

The Promises of God: He Empowers Our Lives

John 15:1-5

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Lonie and I have for years had Friday date night. It started out as family fun night when our sons were little and we've done it ever since. It's our way of staying connected.

This past Friday we went to Coshocton's newest restaurant, if you haven't been there the menu is Puerto Rican with two American cuisine items. I connected, the food was good.

Did you see what I did there? Maybe not yet.

We're looking at John fifteen verses one through five this morning. If you're keeping track of the messages in the newsletter I switched up the Bible passages. I wanted us to talk about being connected. That is being connected with Jesus, being connected with one another.

Jesus said, "I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."

John 15:1-5 (NLT)

If you want to be empowered you need to be connected to Jesus. Power, authority, empowerment are the unspoken desires of our hearts. We don't like being powerless. That is we don't like it when others have power over us. We don't like it when we can't control our situation and circumstances. I am powerless when it comes to chocolate.

We want to have the authority to take action in every situation. But so many times the situations of our lives are beyond our authority to act. We don't like paying taxes, but we don't have the authority to not pay taxes without facing consequences.

Before we became Christians we wanted power and authority. We wanted it to live sinful, selfish lives. We wanted the power to do whatever we want whenever we want to do it. We gave ourselves the authority to behave and to think and to carry on as we wish.

As sinners we've even done the opposite. We wallow in self-pity because we don't have any power. We wear our lack of authority like a heavy rock on our backs. Either way, selfish power and authority or powerlessness, we become our own worst enemies. We are self-destructive. In Jesus words we deserve to be cut out from the vine. We don't produce fruit and we've lost the potential to produce fruit.

The desire for power, authority, and empowerment are part of our nature for evil or for good. As Christians we seek to be empowered to carry out God's will, doing Kingdom work.

Jesus has the greatest power and authority. He had the power and authority to leave heaven, come to earth and save the world from it's self. Jesus had the power and authority to turn water to wine; heal people who couldn't walk; open eyes that couldn't see. He had the power and authority to feed thousands and thousands; calm the sea, the wind and the rain; cast out demons.

Jesus had the power and the authority to forgive Matthew of his sin, restore Peter from his sin, forgive the woman caught in adultery, and become our sin. He had the power and authority over death. He raised a young girl and a young man from the dead. He brought Lazarus back to life. He rose from the dead. All things in heaven and on the earth bend their knee and proclaim Him Lord of all.

Jesus' power and authority is given to everyone, regardless of their sin, through His Holy Spirit when they confess and repent of their sin. It is by His Holy Spirit that Jesus dwells within all who believe in Him. It is through His Holy Spirit that Jesus speaks to and remains connected to all who call upon Him as their Savior and Lord. It is through His Holy Spirit that Jesus empowers His followers to be His disciples.

When you give your life; your body, mind, spirit, and soul to Jesus you are empowered. There is nothing in the heavens or on the earth that can come against you and be victorious. For all those who believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord are empowered to bear fruit.

The Father cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. John 15:2-3 (NLT)

Do you want to be pruned and discard or pruned and purified? Jesus is anticipating the disciples these men will become. So far the disciples of Jesus have followed Him everywhere. But within hours of Jesus speaking these words they will be scattered, Peter will chop off a man's ear and then deny three times he knows Jesus. None of that sounds like fruit bearing. All of it sounds like branch pruning and being discarded. Thank you Jesus for your mercy, grace, and love.

Jesus knows who these men will become. He has spent three years with them. He has discipled them to become disciple makers. As He says that they are pruned and purified He is looking about fifty days into the future. That is the day of Pentecost when they are all baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus has seen them struggle and fail. He has watched them be faithful and succeed. He has called them to trust in Him and to bear fruit. They will be empowered. They will bear fruit.

So many things happen in our lives to prune away the sin and purify our lives. The lives of these disciples are examples for all of us who call Jesus our Savior and Lord. There are bad seasons of life. There are diseases that happen. There are predators and enemies out to destroy the vine. Things like droughts and floods happen to the vineyard. Bugs, insects, and pest invade the vineyard. Birds come along and eat the fruit before it's ripe. This is the course of nature.

This is the course of life in a sin-filled, sin-corrupted, sin damaged world. We are susceptible to the powers of sin and evil attacking all of us. We are in the path of destruction caused by sin. We are vulnerable to a decaying world and a decaying body. How we respond in our sinful world makes the difference between pruned and discarded or pruned and purified. Do we trust Jesus in the midst of sin's most powerful attempts to destroy us? Do we give into the work of sin and let it separate us from Jesus?

Jesus is talking about you and me and the potential fruit we will bear. All the bad things that happen to you and me, happen to everyone else. Sin is everywhere and comes against everyone. Those who hear the Word of God and believe, need the sin pruned from our lives so that we are purified. Those who never hear the Word of God or those who reject the Word will be pruned and discarded. So, if you believe Jesus is the Vine then He will remove the sin from your life. In every situation you face, and every circumstance that comes upon you, there is a moment to choose: stay connected to sin or stay connected to Jesus.

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. John 15:5 (NLT)

When you are connected with Jesus disciple-making takes place. Your salvation from sin and it's penalty are only the beginning. When you and I made the choice to trust Jesus as our Savior and Lord we were forgiven of our sins. For me it happened in an emotional moment at church camp when I was a teenager.

Each person who trusts in Jesus has made that choice and has been forgiven. In that same moment we were saved from all of our sins: past, present, and future. We are delivered to heaven and rescued from hell. We don't have to face eternity separated from God in the burning lake of fire. We are freed to live everyday for Him now and then in eternity. That moment was just the beginning. From that moment you have had the opportunity to be connected to Jesus and remain connected to Jesus.

The connection we have with Jesus brings us His heart and mind, His power and authority. His heart and mind could be described as compassion and wisdom. His power and authority are infinite and ultimate. There are no limits to His power. There is no one with greater authority.

Being connected to Jesus gives us His power and His authority in every situation. We may go through the rest of our lives like Peter, leading people, healing people, and being imprisoned. We may go through the rest of our lives like the woman who had an eighteen year affliction. We may go through our lives like Paul, sharing the Good News and being arrested then killed. We will go through the rest of our lives and we will be connected to Jesus if we give Him our body, mind, spirit, and soul.

Jesus wants you to be a branch on His vine. Jesus wants us to be connected to Him at all times so that we can be empowered to be like Him and bear fruit. Being connected to Jesus you are being changed just like a branch on a vine grows and then bears fruit over and over and over again.

Your growth, my growth as a branch connected to Jesus is turned from wanting power and authority to being empowered with His authority and His power. That means that we can do all things for His Kingdom and for His glory. Our minds, our hearts are turned from the things of this world, this life, both good and bad to all that is Jesus.

In other words we want to be connected and we want to bear to fruit. We want others to be like Jesus. We want family, friends, neighbors to know and to trust and to be connected to Jesus. We want others to be disciples just like we're disciples.

We can be Christians who don't take advantage of being saved, a branch waiting to be pruned. We can be Christians who want all the power of Jesus and to make disciples. Many of us are some place in between. We're connected but still wondering what to do. You might be connected but don't know

how to make disciples. You could be making disciples and still wanting more of Jesus to be seen in your life. Let the Father prune away anything that hinders your relationship with Jesus.

Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (NLT)

Be connected, be empowered, be fruitful. You know that you want more for yourself than you have now. Sin has done enough to your body, mind, spirit, and soul. You have had enough. You have tried everything on your own. You have given yourself over to negative attitudes. You have been self-destructive for too long.

Jesus wants to be connected to you. He is ready to take away your sin, giving you a new life. He will be with you always. Jesus has been in your shoes, He has walked the path you are on. He has been tempted, but He trusted God and remained connected. Jesus has seen and experienced every temptation you have experienced. He carried your sin on the cross. He died as your sin. He placed your sin in hell. He rose from the dead to give you His power and authority. You can be empowered.

You are ready to bear fruit. It's not enough for you to escape hell, it's suffering and pain, loneliness and darkness: you are ready to be productive. You are ready to stop being like you, stop being like the world, and start being like Jesus. You want to share the love, mercy, and grace with others that you received from Him. You want others to become like Jesus.

From now on you want to say what Jesus said, do what Jesus did. In all of your relationships you're ready for Jesus' name to be heard. When you gather with family, friends, and neighbors you want them to see Jesus in your life. As you go through each day you're ready to help those around you to become disciples. Jesus has given you the power to interact, guide, comfort, encourage, and challenge yourself and the people you meet.

You are ready to be connected to Jesus. No matter how young or old you think you are being connected to Jesus for eternity is the only thing that matters. Regardless of your responses to life's ups and downs Jesus is the only person who is important. He is the nourishing, empowering, encouraging, powerful vine that you need.

Jesus will touch your brain. He will change your attitudes. Jesus will speak to your heart. He understands your pain and your struggles. Jesus will enter your life. You will become like Him. You will be saved from your sin. You will be redeemed from it's eternal penalty. You will be delivered to a new life now and for all of eternity.

Can you make this choice? Can you choose Jesus? Can you allow yourself to be connected to Jesus today?