

REFLECTION GUIDE

JOHN 15:1-11

This Sunday we will spend extended time in worship and prayer. To prepare for our worship gathering, take some time to reflect on Jesus' famous words in John 15 about abiding in him. Following the reflection is our latest all-church axiom, Prayer Is the Path to Spiritual Vitality, and some discussion questions based on the axiom. These questions are designed to be helpful for you personally or for small group discussion.

Read:

"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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

- John 15:1-11

Reflect:

1. What stood out to you most while reading this passage? Why do you think it stood out to you?
2. How are you doing when it comes to abiding in Jesus? What practices help you abide in Jesus? What pulls you away from him?
3. What encourages you most from Jesus' words in John 15?

Pray:

Spend a few minutes in prayer, thanking God for your relationship with him that has been secured through Jesus and asking God to help you abide in him moment by moment each day.

PRAYER AXIOM

PRAYER IS THE PATH TO SPIRITUAL VITALITY.

Prayer is as counter-cultural a thing as we can do in a hyper busy, success obsessed, image aware, and media overloaded suburban culture. “American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to learn to pray. We are so busy that when we slow down to pray, we find it uncomfortable. We prize accomplishments, production. But prayer is nothing but talking to God. It feels useless, as if we are wasting time. Every bone in our body screams, ‘Get to work.’” (A Praying Life, 15)

This is actually why prayer is so important! Prayer forces us to look beyond ourselves. Jesus himself showed us the priority of praying to our Father in heaven: “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35). Jesus modeled for us the way of union with God through prayer. Spiritual growth is fueled by a vibrant prayer life as we discover how to walk with God in real friendship that restores and re-centers our lives.

When we pray, we say, “I am not made for myself, and I was not intended to manage all of life on my own. Right now, I need God’s love, joy, grace, guidance, and help.” We seek a regular rhythm that balances (1) our confession of our need for God in our lives / church / world, and (2) our commitment to trust God with our lives / church / world. In prayer, whether individually or together, we seek God’s praise and presence, as well as his provision. We pray expectantly to our Heavenly Father who loves us and never leaves us.

Here are a few of the practical ways this works out in our community:

- **Prayer is more caught than taught.** Like riding a bike, the best way to learn to pray is by praying. There is no way to download, absorb, read, or podcast a prayer life. It’s something you learn through doing the thing rather than observing something else doing it. The best way to grow a healthy prayer life is to pray.
- **Prayer is not a performance.** Don’t dress it up with impressive or “spiritual-sounding” language. Just talk to God like you would speak with your most trusted friend.
- **Praying fosters joy, hope, and strength in the Christian life.** Prayer is talking personally to God, and we grow through going directly to God ourselves. Over time, we discover an intimacy with God that we enjoy as he meets us in prayer, fellowship, and deep dependence upon him.
- **Prayer takes different forms for different purposes.** We need a well-rounded approach to our prayer lives that includes praying in a church gathering with a large group, praying in small groups of spiritual friends, praying alone. We need to pray silently, and we need to pray out loud. We may experience kingdom prayer, abiding prayer, intercessory prayer, moment-by-moment prayers, daily rhythms or discipline of setting aside times for prayer and solitude.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are some things that keep you from having a robust prayer life?
2. Think about someone you know whose prayer life you admire. What about that person's prayer life (or life in general) stands out to you?
3. Do you find it difficult to pray in group settings? How does this axiom encourage you to pray with others?
4. How have you seen prayer increase your joy, hope, and strength in Jesus? Can you think of specific prayers you've prayed or seasons in your life where God used prayer to grow your relationship with him?
5. Spend some extended time in prayer. Use the following categories to focus your prayers by picking one category to focus on or by moving from category to category one by one:
 - Kingdom prayer - boldly and specifically asking for God's kingdom to come where it is not present (e.g. salvation, renewal, healing, spiritual growth, etc.)
 - Abiding prayer - focused on growing our relationship with God (e.g. praying Scripture, thanking God, praising God, silence before God, etc.)
 - Intercessory prayer - praying on behalf of others (e.g. specific needs of your family, friends, church, and small group, spiritual growth for those in your family, friends, church, and small group)