

INTIMACY WITH GOD

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” James 4:8 NKJV

As we give God our attention and turn away from thoughts and actions that are not of Him, we draw near to Him. ABIDING in Christ is all about relationship! With the pressure of increasingly busy lives, it can be difficult to maintain relationships. For a personal relationship to thrive, we need to be intentionally present, to respond and communicate with one another. It is easy to drift apart when there are so many demands for our attention. But if the relationship is important, we prioritize and give time to make it work.

This devotional will take you on a personal journey of enriching your relationship with Christ over the next eight weeks through the ABIDING CHALLENGE. As Christians, we are called to ABIDE in Christ. The word ABIDE means “to connect with” or “live in.” In Hebrew and Greek, it means “to dwell” or “to remain.” We often refer to our home as our “abode” or “the place where we ABIDE.” So, when we say, “ABIDE in Christ,” we are talking about being in Christ and letting Christ be in us. We are talking about dwelling in Him and letting Him dwell in us. We are talking about Union with Christ. 1 Corinthians 6:17 AMP says, *“But the one who is united and joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”*

Going to church does not mean you are ABIDING in Christ; rather, ABIDING is your daily union with the person of Jesus Christ.

WHAT WOULD THIS LOOK LIKE?

ABIDING in Christ is illustrated in John 15 as a relationship involving the Gardener, the Vine, and the Branches. In this text, we read a powerful illustration about Jesus being the Vine and God being the Gardener, and in some translations, “the farmer or vinedresser.” *“I am a true sprouting vine, and the farmer who tends the vine is my Father.”* John 15:1 TPT

As we work through this text, we see that we are the Branches. Jesus says that as a Branch ABIDES in the Vine or is connected to the Vine, so his disciples are connected to Him. We are all connected to Him like a Branch to the Vine. As the Branch receives water and nutrients from the Vine, so do we. Our very lives are dependent on the Vine, which is Christ. John 15:5 NIV explains it: “Apart from me you can do nothing.”

DO YOU FEEL CLOSE TO CHRIST?

Are you connected to Him on a deep level, or more on the surface? It's so easy for us to know about Jesus and not know Him. We can learn about the teachings and the doctrines. We can know the answers to many questions. But do we know Jesus? Are we walking with Him and talking to Him? Do we consider His feelings and act based on His wants because we love Him? In Daniel 11:32 NKJ says *“.....but the people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits.”* The “know” in this verse is experiential knowledge and not just head knowledge. In this eight-week ABIDING CHALLENGE, we will further explore why we need to ABIDE in Christ based on the instruction in John 15.

ABIDING FOR GROWTH

Jesus describes the abundant growth that occurs when we ABIDE in verses 2 and 3: *“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already, you are clean because of the words that I have spoken to you.”* John 15:2-3 ESV

Jesus says that if we want to bear Fruit for God, we must ABIDE in Jesus and let God, our Gardener, prune us. ABIDING in Jesus doesn't mean we are free from pain or suffering. It simply means we still have life as we endure pain and suffering.

ABIDING FOR FRUIT

To be fruitful, verses 4 and 5 make it clear, we need Jesus: *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* John 15:4-5 ESV

Notice in verse 4 that a Branch cannot bear Fruit by itself. Can you imagine that? Imagine cutting a Branch off a grapevine, and it continues to grow grapes. That's exactly what we're thinking when we can produce Fruit without Jesus. It's not possible. So often, we think we must figure everything out for ourselves, learn to say the right things and do the right things, or even believe we can help God. No. The only way we will ever bear Fruit is if we ABIDE in Jesus. To ABIDE in Jesus is to look to Him as the source of wisdom, strength, and comfort. It means to consider Him to be your Lord, your closest friend, and brother. If we ABIDE in Him, we trust Him, obey Him, and seek to follow Him wherever He may lead us.

ABIDING BY HIS WORDS

ABIDING is powerful proof that we are Jesus' disciples: *“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this, my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”* John 15:7-8 ESV

These verses sound like a blank check, as He talks to His disciples about bearing Fruit. Please don't take them out of context. They say that ABIDING in Jesus opens the door for our prayer to be answered. You cannot ABIDE in Christ and harbor desires that are contrary to His will. Jesus' instruction is clear: *“If you ABIDE in me, and my words ABIDE in you...”*

In other words, His disciples believed and followed the concepts that He taught them. If this is true, they could *“ask whatever they wish.”* And then, they will bear much Fruit, God will be glorified, and they will prove to be Jesus' disciples. Can you imagine a Christian hearing the words of Christ and refusing to make them a part of his life? Wouldn't that be a sad situation?

“If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” John 15:6 ESV. Failure to ABIDE in Christ and bear Fruit has catastrophic results.

ABIDE IN LOVE AND JOY

ABIDING in Christ takes a lot of trust. It's not easy to give yourself over to someone else. It's not something I do lightly. Why would I choose to ABIDE in Jesus and trust Him to this extent? Jesus gives us every reason to ABIDE in Him.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” John 15:9-11 ESV

Pursuing a righteous and obedient life brings love and joy unlike anything this world could give us. It is unlike anything else you will ever know or experience. This study will show that it's crucial for us to prioritize our relationship with Christ and to make that relationship deeper than simply knowing information about Him. We must welcome Jesus into our lives and give Him a home in our hearts. This is the only way to truly be the church of Christ. Let him in. Through this ABIDING CHALLENGE devotional, you will:

- Discover ways to ABIDE in Jesus throughout your day.
- Find peace in pursuing a daily walk with Jesus.
- Deepen your relationship with Jesus.
- Pursue His ABIDING Presence.

A relationship with Christ won't spontaneously sprout and grow. It must be cultivated and nurtured to flourish. It must be intentional. This requires work — hence the need to ABIDE in Him.

A PRAYER TO PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, as I go through this eight-week ABIDING CHALLENGE, I pray that you grant me a spirit of wisdom and of revelation into an ABIDING life in Christ, who is my true Vine.

Give me revelation for a deep, personal, and intimate insight into the true knowledge of Him. Just like you did for Paul in Galatians 1:16, reveal your Son in me so that I might share Christ among the unsaved. Please lead me into a deeper experience of Your love.

Draw me into your manifest presence and speak to me in a way that I can hear. I pray that You use every moment of my day to foster a deeper connection with You.

Help me let go of everything that distances me from You. Teach me to ABIDE and help me to enter Your rest. May my life in Christ be enriched in a deep and profound way in Jesus' Mighty Name! Amen.

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK ONE - DAY ONE

PREPARING THE SOIL OF OUR HEART

KEY SCRIPTURE: Mark 4:3-9

READING: Matthew 6:21; 1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 5:8

INTRODUCTION

The human heart was created to mirror God's own heart (Genesis 1:27; James 3:9). God always seeks a heart that is prepared and ready so He can steer towards His will. The heart refers to the soul of a man that controls the will and emotions. The heart is the "inner man" (2 Corinthians 4:16). The prophet Ezekiel makes several references to a "new heart," which God gives and seeks (Ezekiel 18:31).

In Mark 4, Jesus highlights a piercing truth in the Parable of the Sower. In the parable, God, the Sower, is liberally scattering seed about. Sometimes the seeds take root. Sometimes they don't. The hard-to-hear truth in this parable is that the seed is always good. The variable is always the soil of our heart. In the parable, some seeds fell on the path (shallow heart). Other seeds fell on rocky ground (hard and rebellious heart), and others fell among thorns (wounded heart). Other seeds fell into good soil (God-kind-of heart), and verse 8 tells us

"Produced grain growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." Mark 4:8 ESV

My question to you is this: What is the condition of your heart? To get the maximum result from the eight-week ABIDING CHALLENGE, you will need to prepare the soil of your heart. First, examine your heart. Allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart. Follow these examples from David:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting" Psalm 139:23-24 ESV

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" Psalm 51:10 ESV

RESPOND

EXAMINE MY HEART, LORD – Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and reveal all grievous ways in you. (Psalm 139:23-24 ESV)

- **REPENT** – Repent and forgive anyone who has hurt you.

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; 1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 4:23

on these scriptures and let the Lord speak to your heart. To

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THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK ONE - DAY TWO

THE PRESENCE OF GOD RELEASES GOD'S POWER

KEY SCRIPTURE: Psalms 105:4

READING: 1 Chronicles 16:11; Acts 17:27; Exodus 33:14; Matthew 5:8

INTRODUCTION

“Seek and deeply long for the LORD and His strength [His power, His might]; Seek and deeply long for His face and His presence continually.” Psalms 105:4 AMP

In a recent series on how to attract God’s presence, I made this Holy Spirit-filled statement: “You were created to live in God’s presence; you were designed to host God’s presence; You were fashioned to hunger for God’s presence.”

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When shall I come and appear in God’s Presence?” Psalm 42:1-2 NASB

In chapter one of the ABIDING CHALLENGE book, we discover seven clod-busting, expectation-raising truths modeled and taught by Jesus. These truths are designed to help prepare our hearts to host God’s presence. This is Truth #1: We must understand that the presence of God releases the power of God. We all want to see and experience the power of God; however, His power is released through ABIDING in His presence. After Moses had displayed the incredible power of God in miracles, signs, and wonders in Egypt and in the wilderness, he wasn’t satisfied. He wanted God’s presence. Moses understood the relationship between God’s presence and power and how His presence precedes His power. So, Moses asked the Lord to show him His ways that he might find favor in His sight, and the Lord’s response is recorded in two books of the Bible:

“And He said, ‘My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’” Exodus 33:14
ESV

“The Lord made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel.” Psalm 103:7
ESV

To paraphrase, the Lord made known His ABIDING presence to Moses and displayed His power to the children of Israel.

HIS FACE AND PRESENCE

Many times, in Scripture, God’s people are encouraged to seek His face. If we can’t see God’s face, how do we seek God’s face? The Hebrew word for “face” is often translated in the Old Testament as “presence.” When we seek the face of God, we are seeking His presence. A person’s face reveals much about his or her character and personality. We see the inward emotions of a person expressed outwardly on their face. We recognize a person by looking at his or her face. And so, before going to seek after God’s power, first seek His ABIDING presence.

RESPOND

- **GOD'S PRESENCE** – How do you cultivate God's presence in your life?

- **ATTRACT HIS PRESENCE** – How can you attract God's presence?

- **HUNGER** – Examine the yearnings of your soul.

- What do you hunger for most in your life?
- Do you hunger for God's presence? (Psalm 42:1-2 NKJV)
- Is God's presence a priority in your life?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

1 Chronicles 16:11; Acts 17:27; Exodus 33:14; Matthew 5:8

Meditate on the scriptures above and let the Lord speak to your heart. To meditate, you need to memorize, analyze, visualize, and personalize.

REFLECT ON THIS:

“You were created to **LIVE** in God's presence. You were designed to **HOST** God's presence. You were fashioned to **HUNGER** for God's presence.”

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK ONE - DAY THREE

JESUS' APPROACH TO LIFE IS POSSIBLE FOR US

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 5:30 NLT

READING: John 8:28-29; John 10:30; John 12:49-50; John 14:10-11.

INTRODUCTION

"I can do nothing on my own initiative or authority. Just as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just (fair, righteous, unbiased), because I do not seek My own will, but only the will of Him who sent Me." John 5:30 AMP

Jesus lived by the principle of Stewardship, which expresses His obedience in carrying out everything regarding the administration of all God had placed under His control, which is all-encompassing. Stewardship is the commitment of oneself and possessions to God's service, recognizing that we do not have the right of control over our property or ourselves. Simply put: God is the Owner, and I, His steward. There are four principles of Stewardship:

1. **Ownership** – Psalm 24:1 NIV proclaims that *"the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."* To understand Stewardship, we must recognize that God owns everything in our lives. We must change our mindset about ownership to obey God's will involving our possessions. Since God owns it all, how much authority do you give God over your possessions?
2. **Responsibility** – God created everything and, therefore, possesses ultimate ownership, while humans are entrusted with the responsibility of managing and caring for God's creation, acting as stewards. This involves making wise decisions about how to use resources, protecting the environment, and ensuring the well-being of relationships He entrusts to us.
3. **Accountability** – In Matthew 12:36 NIV, Jesus says: *"I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken."* God has entrusted humanity to have authority over creation, and we are not allowed to rule over it however we see fit. We are called to exercise dominion under the management of the Creator. We have been tasked with overseeing His creation in accordance with the principles He has established. In the end, we will all give account to the rightful owner as to how well we managed the things He has entrusted to us. How can you stay accountable and steward well what He has provided?
4. **Reward** – In Colossians 3:23-24, Paul writes, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."* Accountability for our ability to follow God's commandments can generate reward. How comfortable are you with your life if God were to give an account for you right now? Jesus lived by these principles, and we, His followers, must emulate His example. In John 14:10-11 ESV, Jesus said, *"I am in the Father and the Father is in Me."* This is the secret to His amazing life.

This, from the ABIDING CHALLENGE book, is Truth #2: We must believe that Jesus' approach to life is possible for us. Jesus lived an ABIDING life. The secret to His power, purposefulness, and productivity is that He lived in an unbroken fellowship with His Father, the Gardener. This secret is hidden in plain sight throughout the gospel story. Jesus ABIDED in His Father, and His Father ABIDED in Him. *"I and My Father are One [in essence and nature]."* John 10:30 AMP

RESPOND

- Do you believe you can emulate the ABIDING life of JESUS?

If Yes, how?

If No, why?

- **PRINCIPLE OF STEWARDSHIP – Ownership:** Do you see God as the owner of your life and everything you own? Are you ready to surrender your all to Him? Since God owns it all, how much authority do you give God over your possessions?

- **PRINCIPLE OF STEWARDSHIP – Responsibility:** Since God owns everything, we are obligated to carry out the will of the Father. Are you ready to do His will? Remember: Owners have rights and stewards have responsibilities.

- **PRINCIPLE OF STEWARDSHIP – Accountability:** How can you stay accountable and steward well what He has provided?

- **PRINCIPLE OF STEWARDSHIP – Reward:** How comfortable are you with your life if God were to give an account for you right now?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

John 8:28-29; John 10:30; John 12:49-50; John 14:10-11

Meditate on the scriptures above and let the Lord speak to your heart.

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Meditate on the Principles of Stewardship

To meditate, you need to memorize, analyze, visualize, and personalize.

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THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK ONE - DAY FOUR

ACCEPT YOUR TRUE IDENTITY IN CHRIST

KEY SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 5:17

READING: Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:9

INTRODUCTION

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV

To be able to ABIDE in the Vine, you need to know and own your identity in Christ. Identity is an all-consuming word. We use our identity to define how we perceive ourselves, what choices we make, and how we portray ourselves to others. We allow our identity to be shaped by our appearance, our children, our spouse, or maybe our career and income. Who are we, really, deep in the core of our souls? Have you ever wondered about the origin of who you really are? The answer to any identity crisis can be found in the first chapter of the Bible. We were created on purpose, with a purpose, and for a purpose. “Identity in Christ” cannot be separated from Christ and all that comes within the message of the gospel – God’s holiness, mankind’s rebellion, and Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

The concept of being “in Christ” is a recurring theme, suggesting an intimate union between the believer and Jesus. This union is often portrayed as a source of strength, security, and purpose. Christians are called to find their identity in Christ, recognizing that their worth and significance come from their relationship with Him rather than worldly standards. Ephesians 2:10 NIV, for example, states that believers are *“God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* This implies a divine purpose and a sense of belonging that shapes the Christian identity. Overall, the traditional Christian understanding of identity in Christ is rooted in the transformative power of faith, emphasizing a new and purposeful life found through a personal relationship with Jesus. The Vineyard story in John 15 has four distinct characters: the Gardener (God the Father); the Vine (Jesus); the Branch (you); and the Fruit (works). This tells us much about who we are and who we are not. Owning who we are is the key to ABIDING in Christ. Let’s look at a few scriptures on our identity in Christ:

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20 ESV

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9 ESV

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10 ESV

“But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 ESV

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:3 ESV

“For our sake He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

RESPOND

What's My Identity in Christ - Quiz

Do you struggle with your identity in Christ?

- ☐ Yes. Why?
- ☐ No. Who are you in Christ?
- ☐ Not sure. Why?

Do you believe you are created for a purpose?

- ☐ Yes, but it's hard for me to believe.
- ☐ Yes, I believe I have a purpose, but I want to know what God says about purpose.
- ☐ No, I don't think I have a purpose

Do you believe you are significant?

- ☐ Yes, but it's hard for me to believe.
- ☐ Yes, I believe I have significance, but I want to know what God says about significance.
- ☐ No, I don't believe I have significance.

Do you believe you have authority in Jesus?

- ☐ Yes, but I'm not sure what authority I have.
- ☐ No, I do not believe I have authority in Jesus.
- ☐ I don't know what that means.

Do you believe you are blessed in Jesus?

- ☐ Yes, but I want to know more about what God says about this.
- ☐ No, I do not know how I am blessed in Jesus.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Ephesians 2:10; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:9

Meditate on the scriptures above and let the Lord speak to your heart.

REFLECTION

Have you ever considered your identity to be defined by the image of God? By understanding you were created in His own image, how does this change the choices you make moving forward?

Most of our anxieties and fears are rooted in us taking on the role of the Gardener or the Vine or defining ourselves by our fruitfulness. If you are guilty of that, why don't you repent and ask the Lord to help you rest in your identity as a Branch?

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK ONE - DAY FIVE

LIVING IN PROPER ALIGNMENT WITH GOD

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 15:1,5

READING: Amos 3:3; Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 12:1-3; Psalm 139:1-6,13-14

INTRODUCTION

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." John 15:1 NIV

"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." John 15:5 NIV

The picture of the Gardener, the Vine, the Branch, and the Fruit shows perfect alignment and harmony. Without the Gardener, there would be no Vine, and without the Vine, there would be no Branch, and without the Branch, there can be no Fruit.

Living in alignment with God involves coming into agreement with God and taking your place as the Branch connected to the true Vine, which is Christ. It's when our hearts are right with God that our spirits, souls, and bodies will work together in peace and harmony. We are three-part beings: spirit, soul, and body. When we are aligned with God, the spirit rules the soul and body. The aligned person has a strong spirit, which is attained by feeding on God's Word and praying in and partnering with the Holy Spirit. When we are in alignment with God, our wills are not stubborn but choose to do God's will. And for the child of God who is in alignment with the Lord, the emotions are stable and at peace. Allowing God to bring alignment to our lives means surrendering our own desires, ambitions, and agendas to fully embrace and pursue what He desires for us. It means acknowledging that God owns us and that we need to hear His voice. We need to understand that He has a plan that we can't begin to accomplish without a relationship with Him. We must know deeply inside that His ways are higher, and His plans are perfect, even when they may differ from our own good plans. As humans, we drift and often get out of alignment with God. Here is a list of things that can get you out of alignment with God:

1. You assume the role of the Gardener [Abba Father], the Owner.
2. You take on the role of the Vine [Jesus], your Source.
3. You ignore the lordship and leadership of the Holy Spirit [Helper].
4. You find your identity in your works [Fruit] and not in Christ.
5. Unconfessed sin: Repentance closes the gap between us and God.
6. Pride: *"God resists the proud"* James 4:6 NKJV. When we think we can handle things on our own, we may have less reason to go to God.
7. Idolatry: When we think something else satisfies more than God.

8. Circumstances: Circumstances can cause a person to try to do everything on their own instead of looking to God. We become self-reliant.

God calls us to “Stay in Our Lane.” In other words: “Just be the Branch” or stay in alignment, and you will find rest for your soul.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” Hebrews 12:1-3 NIV

RESPOND

- **MISALIGNMENT** – From the list above, identify what gets you out of alignment and why.

- **ALIGNMENT** – What aligns you with God?

- **STAY IN YOUR LANE** – Do you find it difficult to stay in your lane? (Yes/No) If no, is it because of your desire to be in control?

A PRAYER TO PRAY

Dear Lord,

You are the Gardener and the Vine, and I am the Branch. Forgive me for taking Your place. Forgive me for always straying from my lane. Help me to align myself with Your will so that I can faithfully ABIDE in You, my True Vine. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Amos 3:3; Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 12:1-3; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-14

Read and meditate on these scriptures and let the Lord speak to your heart.

*We will only see
the Fruit of
answered prayer
when our will is
aligned with His.*

Reflect on This Statement:

“Without the Gardener, there would be no Vine, and without the Vine, there would be no Branch, and without the Branch, there can be no Fruit.”
