

Devotion & Fruitfulness – Empowered By The Holy Spirit

John 15:1-17

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. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 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. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

If we listen carefully to this we can see how this is reflected in the account of the activities of the fellowship we read in **Acts 2:42-47**

- The abiding is seen in their devotion and in the centrality of Jesus and His work on the cross
- Abiding is also seen in their obedience to his command to love each other – laying down their lives for each other
- The dimensions of both the word and Spirit are continually and vitally present
- Their fruitfulness is clear
- Their joy is complete

Let's look for a while at this statement of Jesus in John 15

- that we can do nothing without Him.

Do you believe that?

Perhaps one of the questions at the back of our minds is

- how it is that there are astounding achievements in the world amongst those who deny Him.
- Perhaps we doubt that we will personally know the full truth of this in our lives...

Jesus is, however, talking to them about

- what is about to become available to every believer
- until the end of the age.

Do you believe that?

He is talking about

- the desire,
- the will of the Father
- that He is glorified in us bearing fruit that lasts.

Do you believe that?

During this discourse in this section of John's gospel,

- Jesus also talks much to them about the Holy Spirit.
- Later on He tells them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit is poured out.
- In other words, not to go and try and bear fruit until they had received THE gift the Father had promised.

Could it be equally accurate to say that without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing?

- I think that is precisely what Jesus wanted His disciples to understand
- and believe
- as the events of the cross, His ascension and Pentecost unfolded.

Do you believe that?

- Not simply know and understand
- believe?

John uses the **verb** 'believe' in all his writing,

- with only one exception.
- **1 John 5:4-5** – For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-our faith. (Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?)

Believing is not something we simply think or understand to be true

It is not merely giving intellectual assent (agreeing with) something

Believing is something we do and that determines the way we live

This is why what Gavin introduced last week about worldviews is so important.

- Worldviews are more than simply a way of seeing reality
- although they are that
- They determine how we live in the world
- How we order our lives
- What we consider to have ultimate value
- What we will give time and energy to

But let me ask you this: do you believe that without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing?

Believing means

- to actively put your trust in,
- accept as true and authoritative
- and purposefully pursue in the way that you live your life

Do you believe that

- unless we abide in the Vine,
- with His life flowing through us,
- through the work of the Holy Spirit,
- we can do nothing?

If so, what are the implications for the way we live our lives day by day if we truly believe that?

One thing we will know is that

- the discipline of devotion is empowered by the Holy Spirit
- rather than self-effort
- and we will not to do it any other way

We will also do whatever is necessary to have this 'empowering' present

- continually being filled with the Spirit
- and avoid any reliance on self-effort
 - We will seek to keep in step with the Spirit
 - We will be eager not to quench the Spirit
 - We will have a heart not to grieve the Spirit

Our 'believing' needs to be focused in the right place –

- on Jesus,
- the author and perfecter (maturer) of our faith.

Now:

Prayer is one of the disciplines of devotion we see in the life of the fellowship in Acts 2:42-47.

Prayer is, I think, one of the most important activities that connects us to the kind of fruitfulness that Jesus calls us to.

Consider the following verses:

John 15:5 & 7

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. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

John 15:16

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

John 14:13-14

13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

John 16:23-24

23 In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name.

Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. -

1 John 5:14-15

14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

1 John 3:21-24

21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

None of the other New Testament writers say anything quite like this

Points to a life of fellowship in God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) that is joy filled and fruitful.

Also points to a life of devotion – of abiding in Him

- Devotion – living by faith and the willing obedience of faith
- Devotion – loving God with all our heart, mind and strength
- Devotion – that is expressed in our personal life and in the fellowship
- Devotion – that means aligning our thinking and our hearts with God's.
 - Changing the way we live our lives to give expression to that devotion
-

- Devotion – requires discipline even though we have made it the desire of hearts
 - ‘Want to’ does not always equal feeling like it

It is vital though that

- we always know and live in this truth:
- the disciplines of devotion are empowered by the Holy Spirit rather than self-effort

This is perhaps the most clearly illustrated by the devotion to prayer.

Prayer does not happen without us but it does not happen because of us.

It will most certainly not be truly alive without the work of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, none of our devotion will be alive and fruitful without this.

- We need to be properly connected to The Vine
- and have His life flowing through us every day

Do you believe this?

How much does that matter to you?

I think John 15 is one of the messages Jesus gave us in order to help us see why it should matter more than anything else.

As far as the church goes, the devotions of Acts2:42 are not ‘nice to haves’.

- They are as essential to the Church, and each of its members, as eating and drinking are to our physical life
- They are signs of life but they also nurture life
- are essential to our
 - growing,
 - persevering,
 - being strengthened in our faith
 - and bearing fruit that lasts

Do we really believe this?

- This is actually easy to answer.
- We simply have to look at what role these devotions play in our lives?

Do I

- spend time (quantity and quality) feeding on God's word;
 - time in His presence with His word
 - Time listening to the Holy Spirit in His word
 - Time learning to handle the Word well and accurately
- Is this a non-negotiable for me
 - that I have accurately interpreted the word
- Do I give time to searching the word
 - to ensure that I allow it to speak for itself,
 - interpret itself
- that I am not interpreting it through
 - the filter of my own thoughts,
 - emotions
 - or preferences
- That I am not interpreting it through
 - the grid of prevailing Worldviews
 - the pattern of the world

Do I

- seek out time with the body of Christ
- where I am in fellowship in the sense of koinonia
- Koinonia means
 - being in one accord with,
 - having all in common
 - and having a common purpose
- Do I make sure that I am part of building the church
 - that I am a part of the body doing its work
- Am I known as a giver in this context
 - practicing generosity,
 - practicing hospitality,
 - serving willingly and with a glad heart
-

- Am I encouraging my brothers and sisters,
 - praying for them,
 - stirring them up to love and good works
- What is the nature of my love for my brothers and sisters?
 - Does it look like Christ's
 - who gave His life up for the Church
 - or is it at least growing toward that
- Do I do what it takes to ensure that this has a vital and regular expression in my life?
 - Does that go beyond Sundays
 - Beyond the 'organised' meetings
 - Or am I waiting for someone else to organise a meeting
 - Does it have an organic, Spirit led, expression

Are the realities of the breaking of bread and prayers

- alive in my heart
- and expressed in my daily life
- Am I a regular part of the expression of these in the context of fellowship
- Of koinonia

Is what the breaking of bread represents (the cross) the central focus of my faith?

- Do I regularly find encouragement for my faith in this with my brothers and sisters
- Am I encouraging them in their faith in these times
- Is it the foundation on which I live the whole of life

What about prayer?

- Spending time in the presence of God
 - speaking to Him,
 - listening to Him
- both on my own and with the fellowship
 - Hearing His heart,
 - feeding on who He is,
 - learning His ways.

- Time praying for the nations,
 - for all men everywhere to be saved
 - Interceding for the lost?
- Praying for governments
- Bringing our petitions before Him
- Are our prayers, prayers of faith
 - are they aligned with His heart,
 - with His will

Do we pray in agreement with each other?

As much as God made prayer something we really should be doing all the time

- on our own and together,
- He never made it about the numbers.
- Where TWO or more, who are gathered in His name, agree in prayer... He is there and our prayers are answered, (Matt 18:19-29).
- The fervent prayer of one righteous man accomplishes much (Jam 5:16).

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- If you feel you want to go:
- Pray before and pray after
 - don't trust in numbers,
 - any man
 - or in an event
- Go with a heart ready to 'be in one accord'
- Plan wisely – logistics

Being in one accord underpins our prayer

- we have heard that before – Acts 1:14, 4:32 – one in heart and soul
- This is where our agreement in prayer comes from
- Hearing God together
- Hearing God through each other
- Most often listening (and agreeing) more than speaking when we are praying together
- Pleasing to God

Prayer is also not a matter of many words (Matt 6:7-8).

It is about devotion,

- about heart,
- about faith,
- about persevering in prayer...
- And, when we are together, it is also about agreeing in prayer
- This is perhaps more about a being one in “heart and soul” than agreeing 100% on every detail

Devotion to prayers cannot happen without devotion to the fellowship.

Devotion to the fellowship is incomplete if there is not a regular ‘together’ expression of prayer.

Story 1 – the way things are in the church...

This really should be a primary activity of the church.

- If we are honest then we know this
 - at least on some level
- Because the Holy Spirit has already put that understanding in our hearts
- But do we really believe that
- Do we believe it in a way that it finds a faith expression in our lives
 - the obedience of faith

Do we really believe that these devotions are as essential as eating and drinking?

- What would our daily lives / behaviour look like if we did believe this?

Story 2 – what it could look like...

Prayer, along with the proclamation of the gospel, is the chief work of the church.

The teaching of the apostle's gives us the context in which we pray and guides us around the content of our prayers.

The breaking of bread reminds us of the foundation of our faith,

- the reason we have access to the throne room and why our prayers are heard
- That we pray in His name because we belong to Him
- and that being heard and answered depends on what He has done
 - and not our effort

Fellowship provides opportunity for us to pray together

- in agreement
- and encourages / strengthens us in and through prayer

Prayer is a central part of how we express koinonia.

Prayer does not happen without us

- but it does not happen because of us.
 - Our devotion to prayer is empowered by the Holy Spirit rather than self-effort
- It is a partnership with God that
- He desires,
 - initiates,
 - empowers / resources
 - and delivers on

A very unequal partnership, but still a partnership.

We cannot take credit for the result but God counts our prayers as extremely valuable.

Prayer, true prayer,

- comes from a heart that acknowledges and believes that we can do nothing without God,
- that He alone is sovereign,
- that He is the source of all life,
- that the earth is His and the fullness thereof
- and that He is good

The more we neglect these devotions illustrated so richly in Acts 2:42-47,

- the easier it becomes to find reasons why we can't do this,
- why we don't have the time,
- why we have to do other pressing and very important things

But at what price?

- Jesus speaks about this in John 15.

What if our devotion is lacking?

- Agree with God
- Change your mind – repentance
- Be in fellowship with Him – properly connected to the vine
- Be filled with the Spirit – continually
- Practice the disciplines of devotion – by faith, with faith
- Make sure that this has both a personal and corporate expression

What do you believe?

How do the disciplines of devotion show up in your life?

How is the dimensions of abiding in Him and being continually filled with the Spirit expressed in your life?

Devotion to prayer

IS devotion to PRAYER

NOT to prayer meetings – being at prayer meetings

What would a devotion to prayer look like?

Something that is alive in my heart

Something I seek out opportunity for

Something that is even more important to me than daily food

Always ready to pray

Proactive in prayer

Constant in prayer

Seeking to pray in the Spirit

Flows naturally on the one hand but is pursued with the discipline of devotion on the other

Have stamina / capacity to pray

Have become familiar with the 'ways' of prayer

Able to pray across a wide spectrum. Motivated to pray way beyond my own needs.

Awareness that God wants all men and women everywhere to be saved – outward focus

Mt 18:18

31.15 συμφωνέω^a; συμφώνησις, εως *f*; σύμφωνον, ου *n*: to come to an agreement with, often implying a type of joint decision—‘to agree with, agreement.’

συμφωνέω^a: συμφωνήσας δὲ μετὰ τῶν ἐργατῶν ἐκ δηναρίου ‘he came to an agreement with the workmen for a denarius’ Mt 20:2.

συμφώνησις: τίς δὲ συμφώνησις Χριστοῦ πρὸς Βελιάρ; ‘do Christ and Beliar agree on anything?’ 2 Cor 6:15.

σύμφωνον: μὴ ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μήτι ἂν ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς καιρὸν ‘do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you agree to do so for a while’ 1 Cor 7:5.¹

4856 συμφωνέω [*sumphoneo* /soom·fo·neh·o/] v. From 4859; TDNT 9:304; TDNTA 1287; GK 5244; Six occurrences; AV translates as “agree” three times, “agree with” twice, and “agree together” once. **1** to agree together. **2** to agree with one in making a bargain, to make an agreement, to bargain.²

4859 σύμφωνος [*sumphonos* /soom·fo·nos/] adj. From 4862 and 5456; TDNT 9:304; TDNTA 1287; GK 5247; AV translates as “consent” once. **1** harmonious, accordant, agreeing. **2** thing agreed upon, compact.³

4862 σύν, συνεπίσκοπος [*sun* /soon/] prep. A primary preposition denoting union; TDNT 7:766; TDNTA 1102; GK 5250 and together with Strongs 1985 as GK 5297; 125 occurrences; AV translates as “with” 123 times, “beside” once, and “accompany + 2064” once. **1** with.⁴

AGREE, AGREEMENT

A. Verbs.

1. SUMPĤONEŌ (συμφωνέω, (4856)), lit., to sound together (*sun*, together, *phōnē*, a sound), i.e., to be in accord, primarily of musical instruments, is used in the N.T. of the agreement (*a*) of persons concerning a matter, Matt. 18:19; 20:2, 13; Acts 5:9; (*b*) of the writers of Scripture, Acts 15:15; (*c*) of things that are said to be congruous in their nature, Luke 5:36.¶

Note: Cp. *sumphōnēsis*, concord, 2 Cor. 6:15,¶, and *sumphōnia*, music, Luke 15:25.¶⁵

Acts 1:14, 4:46

¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 367). New York: United Bible Societies.

² Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

³ Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

⁴ Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

⁵ Vine, W. E., & Bruce, F. F. (1981). [Vine's Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 43–44). Old Tappan NJ: Revell.

31.23 ὁμοθυμαδόν: pertaining to mutual consent or agreement—‘with one mind, by common consent, unanimously.’ οὔτοι πάντες ἦσαν προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν τῇ προσευχῇ ‘all these continued in prayer with one mind’ Ac 1:14. In a number of languages ‘with one mind’ would need to be rendered as ‘prayed for the same things’ or ‘said the same in their prayers.’ ἔδοξεν ἡμῖν γενομένοις μαδὸν ἐκλεξαμένοις ἄνδρας πέμψαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς ‘we unanimously agreed to choose some messengers to send to you’ Ac 15:25. The expression ‘we unanimously agreed’ may also be rendered as ‘we were in agreement that.’⁶

3661 ὁμοθυμαδόν [*homothumadon* /hom-oth-oo-mad-on/] adv. From a compound of the base of 3674 and 2372; TDNT 5:185; TDNTA 684; GK 3924; 12 occurrences; AV translates as “with one accord” 11 times, and “with one mind” once. **1** with one mind, with one accord, with one passion. *Additional Information:* A unique Greek word, used 10 of its 12 New Testament occurrences in the Book of Acts, helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community. Homothumadon is a compound of two words meaning to “rush along” and “in unison”. The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonise in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ’s church.⁷

3674 ὁμοῦ [*homou* /hom-oo/] adv. Genitive case of *homos* (the same, akin to 260) as adv; GK 3938; Three occurrences; AV translates as “together” three times. **1** together: of persons assembled together. *Additional Information:* For synonyms see entry 260, *hama*. See entry 5807 for comparison of synonyms.⁸

2372 θυμός [*thumos* /thoo-mos/] n m. From 2380; TDNT 3:167; TDNTA 339; GK 2596; 18 occurrences; AV translates as “wrath” 15 times, “fierceness” twice, and “indignation” once. **1** passion, angry, heat, anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again. **2** glow, ardour, the wine of passion, inflaming wine (which either drives the drinker mad or kills him with its strength).⁹

ACCORD

A. Adverb.

HOMOTHUMADON (ὁμοθυμαδόν, (3661)), of one accord (from *homos*, same, *thumos*, mind), occurs eleven times, ten in the Acts, 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29, and the other in Rom. 15:6, where, for A.V., “with one mind,” the R.V. has “with one accord,” as throughout the Acts. See MIND.¶

Note: In Acts 2:1, the adverb *homou*, “together,” is so rendered in the R.V., for A.V., “of one accord.”¹⁰

⁶ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, pp. 367–368). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁷ Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

⁸ Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

⁹ Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

¹⁰ Vine, W. E., & Bruce, F. F. (1981). [Vine’s Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words](#) (Vol. 2, p. 23). Old Tappan NJ: Revell.

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¹¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, pp. 367–368). New York: United Bible Societies.