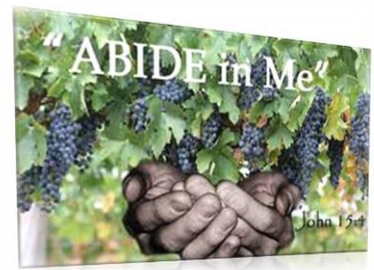


What does it mean to abide in Christ? (John 15:4-5)



Relational Maturity – There is no substitute for ‘growing up.’ Looking back, this is what stands out to me when I think about what it means to abide in Christ.

1. Self-Awareness - A Precious Gift

Do not refuse the discernment of another. None of us have eyes on the back of our heads.

- a. Motive – Am I using God? Or is God using me? This is a simple question with far-reaching implications! It colours everything we say and do. We can cease making our needs the top priority in all our relationships – our pain or opinion or desire for honour, etc. What is the primary agenda you are incessantly working towards in your relationship? It is a tremendous gift from God when you can see deeper motivations in your heart in your ministry, prayer life, or relationship with someone. It is a life-saving insight when you can see it in key moments of your life.
- b. Speech – We can cease from turning every conversation towards ourselves about our needs and our agenda. When you are free from pushing your agenda or your particular angle in conversation, there is room for hearing others and a deeper exchange of hearts. E.g. ‘I caught a 5kg fish last week.’ ‘O yeah? I caught a 7kg fish yesterday.’ You are free from your need or addiction to be the centre of attention at all times. Our prayer life needs to be freed from the endless ‘please prayers’ to ‘Thank you prayers’.

2. Grace of Yielding

- a. Jesus possessed perfect faith. All His prayers were and will be answered by the Father. Yet, the Bible says Jesus’ prayer was heard, ‘because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.’ (Heb 5:7-8) ‘Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done.’ (Luke 22:43) This means there is a fine balance between active faith to change things and yielding to the will of the Father even when it does not please me. The Holy Spirit helps us know the difference between the two.
- b. The verse I thought most about in the last 5 months is 2 Cor 12:9-10. Apostle Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ (a fishhook) is scandalous to many believers today. Paul had amazing spiritual experiences with God, yet it did not exempt him from experiencing the ‘thorn in the flesh.’ Rather Paul’s deep knowledge of God qualified him for it. What is the thorn in the flesh? It is what produces ‘weakness’ in us. It takes us out of the driver’s seat. After having petitioned three times for God to take the thorn away, Paul yielded to God’s will by accepting it. Why? Because that ‘weakness’ in Paul made God use Paul more, rather than Paul using God more. The thorn burst the bubble of pride in his revelational knowledge.
- c. There are times when life does not make sense and we cannot understand the sequence of events that God allows in our lives. We struggle to accept the ways of God. When you do not get your way, that is when you learn to smile at disappointments and trust in God. This to me is what it means to ‘abide in Him’ in the context of John 15, when the Father prunes our lives. You don’t get your way! That is when you hunker down and let the Father take charge and explain it to you in His time. Why? Because you know the Father. You know there is absolutely nothing the Father does, allows, or permits in your life that is not redemptive. So, we learn to choose the ‘agape way’ in times of crisis because of our confidence in our Father. The ‘*Agape way*’ is always costly upfront, but it pays dividends beyond our wildest imagination.

3. Gift of Joy

- a. Martin Luther learned to thank God for the ‘alien gifts’ – i.e. what produced weakness in him: a thorn in the flesh. When God takes you out of the driver’s seat and when things do not please you.
- b. Joy is a mark (evidence) of Christian maturity. You have the joy of the Lord, irrespective of your circumstances. ‘The joy of the Lord is my strength.’ (Neh 8:10) The joy of the Lord comes from within our spirit from knowing God. And we keep His word even when it costs us. This joy does not come from having favourable circumstances (John 15:11)

There is a growing peace and joy in me knowing that by God’s grace, I have given the bulk of my youth to Him – even when it cost me every step of the way.