

**The Importance of Abiding**  
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We are in a series called Forward in Faith where we are learning what it means to be a disciple – a follower of Christ. In this series we are using the word FORWARD as our outline. Follow – Obey – Reach – Worship – Abide – Resist – Disciple

So far we've taught on what it means to follow Christ, the blessing of obeying Christ, how to reach others for Christ and how to worship Christ by beholding Him so we can become like Him. Today I'm speaking on The Importance of Abiding.

Learning to abide in God's presence has been a lifelong journey for me. After becoming a Christian I had occasional glimpses of God's presence. But, I always yearned for more. I wanted to abide in His presence and not just occasionally experience His presence. God heard the cry of my heart and in 1979 He led my husband and me to Shady Grove Church.

The first time I walked into Shady Grove I knew I was home. It wasn't just because of how friendly the people were or how good the sermon was or how talented the musicians were or the excellent children's ministry. It was because the presence of God was in that place.

From the first note on the keyboard to the last word of the sermon... God was there. I could feel Him, sense Him, and hear Him. The atmosphere was charged with the power of the Holy Spirit. All over the sanctuary God was exalted and glorified through heartfelt praise and worship.

The church grew rapidly - not just because of following church growth principles, but because of following God's presence. I remember when Pastor Joe would ask Pastor Olen the reason for the growth of the church, he would shake his head, shrug his shoulders and reply, "I don't know. It's just God."

The leaders knew all the growth principles, but it was the presence of God that drew people to Shady Grove Church. It wasn't growth principles that changed their lives; it was God's presence that changed their lives.

Principles alone are powerless to transform a heart or heal a hurting soul. Principles alone can't speak to the agony of divorce, abuse, sickness, failure, disappointment, shame, or fear... but God can.

Please understand, I'm not saying that principles aren't important, because I believe they are extremely important. Principles play a major role in providing structure and systems. Principles maintain and facilitate what God is doing and without them the church would not grow and people would not grow.

But principles without God's presence are powerless. It was God's presence that changed my life and His presence can change your life too! That's why we place such a huge emphasis on God's presence at GFC.

In John 15, Jesus gives an analogy of a vine and its branches. In John 15:1-8, Jesus said:

*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

*You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.*

*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; showing yourselves to be My disciples.*

Just as a branch is completely dependent on the vine - we are completely dependent on Christ.

Just as a branch can do nothing apart from the vine - we can do nothing apart from Christ.

Just as a branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine - we cannot bear fruit apart from Christ.

Obviously, abiding in Christ is a big part of discipleship. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. So, apart from Him, we cannot become like Him.

In Bible days, people understood what Jesus said because the vineyard was extremely important to the life and economy of Israel. Vineyards adorned the landscape and every Jew understood the relationship between a vine and its branches. They understood that the vine supplied nourishment to all the branches. They understood that they had to stay connected to Christ in order to receive the life and power that comes from Him.

Jesus did not say He is a vine - He said He is the TRUE vine. To say that Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches is saying that Jesus is the source of all nourishment to our souls. He is our life and breath, our power, our strength, our hope, our wisdom, our joy, our peace, our deliverance, our healing, our provision! He is and our all in all!

Since Jesus is the true Vine, that means there must be false vines or counterfeit vines. Maybe we think money or power or success, or things or people will nourish our souls.

But counterfeit vines will never satisfy our souls. Only Jesus is the “true” vine. Nourishment for our souls and bearing fruit in our lives only happens...IF we abide in the true vine.

So let’s further examine what it means to abide. In this passage the Greek word for abide is “meno” (men no)

- It means to stay in a certain place.
- The noun is Abode which means - the place where we live.
- The KJV translates it as continue, dwell, endure, remain, and stand
- Webster’s defines it as -To remain stable.
- The classical Greek meaning is - to stay and stand fast.

So if you put it all together here’s the combined meaning of abide:

- To stay in a certain place.
- Our abode where we live.
- To continue, dwell, endure, remain, and stand.
- To remain stable and to stand fast.

Abiding in Christ means you make your home in Him and you stay there!

So then, how does that apply to our spiritual life?

Where are we supposed to stay, live, or dwell?

What are we supposed to endure and how?

How do we remain stable and stand fast?

Here’s how: We need to be so connected to Jesus our true Vine that we live there, we dwell there, and we make our abode in His presence. We aren’t visitors - but permanent residents drawing life from Jesus.

And when Satan attacks us, or life is difficult, we endure, remain and stand fast as we draw sustenance from the vine. We continue in worship, prayer, and the word and we remain stable and connected to the true Vine. That is what it means to abide.

But please understand...abiding in God’s presence is not a magic formula or a quick fix. You can’t just hear a sermon and voila...you’ve figured it out. On the contrary, abiding is an all-encompassing, all-consuming, relationship with our Creator, our Maker, and our God. It will require all we have to give and more. It’s not for cowards or the faint of heart. It will call us to live, but require us to die to ourselves.

Also, abiding doesn’t happen overnight. It happens over time...

For many painful, years I lived in guilt, condemnation, depression, discouragement, disappointment and fear. I would wake up depressed, go to bed afraid and repeat the whole process again the next day. I lived in pain. I was imprisoned in fear. I was suffocating spiritually and didn’t know how to make it stop.

Satan had so many strongholds in my life. Yes, I was a Christian. A sold out, born again, Bible believing, Spirit-filled child of God. I read my Bible, and went to church every time the doors were open. I did it all, but all of it wasn't enough. Something was missing. Something had to change. I didn't know how to Abide in Christ.

Part of the reason it took me so long was because I had a lot of baggage from my past. My mom and dad were separated when my mom was pregnant with me, so the last thing my mother wanted was a baby. We were also poor. So, not only was I unwanted, I was also a financial burden. My mother remarried an alcoholic and who sexually abused me.

It was this abuse that hindered my ability to Abide. It put me in a spiritual prison that took me a decade to escape. But, I did escape. I escaped when I learned how to abide in Christ.

Now my life is mostly characterized by victory, not defeat. That doesn't mean I don't have struggles because I do. But I know that no matter what – in Him I live and move and have my being.

I recognize His voice when He speaks to me. Even when I feel alone, I know I'm not. I know He is with me. Nothing is too difficult for me when I abide in Him. He gets me through every second of every minute of every hour of every day... if I abide in Him.

This is an important concept if we are to comprehend the vine analogy.  
 We are not our source; Jesus is our source.  
 People are not our source; Jesus is our source!  
 Our boss is not our source; Jesus is our source.  
 Our spouse is not our source; Jesus is our source.  
 Jesus is the Vine that nourishes us, provides for us and sustains us.

Relationship with God is the most important relationship in your life. Your spouse, your children, your relatives, your friends, your pastor, your counselor, your boss, your doctor, your accountant... no other relationship on this earth compares to your relationship with God. No one cares like God. No one understands you like God. So, are you abiding in Him?

There are consequences for not abiding in Christ. Consider for a moment every failure you've ever experienced in your life, every mistake you've ever made, and every sin you've ever committed. These are a consequence of failing to abide in Christ.

You see, it's difficult to sin when you're abiding in Christ. It's harder to do evil when you're encompassed by good. Light and darkness can't exist together. There must be a disconnect in order for sin to exist. That's why abiding in Christ is the answer to our sin problem. John 15:4 says it this way:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Moving forward in faith and discipleship only happens IF we abide in the true vine.

One of the most popular trends in fitness and weight loss these days is intermittent fasting. It's an eating pattern that focuses on when you eat, not what you eat. You cycle between periods of fasting and eating.

Please understand this: what works in physical health does not work in spiritual health! Way too many Christians are trying to get by on intermittent following – intermittent discipleship – intermittent obedience. They follow Jesus some of the time, they don't follow Him other times. They pick and choose when, where, what and how they follow Christ. This is the opposite of abiding in Christ and it never works! Abiding in Christ should be constant, not intermittent.

Have you ever noticed that some people praise God wholeheartedly when everything is going well? But as soon as life gets difficult, as soon as finances get tight or they lose their job or a child rebels or a friend hurts them, then they begin to question God or doubt His Word or quit attending church. As soon as things get tough they stop trusting God and go back to living in doubt and defeat. The Bible calls this being double-minded.

James 1:5-8 tells us to ask God for wisdom.

*But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

Remember one of the definitions of abide is to remain stable. If someone is double-minded they are unstable in every area of life, but when you are abiding in Christ, then you have the mind of Christ, you think His thoughts, you have His desires, and you want His will. Romans 8:6-9 says:

*The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.*

If you don't abide in Christ you will be controlled by sin - you won't submit to God or please God. You will be double-minded and unstable.

But it doesn't have to be that way because when we abide in Christ we are stable, not double minded. When you abide, your mind is controlled by the Spirit and you have peace.

Wuest's Word Studies says abiding is a "permanence of position, occupying a place as one's dwelling place, and maintaining unbroken communion and fellowship with another... To depend on Him for spiritual life as the branch depends on the vine. To take up permanent residence in Him and He supplies us with spiritual energy to produce fruit through the ministry of the Holy Spirit."

This definition leaves no doubt that proof of abiding is maintaining consistent stability in your life. Stability is proof of abiding. This stability is produced by the power of God and it sustains us in the good times and the bad.

Have you ever noticed it's easy to abide when everything is going our way? Like when life is good and our prayers are answered, when there's money in the bank, when our spouse listens and agrees with us, when our children obey, when our friends accept us, when our boss appreciates us, and when dreams come true? But, what about the other 364 days of the year?

Remember, abide means: to continue, dwell, endure, remain, and stand. To remain stable and to stand fast. Listen to the antonyms of abide: escape, evacuate, get out, abandon, forsake, and vacate.

When times get tough do you escape, evacuate, abandon and forsake worship, the Word and prayer?

I've had people tell me they haven't been in church because they are going through hard times. I want to say, "WHAT? That's all the more reason to be in church!"

*Thayer's Greek Lexicon* says it like this: to abide means "Something has established itself permanently within my soul, and always exerts its power in me."

The moment you begin to doubt, the moment you engage fear or unforgiveness or bitterness or self-pity or any sin is the moment you lose power... it's the moment you cease to abide.

Just as electricity provides power for a light bulb to produce light – Jesus provides power to us - when we abide in Him.

When we are connected to Him – He provides power and light and life.  
But when we are disconnected – there is no power or light or life.  
That's why we don't need to just occasionally connect with Him!  
We need to abide in His presence – and when we do - He changes our lives!

Since becoming like Christ is the goal of discipleship, discipleship does not happen without abiding in Christ.

You must abide in Christ in order to change your life!  
You must abide in Christ in order to become like Christ!

When you abide in Christ:

He takes your sin and makes you righteous!  
He takes your addiction and sets you free!

When you abide in Christ:

He moves you from a place called fear to a place called faith!  
From a place called anger to a place called self-control!  
From a place called bitterness to a place called forgiveness!

When you abide in Christ:

He turns the ashes of your life into beauty!  
He turns your mess into your message!  
He turns your sadness into gladness!  
Your failure into success!  
Your discouragement into hope!  
Your weakness into strength!  
Your hurt into healing!  
God can even turn can't into can and won't into will!

Are you abiding in Christ?

If you've never placed your faith in Christ, today is the day of salvation!  
If you've wandered away from Him, He's calling you back home today!