shown you both the same thing.

When that agreement is reached—when you can both say with genuine faith, God told us this, and we are in unity about it—then you pray. And He says: it will be done. Not maybe. Not if you are lucky. It will be done. Because you are not asking for your will. You are agreeing with His will, which He has already determined and is ready to deliver. Your agreement is the signal that you are in the place where He can release the blessing.

This is why unity and prayer are inseparable. Unity is not just a better way to make decisions. It is the posture that positions you to receive everything God has already planned to give you. There the Lord commanded the blessing—when you dwell in unity with Him. Unity with the Spirit is the place where prayer moves from wishful thinking to confident expectation.

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ASK IN FAITH, WITHOUT DOUBTING

James says if you lack wisdom, ask God and He will give it generously. But there is a condition. What is the condition—and what exactly does “doubting” mean here?

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But 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. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

James 1:5–8, ESV

- ▶ James says He gives wisdom generously to all “without reproach.” He does not scold you for not knowing. He simply gives. What does that say about the way God receives a genuine request for wisdom—and what does it say about why you should ask freely?

- ▶ The doubt James is describing is not doubt about whether the specific answer is right. It is doubt about whether God will answer at all. What is the difference—and why does that particular doubt prevent you from receiving?

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- ▶ A six-year-old and a nine-year-old stand in front of you and ask the same question. The nine-year-old understands your answer. The six-year-old does not. What do you do—and what does that illustrate about how God handles our varying capacities to receive His answer?

You lack wisdom about every issue. No matter how experienced or capable you are, you do not know what is around the corner. What looks like a perfectly reasonable decision today could be undermined by something that is about to happen—an economic shift, a relational development, something in your neighborhood or industry or family. God knows all of it. And He says: ask Me. I will give you the answer with great clarity.

The Greek word translated “generously” here literally means with great precision—with great clarity. Not vague impressions. Not maybe. He gives wisdom with precision. That means He will tell you something specific. A specific step to take. A specific thing to investigate. A specific person to call. And it will often be something you would not have thought of on your own.

Scott and Kristen Cornell were building a barn in New Hampshire. The concrete had been laid completely wrong, and the walls were caving in. Every engineer they brought in said the same thing: tear it all out, start over. Big money. Lost season. Then God said: call the building inspector. That was the last person Scott would have thought to call—the building inspector would just enforce the requirement to fix it. But they prayed, confirmed it together, and made the call. The inspector came out within two days—itself remarkable. He took one look and said: I’ve seen this before. Buy some boards. One hundred dollars. Prop them this way, support them here. They’ll come back into line. They did.

The condition for receiving that kind of wisdom is not spiritual maturity. It is not how long you have been walking with God or how well you know Scripture. It is one thing: do you believe God will answer? Have you settled it that He speaks and you will hear Him—even if you do not yet know exactly how or in what form? That settled expectancy—not the absence of all doubt, but the settled conviction that He will answer—is what James calls faith. And it is what opens the door.

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The Couple Arrested at the Beach

During the Covid restrictions, a couple on vacation was arrested for being on a beach where local ordinance had made that illegal. They were booked and released, and now faced the court process. The potential penalty: a year in jail and a \$10,000 fine.

Rich connected them with three attorneys through the American Defense Fund network. The first could help but was backed up for two months. The second had not handled this exact type of case before, but said: I know this court, I know how to do this, and I believe God is going to resolve it for you. The third never called back.

They could not decide between the first two. Rich asked: did anything happen while you were talking to them? Well, the second one—while we were on the phone with him, on a completely overcast day, the clouds broke and a beam of light fell directly on the phone. Rich said: that's your answer. That's the one. Trust it. They hired him.

The attorney got them on a call with the judge. After hearing the explanation, the judge took two days and called back: no fine, no record, everything expunged, case closed. Completely. Ask in faith, and He gives wisdom with precision. Sometimes that precision looks like a ray of light on a phone.

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SECTION 4—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

28. Matthew 18:19 says “if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them.” Many people have tried this and nothing happened. What is the correct interpretation of “agree” here—and what does verse 20 (“gathered in my name”) add that is essential to understanding the promise?

29. James 1:5 says God gives wisdom “generously to all without reproach.” What does “without reproach” mean—and what does it tell us about God’s attitude toward the person who comes and says “I don’t know what to do”? How should that change the way you approach Him with confusing or difficult situations?

30. Verses 7–8 say the doubting person “must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” and is “unstable in all his ways.” Why is double-mindedness—wanting God’s answer but not really expecting it—so corrosive? How does it undermine both prayer and the unity process?

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For Deeper Understanding

31. Prayer, as described in this lesson, is mostly listening—processing the Word together, seeking what God is saying, staying in the question until clarity comes. How does that differ from the way you have typically spent your prayer time? What would a prayer session that looks like this actually feel like?

32. The barn story illustrates God’s precision: the answer was a \$100 fix that no engineer had suggested, revealed by the one person Scott would never have thought to call. What does this say about how God gives wisdom—and what would have been lost if Scott had simply acted on the unanimous advice of the engineers?

33. The attorney story ended with a ray of light on a phone during an overcast day. God’s confirmations are sometimes dramatic and sometimes subtle. How do you learn to recognize them—and what role does the settled expectation that He will answer play in your ability to notice when He does?

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For Personal Application

34. Think of a situation you are currently praying about. Are you primarily presenting a wish list—telling God what you want and asking Him to deliver it—or are you primarily seeking to understand His will? What would you need to shift to make it the second?

35. Have you settled it—genuinely, not just theoretically—that God will answer when you ask for wisdom? Or are you still somewhere in double-mindedness, wanting the answer but not quite expecting it? What would it take for you to arrive at that settled expectancy?

36. Bring a specific issue to mind—a decision, a conflict, a situation you do not know how to navigate. Commit right now to spending time in prayer not asking God to do what you want, but genuinely asking: “What do You have to say about this?” Write down whatever comes.

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CLOSING—LESSON 5 EXERCISE

Before Lesson 6, practice this prayer approach with a real issue in your life. Work through the following steps.

1. Identify the issue.

What decision or situation do you need God's wisdom about right now?

2. Seek His word about it.

Spend time in Scripture and prayer asking: what does God have to say about this? Stay with it. Write down what comes—scriptures, impressions, thoughts that seem to come from outside yourself.

3. Share it with your spouse or a close friend.

Do they hear the same thing? Is there confirmation? Are you moving toward unity—or do you need to keep seeking?

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4. Write the desires of your heart.

Take time separately to write out desires for this season of your life—uncensored. Not just spiritual things. What would thrill you? What do you dream about? Write freely and then bring those to God. Do not chase them. Commit your way to Him and trust Him to act.

In Lesson 6, we will learn how to get into the Word and process it well as we abide—deepening the very practice that makes everything else in this course possible.

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CLOSING—LESSON 5 REVIEW

Three things to carry into Lesson 6:

- Living in the Spirit is supposed to be normal—not the exception. You are not obligated to live in the flesh. When you drift, the remedy is simple: repent, turn around, come back. Do not fix it. Just return.
- All the promises of God are Yes in Christ. He does not say yes to some and no to others. If He says it, He will do it. You may not know the when or the how—and His how will often surprise you. But the promise is yes. Your response is Amen.
- Prayer is not a wish list. It is the process of seeking God’s will until you arrive at unity with Him—and then asking from that place of agreement. That is when He says: it will be done. That is when He is glorified. That is when faith grows.

Practice writing the desires of your heart this week. Bring them to God without censoring or spiritualizing. And in your next disagreement or decision, practice the prayer posture: not “here is what I want” but “what do You have to say about this?”

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD



**If we abide in Him,
His words must
abide in us.**

This is the final lesson of Abiding in the Vine. We have covered the core of what abiding is and what it produces: living in relationship with Christ as the vine, being guided by the Father as the vine dresser, bearing the fruit of forgiveness, unity, and being led by the Holy Spirit. We have seen that God's promises are yes, that prayer is agreeing with His will, and that the desires of your heart are safe in His hands.

This lesson closes with what is in many ways the most practical question of the whole course: how do you actually abide in the Word? Not how to study the Bible as information. Not how to do a devotion. But how to sit at God's feet—the way Mary sat at Jesus' feet—and receive what He has to say to you personally, let it get into your heart, and be transformed by it.

We close with the Ezekiel 34 exercise—a guided first step into this practice that you can begin today.

SECTION 1: RELATIONSHIP, NOT BIBLE STUDY—MARY AND MARTHA

There is a critical distinction that runs through everything in this course: abiding is not Bible study. It is relationship. It is not acquiring information about God. It is receiving what God is saying—to you, personally, right now. Mary understood this. Martha did not.

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

Martha is serving Jesus—busy, anxious, working hard to do something good for Him. Jesus says she has missed the point. What is the one thing necessary that Mary chose, and why does Jesus say it will not be taken from her?

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and

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said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.”⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 10:38–42, ESV

- ▶ Martha is serving Jesus—that sounds noble. Why does Jesus say she is actually serving herself? What is the difference between doing things for Jesus and abiding with Jesus?

- ▶ “Sitting at his feet” was not Mary sitting on the floor while Jesus lectured. It was a posture of intimate, two-way dialogue—the Greek word for “teaching” here is didactic, meaning dynamic back-and-forth. What does that tell us about what abiding in the Word actually looks like?

- ▶ Jesus says this is the “one thing necessary.” What does calling it necessary reveal about His priorities—and about what He is trying to guard in Mary against Martha’s demand?

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Martha was busy doing good things for Jesus. She was working hard, preparing, serving. If you had asked her what she was doing, she would have said: I am serving the Messiah. And she would have been right—about the activity. But Jesus gently exposes something else: she decided on her own what needed to be done and then did it. She never asked Him what He wanted. She was serving herself in Jesus' name.

Mary, by contrast, was doing nothing productive. She was just sitting there, in dialogue with Jesus, receiving what He had to say. And when Martha demanded that Jesus make her get up and help, Jesus said no. Not because the work did not matter—there would be time for that. But because what Mary was doing was so much more important that He would not let anything interrupt it.

That is what abiding in the Word looks like: sitting with Jesus, in dialogue, receiving what He has to say. Not checking off a reading plan. Not completing a devotional. Not preparing a lesson. Just: what are You saying to me? And staying there until you genuinely receive it.

Abiding is not about quantity. It is about receiving. A devotion you read and forget by lunchtime has not abided in you. A verse you have been sitting with for three weeks—praying it, questioning it, journaling it, asking what it means—that is abiding. The goal is not to cover ground. The goal is to receive what God has specifically prepared to give you right now.

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SECTION 1—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

1. Jesus tells Martha she is “anxious and troubled about many things.” What is the connection between anxiety and trying to serve God from self—deciding on your own what needs to be done and doing it? How does abiding address the root of that anxiety?

2. Verse 42 says “one thing is necessary.” Jesus does not say Mary’s approach is one good option among others. He calls it necessary. What does that word signal about how God views time spent receiving from Him versus time spent doing for Him?

3. The word “teaching” in this passage describes dynamic, two-way dialogue—not a one-way lecture. How does understanding abiding as an interactive dialogue rather than passive listening change how you approach your time in the Word?

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For Deeper Understanding

4. Rich says the difference between Martha and Mary is this: Martha decided what Jesus needed and provided it. Mary asked what Jesus wanted and received it. How does that distinction show up in your current approach to Bible reading and prayer? Which mode are you usually in?

5. Most believers have experienced a devotion or scripture reading that stayed with them for years—and many more that disappeared by the next morning. What made the difference in the ones that stuck? What was happening in you when the Word actually got in?

6. Rich says abiding is “not absent of the Word of God, because that’s the center piece of it—but it’s relationship, not Bible study.” How would you explain the difference between those two things to someone who has only ever done the latter?

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For Personal Application

7. When you currently spend time in Scripture, which is more common: reading to cover material, or sitting in dialogue until you receive something? What would it look like to shift from the first to the second?

8. Rich asks: “What is God saying to you?”—not “What did you read?” If someone asked you that question right now, what would you say? What has God been speaking to you in this season, and how deep has it gotten into you?

9. The Mary posture requires stopping other things—including good, productive things—to sit and receive. What is the “Martha activity” in your life that most often crowds out this time? What would it take to protect the one thing necessary?

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SECTION 2: GETTING THE WORD INTO YOUR HEART

Receiving the Word is not passive. There is active work involved in getting what God is speaking off the surface of the page and into your soul. The Word has to travel from your mind into your heart. And that journey takes time, attention, and specific practices.

KEEP MY WORDS WITHIN YOUR HEART

The father in this passage instructs his son with unusual urgency: get wisdom, get insight, do not forsake her, love her, keep her. What does the intensity of these instructions tell us about the value of what is being described—and what does it mean for God’s words to be kept “within your heart”?

¹ Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction,
and be attentive, that you may gain insight,
² for I give you good precepts;
do not forsake my teaching.
³ When I was a son with my father,
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
⁴ he taught me and said to me,
“Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live.
⁵ Get wisdom; get insight;
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.
⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.
⁷ The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever you get, get insight. [...]

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²⁰ My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.
²¹ Let them not escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.
²² For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.
²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

Proverbs 4:1–7, 20–23, ESV

- “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.” This seems circular. What does it actually mean—and what does it tell us about how you begin the process of abiding deeply in the Word?

- Verse 23 says “from it flow the springs of life.” What “it” is the verse referring to—and why does everything in the abundant life flow from that particular source?

The Word has to get into your heart—not just your head. This is the whole challenge and the whole practice. Most Scripture reading stays at the surface. You understand it intellectually, you agree with it, and then you move on. Nothing is transformed. God says: I want something different. I want My words to get into the very center of you, the place from which your life flows.

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Abiding in a section of Scripture typically means staying in the same passage for two to eight weeks—sometimes longer. You do not move on because you finished reading it. You move on when you have received it. When you have understood it, believed it, and begun to experience it. Until then, stay.

If you start now—even young, even early—and build this library of received truth, the depth and richness of what you carry will be extraordinary ten, twenty, thirty years from now. You will not just know about forgiveness. You will carry forgiveness. You will not just know about God’s faithfulness. You will have walked through it again and again, in your own story.

WHEN THE WORDS ARE READY ON YOUR LIPS

This passage describes a progression: words received, then kept, then ready on your lips. What does it mean for God’s words to be “ready on your lips”—and how do you know when you have arrived at that point?

¹⁷ Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise,
and apply your heart to my knowledge,
¹⁸ for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,
if all of them are ready on your lips.
¹⁹ That your trust may be in the Lord,
I have made them known to you today, even to you.
²⁰ Have I not written for you thirty sayings
of counsel and knowledge,
²¹ to 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

- Verse 19 says “I have made them known to you today, even to you.” What does that “even to you” communicate—and what does it say about who is qualified to receive God’s word?

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- The goal of this passage is not just personal transformation but being able to “give a true answer to those who sent you.” How does deeply receiving God’s Word in your own life eventually equip you to serve others?

Here is how you know whether the Word is getting into your heart: you can speak it. Not just reference it—speak it. You can say it without looking it up, because it is actually in you. When Linda was first beginning to abide in Isaiah 55, she would read the verses from the Bible when asked what God was saying to her. That is where it starts. Two weeks later, she was speaking those verses from memory—not as a performance, but because they were becoming part of her. That is the marker.

This is a library being built within you. And the remarkable thing about this library is that the Holy Spirit can pull from it at any moment. A verse you absorbed five years ago will surface when you need it most—for yourself or for someone standing in front of you—because it is in there. God has “made it known to you,” and it does not leave.

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Practical Tools for Getting the Word In

Write out verses longhand. Do not type them, do not just read them on a screen. Write them by hand. Something connects between the hand, the eye, and the heart when you do this that does not happen otherwise. Words that you might have glossed over become visible in a new way.

Use a solid translation. For serious abiding work, the NASB, New King James, or NIV are reliable. A paraphrase is someone's interpretation of the Bible, not the Bible itself—useful for new believers finding their footing, but too loose for deep abiding. Keep an Amplified Bible nearby for those moments when a single English word is clearly carrying more weight than it can hold—the Amplified unpacks the original language range of a word in ways that open up what you are sitting in.

Use a cross-reference Bible. When you are abiding in a passage, the cross-references take you to other places in Scripture that speak to the same truth. Follow them. Read the whole paragraph when you arrive, not just the specific verse. Write out any additional verse that strikes you. Cross-referencing builds the connective tissue of your understanding.

Go to the Greek and Hebrew. The original languages have approximately 15,000 words available to them; English manages around 5,000. A lot gets lost in translation. When you hit a word that matters—especially one that seems confusing or contradictory—go deeper. The Interlinear Bible at studylight.org lets you click on any English word and see exactly what Greek or Hebrew word underlies it, with a full range of meaning. This is where verses that seem to say something obvious reveal that they are actually saying something far richer.

Memorize. Commit the verses you are abiding in to memory—not as a program, but as a natural part of the process. Linda keeps five-by-seven spiral-bound cards with the verses she has been abiding in each year. They are with her in her car, in her purse, wherever she goes. She can pull from any year and the words are as fresh as the day she received them, because they are genuinely in her heart.

Psalm 16:7 says that while you sleep, God is at work. Memorizing verses before bed, praying them as you fall asleep, is not a ritual—it is giving God working space while your logical mind is quiet. Many people find that something shifts in their understanding overnight when they have been praying a memorized verse before sleeping. They wake to a new clarity they did not have the night before.

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

SECTION 2—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

10. Proverbs 4:23 says “keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” What does it mean to keep your heart with vigilance—and what are the things that most easily displace God’s Word from that center? How does abiding serve as that vigilance?

11. Proverbs 22:18 says it will be “pleasant” when the words are kept within you and ready on your lips. Why is pleasantness specifically named as the result? What does that say about what the experience of abiding deeply is supposed to feel like—and what does it suggest when it does not feel that way?

12. Verse 19 says “I have made them known to you today, even to you.” The “even to you” is striking. Who might have assumed this kind of intimate revelation was not available to them—and why does God specifically address that person? What does this say to you about your own access to what God is speaking?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

For Deeper Understanding

13. Rich describes the library of truth being built within you over years of abiding—one that the Holy Spirit can draw from at any moment. What would it mean for your life and your ability to serve others if you spent the next ten years building that library intentionally? What would you be able to offer that you cannot offer now?

14. Writing longhand, using a cross-reference Bible, going to the Greek and Hebrew, memorizing verses—these are all tools to help the Word travel from the mind to the heart. Which of these are you currently using, and which are unfamiliar? Which one do you most want to begin?

15. Rich warns against “thing to thing to thing”—moving from passage to passage before receiving anything. What is the temptation that drives that kind of scattershot approach, and what does it cost you? What would it take to stay in one place until you genuinely receive it?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

For Personal Application

16. Where are you in the progression Proverbs 22 describes—hearing the words, keeping them, having them ready on your lips? Choose one passage God has been speaking to you about and assess honestly: have you received it at the level of being able to speak it freely from your heart?

17. Linda's five-by-seven card system has spanned more than twenty years of specific verses God has spoken to her. What would it mean to you to have that kind of documented, accessible record of God's personal word to you across years? What would you need to start today to build something like that?

18. Rich estimates that 20 minutes a day for 30 days in a specific passage—genuinely abiding, not just reading—will change what you want to do with the Word for the rest of your life. Are you willing to commit to that 30-day experiment? What passage is God already drawing you toward?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

SECTION 3: REVELATION, NOT LOGIC— RECEIVING WHAT THE SPIRIT REVEALS

The single biggest obstacle to abiding deeply in the Word is bringing the wrong tool to the process. If you approach Scripture with your intellect—trying to figure it out, evaluating whether it makes sense, deciding whether the logic holds—you will receive almost nothing. The things of God are spiritually discerned. They require a different kind of receiving.

WHAT THE SPIRIT REVEALS

Paul says what no eye has seen, ear heard, or heart imagined—God has revealed through the Spirit. What kind of knowledge is he describing, and why is it specifically unavailable to the natural mind?

⁹ But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him” —

¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³ And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 2:9–14, ESV

- Verse 12 says we have received the Spirit “that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” The word “freely” matters here. What does it mean that these things are given freely—and what does that tell us about what is required of us to receive them?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

- ▶ Verse 14 says the natural person considers the things of the Spirit to be “folly.” Have you encountered Scripture that seemed contradictory, confusing, or just did not make sense? What is the right response when that happens—and what is the wrong response?

God has prepared in advance what He wants to give you. The Spirit has already searched the depths of God on your behalf. What He wants to reveal to you is not withheld, waiting for you to become spiritual enough to deserve it. It is freely given. Your job is not to figure it out. Your job is to receive it.

This is the essential posture: be a receiver, not a go-getter. Do not try to determine it or analyze it or get there quickly. Just stay in the place of receiving—what are You saying to me?—and let God do the work. It will come. It may take days or weeks for a particular truth to fully settle in. That is fine. Stay there. He has prepared it for you and He intends you to have it.

There is also a tool here for when Scripture seems to say something that does not seem true. The Psalmist says in Psalm 91 that if you abide in the shelter of the Almighty, no evil will befall you. Your natural response: but evil happens to me all the time. Does that mean you skip it? No. It means there is something here you do not yet understand. The Hebrew word translated “evil” in that verse has a specific range of meaning: things that annoy, frustrate, irritate, and cause you difficulty. The promise is that those things will not characterize your life for long when you are abiding. A little different from what the English seems to say. The original language unlocks what God was actually saying.

When you hit something that seems like foolishness or contradiction, that is often the signal that there is treasure right there. Stay with it. Do not skip it. Ask God to show you the truth of it. Go to the Greek or Hebrew. Follow the cross-references. He will show you—because He wants you to have it.

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

NOT OF THE LETTER, BUT OF THE SPIRIT

Paul makes a striking statement: “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

What does it mean to read Scripture as “letter”—as law—versus reading it as “spirit”? How do you know which one you are doing?

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. [...] ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:4–6, 16–18, ESV

- Verse 5 says our sufficiency is from God—not from us. What does this mean for someone who feels they are not spiritual enough, not smart enough, or not experienced enough to receive what God is saying through Scripture?

- Verse 18 says we are “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” What is the agent of this transformation—and what is the condition that makes it happen? How does abiding in the Word connect directly to this?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

- There is an indicator available to you as you cross-reference and read: is this verse producing life in you, or is it not? What does that quickening—that sense of “there is something here”—feel like? And when nothing comes from a verse, what do you do?

Your ability to receive what God is saying through Scripture is not dependent on your intelligence, your education, your years of walking with God, or your level of biblical knowledge. It is dependent on His sufficiency, not yours. He is the one who makes you sufficient. That means a brand-new believer can sit in the Word and receive something profound—because God will calibrate His communication to where that person is. He is a good father. He knows how to communicate with a six-year-old and a sixty-year-old.

Reading Scripture as law—reading it to find out what you should do, what you have failed to do, what you now need to try harder to do—kills the very power you are seeking. It cuts you off from the transforming work the Spirit wants to do. Linda did not get freed from unforgiveness by trying harder to forgive. She got freed by receiving forgiveness—by staying in the Word on that topic until the Spirit did the work, softening her heart degree by degree until the breakthrough came. The letter would have killed that process. The Spirit gave it life.

Verse 18 is one of the most beautiful promises in Scripture: as you behold the glory of the Lord—as you stay in His presence, receiving what He is saying—you are being transformed into His likeness. Degree by degree. From one level to the next. Not by effort. Not by discipline alone. By beholding. By abiding. That is what the process produces.

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

SECTION 3—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

19. 1 Corinthians 2:9 begins “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined.” This is not describing what we will receive in heaven—it is describing what God has prepared for those who love Him now. How does that reframe your expectation of what is available to you in this life as you abide?

20. 2 Corinthians 3:6 says “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” How can the same Scripture be either killing or life-giving depending on how it is approached? What is the specific difference in posture that determines which result you experience?

21. Verse 18 says transformation happens “from one degree of glory to another.” This is a progressive, gradual process. How does that slow, cumulative picture of transformation challenge impatience—the desire to be changed quickly—and how does it encourage faithfulness in abiding even when nothing seems to be happening?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

For Deeper Understanding

22. Rich uses Psalm 91 as an example of a verse that seems to say something the logical mind rejects—“no evil will befall you”—and shows that the Hebrew reveals a far more specific and credible meaning. Have you ever experienced a verse that seemed contradictory or unfair, and then discovered that going deeper revealed its real meaning? What changed when you understood it?

23. Rich describes a “quickenings”—a sense of life when you hit a verse that God is using versus nothing when the cross-reference is not for you right now. Have you experienced that? What does it feel like, and how do you learn to trust it rather than override it with logic?

24. Linda’s forgiveness breakthrough did not come through trying harder to forgive. It came through the Word doing its work in her heart over time, softening what was hard, until one day she could hug the person and genuinely feel nothing but goodwill. What does this story reveal about the relationship between abiding in the Word and character transformation?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

For Personal Application

25. When you encounter a verse or passage that does not make sense, that seems contradictory or confusing—what is your typical response? Do you skip it, note it and forget it, or stay with it? What would it look like to treat confusion as a signal that treasure is nearby?

26. Are you currently reading Scripture primarily as law—what I should do—or as Spirit—what God is doing and offering? How does your experience during Scripture reading reflect which mode you are in?

27. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says transformation comes through “beholding the glory of the Lord.” What would it mean for you to behold His glory this week—not as a theoretical concept, but as an actual practice in your time with God? What would you look for, and what would you do with what you saw?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

SECTION 4: WORDS THAT ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE

We close with the two most elemental truths about the Word of God: what it is in itself, and what it was meant to produce in you.

SPIRIT AND LIFE

Jesus says the words He speaks are “spirit and life.” The flesh—meaning anything you try to do through natural effort and intellect—is no help at all. What does it mean that the very words of Jesus are spirit and life—not just information about spiritual things?

⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

John 6:63, ESV

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

John 6:68; 17:3, ESV

- Peter says “to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Peter is not just talking about eternal life as a destination—he is recognizing that the words Jesus speaks carry life in themselves. What does that mean for how you receive Scripture—not just read it, but receive it?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

- ▶ Jesus defines eternal life as knowing the Father and the Son—the Greek word for “know” here means experiential knowing, not intellectual awareness. How does abiding in the Word lead to that kind of knowing? What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God?

The flesh is no help at all. This means: nothing you generate through your own effort, intelligence, willpower, or religious discipline will produce what only the Spirit can produce. This is not a discouragement—it is a liberation. You do not have to manufacture transformation. You just have to receive it. The words Jesus speaks are spirit and life. They carry within them the power to do what they describe. Your role is to stay close enough, long enough, for them to do their work.

Linda’s practice: for more than twenty years, she has kept annual spiral-bound five-by-seven cards—one set per year—with the verses she has been abiding in written out by hand. Every year. They are with her constantly. She can pull any year from the shelf and read from it, and the words are as alive now as the day she first received them. That is what it looks like when the words truly abide in you.

A JOY AND A DELIGHT

Jeremiah was frustrated with his ministry—speaking God’s words and seeing no response. God’s answer is not to tell him to try harder. What is God’s answer—and what does it reveal about what abiding in the Word is supposed to feel like?

¹⁶ Your 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

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

- “Your words were found, and I ate them.” The image is eating—not reading, not studying, but consuming for nourishment. What does that image tell us about the intimacy and intensity of real engagement with God’s Word?

- The test question Rich and Linda ask each other: “Are you enjoying your abiding?” If the answer is no, something is wrong. What has typically gone wrong when abiding feels like duty instead of joy—and what is the remedy?

Abiding in the Word is meant to be a joy. If it is not, something has shifted—usually toward intellect, toward law, toward trying to figure it out or perform it rather than receive it. The remedy is not to try harder at joy. The remedy is to go back to the posture of a child sitting at the Father’s feet, asking: what do You have to say to me? And then staying there.

Jeremiah ate the words and they became the delight of his heart. That is what is available to you. The same words that produced forgiveness in Linda’s heart after months of sitting with them. The same words that confirmed to Rich what to do about the IRS situation. The same words that prepared Scott and Kristen to call the building inspector. These words are spirit and life—and when they get into you, they produce things that nothing else can.

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

Jesus at Twelve—The Pattern for Abiding

When Jesus was twelve years old and found in the temple, He was doing two things in a specific order. First, He was listening—completely attentive to what was being said, receiving before engaging. Then, second, He was asking questions. Not giving answers. Asking. His journal—if He kept one—would have been full of questions: What does that mean? How does this connect to that? What is the truth underneath this?

And everyone who heard His answers was amazed. Not because He was brilliant—though He was. But because He had listened first, and asked deeply, and received before He spoke. That is the pattern for abiding in the Word: listen, ask, record, and be amazed at what you are receiving.

At the end of each week of abiding, Rich writes on a separate page: here is what I learned this week. He goes back through every day. Some days were breakthroughs. Some days he understood nothing. Some days he skipped entirely. He notes all of it—and then the following week, he goes back to the days where nothing came, and goes deeper into those passages again. Not with pressure, but with curiosity. What is in here that I have not yet received?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

SECTION 4—DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For Scriptural Understanding

28. John 6:63 says “the flesh is no help at all.” In the context of abiding in the Word, what is “the flesh” doing that is no help? What specific activities or approaches does this refer to—and what is the Spirit-led alternative in each case?

29. Jesus defines eternal life in John 17:3 as knowing the Father and the Son. The Greek word for “know” is experiential, relational knowing—not intellectual knowledge about. How does the practice of abiding in the Word produce that kind of knowing? What is the difference in your experience between knowing about God and knowing God?

30. Jeremiah says the words became “a joy and the delight of my heart.” Joy is specifically mentioned as the result of true abiding. What does the presence or absence of joy in your time with God indicate about the posture you are bringing to it?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

For Deeper Understanding

31. The twelve-year-old Jesus listened first, then asked questions. His questions were genuine—not rhetorical, not tests. They came from a posture of true seeking. What does your journal look like in terms of questions? Are you recording the things you do not understand and staying with them—or moving past them?

32. Linda's card system represents more than twenty years of specific, personal, documented encounters with God through Scripture. What would it mean for your faith if you had that kind of record? How does having concrete evidence of what God has spoken to you over time build the settled confidence that He will continue to speak?

33. Rich says the only thing that would prevent you from experiencing the abundant life is never taking the time to abide in the Word—being too busy, too active, not making it a priority. What honest assessment would you make of your life right now on that point? What is the specific thing that most competes with this time?

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

For Personal Application

34. Peter asks “to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Is that the settled conviction of your heart—that the words of Jesus are the source of the life you are seeking? Or are there other places you still tend to go first? Name them honestly.

35. Are you enjoying your abiding? Answer honestly. If yes—what specifically is producing that joy? If no—what has shifted, and what would it take to get back to the posture that makes abiding delightful?

36. You have now completed this course on Abiding in the Vine. What is the one thing you most want to carry forward—the truth or practice that you know needs to take deeper root in your life? Write it as a commitment.

LESSON 6

ABIDING IN THE WORD

As you abide, you are to be listening to what He is speaking to you. So always journal and write down what you are hearing. Second, your journaling should include as many questions as you are receiving. Many of the truths you come across should raise up things that you do not understand, or “if that is true, then how does this work?” This will draw you further into deeper abiding to discover the answer to the questions. You also will be writing down what you do understand. This is progressive, so as you gain understanding, you will be building truth upon truth and this will be reinforced as you write down what you do understand. This also will reveal what He wants you to understand so you can eventually go deeper into things you don’t yet understand. It is a beautiful process: listen, ask questions, write what you know. Keep the process going throughout your journaling.

INSTRUCTIONS ON ABIDING/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 “quickening” 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.
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.

INSTRUCTIONS ON ABIDING/JOURNALING

As you review this set of instructions, consider some key points:

1. Write out the Scriptures long hand instead of just reading or copying/pasting from a computer, as this will help you see all the words in the Scripture—the verbs, the if/then statements, each phrase, etc. It will open up your heart to see what the Lord wishes to speak to you.
2. As you are abiding and maturing in your abiding, do not use a paraphrased version of the Bible because, in this case, you are not reading the Bible, but a person's interpretation of the Bible. This is okay for a brand new believer who is getting used to reading the Bible for the first time, but as you move into abiding, you need to go to a word-for-word or a thought-for-thought translation that stayed true to the original languages.
3. As you are abiding, you will receive life, a high interest in, or a desire to look further into certain verses that strike your heart. Do the cross-referencing, as described in the instruction sheet. It will lead you to further insight and truth about the very thing the Lord is speaking to you. Continue to journal about what you are led to in the cross referencing and further cross reference from there. You also may wish to do a word study on a particular word that strikes you and see where else in Scripture this word is spoken and if there is life for you there as well. If you cross reference and there is no life or particular meaning for you, then just pass on it, and do not try to force something. Remember, this is God speaking to you and not a book study or a report, so let it always be life to you.
4. It is good to write out what the verses actually say so you do not read into the verses but let them speak to you. Follow #4 in the instruction sheet to outline what the verses say.
5. You can use computer software programs to go to the Greek and Hebrew word meanings, which are quite a bit more precise than English. As you write out the verses, you will see certain words that wish to know exactly what they mean (and will have great impact on what you receive), so circle those, and then in your abiding time, go to the Greek and Hebrew and learn all that they mean. As you learn this, you will find it to be great fun and very insightful.

INSTRUCTIONS ON ABIDING/JOURNALING

6. Memorize the verses in which you are abiding. Again, no rush, take your time, and just work on memorizing these so they get into your heart.
7. A key to abiding is your personal journaling—your authentic dialoguing with God about your processing of the truths He is revealing to you. This is not a sanitized version, as if you were going to read it in front of church, but rather just between you and God and what is really going on, including all your frustrations, lack of belief, all of your struggles, etc. This is then a back and forth dialogue as He moves you to His desire to transform your heart and bring changes in your circumstances according to His wonderful plan for you. The journal is only to be between you and God and no one else, including a spouse. You never hand it to another person (certainly you can share certain things with your significant other, but don't let them read it. This keeps it safe for your authentic heart to be shared with God).
8. You are to pray the promises and the verses He is giving you. See the section on prayer to understand this further.
9. At least once a week, you are to share with your spouse what God is speaking to you. This will help you understand what God is speaking, and be each other's best cheerleader as you pray for each other and ask God to fulfill what He is speaking.

INSTRUCTIONS ON ABIDING/JOURNALING

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. 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 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 that 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 bring life and it will be joy—always exciting as you receive this life and enjoy the wonderful relationship that this brings to you.

INSTRUCTIONS ON ABIDING/JOURNALING

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 to 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.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FREE TIME

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FREE TIME: COUPLES

1. Discuss with each other the true desires of your heart—your dreams—how can each assist in fulfilling these?
2. Take a decision or issue identified last night and begin processing (start with one that has not proved to be highly contentious in the past).
 - a. Take one issue at a time
 - b. One of you starts and the other listens:
 - i. What do you think, feel, and believe about this?
 - ii. When done sharing, the other who has been listening repeats back what he/she heard.
 1. Did I get it right? Did I get it all?
 2. If not, go back and repeat process until the one speaking can say: yes, you got it right and you got it all.
 - iii. Repeat process for the one who listened until he/she can also say: yes, you got it right and you got it all.
3. Based upon what you have understood together, one of you offers a solution to the decision or issue. Explain why. The other then responds with agreement or a different perspective on the answer. Keep it as long as needed until you reach unity or realize with integrity that you still disagree. Say to each other: We just do not know God's will and we will continue to seek God until He shows us His answer. Keep asking for wisdom (James 1: 5–8). Do not argue or debate—allow it to sit and not let it ruin your afternoon.
4. If time, go to another decision or issue.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FREE TIME

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FREE TIME: SINGLES

1. Journal out the true desires of your heart—your dreams—how can each assist in fulfilling these?
2. Take a decision or issue identified last night and begin processing by journaling through with the Father: (take one issue at a time)
 - a. Share your heart about this issue: What do you think, feel, and believe about this?
 - b. What do you know, what do you not know, what do you need to know?
 - c. Journal through creative thoughts and insight about this.
 - d. Journal any new instruction, conclusion, understanding that will move you toward resolution on this.
3. If time, go to another decision or issue.
4. If available, share your desires and insight on your issues with another person (potentially retreat leader) at the retreat.

FINAL EXERCISE—HEARING FROM GOD

EZEKIEL 34 EXERCISE



God said: I am going to bypass the corrupt shepherds and become your shepherd directly.

THE EZEKIEL 34 PRACTICE

This exercise is your first step into the practice of abiding in the Word. Ezekiel 34:10–31 contains twenty-two promises God makes to His people without conditions: I will. Each one is a direct declaration of what God intends to do. This passage was spoken to Israel at a time when its leaders had manipulated and exploited the people for their own purposes. God said: I am going to bypass the corrupt shepherds and become your shepherd directly. What follows is a picture of what it looks like when God is your shepherd.

You need a Bible with a center cross-reference column for this exercise. If you do not have one, they are available from Amazon—search for “center column reference Bible” and choose the translation that suits you (NASB, New King James, or NIV are recommended).

Step 1—Read and Mark

Read Ezekiel 34:10–31 slowly. Do not rush. As you read, place a checkmark next to any verse or phrase that strikes you—any promise that resonates with something in your current season, any line that makes you feel a quiet pull or sense of recognition. Do not try to get them all right. Do not overthink it. Just notice.

Most people find one to six verses that stand out. Write those below.

- **Verses that struck me in Ezekiel 34:10–31:**

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Step 2—Choose One

From the verses you marked, pick one. It does not need to be the “right” one—trust what draws you. Write it out in full, by hand, below.

- **My verse (written out longhand):**

What does this verse say to you? What is God pointing at in your life with this particular promise? Write your initial thoughts.

- **What this says to me:**

Step 3—Cross-Reference Once

Locate the cross-reference for your chosen verse in the center column of your Bible. Follow one of those references. Read the entire paragraph surrounding it—not just the specific verse. Write out any portion of that paragraph that speaks to you, and note what it adds to your understanding.

- **Cross-reference verse and what it adds:**

Step 4—Cross-Reference Again

From your cross-reference passage, follow one more cross-reference. Again, read the whole paragraph. Write out what strikes you and what it means.

- **Second cross-reference verse and what it means:**

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Step 5—Summarize What God Is Saying

You now have three verses—your original from Ezekiel 34, and two from cross-referencing. Read back through what you have written. What do you see? Is there a thread connecting them? A single theme or direction that God seems to be pointing toward in your life?

Write your summary below—or share your three verses and what you wrote with your spouse or a close friend and ask what they see.

- **What I believe God is saying to me through these verses:**

Next Steps

If you sense that God is pointing at something specific—forgiveness, identity, fear, provision, healing, guidance—this is your invitation to begin abiding there. Take the passage and the cross-references into the coming weeks. Stay with them. Pray them. Memorize key phrases. Journal what you are learning, believing, questioning, and experiencing. Stay until you receive it.

If you are uncertain what God is saying or what to do next, you are welcome to share your three verses and what you wrote with Abide Ministries. Email your name, the verses, and your notes to: info@abideministries.com or questions@abideministries.com. Rich and Linda will review what you have written, process it with God, and respond with direction for where to go next.

God has spoken to every person who has done this exercise over the twenty-plus years it has been in use. No one has come away empty. He will speak to you. You do not need a special skill. You do not need to get it right. You just need a heart to receive—and He will do the rest.

COURSE REVIEW

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

COURSE REVIEW—WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

You have now completed Abiding in the Vine. Here is what you have received over these six lessons:

- Lesson 1—The vine is Christ, who gives life. The vine dresser is the Father, who directs everything. You are the branch. Your role is to stay connected. You cannot bear fruit by effort—only by abiding.
- Lesson 2—The enemy works to pull you away from abiding—through the sin nature, through strife and judgment, through the flesh. Christ came to restore what was lost. The gospel is not only forgiveness of sins—it is the restoration of the seven exceptional things God designed you to have.
- Lesson 3—The first fruit of abiding is forgiveness. Forgiveness is not reconciliation—it is releasing the requirement for the other person to do anything. Forgiveness is between you and God, on the same basis Christ forgave you: His nature, not their behavior.
- Lesson 4—The second fruit is unity. God commands the blessing where people dwell in unity with His Spirit—not agreement between people, but agreement with Him. Disagreement is not a problem; it is often the process. Neutrality, integrity, and the think-feel-believe process are the tools for getting there.
- Lesson 5—Being led by the Holy Spirit is meant to be normal, not exceptional. All the promises of God are Yes in Christ. Prayer is not a wish list—it is the process of seeking God’s will until you arrive at unity with Him and then asking from that place of agreement.
- Lesson 6—Abiding in the Word is not Bible study. It is sitting at Jesus’ feet in dialogue, receiving what He has to say. The Word must travel from your mind into your heart. That journey takes time, attentiveness, memorization, cross-referencing, and willingness to stay in one place until you truly receive it. The result is transformation—from one degree of glory to another.

Apart from Me you can do nothing. If you abide in Me, you will bear fruit—more fruit—much fruit. And there the Lord commands the blessing, life forevermore.

We pray that you will practice abiding—that you will have a heart to stay with it, that God will speak to you, and that you will go deeper into the Word and walk with Him and hear His voice. Your life will begin to experience the super abundant life He has always planned for you. And you will give it away—because other people will want to know if it is really possible. And you will be able to say: yes. It is. And it will make all the difference.



History of **Abide Ministries**



In the 1990s, Rich and Linda Case received a call from God to dig into what it means to truly live in the Spirit.

In the 1990s, Rich and Linda Case received a call from God to dig into what it means to truly live in the Spirit. They had been believers for most of their lives and regularly attended church and Bible studies, but began to realize that, despite knowing the Bible intellectually, their personal experiences seemed disconnected from the promises and truths found in scripture. As they then learned these essential truths through their abiding and hearing God's voice – and began to see the grand life play out in their lives God called them to give that knowledge away. In 2001, God initiated the ABIDE ministry at a retreat with friends in Austria, and through their personal experience of this abiding life, their friends noticed the change in their lives and inquired if Rich and Linda could host a similar retreat the following year. This was repeated three years in a row, and then God called them to host weekend retreats in their home in Colorado.

Through the formal development of the truths revealed by God with Abiding and additional electives, they founded All for Jesus – Living Waters Ministries, now Abide Ministries – and have seen it grow exponentially since then, with 24+ retreat leaders all over the world, 29 online courses, eight books on various aspects of living life with Christ, and a daily podcast. Rich and Linda have also worked with various churches to strengthening them with the truths of an abiding life in Christ, and seeing Christ bring reconciliation and new vision to desperate situations.

Their heart is to bring the truths and promises of God to as many people as possible, showing everyone that when you abide in Christ and seek Him daily, your life can be completely and utterly transformed – enabling you to experience the grand life promised by God.



Vision

At our core, we believe in walking along God's path and connecting to the vine (abiding). As we walk in unity with others and understand God's Word as the truth, we are sure to experience His promised grand life and thus, willingly accept God's will as our chosen path.



Mission

1. Live out and invite everyone to experience the grand, spectacular, abundant life by hearing God's voice.
2. Share God's majesty, a close relationship with us as he yearns for our restoration.
3. God is majestic, grand and pure goodness, so that we can experience His nature in real life.
4. Communicate to everyone, irrespective of their condition, that all are meant to experience God's Divine Life (grand, majestic), by receiving His personal plan for us.
5. God delivers this life for us in a SUPERNATURAL way, transcending human comprehension, and thus, becoming normal in our life.
6. Teach that personal truths are revealed to us by God, grounded on His word – the embodiment of Truth.
7. Recognize that abiding in Christ changes our life in tangible, real ways, and is not just learning about or studying this life.
8. Teach that as we abide in Christ, we learn to understand and amp; follow God's will for our lives, as He leads us personally into His grand, Divine plan for us. His personal plan calls us into His bigger story with our best interest at heart (blessed to bless others).

Statement of Non-Profit Status

Abide Ministries is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization that has been fully funded by our founders, leaders and retreat participants since its inception.

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Testimonies

“If I’m not abiding, I feel like I’m dying. Abiding is living...It’s powerful to know that you have God’s perspective on something.”



Steve

“This was the first time that I understood what people meant by God’s living Word. And I’ve been a Christian for a lot of years, but this was the first time it really came alive for me and I really could experience that.”



Dan

“It doesn’t matter where you are at in your walk. If you just got saved yesterday or if you’ve been a 20+ year believer like i have, learning how to hear God’s voice and learning His will is just as important in day one as it is in day 3,426. You wanna hear God’s will and this course has helped me hear Him more clearly.”



Bob

“Abiding turned out to be the most transformational thing I’ve ever had since salvation in my Christian walk and in our marriage, and it’s just been amazing. God has a path for us and He is there and He’s showing it to us.”



Heath

“Before, in my quiet time, it was more of a checklist thing for me to do in the morning, and, honestly, some mornings it was the thing that went if I was busy, and some days it didn’t even happen. Now, it’s become so personal to me and the time flies by in the morning and God speaks so directly to me and I just never felt that way on a daily basis before. That has been life-altering for me.”



Rebecca

“I heard about people living in peace, I heard about people living in joy, and realizing all kinds of things around them are happening. And then we realize, wait a minute, we’re there, we have peace beyond understanding.”



Brad

Giving to the Ministry

Have you experienced abundant blessing from your time with Abide Ministries?

Pay it forward by donating at abideministries.com/donate and help us support others in learning how to seek Christ and abide in Him! We appreciate your desire to help us share the Abundant Life with the rest of the world.



Learn More at abideministries.com

Podcast

Escape the chaos and uncertainty of the world with our podcast, ***“Come and See, Finding Truth in a World of Chaos,”*** available on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify.



CHANNEL



PLAYLIST PAGE



Tune in five days a week as our hosts, Rich Case and Kathy Rocconi, dive into the scriptures and discuss what it looks like to live an abiding life with Christ. Join us as we seek God’s truth in a world of turmoil and darkness.

Online Courses



Abide Ministries online courses uncover life-changing biblical truths, with practical application and wisdom. Our courses are joyful and life-giving and are perfect for small groups as well as individuals.

Each course has an accompanying workbook. Join us as we learn about biblical topics like Hearing God's Voice, Discerning God's Will, the Covenant, Living in Forgiveness, Living in the Kingdom of God, Living in the Supernatural, Christ, Clutter and the Calendar, Living the Grand Life, and many, many more.



COURSES

Abide Retreats



Learn more at
abideministries.com

Do you have friends or a small group that you would like to experience what you just experienced?

Would you be interested in attending another retreat, which we call electives to go deeper in your walk with God?

See the various options on our website.
The topics for retreats and courses are the same.

RETREATS



COURSES



STORE

