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Make Your Home in Me

By Kregg Hood

As both a Christian and a minister to Christians, I feel a strong pull toward the pursuit of “Christlikeness.” This interest in a personal walk with Christ began to capture my attention in college almost two decades ago. Like so many other dedicated students of Jesus’ teachings I’ve studied the appropriate biblical texts, memorized helpful passages, and sought to practice healthy spiritual disciplines in my desire to experience true, spiritual maturity. But, for me at least, a personal, constant, nurturing relationship with the Son of God continued to elude me. My theology told me this was possible but my experience gnawed away at my inner confidence. While I determined not to quit searching, I still fought doubt and wondered if I would ever experience anything but an introduction to this quest.

In recent months my desire to expand my search was stirred. I know now that the Lord was breathing a new freshness into my weary spirit. Still, it surprised me when, while preparing for a lesson from John 15, my spirit stumbled over the first really helpful clue I had seen in years. I was reading John 15 in Eugene Peterson’s New Testament paraphrase, **The Message**. The reading for John 15:4 broke through to my heart: “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you.”

“Make your home in me . . .” That was a new way to describe Jesus’ words. I remembered most

translations used the word “abide” or “remain” to translate this idea. While both are accurate renderings of the word in John’s original language, neither carried the warm, personal feel of the phrase, “Make your home . . .”

Intrigued by the possibilities offered by this perspective, I began to ponder the actual word John used and study its usage in other New Testament passages. For example, John uses the past tense of this word in a number of verses to refer to a person spending the night somewhere temporarily (2:12; 7:9; 10:40; 11:6,54). In chapter 15 alone the same word is used ten times and in verses 1-8 the tenses employed suggest John intended to convey an ongoing sense of remaining or abiding. This realization helped me see why Peterson selected the reading “make your home...” His usage was legitimate, both grammatically and conceptually.

Perhaps it can be argued that using the phrase “make your home” in a section where Jesus also calls himself “the true Vine” is mixing metaphors. If so, this type of analysis might also point back to the root problem over which many Christians struggle. Analysis doesn’t always lead to experience. Knowledge doesn’t guarantee life! The thrill received as one expands the boundaries of cognitive, biblical conclusions about Christ can become a substitute for loving the Son of God as a Person.

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Both the content and the sequencing in John's gospel points to this reality. Chapter 15 falls within the section commonly called "The Upper Room Discourse" (13:31-16:33). Jesus is nearing the end of his earthly ministry. His public teaching is complete. Jesus even indicates he has completed the main course of teaching he planned to give to the apostles (15:3). At this point he wanted to emphasize the key to experiencing closeness with him. He chose not to re-teach previous lessons. He knew he would be gone soon and while the apostles would remember what he said and did, this knowledge alone was not enough. Without his actual presence there was no way they could carry on his mission. Their three and a half years with him had already demonstrated their inherent weaknesses! So Jesus spoke of simply remaining in him. The heart of this encouragement is summed up well with the phrase, "Make your home with me."

This is now my top priority. As a fellow learner of these truths, the following thoughts are offered to encourage a personal, constant, nurturing relationship with the Son of God. My own personal testimony is this intimate reality is now growing steadily in my life. In some ways I sense I have further to go than ever; at the same time, I'm beginning to feel the joy I once feared was only a dream.

The larger context of John 15:1-8 provides an intriguing collection of insights and illustrations the Savior spoke first to the heart and then to the head. Each thought is drawn from the text in John 15 and then illustrated through the lives of the apostles John and Paul. These men truly knew the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remain with the source of life. Jesus is the true vine (15:1). This effective illustration was given to men who knew the agricultural world of the vineyard. The vine symbolized life. Branches were

important because they carried grapes but the vine dictated the quality of the fruit. These men had received Christ's teaching and were "clean" (15:3), but that was not enough. If they did not remain in an on-going relationship with the vine, they would die. No branch can survive after it is cut off from the vine. It will dry out and the grapes will turn into prunes! A past knowledge of Jesus' teachings cannot sustain life. Fresh, new growth is needed.

John, many years later, wrote these words: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And *our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ*" (1 John 1:3). John could describe what he had seen and heard in the past. He also continued to sense the present reality of his relationship with the Lord. It's no surprise he was transformed from the "Son of Thunder" into "The Apostle of Love."

We, too, should seek fellowship with Jesus. Genuine fellowship means opening one's spirit up to the Lord. It includes maintaining the obvious habits of prayer, meditation, Bible study, and so on. It also includes a desire to see these times become an opportunity to actually sit in the Lord's presence, waiting to listen and discern his voice. It's hard to comprehend but the Lord actually wants to be with us! He wants to share his life with us, and will accomplish this desire through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). The essential decision a disciple of Jesus must make is to remain long enough receive the blessing. Are we sometimes satisfied to just "spend the night?" Jesus' desire is for us to make our home with him.

Make humility a hallmark of your walk with Christ. Jesus not only uses the vine illustration to describe his relationship with his people, he portrays God, the Father, as the "Gardener" (15:1). In Palestinian culture this man "tilled the soil." That role fits God's role as heavenly Father. But Jesus goes further and describes the Gardener as one who prunes the branches as well (15:2). To grow in this intimate, personal, joy-filled relationship with Jesus, the Vine, we must accept pruning. Both sin and unproductive habits need to go. This text implies God will do the pruning and cleaning, too. But the Christian still has to accept the procedure with humility, realizing God's intentions are to bring a great blessing. One Christian teacher I heard described the gardening process as "weeding and watering." Weeding referred to repentance and confession. Watering referred to the process of opening up the spirit to the presence of God. That's a very helpful, but simple model.

The apostle Paul experienced a glorious closeness with Jesus. But he was not arrogant. He

spoke of his on-going desire to know Christ even better (Phil 3:10). He had even heard “inexpressible things” in Paradise (2 Cor 12:4). At the same time, he was willing to share in the suffering of Christ (Phil 3:10) and recognized he had not achieved perfection (Phil 3:12). Plus, God allowed a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him humble (2 Cor 12:7). Paul accepted constant pruning because he had a humble desire to make his home with Jesus.

Cultivate a “fruit-filled” consciousness.

Much of Jesus’ concern in this section of chapter 15 affects the fruit-bearing capabilities of his people. Once again, the “make your home in me” theme fits because Jesus said, “Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (15:4) and “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit” (15:5).

The theme of fruit-bearing has often focused on personal evangelism. While leading someone to Christ is definitely fruit for the Gospel, the context of John 15 indicates a much broader and more personal concern. Jesus’ linking of the vine and fruitfulness means fruitfulness is, in fact, an illustration of the

promise that he will produce his life in us. All we have to do is to remain in him or “make our home in him.”

Paul wrote of this concern in Galatians 5:22-23. Here he described the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul also wrote, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful nature with its passion and desires” (5:24). Notice that belonging to Christ comes first and the power to crucify the causes of fruitlessness comes second. Once again, the personal relationship with Jesus governs the success of the fruitfulness.

This is hardly the end of a study of this magnitude. But it’s one place to begin. And when you make your home with Jesus, this refreshing journey will never end. We start to experience him now and that joyous communion becomes a permanent reality in heaven!

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