

We seek the Spirit of Christ in our lives daily

Message for Sunday, February 26, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Romans 15:17-19 and others

Children's Message: John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches."

Some of you may remember we did this in Vacation Bible School last summer.

Here is the indoor garden I got for Christmas last year. All the plants are doing well... except for this one. One of its leaves is flopped over; it's not firm and straight like the other leaves. What's wrong with it? *Let them examine the plant.*

Oh, that leaf got broken off; it's not connected to the plant. That's why that leaf is so weak.

Jesus tells us that we need to stay connected to him. Talking with God in prayer and reading the Bible are like our lifeline, our connection with God. When that gets cut off—or we cut it off ourselves—then our spiritual life dries up.

Of course, being connected to Jesus also means being connected with everyone else who is part of the "plant," that is, the church.

Message "We seek the Spirit of Christ in our lives daily"

Welcome the Holy Spirit to work in our lives

There's an old story about meeting someone in the woods who is working feverishly to saw down a tree. You can tell it's an old story because they're using a hand saw, not a chain saw.

You ask, "What are you doing?"

"Can't you see?" comes the impatient reply. "I'm sawing down this tree."

You watch for a minute, and then exclaim, "You look exhausted! How long have you been at it?"

"Over five hours," comes the reply, "and I'm beat! This is hard work."

"Well, why don't you take a break for a few minutes and sharpen that saw?" you inquire. "I'm sure that would make it go a lot faster."

"I don't have time to sharpen the saw," is the exasperated answer. "I'm too busy sawing!"

For the Christian, spending time with God is like sharpening the saw. Bill Hybels wrote a book with the intriguing title *Too Busy Not to Pray*. I have it here, if anyone would like to borrow it.

It's surprising, but true: many people are so busy with urgent things that absolutely must be done right away, that they don't have time for the truly important things in life. And yet, it is these important things that make life worthwhile, that bring the joy and the energy to go on living. People are in a rut, and they think the way to get out of the rut is to dig deeper and faster.

The life of Paul in the New Testament is an example of someone who worked with intensity and devotion, yet did not burn out. I've selected a few passages from his letters which illustrate this.

Romans 15:17-19, New International Version:
I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done — by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10, New Century Version:
All the other apostles are greater than I am. I am not even good enough to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But God's grace has made me what I am, and his grace to me was not wasted. I worked harder than all the other apostles. (But it was not I really; it was God's grace that was with me.)

2 Corinthians 3:4-5, New Living Translation:
We are confident of all this because of our great trust in God through Christ. It is not that we think we can do anything of lasting value by ourselves. Our only power and success come from God.

Over and over Paul says, "Whatever I accomplished in my life, whatever goals I achieved, it was all because of God's grace and power working in my life." Look again at all the places underlined above.

I think that Paul may have written the third part of our mission statement, especially the underlined part:

ST. PAUL'S MISSION STATEMENT, part 3
We endeavour to seek the Spirit of Christ in our lives daily, and with love encourage others to do likewise.

This is true of our individual lives, and it is also true of the church as a whole. Whatever we accomplish, whatever goals we achieve, it is all because of God's grace and God's power working in us.

This is both humbling and encouraging. It's humbling, because it puts us in our place. But even more, it's encouraging because it puts God in his place: always with us, more than willing to help if we will only ask, eager to keep his promises.

I've done some reading in church history about churches that experience an outbreak of new life and new energy. Some call it "revival" or "renewal." Here's one interesting note: in every case—without exception—this new life came after a period of prayer by the people of the church.

It's like the difference between trying to push a car uphill, and putting the fuel in the engine. It's like the difference between rowing a boat against the wind, and putting up a sail and going with the wind. That's how I picture the phrase "seek the Spirit of Christ." We need to welcome the Holy Spirit to work in our lives.

This is not to say that we should all just sit back and let God do the work. Rather, it means to do our work with an attitude of faith and expectancy: God, we're doing our part, and we trust that you'll do your part.

I read a sermon by John Piper who was preaching at a Bible college to students preparing to be pastors and church leaders. In it he said to them, "If you think you have it in you to be a frontier missionary, you are disqualified. The only people who will bear fruit for God are people who know they can't." He then quoted Jesus' words:

John 15:5, Good News Bible:

"I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me."

Let me give you an example of the Holy Spirit working in our lives, to help us do what we cannot do by our own power. Corrie Ten Boom lived through some of the worst of World War II. She wrote about her experience in the book *The Hiding Place*. It is about a Christian family in the Netherlands who opened their home to Jews seeking to escape the Nazis.

They are eventually caught, and the whole family is taken away to the concentration camps. Corrie and her sister Betsie are together in the most horrible conditions. They ended up in Ravensbruck, the German concentration camp for women where 96,000 women were burned in the gas ovens.

Yet even in that hell-hole, Corrie and Betsie shone the love of Jesus Christ to everyone around them. Betsie was gravely ill, yet insisted on sharing their food and blankets with others. Right until the time of her death, Betsie was filled with love for everyone, including the sadistic guards.

That's right, Betsie and the rest of the family died in the camps, while Corrie alone survived until the end of the war. After the war, Corrie became a travelling evangelist, telling people about the love of Jesus Christ. Then it happened—she met one of the Nazis who had persecuted her. Listen to how she tells it:

It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing centre at Ravensbruck. Suddenly it was all there — the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blانched face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, he has washed my sins away!"

He thrust his hand out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to people the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? "Lord Jesus," I prayed, "forgive me and help me to forgive him."

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer: "Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness."

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on Jesus'. When he tells us to love our enemies, he gives, along with the command, the love itself.

Well, how sharp is your saw? How is your life with Christ?

Some people think they come to worship on a Sunday, and that's all they need. Can you take one breath, or eat one huge meal, and expect it to last you the whole week? Of course not! That's why we need to seek the Spirit of Christ in our lives daily.

Next Steps:

- Be hungry. Desire more of God in your life, more of his power, more of his love.
- Ask God to fill you, day by day.
- Do your part, and trust God to do his part.