

“What Can Happen When Christ Lives In Us”

Tony Campolo was one of my favorite people. He died last November. He once talked about his prayer life. He said he gets up about half an hour before he has to, and lies in bed in absolute stillness and quiet. He doesn't ask God for anything; he does his asking at night. In the morning it's his time to be still. He's a tremendously busy man, and says before life comes rushing at him that day, he needs time to be still. In the morning, he surrenders himself to Jesus and lets Christ reach out and touch him and absorb out of him everything that's dirty, dark and ugly.

He says we can believe in the forgiveness of our sins, but Jesus wants to do more than just forgive. There's junk in our lives that needs to be cleansed. In that morning quiet time he connects with Jesus, and lets Jesus reach out and like a sponge absorb what is unclean and ugly out of him. In that time the Spirit of God explodes in him, and is like a fountain of living water that cleanses him.

There's a spiritual dimension to all of us, but the sin and dirt and darkness – the trash in our life – smothers and suppresses and crushes the Spirit in us. Tony says when you get cleansed, when you let Jesus absorb the dirt out of you, the Spirit is released and explodes in us. And the first effect is *love* – the explosiveness of love, sensitivity, awareness – you come alive in Jesus!

He went on to tell of several remarkable stories of how this Spirit of God flowed through him to others. I think it's best if he tells it in his own words:

I got on a plane right after a morning time of quiet with Jesus and I was squeezed in the middle seat sitting between two fat guys. The guy on my right is nervous. He's tense and tight. I can feel it in his arm. He's biting on his thumb and I can see beads of perspiration on him. I know that some of you are very good at turning to a guy like that and saying, 'Excuse me sir, you're messed up! You need Jesus.' I can never pull that off, but I did the next best thing. I leaned on him and I let the Spirit, the power of God, flow out of me into him. I had been cleansed that morning and as I was cleansed the Spirit exploded inside of me and I was filled with the energy of God. I leaned on him and I let it flow...

I am here to declare what it says in the 8th chapter of Romans: 'And the same power that was in Jesus Christ shall be in your mortal body.' It was there, that morning it was there. Jesus cleansed me and I felt the Spirit of God released and flowing through me and I let him have it all the way to Chicago. When the plane touched down I said, 'God, if you want me to talk to this guy you're going to have to give me a sign.' No sooner had I said that than this guy turned to me and said, 'Mister, I'm in bad trouble. I mean bad trouble. I need God.'

I was hoping for something more specific, you know! We went into the cafeteria at O'Hare and over the next half-hour I led him into a personal relationship with Jesus.

It wasn't because I was a good talker or because I came with the right words ...when you get cleansed and that Spirit explodes inside of you there is an energy force of love and help and it flows out of you.”

He relates another story...

I was walking to my car at the university where I taught. It was late at night and I got to the corner of 34th and Spruce and I heard the duck lady coming. She is a schizophrenic woman who quacked incessantly. We called her the duck lady at the University of Penn because she never stopped quacking. She seemed to be omnipresent. She'd never leave. She was crazy. She would come down the street quacking. I heard her coming up alongside of me. I almost looked away, and then I turned. Her eyes met mine and then for one incredible mystical moment I reached through her eyes and down to the depth of her being and I connected with her. I touched her soul...in that moment with all the power of the Holy Spirit I read through her eyes and into the guts of her being and I touched her soul, and then, incredibly, I felt Jesus coming out of her, flowing into me. I felt connected in Jesus.

She stopped her quacking. I had never known her to stop her quacking before. She stopped. She looked around and said, 'It's lovely.'

Before I could ask what she meant the light changed and someone bumped her. Her head shook and I watched her fall back into her schizophrenic condition and she started quacking again. She wandered into the crowd and disappeared and I stood there and wondered what would have been if I could have held onto her for two minutes more, five minutes more. If only I could have given Jesus to her, just for about five minutes more, maybe the disappearance of her schizophrenia would not have been temporary.

Wow! Turn to John, chapter 15. I thought of the words of Jesus here when I heard Tony share this. John 15:1, Jesus claims: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener" (or "vine grower"). In the Old Testament, *Israel* was referred to as a "vine" – the vineyard of God – God's people, chosen for a mission to the world. But because Israel failed, she began to be referred to as *degenerate vine*, an empty, fruitless vine.

Here, Jesus says He is the *true vine*! God's Son, sent on a mission to save world. He goes on to say that *believers* are the "branches": "I am the vine; you are the branches" (John 15:5). Because of this, there is a mystical connection between Christ and the believer. "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me" (John 15:4).

Christ lives in us! The apostle Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Colossians 1:27 says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Being a Christian is not just believing the right stuff, nodding yes to a set of doctrines – it is being connected to Jesus – as branches are connected to a vine. The Spirit of Christ actually lives in us!

One of the things that happens when Christ lives in us is that He cleanses us. He makes us clean inside. "You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

Tony talked about how in that morning quiet time Jesus cleansed him.

We do need more than forgiveness, don't we? It's one thing to be *forgiven* – that's important. But it's also important to be *freed* from the filth, the dirt, that can get into our life. Isn't it true that sometimes some ugly stuff can creep into our life: in our mind, in our thought life...in some of the bad attitudes that we can have...in some of our behaviors that aren't very Christlike. Jesus can *cleanse us* when we are connected to Him, branches attached to the vine. But there's something else that happens when we are connected to the vine.

We are able to touch other people for Christ. Jesus says we are to “bear fruit”. “I am the true vine and my father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit...I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing...my Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples” (John 15:1-2, 5, 8).

If you have an apple tree or a cherry tree in your yard, you'd like it to produce fruit, wouldn't you? Apples. Cherries. If you have a whole bunch of grapevines, and they never produce grapes, you wouldn't be very happy. They'd be a waste.

If we are believers, we are meant to bear fruit! What does it mean to “bear fruit”? It means to *reproduce* our faith in others. To influence other people for Christ. To have people come to believe in Jesus or be stronger in Jesus because of what God does through us.

There are a lot of people who say they're Christians, but they don't bear fruit. There are believers who think faith is just matter of reading the Bible, coming to church, nurturing our own spiritual life. But there isn't much desire, or sense of obligation, to reach out beyond themselves – to serve, to help others, to look for opportunities to share their faith with someone who doesn't know the Lord!

Jesus says those who don't bear fruit are *useless* – and will be cutoff! Again, Jesus' words: “He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit” (John 15:2). We don't bear fruit, we are cut off. We bear fruit, we are pruned so we can bear even more fruit.

If we're followers of Jesus, part of our destiny is to influence other people for Jesus. Jesus said, “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (John 15:16a). Think of the people whom God has brought across your path, who helped you decide for Christ – it could be a parent, a Sunday School teacher, a pastor, relative, neighbor – *you* are the fruit of their witness for Christ! Think of the people who encourage you in the Christian life, who lead you deeper into spiritual things, who inspire you – *you* are the fruit of their efforts!

Who's a Christian today because you told the story of Jesus to them? Maybe you weren't the

one to lead them to Christ, but you shared your faith and planted a seed. Who's growing in their faith because of your example, or your teaching, or your words of encouragement? See, God doesn't want us to be *receiving* all the time – God wants us to give, to reach out, to serve, to help – to bear fruit – and impact others for Christ.

Now we don't bear fruit just because of what we do, through our own power. It happens when we are connected to the vine – when we get connected to Jesus and He lives in us. Tony talks about the Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) “exploding” in us – I like that!

But there's another thing that enables us to bear fruit: *Christ fills us with His love*. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love...this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:9, 12-13). If you and I say we're Christians, and we're not more kind, more caring, more considerate, more understanding as a result, we had better check and see if we have the real thing!

It's the love of Jesus flowing through us to others that helps our life to be fruitful and make an impact! When the Holy Spirit “explodes” in us...when the Spirit controls us...we will be a more loving person! Love is one of the fruits of the Spirit. In fact, it's listed first. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love...” (Galatians 5:22). From what I knew of Tony, and the few one on one interactions I had with him, he embodied the love of Jesus!

Have you ever experienced a time when you felt connected to Christ and the Spirit of the Lord just kind of flowed out of you and touched another? When I was a teenager, and a new Christian, I would have my prayer time when I got home from school. I was alone in the house for a while. Sometimes I would feel the Lord's presence so much that I'd get up from praying, and just look for someone to whom I could show love. I have to be honest and say that I've rarely had that same experience as an adult. But hopefully the Spirit in me has made me a more loving human being.

Tony Campolo has had a tremendous influence on my life! I love how he could take the truths of Scripture and present them in fresh ways. Maybe it is most fitting if I end this message with some of Tony's words. “*Maybe it's time to say nothing, to go to the quiet place, the still place, and allow Jesus to reach out from the cross and like a magnet, attract out of you everything that is dirty and dark to get purified, to get cleansed. As you yield to the cleansing the Spirit fills you up and you don't have to say anything. You can just put your arm around that person and the power and love of Jesus flows into that person. That's what it's about.*”

“*St. Francis of Assisi once said, ‘You should give Jesus to people all day long and sometimes you should use words.’ What a good line. Jesus is not just a doctrine, just not an idea, Jesus is an energy presence in your life. If you allow him to cleanse you, when the dirt is taken out, his energizing spiritual power explodes inside of you and you shall be like a fountain of living water.*” Why don't we try that!

