

The
GOD
We Can Know

EXPLORING THE "I AM" SAYINGS OF JESUS

LENT BIBLE STUDY

7:00 PM

FELLOWSHIP HALL & ZOOM
MARCH 8, 15, 22, 29 APRIL 5

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The God We Can Know

“Let us occupy ourselves entirely in knowing God. The more we know [God] the more we will desire to know [God].”

- Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

Recap: I AM the Bread of Life: Knowing God's Satisfaction

I AM the Light of the World: Knowing God's Guidance

I AM the True Vine: Knowing God's Power

Furnace story

Have you ever been really close to a source of power but felt cut off from it?

Sometimes we can be surrounded by symbols and activities that make God's power as easy as flipping a switch, and yet we remain powerless. Sometimes we are plenty religious and still feel disconnected from God.

When was a time you felt near to God but far away from God's presence?

I AM the True Vine: Knowing God's Power

John 14-17: Farewell Discourse - Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure, when they will be cut off from him in death. Jesus offers an image to those who feel they have a lot to live up to and get frustrated by their own frailty.

Read Isaiah 5:1-15. Why did the vineyard/grapevine symbolize Israel?

The grapevine came to symbolize the nation of Israel much like an eagle symbolizes America. The entrance to the Temple had a giant grapevine with grape clusters carved and covered in pure gold over the doorway. The grapes were supposedly the size of a person's head!

Imagine Jesus saying this, standing in that doorway: Jesus is connected to Israel's source of strength.

I AM the True Vine: Knowing God's Power

Long-established vineyards know that the quality of the fruit passes down through the vine.

I AM the True Vine: same authority and power of God given to Israel lives in Him AND "I AM" - not just a son of Israel but the Son of God, connected to the true source of Israel's strength. So we stay connected to God's power by staying connected to Jesus.

Read John 15:1-8. How do we stay connected?

Abiding & Pruning

μένω - dwelling places comes from same root

Always plural “you”

Abide - ten times in John 15; 64 out of 118 in NT

This is a relationship of purpose and power. Imagine being the branch - not the vine or the fruit - the branch. On one side feel yourself connected to the vine - grab a hold of it. On the other side imagine that you are holding up fruit.

Pruning: pinch the suckers. What needs pinching in your life - that saps energy but doesn't promise to be productive?

Spiritual Energy Audit: what are the areas of your life that deserve your greatest energy? What are those activities that rob you of your best energy?

Pruning the Branches

“Protecting our five percent” - nearly 95% of what we do in life others can do: our job, clean the house, make dinner, etc. But there’s 5% that only we can do, and no one else will do the pruning for us.

When we prune something, we are not saying it is unimportant; instead we’re just keeping productive things productive.

If pruning helps a branch stay healthy, what does it mean for us to be pruned?
When was a time you felt pruned?

Are less important things robbing you of productive energy? If so, what are they?

Cutting Away the Branches

Other times pruning is not enough; the gardener cuts away dead branches completely. No hopes of producing - just weighing down the vine.

What nonproductive branches are in our lives?

- Regrets
- Living in the past
- Resentments
- Bitterness
- Envy
- Disappointment
- Shame

Can you relate to holding on to dead things that don't have the chance to produce?

Clinging to the Vine

Staying connected includes:

- 1) Removing what is unnecessary
- 2) Staying focused on the vine

Are your arms getting tired of being a branch yet?

Our effectiveness is determined by which part we focus on: our Vine or the fruit.

So much of our worth is measured by what we produce. But it's not up to us! Jesus says our job is to be a branch and let God's power flow through us.

What does it mean to you to “cling to the vine?” Have you ever placed more focus on being fruitful than faithful?

The Vine, the Branch, the Fruit

If we start to draw our self-worth from the fruit, then that begins to determine our identity. We begin to think that WE are the vine and our own source of strength.

“Do I receive my identity from the things I produce or the One who produces through me?”

“I make it my purpose to honor God right where I am now.” If you make that your purpose, then wherever you are is a place you can honor God. And if you honor God, you’re in the right place.

Vine vs fruit: which way do you look most of the time? Is it toward the goals you’re trying to accomplish? The tasks you have to do? The activities that keep your life fuller than you want? The demands you would like to get beyond but can’t seem to get rid of? Or do you look to the Vine?

Focusing on the Vine

When we focus on the vine:

- We admit we can't produce everything we'd like to.
- We admit we need help.
- Sometimes help looks like God's pruning.
- Sometimes God cuts away what we don't need.
- God is responsible for producing the fruit.
- Our job is to be a branch.