



Restoring my Soul

HE RESTORES MY SOUL, HE LEADS ME IN PATHS

PSA 23:3

NOVEMBER 2020

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A FIVE DAY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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The fruit of the tree of life

Jesus Christ is the tree of life. The fruit of the tree of life is His body and blood. We eat the fruit of the tree of life when we partake of the communion elements in faith, and obey the word of God that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers at the communion table.

As those who are born of the Spirit, we recognise that obeying God's word is only possible when we walk according to the Spirit. **Eze 36:27. Rom 8:3-4.** Having received the word, and the faith that comes with it, we watch and pray in the Spirit with Christ, setting our minds on the Spirit. **Rom 8:5.** This is a critical aspect of what it means to walk according to the Spirit. Jesus said that we are to watch and pray lest we 'enter into temptation'. **Mat 26:41.** This is the temptation to walk according to the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

As we give ourselves to the events of each day, the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. **Joh 16:13.** 'All truth' is the word of the Father concerning our sonship in Christ. The Holy Spirit joins us to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, enabling our participation by strengthening us with the capacity of Eternal Spirit. **Heb 9:14.** In this fellowship, the sufferings that we experience cause us to cry out to God for wisdom and understanding. As we meet Him in our times of suffering and difficulty, He confirms to us the truth of our name and works as a son of God in Christ. In other words, He helps us to understand what truly belongs to our name and works as a son of God in Christ, and what does not. By the Spirit, we are able to fulfil the works of our sonship by the love of God that He pours into our heart, and we are progressively being delivered from our propensity to walk according to the principles of the flesh. **Rom 5:5.** This is how we walk in obedience to the word that is proclaimed at the communion table.

The light of the word

Because we are members of Christ's body and members of one another, we encourage and strengthen one another through our ongoing fellowship in the light of the word that is proclaimed at the communion table. **Rom 12:4-5**. We pray for one another, bear with one another and forgive one another, constantly affirming the truth that the life of God and the inheritance of our sonship will be found only through our participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. In other words, we stir one another up to love and good works in the fellowship of Christ's offering. **Heb 10:24-25**.

Each day, we run the race that is set before us with patience and endurance, 'looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God'. **Heb 12:1-2**. We accept that, as sons of God in Christ, we may fall seven times a day, but we are able to rise again in Christ because we are conformed to His death and the fellowship of His offering. **Pro 24:16**.

As we live this way, we are growing and maturing as God's children. We are enabled to bring forth the fruit of our sonship, which is 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness'. **Heb 12:11**. This is the fruit of light which Paul described as 'all goodness, righteousness and truth'. **Eph 5:9**. This fruit is revealed in our lives as we walk in the light of the word that is ministered to us by Christ. **Psa 119:105**. The darkness of our fallen perspective is passing away, the true light is shining, and we are able to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. **Luk 10:27**. This is what it means to live by every word that proceeds from God, sustained by the fruit of the tree of life. **Mat 4:4**.

The fruit of the wrong tree

A believer who lives by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will not live by every word that proceeds from God. **Mat 4:4**. Rather, they will live by a word that proceeds from within themselves. Assuming that they know and understand God's will, they will pursue a life that is well-pleasing to God according to their own self-defined 'good', and in the power of their own strength.

Those who live this way will view the circumstances and events of their life in relation to their own definition of good and evil. Most often, a person's 'good' will be confirmed by favourable circumstances and outcomes. In other words, success in life and in the work of their sonship will be the confirmation that God is well-pleased with their conduct. In contrast, unfavourable circumstances and outcomes, like suffering, will be associated with evil. Interestingly, such circumstances will rarely be attributed to God's displeasure with their conduct. Nor will they cause such a person to cry out to God or to seek counsel with other Christians, because they are convinced that they are doing God's will. **2Ch 16:12**. Rather, unfavourable circumstances are likely to be attributed to an outside influence (e.g. Satan) that is hindering their sonship work. In fact, they will be viewed as obstacles that can be overcome through more effort, stronger faith or, in extreme circumstances, miraculous intervention by God Himself.

Paul knew from his own experience that a person who lives this way cannot please God. **Rom 8:8**. No matter how hard they try, they can never bring forth the fruit of their sonship. Rather, they will bring forth the works of the flesh, which Paul also called 'the unfruitful works of darkness'. **Eph 5:11**. Their life will be characterised by frustration, agitation, anxiety, anger, depression, and unforgiveness. **Gal 5:19-21**. Ultimately, their end will be eternal separation from God. This is the inevitable outcome of eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

FURTHER STUDY GALATIANS 5

Mixing the fruit of the two trees

Many believers attempt to live by mixing the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the fruit of the tree of life. This means that they are attempting to obey God's word through the diligent application of the principles of good and evil that are another law within them. **Rom 7:23**. In practical terms, they are seeking to do God's will by any means other than their participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. **Luk 14:26-27**.

A person who lives by mixing the fruit of the two trees will usually seek fellowship with those who walk in the same manner. This will be a fellowship of both aspiration and commiseration. Together, they will aspire to obey God's word according to their own strength, encouraging and supporting one another with helpful suggestions and anecdotes that are intended to inspire their flesh. Once they have failed in their obedience, and the wretchedness of their way has become apparent, they will commiserate together, encouraging one another to greater steadfastness and perseverance. They may even suggest slightly easier alternatives to the word which will make obedience a simpler task.

Of course, this highlights the point that a person who lives by mixing the fruit of the two trees is also walking according to the flesh. Like those who eat exclusively from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they inevitably find that they cannot please God, and will only ever bring forth the works of the flesh. **Rom 8:8**. The good to which they aspire will only ever produce an evil that they have not anticipated. **Rom 7:19**. This will be a wretched, unhappy existence, characterised by confusion, disappointment, frustration, and anger. It may even cause them to fall away from the faith. Sadly, however, many Christians have learned to live this way, assuming that this is the normal Christian life.

A mixed response to the word

A believer who mixes the fruit of the two trees may place great importance on the word that is proclaimed to them. In fact, they will readily acknowledge that eternal life can be attained only through obedience to this word. However, this same word, in which they delight, is likely to create in them a significant amount of anxious tension.

For example, if the word and their obedience to it seems straightforward, a person who lives this way will be anxious to go and do it. **Exo 19:7-8**. Upon hearing the word, they may have even developed helpful strategies to ensure their successful obedience to the word. They will prayerfully give themselves to the events of each day, confident that they will be able to obey God's word in the power of their own flesh. They may even entreat the Holy Spirit to empower them in their self-righteous endeavours. **Act 8:18-23**.

If, however, the word does not accord with what they already believe, or if they feel that obedience may be difficult or cause difficulty for them, this will create a different kind of anxiety. In this situation, a person's anxiety may cause them to seek out a perceived leader, or pastoral counsellor, to negotiate a pathway of obedience other than their participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

They may ask the leader to provide a more palatable alternative to the word - one that is easier to accomplish or does not cause them as much pain and suffering. **2Pe 2:17-19**. Alternatively, they may ask the leader to script their obedience for them, thus defining the way that they should walk each day to ensure a successful outcome. Of course, a person may not need to engage with a leader to acquire an alternative to the word. They may simply redefine what the word is saying, themselves, so that they can diligently apply themselves to obeying their own version of it.

Walking according to the Spirit

Every believer, who is committed to following Christ, will be familiar with the wretchedness of trying to fulfil the will of God in the flesh. **Rom 8:8**. Thankfully, we know that God has established a new and living way for us to walk. **Heb 10:19-20**. God desires that we walk according to the Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings so that our fleshly tendencies can be removed, and so that our life can be sustained by the tree of life.

Let us be clear. God *does* want us to obey His word, and thereby, to attain eternal life. **Deu 12:28**. However, there is only one pathway that leads to eternal life, and this is the pathway that Jesus pioneered from the first communion meal through to His death on the cross at Calvary. **Pro 12:28**. We can obey God's word only as we walk on this pathway, joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. Of course, this pathway is confirmed to us through our ongoing participation in the communion meal.

Every week, we eat the fruit of the tree of life as we partake of the communion elements in faith, and receive and believe the word of the cross that is proclaimed by Christ's messengers. This fruit continues to sustain us as we participate in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings every day. The Holy Spirit joins us to this fellowship, enabling our participation by strengthening us with the capacity of Eternal Spirit. **Heb 9:14**. He also pours the love of God into our heart so that the faith that we received by hearing the word at communion is able to work by love. **Rom 5:5**.

As we walk according to the Spirit, we are able to fulfil the works that were prepared for us in Christ, and we are being delivered from our propensity to walk according to the principles of the flesh that are connected to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **Eph 2:10**.

The obedience of faith

Jesus' offering journey from Gethsemane to the cross demonstrated the obedience of His faith. It is helpful to remember that Jesus presented Himself in offering according to the faith that He received in the word of the Father. He testified that He had authority to lay down His life because of the command of the Father. **Joh 10:18. Rom 10:17.** The faith that Jesus received, which the apostle Paul called 'the faith of the Son', was the faith of the Father to birth a multitude of sons of God and to include them in the fellowship of Yahweh. The prophet Isaiah was referring to the faith of the Son when he wrote, 'If He should put forth His soul as a sin offering, *He shall see seed*'. **Isa 53:10.**

Jesus laid down His life as an offering for our sin when He joined us in our death and separation from God, in the garden of Gethsemane. This was when the reproaches of mankind against the Father were laid upon Him. **Psa 69:9.** Each wounding event that caused Christ's blood to flow, progressively accomplished redemption for mankind. We know that His redeeming work was complete because Jesus was able to proclaim to the penitent thief, just before 12:00pm, on the day of His crucifixion, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.' **Luk 23:43.**

Jesus made this remarkable declaration as our great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. This means that every person throughout the church age who, like the penitent thief, responds to the word of the cross and joins the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, is a recipient of this wonderful promise of redemption. Furthermore, as members of Christ's body, we remain joined to Him *and* to the work of the cross which continued *after* 12:00pm.

The patience of faith

Jesus endured each wounding event by the *patience of faith*. 'The patience of faith' refers to the power of God to protect those who obey His word. **1Pe 1:3-5**. As we walk in obedience to the word of our sonship, faith enables us to testify with the same faith of Jesus, who said, 'No-one takes [My life] from Me.' **Joh 10:18**.

The key point is that our obedience to the word of faith preserves us in the patience of God as we experience the sufferings and trials that accompany the word of faith. We recall that Jesus commended the church in Philadelphia, saying, 'You have kept the Word of My patience.' **Rev 3:10**. This principle was exemplified in the life of Joseph, who was a type of Jesus Christ. In Psalm 105, we are reminded to give thanks to God because, 'He sent a man before them, Joseph, being sold for a servant; whose feet they hurt with chains; he was laid in iron, until the time that his word came, the Word of Jehovah refined [tested] him.' **Psa 105:17-19**.

Like Joseph, Jesus did not know when the sufferings of faith that belonged to the word of His sonship would be complete. This is because Jesus did not define the endpoint of His offering. The end of His death, the culmination of His obedient offering, and the birth of new creation were in the hands of the Father.

As the time neared 3:00pm, Christ confessed that He was keeping the word of the Father's patience when He asked the Father, 'Why have You forsaken Me?' **Mat 27:46**. It was as though Christ was saying, 'I can wait patiently, by faith, until Your offering is complete.' Having heard the Son's cry of faith, the Father, by the Holy Spirit, reached down and drew Him, the Firstborn of a new creation, out of many waters. **Psa 18:16. Psa 40:1-2**.

The judgement of faith

After Jesus declared redemption for the penitent thief, the Scripture accounts that a great darkness fell over the whole land until 3:00pm. **Mar 15:33**. These three hours of darkness signalled another phase in Christ's offering. By midday, Christ had completed His work as our great High Priest, and had accomplished our eternal redemption. Having fulfilled His initiative to priest Himself as a living sacrifice, Christ's offering now rested completely in the hands of the Father. The darkness which covered the whole land occurred as the Father laid the final aspect of His reproach upon the Son. The Son was now forsaken by the Father, His heart broken by reproach. **Psa 69:20**. The Son of Man described these reproaches as a great flood that overflowed Him, taking Him into the fiery sea of God's forgetfulness; the very Lake of Fire itself. **Psa 69:1-2. Mic 7:19**.

As Christ's physical, mortal body hung on the cross for three hours, He experienced the judgement of God's wrath upon the sin of the whole world. Concerning this dimension of His sufferings, Christ testified, 'The pains of death surrounded Me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of Me; I found trouble and sorrow.' **Psa 116:3**. Christ was descending to the depths of the Lake of Fire. The cords of death had enveloped Him in His offering body. **Jon 2:5-6**.

Christ was forsaken by the Father for three hours as eternal judgement was exhausted, and everything of the old creation was put to death. In three hours, Christ embodied the fullness of sin and the Lake of Fire. That means that every dimension of sin and corruption were laid upon Christ. But, as an offering for sin, Christ brought all things that are contrary to God, to nothing. During this time, Christ rested in the patience of faith. The faith that He received from the Father, by command, was now His own conviction before God. **Rom 14:22**.

The emergence of new creation

When Jesus asked the Father, 'Why have You forsaken Me?', He silenced the 'why' that belongs to the other law. Unlike Christ, when we cry out to God asking Him, 'Why?', it is the expression of our other law as we struggle to accept our circumstances in life. From midday to 3:00pm, Jesus dealt with the other law. His confession of faith, 'Why have You forsaken Me?', answered every other 'why', for all time. As Jesus was kept by the patience of faith, *the judgement of faith* was invoked upon everything contrary to God. This scriptural principle of the judgement of faith was illustrated when Noah built the ark. Noah was preserved from the floodwaters that covered the face of the earth because he obeyed God. **Gen 6:22**. The very same word that kept Noah by the patience of faith proclaimed the judgement of faith upon mankind and all corruption on earth. **Gen 6:17**. Noah emerged from the waters of judgement, just as Christ was drawn up out of many waters by the loving arms of the Father. **Gen 8:13**.

Having earlier refused to drink the wine mixed with myrrh, offered to Him by the soldiers, Jesus declared, 'I thirst.' **Mar 15:23**. **Joh 19:28**. We recall that, at the last supper, Jesus told His disciples that He would not again partake of the communion until the new creation had been brought forth as a new kingdom. **Luk 22:15-16**. When the Father drew Him out of the waters of judgement, the ground of new creation emerged with Him, in the same way that the earth emerged from the seas on the third day of creation. **Gen 1:9**. At approximately 3:00pm, as Jesus drank sour wine from a sponge put on a reed of hyssop, He was signalling the birth of new creation. Jesus then declared, 'It is finished!' and yielded His Spirit into the hands of the Father. **Joh 19:30**.

The faith of Abraham

The account of Abraham offering up Isaac is a picture of the offering of Christ at the hands of God the Father. We read in the book of Hebrews, '*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son*'. **Heb 11:17**. We recall that Joseph, and indeed Jesus, were both *tested* until the word of the Father came to pass. The most significant promise that God affirmed to Abraham, on account of his obedience, was that *in his seed* all the nations of the earth would be blessed. **Gen 22:18**. This is the faith of the Father and the faith of the Son.

When Yahweh first spoke to Abram, He commanded him to go out from his country into a land that He would show him. **Gen 12:1-4**. The book of Hebrews accounts that '*by faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out into a place which he was afterward going to receive for an inheritance*'. **Heb 11:8**. The Lord further ministered faith to Abram when He declared, 'Fear not Abram, I am your shield [of faith] and your exceeding great reward.' **Gen 15:1**. We recall that Abram believed Yahweh when He said, ' "Look now toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your seed be"' **Gen 15:5**. Because Abram believed in this word, by faith, the Lord counted it to him for righteousness. **Gen 15:6**.

In the same way that Christ asked the Father, 'Why have You forsaken Me?', Abram asked God, 'By what shall I know that I shall inherit it?' **Gen 15:8**. This statement was the 'why' of Abram's faith. As the Father met Abram's confession of faith and accredited it to him as righteousness, He similarly met the Son's cry, 'Why have you forsaken Me?', and accredited it to *Him* as righteousness.

The offering of Abraham

We know that the Lord instructed Abram to make offering. We read in the book of Genesis, 'As the sun was setting a deep sleep fell upon Abram. And, behold, a horror of great darkness fell upon him! The sun went down, it was dark and behold, a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp passed between the pieces [of Abram's offering]. In the same day Jehovah made a covenant with Abram.' **Gen 15:12,17-18**. The darkness and great horror that Abram experienced represented Christ's three hours in the Lake of Fire. At the conclusion of Abram's offering, the Lord made a covenant with him. **Gen 15:18**. Similarly, the completion of Christ's offering marked the ratification of the New Covenant.

In Genesis chapter twenty-two, we read about God testing Abraham by asking him to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. We recall that, after a three-day journey, Abraham said to his servants, 'You stay here. I and the boy will go yonder and worship.' **Gen 22:5**. We note the similarity of this account to Jesus drawing aside from the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane to pray with the Father. We note also that the Father proceeded with Christ through every aspect of His offering journey until 12:00pm on the day of His crucifixion.

We recall that as Abraham stretched out his hand, taking a knife to slay his son, an angel of the Lord intervened, saying, 'Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.' **Gen 22:12**. He then lifted up his eyes and saw that a ram was entangled by its horns in a thicket. **Gen 22:13**. The final aspect of the Father's reproach, which He laid upon Christ at 12:00pm, was the 'knife' that pierced the Son's heart. There was no 'ram caught in a thicket'; Jesus was the Lamb of God who offered Himself, once for all time, for the redemption and salvation of mankind. **Joh 1:29**.

Faith is the substance

The book of Hebrews defines faith as ‘the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’. **Heb 11:1**. In the New Covenant, when we respond to the word of the cross in the obedience of faith, this is a fully *objective* course of action. Walking by faith, keeping the word of the Father’s patience, is the end of a matter. Our other law entices us to use the knowledge of good and evil to be self-defining. In other words, when the word of the cross is proclaimed by Christ’s messengers, we have a fallen propensity to define what the fruit of that word looks like. Those who walk according to this self-definition, mistakenly believe that this is an objective approach to life. However, they are walking in darkness!

Like Joseph, Abraham, and indeed Jesus, we must recognise that the timing and definition of the fruit that the Father is looking for in every season is not in our hands. It is not for us to know the times or the seasons which the Father keeps in the power of His hand. **Act 1:7**. We can take great comfort in Christ’s example. By faith, Jesus was kept by the word of the Father’s patience as He offered Himself to fulfil the Father’s will. **1Pe 1:3-5**. Significantly, He has not only demonstrated the patience of faith; He also ministers this same faith to us in the communion word. **2Th 1:3-4. Rev 14:12**.

In this present season, the word of the cross has ministered faith to us so that we can find closure on various matters. In the same way that Christ found closure by the patience of faith, we too can find closure through the obedience of faith. The Lord is setting us free from our need to define the end of these matters. He is delivering us to the fellowship of His offering, where we are kept by the word of patience. **Luk 8:15**.

The true Vine

Having concluded the first communion meal, which we also know as 'the last supper', with the singing of a hymn, Jesus and His disciples then journeyed from the upper room to the Mount of Olives and to the garden of Gethsemane.

Mat 26:30,36. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus told His disciples, 'I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.' **Joh 15:1-3.**

Jesus was describing to us the corporate body of Christ. **1Co 12:12.** The many fruitful branches are the members of His body, who, by offering, are bringing forth the fruit of the vine. The life coming to the branches is from Yahweh, the Root, through Christ, the Vine. 'The fruit of the vine' is the divine nature of sonship, expressing the fruit of the Spirit – which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Gal 5:22-23. Peter also said that if we are to abound in fruitfulness, we must show diligence to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love. **2Pe 1:5-8.**

This fruit (the grape) is the result of *offering*, and is *for offering*. The juice of the grape that each member drinks was produced by the offering of Christ, to whom we are joined. Also, the juice of the grape is for a drink offering. Therefore, in our drinking, we are to be pouring ourselves out on the sacrifice of another. Our communion meal is us joining Christ's offering, and making offering toward one another. Paul expressed this in the reality of the New Covenant when he said, 'I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith.' **Php 2:17.**

The Father is the Vinedresser

In His teaching on the true vine, Jesus immediately explained that His Father is the Vinedresser. The vinedresser plants the vine and watches over the vine, the branches, and the fruit. The desire of the vinedresser is that the branches would bring forth fruit. **Joh 15:5.** We have been named by the Father. **Eph 3:14-15.** **Isa 45:4.** He has birthed us as His sons, and He is watching over us. He has made us members of the true Vine, and His word has made us clean. He is caring for His vine and branches. Let us note the precious words that Isaiah wrote: 'In that day sing to her, "A vineyard of red wine! I, the LORD, keep it, I water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day"'. **Isa 27:2-3.**

It is important for us to understand that the Father is the Vinedresser, and to appreciate His love and care for us as His sons. There are seasons of visitation when the Father comes to prune us, and to deliver us from our fallen perspectives and false gospels. During the past season, the word has come to us as the command of the Father. It has exposed our false gospels and our worthless doctrines. It has identified where we have been eating the fruit from the wrong tree. The Father, as the Vinedresser, has been looking intently at each branch in the vine. He has been looking for the fruit of fellowship in each of our lives, in our homes, and in our congregations.

Christ desires that the Father is glorified. He is only glorified when we do the works that He has planned for us as sons of God. When we receive the word of the Father that prunes us, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, we will bring forth the fruit of sonship to the glory of the Father. Jesus said, 'By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.' **Joh 15:8.**

The vine branches

Jesus continued His teaching regarding the branches in the vine, by saying, 'I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire and are burned.' **Joh 15:5-6.**

If we are not abiding in the fellowship of Christ's offering, and being pruned by the Father to bring forth fruit, we will be cast off and burned. This can be quite confronting to accept. We must bring forth fruit as sons of God. **Jas 1:25.** A branch in the vine has no other purpose! Every son of God, who is a branch in the true Vine, has access to the life of the vine. **2Pe 1:3-4.** However, not every son of God *abides* in the vine so that they are bringing forth *the fruit of the vine.*

The word of faith that we receive at the communion table, compels us to *abide in Christ.* **Joh 6:56.** We abide in Christ by receiving His words, and by embracing our unique participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, our propensity to live by our own knowledge of good and evil, and to define our own name, is being removed from our hearts. We are being delivered from the darkness of our own understanding and the bondage of living by our own righteousness and 'good' efforts. **Eph 5:8.** Furthermore, the love of God is being poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. **Rom 5:5.** The love of God motivates us, and enables us, to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of another's faith. **Php 2:17.**

You can do nothing

Ezekiel said about vine branches, 'The word of the LORD came to me, saying: "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg from it to hang any vessel on? Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work?"' **Eze 15:1-4.**

When we are having thoughts of promoting ourselves or trying to become someone of importance, we are clearly eating from another tree. We are not abiding in the vine. We know this because, of itself, the branch of the vine is nothing. When we are 'carving' a name for ourselves, we are eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Nothing can be carved from a branch of the vine.

We must heed, and take serious note of, the words of Jesus, 'Without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned.' **Joh 15:5-6.** We cannot continue trying to be what the Father has not named us to be.

We are the branches. Christ is the Vine. We have no life in ourselves. When we abide in the vine, the life that we live by is the life of Christ. Paul expressed it this way: 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.' **Gal 2:20.**

Who shall deliver me?

What did Jesus mean when He said, 'Abide in Me, and I in you'? **Joh 15:4**. To 'abide' is to remain and be one spirit with Christ, the Vine. To abide is totally relational. Jesus said in His statement, 'I' and 'you'. He was speaking of an intimate and personal relationship and fellowship. This relationship is not possible if we are eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When we stop abiding, we are removed from the life and love of God. The relationship is, therefore, replaced by a rule or law. Paul identified this way of 'not abiding' as 'living by another law'. In the book of Romans, he stated, 'I see another law in my members.' **Rom 7:23**. The law that he identified was 'other than' the law of love, and 'other than' the life found in a relationship. When he cried out, 'O wretched man that I am!', he did not ask, 'What will deliver me?'; rather, he asked, 'Who will deliver me?' **Rom 7:24**.

So often, we want the life found in Christ the Vine, but we also want to be the source of our own life. We revert to our other law and lean on our own understanding. We want someone to give us a strategy which we can employ to live a good life. This is the way of the flesh that, sadly, many Christians have adopted. Going to seminars, or reading the latest self-help book on tips for a better Christian life, will not deliver us. Any approach, other than abiding in the fellowship of the seven wounding events that Christ experienced for our sake, will not deliver us. It is not about '*What* shall deliver me?' Rather, His life is totally relational: '*Who* shall deliver me?' 'To abide' is to remain joined to the crucified Christ. **Mat 11:29-30**.

Abiding in Christ

When Jesus spoke these words, 'Abide in Me and I in you', He had just given the disciples the bread and the wine of the communion meal. During His ministry, He had clearly explained to them what these elements truly mean. 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you ... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him'. **Joh 6:53,56.**

When we consider these words of Jesus, we are left with no doubt or uncertainty regarding the gospel of sonship. The gospel of sonship is to remain joined to Christ's offering. When we eat the communion, we are not proclaiming that we are endeavouring to be a son of God who is trying to bring forth the fruit of Christ by our good intentions. Rather, we proclaim that, without abiding in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, we are only fit for the fire. We proclaim the Lord's death, for as long as we have breath, by abiding in the fellowship of the wounding events that He experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross. **1Co 11:26.**

Jesus taught His disciples that we must *abide in Him* and His words must *abide in us*. **Joh 15:7.** We hear His words at the communion table, and these words are to lodge deeply in our hearts so that we live by the word that we have received. Significantly, we can only receive and live by His word if we are those who are *poor in spirit*. **Mat 5:3.** If we come to the communion table with our own knowledge of good and evil, and then mix it with the word that we hear at the communion, we will become confused, and we will not know the peaceable fruit of righteousness. **Heb 12:11.** In this season, the Lord has been highlighting that we must cease from the 'mixed salad' approach of trying to live at two trees.

Ask what you desire

In the context of teaching the disciples about abiding in the true Vine, Jesus said, 'You will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.' **Joh 15:7**. This statement has become misused and misunderstood, with an expectation that Jesus is ready to give people all their self-centred desires. **Jas 4:3**. Many people have grown angry with Jesus because He has not given them what they have asked. Some feel that they must have done something wrong, and that Jesus is punishing them because He has not answered their prayers. Others even say that they cannot trust God because they have not received what they asked.

When we think this way, we clearly have given no regard to the context in which Jesus made this precious promise. This promise of answered prayer must be understood in the context of receiving the words of Christ and abiding in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. **Pro 1:28-29**. To put it plainly and simply, He hears the prayer of the one who is abiding and eating from the tree of life. **1Jn 3:22**. He does not make this promise to the one who is sitting and eating at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **Psa 66:18**.

When Adam and Eve removed themselves from the fellowship of the tree of life and lived by the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, what happened? Did the Lord call out across the garden, saying, 'Hi there, Adam and Eve; I see that you are not abiding in My word and fellowship. I notice you are now living by another word. Well, I just want you to know that, if you ask what you desire, it will be done for you.' Similarly, Jesus would not be watching us mixing the fruit of the two trees, and call out across the garden as we eat from the wrong tree, 'Ask what you desire and it will be done for you.' This promise is totally connected to our abiding in Christ and His word abiding in us. **Joh 15:7**.



Restoring
my Soul