

# The Condition of Faithful Praying

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PART 7

*John 15:7*

One question has nagged me since beginning this journey on prayer. Can we fully understand it? My conclusion is simply, “No.” This is not a response that is giving up on gaining understanding but to admit an understanding. We have to admit the personal, dynamic nature of praying *to God in the name of Christ, the Lord*.

At different times in our walk with Christ prayer seems deeper and more alive, and at others, hallow and vague. This motion of forward and back is not due to any trait of our Lord’s side of the relationship but rather our side.

Prayer is irrevocably tied to growing in Christ. Because we have seen that prayer is first and foremost a relationship between the pray-er and the Living God, it has to be a dynamic concept rather than a quantitative one.

Desiring to pray is not to retrieve an allusive divine answer, making prayer a mechanism of manipulation, but to pursue a human-divine relationship, a union that is invited by and desired of God. As peculiar as that may sound, it is true.

Therefore, we must assume that certain conditions are necessary for the making of this union in prayer. There are some things that we on the human side of the equation must do in order to realize the apparent relationship Jesus invites us to. He explains this in two phrases, “abiding in Him” and “abiding in His word.” He says, “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you will and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

*Continue in Me*

Some translations render “abide” as “continue” or “remain.” It comes from a Greek term that means to stay, reside, dwell, or live with. It can also mean to last or endure (John 6:56) and to be constant (Romans 9:11).<sup>1</sup> The context of His use of the term is the last of the famous “I am” sayings of Jesus. In the other “I am” sayings He reveals Himself as the life-giver and invites people to come to Him. In this saying, He is not issuing an invitation, but speaking to those who have already come. “Now that you have come to me, stay with me. Be at home with me and let my word be at home with you and you will have the answers to your prayers.”

Jesus is articulating the wonderful and marvelous attributes and results of a consistent life with Him. Abiding in Him is like a branch being attached to the vine. There is productivity in this type of union. There is effectiveness and benefit in this type of relationship. The branch is able to bear fruit not because of what it is but because of its “root” in the vine. The branch bears the fruit that the vine produces. Grapes are not grapes because of the type of branches bearing the clusters but because of the vine into which the branch is grafted.

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<sup>1</sup> Moulton, Harold K., editor, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1977.

Our remaining constant in our loyalty to Jesus produces in us His character and will. Those who abide in Christ and He in them are an extension of who Jesus is. If nothing else, this teaching of our Lord should convince us that becoming a Christian is not an event but a consistent relationship with the Son of God.

There comes a moment in every follower's life when they have to stop coming to Jesus and start living with Him. To abide with Him is to love Him. The basis of this love is His love for us expressed supremely in the Cross. From this love grows our worshipping Him as the Christ of God. This means that we see Him as the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. He is the Son of God and the means for God's salvation for the world. He is worthy to receive glory, honor, and all praise. Therefore, abiding in Christ is to believe that Jesus is so necessary for life that without Him there is nothing. All would be worthless without Him.

One of the simplest ways I know to describe abiding is to think about our homes. Everyone's home has a distinctive smell. When you visit in someone's home you notice his or her home smells differently than yours. Whether you go to the back of the house, in the dining room, bedroom, or kitchen, that distinctive smell is there. It is permeated throughout the house.

Abiding in Christ is to be permeated with Christ's love and character. In every category of living, He is there. In every activity, He is there. His presence shapes the way you think, speak, and act in whatever part of life you happen to be in. Whether business, home, playing fields, or school; you have allowed the presence of Jesus to be the controlling factor in all things. Abiding is to want what Jesus wants, to will what Jesus wills, and to seek what Jesus seeks.

#### *Continue in My Word*

The second concept we must notice is abiding or continuing in His word. Jesus tells His disciples that they must continue in His word if prayer is to be answered. He knew of the importance of the position they were in. They would be the heralds of a new gospel to a world that would not receive it well. There would be not only opposition and debate about the gospel message but there would be attempts to compromise its truths. Remaining loyal to what Jesus had told them and constantly relying on the truth of His teachings would be paramount for their success in the kingdom's work.

This same legacy is ours. As followers of Christ His teachings are crucial for our daily lives and our lives as people of God. When He says "His word" He is referring to His teachings and revelation of Himself already given to the disciples. He says, "If you continue in my word you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Accepting the words of Christ as true and purposeful for your life sets you free. By accepting His words about eternal life, you are freed from the penalty for sin and have received eternal life. By accepting the truth that He is "the resurrection and the life" you have life and the promise of resurrection (John 11:25). By accepting that seeking the kingdom of God is your priority then you have the promise "that all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). By accepting as true the power of Christ to overcome the world you can "be of good cheer," unafraid at life's trails (John 16:33).

When Jesus says "His word" He is also referring to His commands. He says that His disciples will abide in His love if they keep His commands. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). Following the commands of Christ demonstrates not only our union with Him but also our love for Him. He says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). He

gives to His disciples the guiding commands for life under God; “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength and ... love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these”(Mark 12:30-31). Obedience seems to be pretty important to the Christ. To love Him is to obey Him and to obey Him is to love Him.

To obey His words is to love the people of God, and to do that you have to esteem others more highly than yourself (John 15:17). To abide in His word is to take up your cross and follow Him, and to do this you have to deny yourself (Luke 9:23). There is little doubt what the primary thrust of the teachings of Jesus is: participating in the kingdom of God through becoming a servant. To do this you cannot exalt yourself but you have to take up a towel (John 13:14-16), walk another mile (Matthew 5:41), turn the other cheek (Luke 9:29). You have to love your enemy, pray for your persecutors, do good to those who despise you (Matthew 5:44-45). Disciples love (John 13:34-35), give (Luke 6:30-38), and tell (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). They seek the kingdom (Matthew 6:33), take the yoke of Christ (Matthew 11:29), show the mercy of God (Luke 10:30-37), and let their light shine before men (Matthew 5:16).

Keeping Christ’s commands (or continuing in His word) does several things. First, the words of Christ discipline you for greater service to God and open the way for more productivity in your personal life. “...Every branch that bears fruit He prunes it so that it will produce more fruit. You are cleaned through the word that I have spoken to you” (John 15:2b-3). Application of and obedience to the sayings of Jesus is like the pruning of fruit trees to enhance their production. As we continue in Christ’s words we will set aside everything that keeps us from being His person. His word will reveal sin and challenge us to service. It will warm our heart and spur us to speak for Him. It will bring assurance and comfort when needed intensely, and it will convict us of our sinfulness and provide a means for confession.

There is a second thing that Christ’s teachings provide. He said, “These things have I spoken to you, that my joy might abide in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). Obedience to His commands and application of His principles produce His joy in us. This is not a joy that is a type of pride in how satisfied you are at your conduct, but rather it is a joy that comes from the satisfaction of being a humble servant of the Lord.

Far too often we categorize joy in terms of things done for us or things we are able to have. Happiness has become too humanistic and materialistic. Jesus had a radical way of seeing His joy for the abiding disciple. It was discovered in giving up life to find it and giving away to others in order to receive. His was a manner of living that was fully servant and completely sacrificial. His word tells us that we are most joyous when God and His Son have been glorified.

### *Condition of Your Assurance*

We would be foolish to believe that we can achieve the will of God in our lives or have the assurance of a relationship with God in Christ without abiding in Him and abiding in His word. These two conditions are the caveat for answered prayer.

Keep in mind that Jesus was preparing His disciples to step off into a world that would be opposed to His kingdom claims, teaching fame, and righteous name. His assurance to them was that they could ask of Him and He would do what they asked if they continued in their relationship of love, worship and belief in who He is, and if they obeyed and made application of His word and commands to their

lives. In other words, they would be praying for the cause of and advancement of the cause of God in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, they were prepared and continued to be ready to face any opposition and endure any hardship because they were centered on their Lord and because they believed His teachings and sayings to be the truth.

Should it be any different for us? Is it not true that we have limited our own lives because of the lack of abiding, worship, love, and obedience? Can we afford to go any further in our living without the pruning of God and the anointing of His presence? Recall this startling saying of Jesus: "I am the vine you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same will bring forth much fruit, for without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). From His perspective, abiding and bearing fruit are critical.

Here are some questions to evaluate yourself with this concept of abiding. Do you look forward to reading the teachings of Jesus, or do you find them out of step with today's world? If you believe the word of Christ is not relevant for you, then you are not abiding. If you are hungry to know His words, you are abiding. Do you see your life being effective in kingdom work? A part of bearing fruit is to bring glory to God and not to yourself. Is God being glorified through what you say and how you say it? If so, you are abiding. Do you know the primary principles for living that Jesus taught so you can put them in practice? If not, you are not abiding. Do you turn to God in prayer as a last resort? If so, you are not abiding. Consider that abiding in Christ is a way of life rather than something that you do occasionally to be spiritual or religious.

A little boy was spending his Saturday playing in his sandbox. He had his trucks and cars in the sand with him as he dug roads and tunnels. All of a sudden he hit a large rock with his plastic shovel. He dug and he dug around the stone, managing to dislodge it. He struggled to roll it to the edge of the sandbox but found it was even more difficult to roll it over the edge of the sandbox wall. Determined, he shoved, pushed, and pried but every time the rock rolled back into the sandbox. Trying over and over again, his only reward was skinned shins and stubbed fingers. Finally, he burst into tears unaware that his father had been watching from the den window. Dad walked out of the house and out to his son's arena of effort. He said, "Why didn't you use all your strength?" "But I did, Daddy, I did," he sobbed. "No you didn't," his father replied. "You didn't use all the strength you had ... you didn't ask me." With that the father reached down and together they rolled the rock over the side and out of the way.

Sadly, many of us have been Christians, followers of Christ, for many years and yet we have sought to be the master of our own lives and have only turned to Christ when we were in trouble, and even then as a last resort. We cannot continue to turn aside His desire to abide with us and turn aside our need to abide with Him. We must utilize all our strength. We must abide.