

Dig Deeper – Abide in Me

8/16/26

John 15:1-8

Sunday AM

There was a season in my life when I was an expert at doing church. I served in church, led in church, and even taught the Bible – and yet somewhere in all the activity, I lost connection. Like a lamp plugged into an outlet – in the busyness of ministry, my foot tripped over the cord, and unknowingly, I became unplugged from the power source. As I've shared before, I lost Jesus at church. I went from thriving w/ God to barely surviving in religion. I'd gotten so caught up in doing church, I lost the wonder of being a child of God. ***I'd become an expert at serving but a novice at abiding.***

To abide might be the most challenging part of the Christian life – yet it's the most essential part b/c it's impossible to live the Christian life w/out abiding.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean b/c of the word I have spoken to you. Abide in me, as I also abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that's thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

John 15:1-8

abide (*meno*) to remain, stay, or dwell; it's to live in alignment under God's authority and in connection to His power – grafted into intimacy.

When Jesus said, 'Abide in me' He meant, 'Cling to me. Stick fast to me. Live your life in close/intimate communion w/ Me. Cast your whole weight on Me. Never let go your hold on me for a moment. J.C. Ryle

Abiding in Christ is cultivating/enjoying the most vital relationship in our lives – recognizing that apart from Him we're nothing and can do nothing. It's not measured by how much we know, how good we are, or how long we pray, but by a heart that seeks to depend on God to experience/enjoy His presence.

Think of **Psalm 42:1-2** – *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

Mary understood this – while Martha was busy doing something for Jesus, Mary chose simply to be WITH Jesus; she chose intimacy over activity. Teaching us that – ***God is more concerned about our connection w/ Him than our activity for Him.***

This is a mistake we often make by focusing on the fruit when Jesus focuses on the connection. A branch doesn't struggle to produce grapes; it simply remains connected to the vine. Our calling is to abide, using the spiritual disciplines not as the goal, but as ways of making ourselves available to Jesus so He can form His character in us and live His life through us.

So, what does it actually look like to live the abiding life? I want to give you five principles to: **A.B.I.D.E.**

A – ATTACH Your Life to Jesus

Our walk w/ God begins by grace thru faith – abiding though, isn't how we stay saved, it is how saved people offer their lives in daily dependence on God.

Notice what Jesus said – ***abide in Me***. He didn't say – *visit Me occasionally* – or, *consult Me when your life falls apart* – or, *try to work Me into your schedule* – or, *work harder*. He said – ***abide*** (remain) ***in Me***.

Truth is – most of us aren't spiritually **defective** as much as spiritually **disconnected**. We try harder, work longer, and do more, but Jesus says the issue isn't effort – it's connection. A branch is nothing apart from the vine – and neither can we apart from Jesus.

Yet too much modern religion focuses on what we do for Jesus instead of what Jesus wants to do **in/thru** us. We bank on Bible knowledge, church attendance, ministry, giving, and more to connect us – but they're all poor substitutes for intimacy. **Activity for Jesus can never be a substitute for intimacy w/ Jesus.**

Thus, our priority must be intimacy, not information – knowing Him, not just knowing about Him as abiding moves us from ***self-sufficiency*** to ***Christ-dependency***.

This is where abiding begins. Before we work for Him – we have to be w/ Him. Before we speak for Him – we have to listen to Him. Before we attempt to produce anything for Him – we have to receive life from Him.

The 1st question of following Jesus isn't – *what am I doing for Jesus?* It's – *Am I living connected to Jesus?*

B – BE with Jesus

If attachment speaks to our dependence on Jesus, abiding teaches us to **be w/ Jesus**. Yet in our obsession w/ doing, we often want a task, goal, or checklist – while Jesus simply says, **“Be w/ Me.”**

This is why practices like solitude, Scripture, prayer, and worship matter. They don't earn God's favor; they create intentional space for us to enjoy His presence. They're not religious boxes to check but relational rhythms that help us walk w/ Jesus. **Jesus is the goal – and this requires intentionality/attentiveness – as we can't miss the 1st base of following Jesus!**

I think of Pirates rookie Ke'Bryan Hayes in 2021 when he hit what appeared to be a HR – until replay showed he'd missed 1st base. Spiritually, we can do the same – we can run hard thru life and miss 1st base w/ God – which is intimacy w/ Jesus in an abiding life.

Jesus modeled making time for God. Mark tells us that early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus w/drew to a solitary place to meet w/ the Father. Jesus modeled that we can't allow the demands of life and ministry to replace the Source of our lives and ministry. And we especially need this today as we live surrounded by noise – texts, emails, social media, news, etc. And then wonder why we can't hear God. It's b/c we have too much noise pollution in our lives.

Just as light pollution can obscure the Milky Way, **noise pollution can obscure our awareness of God's voice**. Yet Jesus said – *My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me*. Sometimes we have to unplug from the noise long enough to become attentive to Jesus.

WTM – abiding can't stop in the chair where we meet Jesus in the morning. The purpose of 30 min. w/ Jesus isn't simply to have 30 min. w/ Jesus – it's to train our hearts to walk w/ Him thru-out the other 23½ hours of the day. It's Jesus in traffic, at work, in meetings, at dinner, at the ballfield, when someone irritates us, when bad news comes, and in the ordinary moments.

Point – to abide requires spending time to be w/ God.

I – **IMMERSE** Your Life in Jesus

If you abide in Me and My words abide in you...15:7

Notice the connection: we abide in Jesus, and His Word abides in us. They're inseparable. The goal isn't just getting into the Word, but getting His Word into us – allowing Scripture to move from information to formation to transformation so our lives remain aligned w/ Christ in a fallen world.

This is a challenge. Have you ever heard of neuro-plasticity? In Neuroscience NP is the brain's ability to create new neuro pathways that reshape our thinking and brain function thru repeated experience/attention. So, whatever repeatedly gets our attention – Scripture, social media, news, politics, entertainment, fear, etc., shapes the mental pathways we instinctively follow.

This is why abiding matters – it fixes our hearts/minds on Jesus as we take ever thought captive allowing our thoughts, beliefs, and values to be shaped by Scripture.

This is why Romans 12:2 says – *do not be conformed to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of the mind*. God's Word renews the mind.

I think of Meg's Nissan Sentra when we first married. It was badly out of alignment. If you loosened your grip on the steering wheel, the car immediately pulled hard to the right – but once corrected, drove straight. Life is like this. When God is displaced from the center, everything pulls in the wrong direction. Our thinking gets crooked. Our desires become distorted. Our priorities drift. But when we immerse/abide in Scripture it brings us back into alignment w/ God.

D – **DEPEND** on the Holy Spirit

...Apart from Me, you can do nothing...

nothing – absolutely nothing – referring to our inability to do anything pleasing to God or of eternal value in our flesh.

The abiding life is a life of conscious dependence. It's the realization that I can't manufacture anything worthy of God thru personal discipline, determination, personality, giftedness, education, or effort. Those things may accomplish human results, but only the H.S. in us working thru us can produce spiritual life.

Take this glove for example. What can this glove do in its own power/ability – NOTHING! Glove... point. Pick up my Bible. Try harder! It can't.

See – no matter how much I can encourage it, educate it, take it to church, put it on a committee, and tell it to try harder – it still can't do what it was designed to do. But the moment I put my hand inside it, something changes. The glove begins doing what my hand enables it to do – this is the abiding life.

Listen – God never intended for us to imitate Jesus thru human effort. He intended for the life of Jesus, thru the H.S., to live thru us.

Major Ian Thomas learned this after seven exhausting years of trying to become a better Christian thru sheer determination. He finally realized he'd spent years trying to live for Jesus the life Jesus wanted to live thr him. His conclusion was simple – *Jesus, I can't. You never said I could; but You can, and You always said You would.*

The Christian life isn't me trying harder to live for Jesus; it's Jesus living His life thru me.

E – **EXPRESS** the Life of Jesus

This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples. 15:8.

Here's the outcome – fruit. And this fruit is the character/actions of Jesus. But don't miss the order. Fruit isn't the root; fruit is the result. The branch doesn't produce fruit so it can connect to the vine. The branch produces fruit b/c it's connected to the vine.

This is the difference b/w religion/relationship. Religion says – *do more so God will accept you*. Grace says – *you've been accepted in Christ – now remain in Him and allow His life to transform you*.

Imagine I brought out branch that was dead, and attached to it to a beautiful cluster of artificial grapes. From 20-ft away it'd look great. You might even think – that's a fruitful branch.” Problem: the fruit isn't alive.

This is what religion does. ***It teaches us how to tape Christian behavior onto an unchanged life.*** We learn Christianese. We attend church. We serve. We give. We learn when to stand, when to sit, and when to sing. We know what Christians are supposed to look like, and before long we can become pretty good at taping religious fruit onto the branch.

But if we're abiding, Jesus produces genuine fruit in and thru us. His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, meekness, gentleness, and self-control – and His life begins flowing outward thru generosity, compassion, witness, disciple-making, and good works.

Meaning – if Jesus lives w/in us and we're in Him, eventually Jesus should show thru us.

Maybe this is what some of us have been missing. We've been trying to produce externally what can only be produced internally thru Christ. We've been trying harder, doing more, serving longer, running faster, and taping artificial grapes onto the branch. And Jesus says – come closer – *b/c apart from Me you can do nothing*

Stop trying harder. Start staying closer. Dig Deeper – and ABIDE.