

Bible Studies for Life: February 28

Joining God's Work • John 15:1-8

By Bobby McKay



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Last year, I was blessed to reach 25 years in the Gospel ministry. I have been fortunate to preach, serve, and pastor in various parts of Mississippi over the years and cultivate a deep love for His church. To mark the anniversary, I sat down one day to list 25 things I have learned since becoming a minister. This proved to be a difficult task and one that remains incomplete. So far, I have written down 117 items and I do not see myself running out of material anytime soon.

Near the top of the list is one area I would have not considered 25 years ago. There is a nagging loneliness at times when serving in the ministry for which no one is fully prepared. Never once in all my formal education was the isolation and loneliness in ministry discussed thoroughly or honestly.

The greatest and most lasting words for me on the subject came from Louis Smith, longtime Mississippi Baptist pastor who retired as director of church-minister relations and annuity with the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. Bro. Louis was one of the preachers I asked to preach at my ordination service. He spoke the following words: "Bobby, there will be

times in your ministry when you battle great times of loneliness. You will feel alone and maybe even you are by yourself in ministry. In those times, remember you are not alone. It is then when Christ and His presence will be real to you more than ever before.”

I cannot tell you how many times over the years those words have sustained and even prodded me to continue. I am not proposing the pastoral ministry is any more difficult than what you do each day, I am simply relating to you my personal experience. You do not have to be in a vocational ministry setting to understand the great need we have for the presence of God in our lives.

Many of the songs we sing contain for their messages words about the nearness and intimacy we can have with God through His presence. If each of us were to meditate on the presence of God more, we would have a deeper joy in our walk with Him and a more intentional desire to pursue godliness and righteousness.

Throughout the Gospel of John, we read seven “I am” statements from Jesus. He says of Himself that He is: the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, truth, and the life, and finally, the true vine. These various pictures of Christ not only reveal His abilities but also His character.

Jesus is telling the listener He is God, and He desires a closer relationship with each of us. For example, an examination of John 15:1 reveals to us the life-giving power contained in our relationship with Jesus. Loneliness may come knocking on our door, but with our connection to the Father we are never abandoned or neglected by Him.

With this connection comes intimacy, fruitfulness, and obedience. This connection also results in pruning. If we are connected to the vine, we will bear fruit. It is the only

logical result of production. The fruit does not dictate to the tree. On the contrary, the tree provides life to the fruit. This means the gardener (in this case, the Father) has the right to prune and manage as He sees fit.

Naturally, this begs a question for each of us. What areas in your life are not producing God-honoring fruit, and need to be shed for us to be more productive? The only way for a branch to produce fruit is to stay connected to its life source. In the same way, if we are unproductive or lifeless in our spiritual walk it is because we have strayed from God. Only as I pursue the connection with God through meditation, prayer, Scripture reading, and service can I be of perpetual use to Him.

Consider marriage or even friendships for a moment. If a spouse refuses to speak to or share time with their companion for an extended period, the relationship will suffer. Our greatest desire is to know God and make Him known to others. This is only possible as we dwell in His presence. Our shared enemy, Satan, knows this fact well. He will do anything in his power to keep you away from the closeness and intimacy with God. If Satan cannot tempt you to do bad, he will tempt you to be busy.

How is your connection with God at this moment? It can always be better! Many of us know the importance of electricity with the recent winter weather. It is cold and dark without the proper heat source. It is even more miserable without the presence of Christ in your life! Get connected.

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