

1

Introduction

We are called to abide. Have you ever wondered what that entails? The journey of faith each of us is on was begun, and will continue, by the Spirit. As we sojourn here on earth, He will by His gentleness and patience draw us ever closer, grace upon grace. Deep will call unto deep, as the Lord's deep grace and mercy answer our deep longings and needs. The depth of His love will drown our deeply felt loneliness, the depth of His mercy will not be fathomed by the depth of our depravity, and His deep power and goodness will more than suffice as we face our deep cowardice and lack of virtue. His deep love and grace overcome our deep misery. He holds us, keeps us from stumbling, transforms us, and will one day bring us safely home. Meanwhile we sojourn here, and as we do we are called to abide in Him. The life He calls us to is one of abiding ever deeper in Him. Abiding is simple, though it doesn't always seem easy.

There is nothing new under the sun, so naturally the readers of this book have already pondered, and perhaps read other books about abiding in Christ. Maybe John 15 is even one of your favorite chapters, or 1 John one of your favorite Epistles. Without a doubt, this is a topic which will

be encouraging to all believers until Christ takes us home. It is good to be reminded of these truths, and it is particularly edifying to remain in these doctrines for the grace and strength we gain therein.

The meditations presented in this book are the fruit of many seasons in my personal walk with the Lord. There were far too many moments of having not tasted or seen God's goodness, many days of not believing God's presence in my life. In conversations with a dear friend, we referred to these as 'dark days.' Over many cups of coffee, we prayed and encouraged one another through seasons of dark days. Over the years I've learned that my feelings in those moments were trumping Jesus as the way, the truth and the life. He calls out 'seek My face' and I respond 'I don't want to – I want You to seek me and remove me from all unpleasant situations.' He would remind me of His firm grip and His everlasting arms, and I would say 'but ...' endlessly, always coming up with a reason for doubting His goodness towards me. In abiding, I have learned to overcome these overwhelming feelings, laying them at the foot of the cross. By abiding in, or remaining in, God's Word I have found the grace to walk through dark seasons. By abiding in God's love, I have learned to silence the doubts that creep into my thoughts. In fellowship with others I have experienced the joy of sharing this grace and His Word, a means of grace so often missed in this world. Jesus promised tribulations for all of His followers in this world, and in the midst of those tribulations He also promises to be our joy and peace. Those days wherein you have no taste for God's Word are the days you need to abide in it most. To abide is to remain, to rest, to dwell, to be at home. Abiding is active, mutual, soul-satisfying, all-encompassing.

Devotion to Christ

Devotion to Christ is quite often mistaken for what this generation calls ‘devotions,’ a quick snippet of time with the Lord and I’m set for the day. Read a book that references a verse and walk away to get on with real life. Well as you may have guessed, this is not one of those sorts of books, rather it is written with the desire that readers will run back to Scripture, dig deeper, cling to it, write it on your own hearts, and think upon it throughout every day of your sojourning. At the heart of what Jesus taught in His call to abide is that abiding is not a task, nor a moment, rather it is living life in His presence. In all moments, to do all things with Him and for Him and through Him (see Rom. 11:36, perhaps meditate on it). This call to abide is for all believers, it is for you beloved.

People are easily deceived. All people, regardless of social standing or education or upbringing or current church membership status, can be deceived easily. Even believers who are set upon the truth and have found that the truth really does set us free, are not yet in a place where they cannot be deceived. Paul worried for the Colossians that someone would come along with plausible or ‘persuasive arguments’ and draw them away (see Col. 2:4). Jesus told His disciples that false teachers would deceive even the elect if He had not set a limit (see Matt. 24:24).

This same idea is emphasized in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, wherein he warns that even those who are seeking truth can be very easily led astray from it. It is quite possible that our ‘minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ’ (see 2 Cor. 11:3). Led astray from what, and how can this be? Led away from simplicity, when we complicate things or add to what Christ has revealed. We tend to excuse Christians who do this

when we believe they really love God. Love will lead them back to the simplicity and purity, and would not let them continue in their own version of pleasing Christ. We are also in danger of being led astray from purity when we are devoted to 'Christ and,' rather than Christ alone. Or when we are double-minded (see James 1:8 and 4:8) concerning our belief in God's goodness and power. Or when we are more devoted to an agenda for our lives that is not first and foremost concerned about God's glory. When our desires are not in line with God's, we will soon discover ourselves to be walking on the broad path, rather than His narrow one.

Devoted in Heart, Soul, Mind, and Body

Christ, who is the Word made flesh, does not change, therefore devotion to Him transcends cultural changes. Devotion does not change with the passing of time. It is Scripture that will encourage and build us up, rather than new or different forms of what some would call worship. Devotion to Christ must be understood as an active state of being that has bearing on our mental, emotional, and physical self. He has revealed Himself in simplicity; there is one Lord, one Word, one Body. Yet we try to serve several lords, or we insist there can be many bodies with many opposing teachings (viewpoints, some may say). One Spirit is at work uniting us in His love, granting His true church perseverance, endurance, fortitude. He will draw His true church deeper and deeper into the true knowledge of Himself, speaking a deeper wisdom to us as we mature (see 1 Cor. 2). The Spirit also draws us deeper into the renewal our souls long for and into the true knowledge of who we really are. The Spirit draws us deeper into His manifold wisdom, and of the glorious plans He has for us. It is not 'flesh and blood' that will reveal any of this to us, it is the

‘Father who is in heaven’ who wills it to be known, and who sends His Spirit of truth to illumine our understanding (Matt. 16:17).

To understand the role of the Spirit in illumining our minds, there are many passages to study; spend some time in John 14–17, 1 Corinthians 2, and 1 John. There is no program for us to engage in, this is His work alone. We come to the Word, and the Spirit grants understanding as a light shining in the dark revealing what is truly there. He continues this work by growing us into an understanding of His deep wisdom, of His thoughts which are higher than ours, a wisdom which can only be understood by those united to Christ, as God was pleased to hide all this wisdom in Christ. We see only dimly, but the Spirit will enable you to see that delightful vision. Paul instructed Timothy to study Scripture without engaging with the useless words of others (see 2 Tim. 2:14-18). This should be the way for all disciples of Jesus. We cannot mishandle His Word, ignore it, add modern viewpoints to it, or think studying it is for elders alone.

‘Manifest’ is another of those words used often in Scripture that ought to be defined. To make manifest is to put on display, to make it known by leading it out to be seen. Jesus says if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father, because He came as the image of the invisible, making God manifest. When Jesus turned water to wine, we are told that: ‘This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him’ (John 2:11). Jesus made God manifest, He led God out to be seen, to be known. We can know, and we can grow in this knowledge, as we abide in Him.

As reasonable creatures we need to daily, prayerfully, and actively engage our minds in His Word, which He uses

to renew all facets of our being. Devotion to Christ is daily. Moment by moment, in all our quotidian affairs, in the midst of (and indeed sanctifying) our vocations. One's devotion to Christ is manifest in the fruit we bear in all our relations and endeavors.

Devotion to Christ is akin to abiding. To abide is to rest, to dwell, but it is not to sit idly by. It is to lean into Jesus' bosom and listen to His words of eternal life. It is to taste those words, muse upon them, and orient our lives around them. Continually. To understand His words is to obey them, for in understanding we grasp it with our whole being and it is manifest inseparably in both our words and deeds.

The call to abide, and to be devoted, is also a call to prepare your minds for action (1 Pet. 1:13). As you read this book, have your Bible at hand, and read the Scripture references. As you do so, know that you are an active party in this most wonderful relationship. We seek, He seeks. We cling, and He holds us. We hope, and discover that God has given us assurance. We are renewed as we wait on Him who renews. We are always becoming our true selves as He conforms us to the image of Christ. We are a partaker in His suffering and glory, rather than any substitute glory, knowing all the while that as we abide in God so He abides in us. Each chapter will unfold an aspect of abiding, ending with some practices to incorporate in personal worship, or Scriptures to meditate upon to grow deeper in grace, and in knowledge and love of the one who loved you first.