

Keys to Abiding in Christ
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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

Last week I spoke on The Importance of Abiding. We learned that abiding in Christ means we find our home in Christ and we stay there. We are so connected to Jesus our TRUE VINE that we live there, we dwell there, we make our home there and He supplies us with spiritual energy to produce spiritual fruit.

Today we are going to learn how to abide. My message is titled “Keys to Abiding in Christ.” The first key is:

1- To abide in Christ, you must first be in Christ

2 Corinthians 5:17 says:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

When we are born again through faith in Jesus Christ, we become a new creation “in Christ.” The person we used to be is gone! We are a new person in Christ.

To be “in something” is to be surrounded by and contained by it. When we are born again - not only do we receive Christ in us – but we are also placed in Christ. We abide in Him and He abides in us. We are surrounded by Him. His strength is our strength and His righteousness is our righteousness.

To abide in Christ, you need to know who you are in Christ:
 You are a child of God through faith in Jesus.
 You are redeemed by Jesus’ blood and your sins are forgiven.
 You are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ.
 You have power, love and a sound mind.
 In all things you have complete victory through Jesus.
 You have every spiritual blessing in Jesus!
 Do you know who you are “In Christ?”

I was talking to someone this week who was experiencing an attack from the enemy. She was so disappointed over an unanswered prayer in her life. As a result, she felt angry at God. Then she immediately felt condemned because she was angry with God. She started to question God and her place in Christ. She started forgetting who she was “in Christ.” Condemnation was causing her to lose her position of abiding in Christ. And that is exactly what the enemy wanted.

So, instead she confessed and accepted God's forgiveness. She stood her ground and maintained her place in Christ by applying His word to her life and refusing to get into condemnation. Romans 8:1 says:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...

So, when we mess up, we don't pull away from God and forget who we are in Him. No, we maintain our position "in Christ" and we continue to abide. Because when we were "in Christ" even if our heart condemns us, God is bigger than our heart.

2- Abiding results in pruning which results in fruitfulness

In John 15:5 Jesus said:

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.

That's great news – abiding results in fruitfulness in our lives. But Jesus also said in John 15:1-2

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.

A big key to abiding in Christ is understanding that He will add things to our lives to make us fruitful, but He will also take away things so that we may bear even more fruit. Fruit is Godly characteristics and character in our lives. God will cut away or prune everything – even good things – that come before Him.

Pruning is not a bad thing. In fact, what would be bad is if God did NOT prune us. That's because vines left to themselves will grow wild and produce huge canopies that hinder fruitfulness. Vines that are not pruned are susceptible to disease, bugs and insects.

Pruning also means cutting away the good to produce the best. In fact, the vinedresser will cut away whole clusters of grapes so that the rest of the vine will be a higher quality. This can seem counter-productive because the grapes look healthy. But the reason for pruning is that grapevines can become so dense that the sun cannot reach into the areas where more fruit should form.

You see sometimes God must cut things out of our lives that "seem good" so that the Son (S-o-n) can reach into other areas of our lives that aren't producing fruit. There may be some things in your life that looks good to you, but God is saying, "give this up."

Pruning also removes "suckers" – which are very small branches that grow in the fork of the main trunk of the tree.

They sap the life from the fruit-producing branches. In our lives, suckers might be those people or situations in our lives that just suck the life out of us. Maybe it's a friend that drains you with their negativity, gossip, or lack of faith or maybe it's a situation that tempts you to sin. God must cut these things out of our lives so we can bear more fruit.

Sometimes pruning involves removing sin, or distractions, or misbeliefs, or bad influences or bad attitudes from our lives. Yes, pruning is painful, but God is changing us to look more like Jesus.

Now, the next three keys to abiding are found in John 15:7 where Jesus said:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Remember last week I said that intermittent fasting works in the physical – it does not work in the spiritual. We cannot expect to grow and bear fruit if we practice intermittent discipleship, intermittent worship, intermittent Bible study, intermittent prayer, intermittent giving, intermittent serving, intermittent obedience. Those who abide and bear fruit are stable and consistent in these things.

That means we don't just come to church and worship if we feel like it. We make church attendance a priority. That means we don't just read the word when it's convenient. We make reading the word a priority. That means we don't just pray when we're in trouble or when we want something from God. We make prayer a daily priority.

It means God is our all in all. He is our life and our light. He is before everything. We can't even imagine a day where He isn't on our heart or on our mind. He permeates our life. We don't want to displease him or act independently of Him.

So, with that in mind let's look at the three keys from John 15:7. The third key is:

3- Abiding In Worship

John 15:7 says *If you abide in Me...* To abide in Jesus means to live where He lives. Psalm 22:3 says God inhabits the praises of His people. The word "inhabit" means to dwell. In other words, God lives in our praise and worship. So, when we worship we are abiding in God's presence.

Moses is a really good example of what I'm talking about. In Exodus 33:1-17 God told Moses he would lead the Children of Israel to the Promised Land – but there was one thing that was a deal breaker for Moses. That one thing wasn't the evil King Pharaoh; it wasn't fear of their enemies or lack of provision or a change of mind. That one thing was the absence of God's presence. God said that He

wasn't going with them - and that was the one and only thing that could keep Moses from the Promised Land. In Exodus 33:15 Moses told God

If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

Moses was willing to give up the Promised Land for God's presence. God's presence meant more to Moses than God's promises. Moses didn't want to go anywhere or do anything unless the presence of God was with him. What about you? Can you say like Moses - "If God's presence is not in it, I'm not going"?

We will not succeed if we go without God! We will not be blessed if we go without God. The only way to be blessed is to Abide in God's presence. And that is accomplished through our worship. You see worship is experiencing the presence of God and responding appropriately. Webster's defines worship as: extreme devotion or intense love.

We don't have to be in church to worship God; our heart can be a private place where we commune with Him moment by moment. Remember abide means a dwelling place or the place where we live. So, to abide in God's presence we must live in a place of worship. We don't worship God from a distance. No, we dwell or abide right where He is.

Exodus 33 tells a story that perfectly illustrates this. The Children of Israel were traveling to the Promised Land. Along the way they would stop and set up camp. Moses would go outside the camp and set up the Tent of Meeting. Verse 8 says -

And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses.

Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

Notice that the Children of Israel stood at their tent door instead of going into the tabernacle where God dwelt. They worshiped from afar.

But where was Moses? In the tabernacle where God dwelt. Moses didn't worship from a distance. He wanted to dwell where God dwelt.

The children of Israel stood at their tent doors but Moses ENTERED INTO the tabernacle of God's presence. The children of Israel I were Tent Door Worshipers. Moses was a Tabernacle Worshiper. No wonder verse 11 says

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.

Many of us are worshipping God at our tent door.

Instead of drawing near, we stay at a distance and try to worship God. Fortunately - unlike the children of Israel - we don't have to go to a tent to worship God. We have the spirit of God living in us. But figuratively many people are still worshipping at their tent door.

You see:

- Tent door worshippers don't have a passion for God's presence.
- Tent door worshippers are satisfied with worshipping God once a week on Sunday. They stroll in late on Sundays and really don't get much out of it.
- Tent door worshippers are more concerned about what others think than what God thinks. "What will people think if I raise my hands or dance or shout?"

On the other hand:

- Tabernacle worshippers have a passion to abide in God's presence.
- Tabernacle worshippers prime the pump for Sunday worship because they worship all week long. They are usually on time because they treasure every moment of corporate worship.
- Tabernacle worshippers care more about what God thinks than what man thinks.
- Tabernacle worshippers understand Psalm 27:4

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek. That I may dwell (or abide) in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. To behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple.

So, I ask you today...are you a Tent Door Worshipper or are you a Tabernacle Worshipper? Do you stand at a distance holding back or do you enter into His presence and give God your best? To abide in God's presence, you must continually draw near in worship. The fourth key is:

4- Abiding in the word

John 15:7 says: *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you...*

As Christians we are supposed to be people of the Word— Bible reading, Bible believing followers of Christ. I know people who say, "I believe every word of the Bible" and they hardly ever read it! 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The word complete means mature. You will never grow to spiritual maturity apart from abiding in the word.

We all know the Scripture "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free." But do we know what comes before that – what it is contingent upon? John 8:31-32 says:

If you continue in My word, then are you my disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Change comes as we continue in the word. The word “continue” is the Greek word “meno” which means abide. It means to remain – to be at home in – to live there! Whatever you need from God comes through abiding in His Word.

Abiding in the word is more than occasionally reading your Bible. Abiding in the word means to read the word regularly and to meditate on the word, which means to think about it through the day. Joshua 1:8 says:

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Notice that successful people don’t just read the Bible – they meditate on it – they think about it – they speak it – they do it – they live it. They know that when you abide in the Word:

When you’re down it will lift You Up!

When you’re lost it will show you the Way!

When you’re fearful it will give You Courage!

When you’re hurting it will give You Healing!

When you’re weak it will give You Strength!

When you’re in despair it will give you hope!

So, abide in the word! The fifth key is:

5- Abiding in prayer

John 15:7 says:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

One of the most common excuses for not praying is busyness. We allow busyness to excuse our prayerlessness. But why is it so hard to pray? I think we don’t pray because we see prayer as something we have to do instead of Someone we get to know.

We are totally missing the essence of prayer. God wants relationship with you. He wants your heart. He wants you to tell Him your innermost thoughts, your fears, your pain, your sorrows, and your disappointments.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says to *pray without ceasing*.

It doesn’t say sing without ceasing or fellowship without ceasing or even preach without ceasing. It says, “*Pray without ceasing.*”

And that’s another way of saying we must abide in prayer.

And when we abide in prayer there is an exchange:

- I exchange my fear for His faith
- I exchange my anger for His peace
- I exchange my depression for His joy
- I exchange my weakness for His strength.

But the key to this kind of praying is abiding in prayer. Luke 11:10 in the Amplified version says-

Ask and keep on asking and it shall be given you; seek and keep on seeking and you shall find; knock and keep on knocking and the door shall be opened to you.

Abiding in prayer is not just praying once or twice then giving up!

Abiding in prayer asks God and keeps asking until it receives.

Abiding in prayer seeks and keeps seeking until it finds.

Abiding in prayer knocks and keeps knocking until God opens the door.

Because prayer changes things:

- Hannah prayed and her barrenness became fruitfulness.
- Jonah prayed and the fish spit him onto dry land.
- Elijah prayed and the heavens gave rain.
- The disciples prayed and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Paul and Silas prayed and the prison doors flew open and everyone's chains were loosed.

Right now, I'm praying, "God teach us to abide in you so that we can bring forth fruit for your glory. Give us a deeper revelation of your presence and of our position in you."

I encourage you to abide in Christ, abide in prayer, the word and worship.

Be a tabernacle worshipper.

Don't worship God from a distance.

And don't let a day go by without praying to God.

Call on Him when you're happy and when you're sad.

Call on Him when life is tough and when life is good.

Call on Him when you feel like it and when you don't.

When you call on Him He will answer.

He will change your life, defeat your enemies, give you victory, fill you with joy, renew your purpose, heal your family, and restore what you've lost.

If you want to abide in God's presence – you must know who you are in Christ, you must submit to His pruning process, you must get in His word, worship and pray.

Those are the keys to abiding in Christ.