

Abide: How it Works, 6/12/22

Go Sunday thank you and celebration...

Todd kicked off our series “Abide” a couple Sundays ago and he used a helpful illustration about how married couples begin to look alike after they are together for a long time...also true in the animal kingdom- look at this **[Picture] happy couple**...I can’t even tell them apart.☺ But it’s a good illustration of our relationship with Jesus- the more we abide (make our home) in Him the more we look like Him and act like him. **[Title Slide]** Wrapped up in this metaphor of the vine and the branches is the secret of discipleship to Christ. Of resisting the enemy, of resilience and facing suffering, of power to live on mission, of deep character change like the fruit of the Spirit Pastor Todd spoke of in Galatians 5. Jesus goes as far as to say that it is impossible to live a fruitful Christian life outside of abiding. It is the baseline of all things in following Jesus. And as simple of a metaphor it is to understand, so many Christians attempt to live apart from abiding.

Imagine someone who is locked inside a Wegmans and yet dies of starvation. You might say that’s impossible but yet in our spiritual lives this is happening all the time. We are locked inside the supermarket of God’s abundant life flowing toward us. It’s all available to us and yet people are starving.¹ Some of us are starving in our marriage, stuck in the rut of our habits, flat-lined in our maturity and character, anemic in our engagement in the world. I think we all want to overcome, we want to grow, we crave it, how exactly do we abide? Which is the same question as how do we walk by the Spirit and how do we change?

We want to avoid the two common errors. On one hand, abiding is more than just “letting go and letting God”, it is not just some passive experience, as if we are the Holy Spirit’s avatars. On the other hand, the answer is not just trying harder. It’s not a matter of willpower. Now we can use our will and fake it for a little while, but for most of us our willpower is used up by 10:30am. You can act more loving for a little but you can’t be more loving. If willpower was the answer the pharisees would have been models of faith. Can’t change the heart. Let’s me share with you a one-sentence how-to then we will spend our time unpacking that a bit. Now one brief series will likely do little to make a major change in your life. This is actually a major part of where we want to focus our resilient discipleship efforts over the next several years.

Abiding: Christ is formed in our hearts (transformation) as we partner with the Holy Spirit to train our heads (attention) and hands (practice) in the ways of Jesus.

Let me take you to a few passages to work this out. Turn to Romans 8. Let me show you in Paul’s words the connection between the Spirit, our minds and Christ-formation. **Romans 8**
⁵ *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*

⁶ *The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.*

¹ Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life*, p.19.

Paul is pretty binary here when it comes to what we set our minds to...or said in Jesus' metaphor, what we are abiding in, what has captured our mind's attention. Either the things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit. What are the things of the Spirit? **Philippians 4:⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.** A mind governed (controlled, focused on, formed by) the flesh produces death. A mind governed (controlled, focused on, formed by) the Spirit produce life and peace. Or as I say all the time, everyone is being disciplined (formed) by a 1000 things. It's just a matter of what.

We can give our attention to things that will rob our soul like the 24-7 new cycle of outrage and anxiety and emotionally charged drama, or the nonstop feed of celebrity gossip, or what everyone is thinking about us and the need to constantly be validated by our peers on social media, or pointing out everything that is wrong with everyone around us. Or we can allow the Spirit to focus our attention on our relationship with God and things that are good and beautiful and true in this world. What are you giving your attention to? Here's the reality- much of our problem is distraction by the pace, demands and digital integration of modern, western culture.

Distraction (Hurry) Sickness- JMC: 10 Symptoms²

1. **Irritability**- easily frustrated, annoyed. People have to tiptoe around you, low-grade negativity.
2. **Hypersensitivity**- hurt feelings by a minor comment and escalate to major
3. **Restlessness**- Even when you try you can't relax. You find any rest or discipline boring, or your mind can't focus
4. **Workaholism**- Can't stop, accomplishment and accumulation. Careerism, housecleaning, overtired and have nothing left for any relationships
5. **Emotional Numbness**- You don't have the capacity to feel other's pain or your own.
6. **Out-of-Order priorities**- Disconnected from identity and calling. Sucked into tyranny of the urgent, constantly reactive life. You aren't getting to the things you said are most important in your life.
7. **Lack of Body Care**- enough sleep, daily exercise, healthy home-cooked food, margin, get sick a lot, gain weight, don't sleep well...Live on the four horsemen of the industrialized food apocalypse: caffeine, sugar, processed carbs and alcohol.
8. **Escapist Behaviors**- Turning to Overeating, overdrinking, binge-watching, social media browsing, porn, name your favorite narcotic.
9. **Hollow Spirituality**- Soul starved from the disciplines, quiet time, Sabbath, fasting, worship, community.
10. **Isolation**- Disconnected from God, others and your own soul.

How did you do? Better than 5? Not great? Here's a lie that we tell ourselves in each stage of our lives...we keep thinking that the next phase of life will be easier, more focused and then you will be able to get more margin, be less distracted, make more time for what is most important.

² Ibid. 48-50

Older crowd- has that ever happened? **Have be do vs. be do have.** Life-change begins in the mind. A decision, fueled by a conviction of the Spirit, to train our attention.

Dallas Willard: "The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds...This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to him.

In the early time of our practicing we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits- not the law of gravity- and can be broken...

a new, grace filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north."³

Romans 12:² *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

We partner with the Holy Spirit to train our Hands (Practice): In the Sermon on the Mount, after this magnificent message on what it looks like to live according to the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus says **Matthew 7:⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.** It is not enough to just think about what good and true... we are not brains on sticks. What we practice is who we become. Francis Chan once used a great illustration of this. Imagine if I told me kids to clean their room. About an hour later they come downstairs and they say, "Dad, we have been in our room really thinking about cleaning our room. We've made signs that say 'Clean your room.' We've even memorized it in the Greek." Francis says, "Wow that's amazing, but have you actually cleaned your room?" "Well, no not yet." Doing matters because that's how we change. In psychological terms by Christ-formation both in our cerebral cortex (how we think) and our limbic system (what we do). Our mind's attention and practice. This takes effort on our parts. Now effort gets a bad rap in some Christian circles. The reason is because we never want to confuse the means of salvation by grace alone in Christ alone. Christ's finished work on the Cross for you is what saves you. Jesus + Nothing. **"Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action."**-Dallas Willard.⁴

Part of the grace given to us is a new desire and power from the Spirit to put forth effort. Or in Paul's words: **Philippians 2:12-13 *continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*** The Spirit wants to train us to become skilled in the way of Jesus. Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers* said it takes about 10,000 hours to master a skill. In other words, you want to see the fruit of the Spirit in your life, you will need to put in the work. **[Slide]** My oldest son, Nathan and

³ <https://dwillard.org/articles/personal-soul-care>

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*

I work out a few days a week at the Y next door. There are some guys in there who are in incredible shape- at the apex of human fitness: muscles, abs, v-shape...man I want to look like that guy. But then I stop and think...but I really don't want to do what it would take to become like him. I don't know for sure, but I'm pretty sure he's not working out just a half hour 3 days a week...he's probably not eating Mazzella's Pizza and making stops at Ritas for Gelatis. I want the byproduct, but not the lifestyle. Same with musician. Christian is a great drummer who aspires to play professionally- practice 2-3 hours a day. Your life is the byproduct of your lifestyle. In engineering terms: **Your system is perfectly designed to get the results that you are currently getting.** This is true for following Jesus. Jesus says he gives us peace...and we long for that, we live in an age of anxiety...how do you get it? There is no short-cut friends.

So let's put it altogether- **Abiding: Christ is formed in our hearts as we partner with the Holy Spirit to train our heads (attention) and hands (practice) in the ways of Jesus.**

You say how do I do this, especially in the busyness of the digital age and traffic, and constant attention to my phone? You live like Jesus lived. **Matthew 16:24 *Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself take up his cross daily and follow me.***

1 John 2:6 *Whoever wishes to abide in him must walk as Jesus walked.* If you want to look like Jesus you need adopt his lifestyle. We often read the gospels to see Jesus as the truth and the life, but I would encourage you to read the Gospels to see the ways of Jesus. You will see what are classically called spiritual disciplines, prefer the practices of abiding. **Solitude & Rest, Prayer, Meditation & Memorization, Fasting, Simplicity, Community**

I gave you a list of 10 Symptoms of Distraction (Hurry) Sickness, let me give you 10 counter-practices to train yourself to abide in Jesus.

1. **Do a Time Evaluation** of your week. Simplify your life according to your values. Stephen Covey once said that we achieve inner peace when our schedules align with our values.
2. **Fixed Hour Quiet Time**
3. Find "sanctuary"- Make one place in your house, neighborhood, nearby
4. Set aside a 12-24 hr. time each week: **Sabbath Rest**. N.T. Wright- "It is only when we slow down our lives that we can catch up with God." Don't finish all your work. We often tell ourselves that once we get all our work done, then we will rest. Martha, Martha- you are busy and anxious about many things...when only one is needed. Leave emails unanswered.
5. **Phone Fasting**- turn your smartphone into a dumbphone, set screen-time limits for yourself, use it only during certain hours. I'm honestly not sure it's possible to thrive spiritually and also rely on our smartphone.
6. **Morning Solitude and silence**: Wake up 5 min earlier progressively Mon-Fri for the next two weeks, giving yourself an 50-60 minutes more time for self-solitude
7. Find a **variety of ways to enter into prayer**. Journal, walk, worship to a playlist, guided prayer app.
8. **Food Fasting** once a week, for a meal...fasting trains our self-denial.
9. **Regular Sleep Schedule**: Go to bed on time, get 8 hrs. and fast from tech at least an hour before bed.

10. **Togetherness**- accountability, mentoring, small group.

Next week we will pick a few of the ideas from this list and go a little deeper into practice. This is something we are committed to developing and training over the next 3 years. Focus group- least developed area.

The Lord's Supper- Is actually a beautiful way to visibly express abiding. It is a time where we intentionally focus our mind's attention on what is true and noble, lovely and praiseworthy- the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins on the cross and then we practice that by partaking of his grace eating the bread and juice, the symbols of his body and blood.