

Abiding in Christ

Chapter 4: Stay Connected Be Fruitful

Practice until It Becomes Natural

The practice of abiding is the practice of simple disciplines to remain in the presence of God that we practice until they become intuitive, instinctive in our life, as natural and rhythmic as breathing. So the practice of abiding is work at first. You have to be diligent about it. You have to labor to enter into it. You have to devote yourself to it. But He gives you incredible grace to enable you to do so.

Your Wandering Mind Can Become An Asset

Many years ago in my devotional time, I got so frustrated with myself. My mind would wander all over the place, and I'd be coming down and I'd have all my great intentions for a brilliant time today. I'm gonna so astonish You today. And I would get there and suddenly my mind is making lists. I mean, lists of things that I need to do. Making lists of stuff that I really have to do like grocery shopping! I'm thinking, "I'm a guy and I'm making lists about, yeah, I need to buy coffee? What the heck is wrong with me?" Or I'm sitting there figuring out 14 ways of making jam. I mean, my mind is wandering all over the place. I'm so frustrated, I'm saying to the Lord, "I hate this." I'm always making list. My mind wanders all over the place.

And the Lord just says, "Well, that's ok. Just wander after it and bring it back." I said, "No Lord. You don't understand. I could spend my whole quiet time wandering after my mind and bringing it back." And He said, "That's ok. I'll go with you." "What?" "I'll go with you. Son, this is a great discipline to establish. I don't mind going with you. When your mind wanders off, just go

after it, bring it back, get on with stuff.” So, that was it. My mind wandered away. I got a hold of it by the scruff of the neck, brought it back. And so, there'll be a day though when your mind will learn that it can't wander off. The thing is, that before we came to Christ that's what our minds did. We let them wandered off into meaningless thoughts. We had our own life to live.

So we must have the discipline of bringing our mind under the rule of the Spirit. “It's a simple discipline Graham. If you practice it, there'll come a day when your mind won't wander. And that'll be great.” And that's exactly what happened. It took me three months though. Three months! My gosh! And now I can tell my mind to think something. Now my mind is an asset. Now my mind is fixed. It's focused. It's under the rule of the Spirit. And I haven't had that problem for years. It's just a simple discipline! And that is what we are doing.

Exchanging Hurtful Reactions for Loving Actions

Just as a wandering mind is natural in the flesh, so are many of our reactions. We have to unlearn all the reactive ways that we have developed into life habits. Something happens and we react. Someone says something and we blow up. These are now instinctive reactions. We have to unlearn all of those because they're not helpful. And they are the flesh. It is carnality gone rampant. You have to know all of your reactions.

Blaming Never Helps

Sometimes we blame it on other people and say, “Well, he pushes my buttons!” Yeah? Well, Dude, you've got the button. It's like some people saying, “Yeah, but he makes me angry.” Ah, get off it! Nobody makes you angry. You choose to get angry. It's a choice. You're in control. Get over your bad self! The thing is when you get angry, it

is because **anger** is in you and it comes out. Some people may actually bring it out. But the anger is actually in you.

It's not like they put it in you. It's there and God allows this person to come into your life to reveal truth to you, "Graham you've got anger." Whenever a certain person gets within three feet of you, you flare up. You've got anger, son. It's in you. It's not in them. So God's allowing this person to come because He's trying to show you that you've got anger. Let's get this anger dealt with.

There are certain things that happen around us and our first response is to get anxious. Well **anxiety** is in you. So God allows certain situations. Why? He's just trying to gently point out, "Do you know what? You're anxious. Why don't we deal with that?" Some things happen and our reaction is fearful panic. Those things are in you. So, God allows the circumstance to come around so that He can show you. You know Graham you're fearful. So, we need to deal with that.

Perfect Love Casts Out . . .

So what you need right now is the **perfect love** of God. Perfect love (agape) casts out fear. So when fear shows up in me, the Lord is standing there with a gift. He's standing there with what's missing. What's missing in your life right now Graham is love. So, I've allowed this situation to happen so that your normal reaction, which is fear will become evident to you, son. Fear is your reaction when love should be your response. What's missing, Graham, is love. So let Me give you the love and you give me the fear. It's a **divine exchange**. The Gospel is a divine exchange. **In reality, perfect love casts out all negative emotions and their related destructive reactions.** You might say that the exchange is my love for God's love!

Vulnerability Promotes Love

So think about the situations in your life. If you really want to grow up in God, think of all the places in your life where you react, and that's where growth needs to occur. And if you are really sensible you will have friends, could be your husband, could be your wife. But you will have friends and people around you who will help you in those areas. You've got to be honest with a bunch of people. You must become vulnerable. Relationship actually hinges on vulnerability. "This is what I know about myself. When certain things happen, this is how I react. And I know if I'm ever gonna grow up in God I have to deal with those areas. And this is what they are. So I give you permission, that when you see me reacting, I want you to come up and say, "You're better than that. You're missing something."

If you are really serious about your growth, the first thing you need to know is that you can't do it by yourself. You have **two relationships** with God. You have a vertical relationship, one on one with God. And then you have a horizontal relationship with God through the friends and people that He has put around you. Some may not be Christians. Some may be animals. And that helps you to get a right angle on things. It is simple, yet profound. It is astonishing.

So we're learning to be **honest** with our self. Otherwise it will always be our patterns that defeat us. It is always our habits that defeat us. Yet, you can go ahead and blame others. But the reality is those things are in you. That's why you react. It's not, "Oh, well, he did this and it made me feel like this." No. You always feel like that no matter what people are doing. So, let's be honest about that. Let's understand our patterns. I react! Always know what your reactions are and then you've got to figure out what is the response I need to cultivate. And growth is

moving from one to the other.

Try Marshmallow Hand Grenades

If you can't stop exploding before you can think about a "best" response, then your only other option is to fill your soul with love, so that what shoots out is love rather than your toxic anger. Actually, rather than trying to manage reactions or responses, being filled with the Spirit (unconditional love of God) will always produce the loving responses of the Spirit of God. So abiding is about **responding to God** first as our primary action in any circumstances. It's about discovering His love, His joy, His peace and remaining in them no matter the emotional roller coaster of your circumstances. I don't live in my circumstances. I live in Jesus. That's my choice.

So there are just days when I just have to tell my emotions, "Shut up! Get off it!" The best way to control your emotions, the negative ones, is by **thanksgiving** and **rejoicing**. Thanksgiving and **rejoicing** are two life savers. They not only guarantee the presence of God, they also guarantee that you won't do anything stupid. "In everything give thanks. Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice." That means to **rejoice in the most miserable adversities** He showers on your life. If you will give yourself to rejoicing and thanksgiving you will be a completely different person in six months.

Until Gratitude Becomes Your First Responder

When something happens your first instinctive, intuitive, response is "Thank You, Lord." Now you are not thanking the Lord because something terrible has happened. It's not like Christian masochism. You're thanking God because He is with you in the circumstances and brought them to you to serve His purposes for you and others who are affected by them. It's not, "O bless

you Lord I just crashed my car.” No! It's, “Thank You, Lord, for being with me in all things.”

I reckon I can normally bring myself to peace inside ten seconds ... no matter what is occurring, because it's a choice. Rejoicing and thanksgiving are my intuitive, instinctive response to every experience of life as a result of practicing them. I want only love to come up out of the Spirit of Christ because I have practiced my spirit's surrender to His Spirit over and over and over again. “Out of your inner man flow the issues of life.” And “out of the Spirit of Christ within flows the love of God.” So when something comes at you from outside, you respond from the inside. Jesus said, “It's not what goes into a man that defiles him. It's what comes out!”

Thanksgiving is not casual, it's intentional. It's standing there and the deal is you give thanks until you become thanks. So you give yourself to thanksgiving until thanksgiving takes hold of you. Then it's almost like you become giddy with giving thanks. .. You get so into giving thanks that you lose sight of all the circumstances and you gain sight of Who God is. You give thanks until you become thanks. It's not, “Well, Thank You, Lord, that it wasn't worse.” That's never going to cut it. It is getting right in His face, and thanking God and going hard after it, because you know that He has a purpose in it even when you can't imagine what that purpose might be.

The enemy hates that! It throws him into consternation and he doesn't know what to do! And everything he throws at us only makes us better. Be rejoicing all through the day, aware of God's presence with you. Always know what you're rejoicing for. Make sure the rejoicing is focused. What should you be rejoicing about right now? What's the season of life that you are in right now? What are you learning from God right now? What part of God's nature is He most trying to impress on you

right now?

Beautiful Attributes of a Loving God

For a long time with me it was the **kindness** of God. God has been relentlessly kind to me for many, many years. And so I've come to depend upon the kindness of God as a way of life. God wants to show you everything about His nature. But there are times and seasons when He wants to show you something particular about Who He is and what He wants to be. So when God started to show me His kindness, it was like a rabbit trail that I just followed. And then it became a pathway. Then it became a street. It expanded into a road. Then it became a highway. And now it's a freeway into the presence of God.

It is so instinctive for me now, it is almost autonomic (like breathing is). Every day for the last 17 or 18 years, every single day, I have encountered some kindness of God. I can't remember a day when God did not say something or do something incredibly kind in my life. Day in and day out; week in and week out; month in and month out, God has been relentlessly kind about everything. God is relentless about everything. He is relentlessly kind, relentlessly loving until this highway opens up and takes you right into the presence of God.

And to think that for decades I had taught people not to **chase rabbits** in Bible study after Bible study. But then God showed me that the best carrots of God's **revelation** were actually hidden away in those holes. And the holes are the unrestrained conversations of all the participants in those Bible studies. It was like group counseling where **every patient and counselor was a counselor** for all others. It was indescribably rich. Instead of only one counselor, there were many. And the word actually states that, "in the multiplicity of counselors plans are confirmed!"

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So kindness washed over me, until it flooded my soul with God's peace. So after thanksgiving, comes the awareness of God's incredible kindness, which enables me to rest in the yoke I took up with Jesus and I am in a **constant state of peace**, which is so magnificent and overwhelming that it truly surpasses my capacity to understand. I'm into this place of relaxing and **resting** in God's peace as a lifestyle. I have become peace. It is really difficult to make me anxious. I can't remember the last time I was anxious. Whenever I do encounter a slap in the face with anxiety, within seconds I have released it to the Holy Spirit within to handle the situation and peace is restored instantly.

Joyous Intimacy

I'm in this season of joy right now, where I just hear heaven laughing. Everything in my life right now is about **joy**. It's about the **laughter** of God. I'm learning about God's happiness, I'm learning about God's joy, I'm learning about His bazaar sense of humor. All my trials and adversities are about establishing a constancy of joy. So, Graham, it is really important to Me that you hear Me laughing on the battlefield. I want you to live every day under My smile. There is a whole realm of fellowship inside My grin. Heaven is full of laughter. So, every day I want you to look at life joyfully. When the enemy comes around, I want you to laugh at him. When adversity comes your way, I want you to laugh in that too. I want everything to be a reason for you to laugh and enjoy life.

What aspect of God's nature are you learning right now? All your tests will be around establishing that! God is so cool the way He thinks through things. So if you just let God teach you, for a year or so, each aspect of the **fruit of the Spirit**, you've got at least nine years of fun. Maybe an extra year or two will be required when you do the 'long suffering' thing. Hey, it takes a while for suffering to get

amusing. However, there is a shortcut to joy in 'long suffering.' That shortcut is found in Galatians 2:20. You may never become 'long suffering.' That may be reserved for Christ in you to live that out. It makes patience seem like child's play. 2 Peter 3:9 uses that expression, '**long suffering**' as something God Himself does, "... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance in Jesus." However, if I embrace what Paul wrote, "... I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me," the Christ-In me already is 'long suffering' on my behalf. Actually you may be able to shortcut all nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit in the same manner.

The Fruit of the Spirit Is All Nine Elements

Consider this as well. The first three elements of the fruit of the spirit are the permanent emotions of God! Love, joy and peace are emotions. These are the essence of God. These are also the distinctive marks of the Christian (Christ-in). Emanating from these three emotions are the remaining six elements of the fruit of the Spirit. These last six are the expressions (reactions, if you will) which are a by-product or automatic result of these three emotions. Since God **is** love, not just possesses it, we too **are** love as the Spirit of Christ is in union with our spirit. What prevents love from flowing spontaneously from within us all the time is ignoring the Holy Spirit. Abiding guarantees the continuous awareness of the Presence of God as we learn to live from the inside to the outside.

Every Relationship Is Spiritual

I get so many requests from people to pray for them so that they'll have the presence of God. And my question is always one of these two. "Why did you stop abiding?" or "Have you ever been taught about abiding?" Abiding guarantees the Presence of God. Abiding in not something you pray to have poured over you. Abiding is a

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state of loving, intimate awareness of the object of our deepest affections. This is demonstrated in the love of most significant others. Most of us are more constantly aware of our spouse than we are of God. Yet, many of us say that God is our 'first' or 'primary' lover. If you want to know if that is really true, remember this. Loving is what I do when I am not thinking about it. Love compels me to think about someone else's well-being over and above my own. And to be sure, love is ever, only and always a spiritual thing.

Physical Expressions of Relationship

The physical expressions of love spring from the spiritual reality of love. When we think about our loved ones who are hundreds of miles away, our feelings of affection rise the instant in which they come to mind. We may have heightened feelings when we step into their physical space. But there is really no distance, with respect to the affection, between two hearts that love each other. And this is truly how we can develop a deeply, passionate, intimate relationship with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit! Abiding is the essence of returning to our first genuine, marital love for God and never to forget that passionate affection again.

Just Stay Connected

So let's look at verse 5 - "I Am the Vine. You are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing!" You know the Lord wants you to be incredibly fruitful in life. And fruitfulness is totally guaranteed in abiding. It's unconscious. It's unforced. God wants you fruitful in love even when your finances, health, job, and ministry are failing. God wants you fruitful in relationship to Him and others. He wants you to be fruitful by walking in the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit He wants manifest in

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you. His love and wisdom flow out of a heart that is settled. And the role of the Holy Spirit is to fix your inner man, your attention, on Who God is and especially on Who God is for you **now**.

Aware – Available – Accepting

Consider this. When you have developed the art of abiding, you will never again have a problem knowing the will of God. You may not have the 'big' picture, but you will know that you are walking in His will for you in your current situation. The last time I ever had a problem knowing God's will I think was maybe 20 years ago. I always know what God wants. There are three things God wants me to be. Be **aware** of His presence within me at all times. Be **available** to instantly stop what I am doing in order to divert my activities to His present request. And be **accepting** in a two-fold way: accepting all **others "as-is"** with no conditions of behavior or motive; and accepting **whatever God asks me to do** with thanksgiving and delight.

You can always know what the will of God is in any given moment because He's not hiding it. Jesus stated it very clearly in His only command to His disciples, "A new commandment I give you. Love one another to the same degree and purity as I have loved you. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love for each other!" This command is in perfect resonance with who God is. John put it this way, "God **is** love!" I simply step out in faith assuming that whatever God has put in my heart to do is His will. I can trust the Holy Spirit to check my spirit if it is not.

God loves you to know stuff. So knowing the will of God is like the easiest thing in the world because God is so intent on showing you, and it comes easy to us by the practice of abiding! When you abide in Jesus, it's like you

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are the will of God. Jesus said, "I only say what the Father is saying. I only do what the Father is doing." So abiding is dwelling in the presence of God. You are staying there. You are continuing there. You're right in the presence. You're right in the place for God to show you stuff. And for God to show you instinctively, intuitively what He's up to. Abiding means living in sonship that's fixated on the Father. When that occurs, all of your free choices, in that context, are actually God's ordained decrees.

Agape God! Agape Others! (unconditionally loving)

So, in every situation you're in, you're called to love God right there, right then. The expression of loving God is "Lord, I thank You. I trust You. I'm not sure how this is going to work out, but I trust You, and I give You thanks in Jesus' Name. Thanks Lord. Thanks that You are with me. Thanks that You always have my best interest at heart. Thanks that we're on the same side. Thank You that You can see what I can't see. Thank You that the power of the Holy Spirit is with me. Thank You that You are gonna show me how I need to work this thing through: Giving thanks, rejoicing, practicing your peace, trusting You completely, loving You.

Kingdom Minded

So God wants you to live in such a way that you can take advantage of everything that's happening for the sake of the Kingdom. Even when other peoples' poor choices radically affect your life, as you abide and as you stay in that fixed state before God, "He makes everything work out together for good!" Romans 8:28. That verse is not come kind of, "O well, everything will work together for good somehow." If you are going to love God it means you must trust Him. It's not like, "I'm a Christian, so God will get me out of my misery!"

You have to stay and you have to love God **in** that situation. And the purpose of God takes into account the greater good of the Kingdom. Your particular outcome might not be pleasant at all. The right question to ask is, "What is the purpose of God in this circumstance?" Everything works together for good, when as believers we see good in the way God sees it. You may be called to suffer greatly or even meet death is that will serve God's purposes in it.

For a lot of us, we've been in situations that have not worked together for good, that is, for our own personal good (pleasure, health, prosperity, and so forth). (Insertion by BoB: The reason 'why' is this. "When you are so in love with God that you define *good* in the same way that God does, everything works out for *good*, even for you, because you want to please Your lover, God. God always does *good*. It is His nature. The human definition of good only occasionally coincides with God's definition of good. Consider parent and child views of what is good in the moment of discipline.") When we've not experienced peace in the circumstances, we've been anxious, it is because we're not cooperating with the Personality of God and how He defines '*good*.'

The 'Why did this happen to me?' question is not helpful. Better questions are, "What does this mean?" And, "What must I do?" You need to **find the purpose of God in the circumstances that you are in**. Sometimes that purpose is about changing you! Sometimes that purpose is about teaching you faith or teaching you how to face something! Sometimes it's just about learning how to be faithful. "... having done everything to stand!" Sometimes it may be about confirming that you have learned something or that you have not. Or it may be about how to remain faithful to truth when others resist it. It is always something that we need to be doing in terms of the purposes of God!

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So, you **want** to know what the purpose of God is in this situation. But it is **quite sufficient not to** know. We **need** only to **trust God's heart**. For this thing to work together for good, all I need to do is to love God and trust His character. If I get to see His purposes in the situation, that's icing on the cake. If I truly trust Him, I do not need to know the reasons. Again, our kids can enjoy the security of our trust and not get anxious about the things which are our responsibility in their regard.

“When the love of God saturates my soul, that love will seep out through the fabric of my lifestyle and heal the wounds of the soul of all those who receive it.”

— J. H. Alan