

Abide In Christ

Life in Christ

“Abide in me.” Three words from Jesus that change everything. The word “abide” means continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, or tarry. Are you present in Christ this moment? In the rush of your life, will you tarry in him today? Do you see yourself standing in him and going on to live in him for the rest of your days? Someone asked Hudson Taylor (missionary to China), “Are you always conscious of abiding in Christ?” “While sleeping last night,” he replied, “did I cease to abide in your house because I was unconscious of the fact? We should never be conscious of *not* abiding in Christ.” Worth thinking about.

Christ in You

“Abide in me,” said Jesus, “and I in you.” The second part may be more important than the first. I can live in Christ only because he declares to me, “Dear child, I am living in you.” Hudson Taylor (missionary to China) came close to suicide because he felt he was not Christ-like enough. Then his life was changed through a book entitled *Christ Is All*. Hudson’s conclusion: “I have striven in vain to abide in Him. I’ll strive no more. Has He not promised He will abide with me? . . . Oh, to understand that makes all the worries fall away.” Today, will you stop trying to be Christ-like enough, and instead consciously visualise Christ living in you? Then see those worries fall away.

The Secret of Fruit

“Abide in me and I in you,” said Jesus, “and you will bear much fruit.” Abiding in the world doesn’t do it. Abiding in the church is a good choice, but falls short. Only when I am a personal branch on the vine of Christ, will the fruit come. “Get rightly related to Jesus Christ,” said chaplain Oswald Chambers, “and he will make you of use unconsciously every minute you live.” Much fruit will be unconscious, though some will be intentional. On a trip in 1907, Oswald Chambers spoke about spiritual things with every one of the 1,300 people on board the ship, from the captain to the boy in the stokehold. This is fruitfulness, and it comes from abiding in Christ.

A Blank Cheque

When teaching about the vine and the branches, Jesus gave this profound guarantee: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” This is not a stand-alone promise; it is a stand-in-Christ promise. Think about it. When you abide in Christ and are at peace with him, you can ask anything in union with him, and he will give it to you. He gives you a blank cheque drawn on the Bank of Heaven, signed with his name. E. M. Bounds expressed it this way: “Prayer has all the force of God in it. . . . He actually places himself at the command of praying preachers and a praying church.” So church, let’s pray!

In Conversation with God

Including God

Prayer is the way in which we include God in our conversation. Imagine standing in a group with Jesus, talking with everyone except him! Yet how often that's life, and that's church. Busy with our own projects and our God projects, too busy for God himself. But there's good news. When Jesus' disciples failed in prayer, he understood: "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." Later, the disciples came into total prayer conversation with God—and when they did, a church was born. "A person who can pray is the mightiest instrument Christ has in this world. A praying church is stronger than all the gates of hell." (E. M. Bounds.)

Like Friendship and Marriage

Prayer is the way in which we include God in our conversation. Like a close friendship or a good marriage, times of intimate sharing are interspersed with times of spontaneous back-and-forth. When conversation dies, friendships fade, marriages dissolve, spiritual life withers. Conversely, positive conversation builds great relationships. No wonder God advises, "Pray without ceasing." Andrew Murray expressed it well: "Prayer is not merely coming to God to ask something from Him. It is above all fellowship with God and being brought under the power of His holiness and love." Prayer as conversation and fellowship. Let's have that today.

Great Conversation

Prayer is the way in which we include God in our conversation. Consider any great conversation. It's intimate, trusting, self-disclosing, affirming, "all over the world," bantering, laughing, loving, crying. With God, it's also worshipful. Good conversations unite hearts and minds in a symphony of friendship. The Bible teaches that when we pray, God enters our minds, and our minds enter God's mind. Spirit with spirit. Friend with friend. Read Romans 8:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 1:9-16. "How true," concluded C. S. Lewis, "that our prayers are really His prayers. He speaks to Himself through us." Let God speak to himself through you today.

Cry of the Heart

Prayer is the way in which we include God in our conversation. True praying is not ritual; it is conversation. Look at the psalms, and at Jesus' prayer in John 17. See hearts poured out with natural expression. True prayer is the simple statement of our desires, needs, thankfulness, and wants. When we talk with an intimate friend, we don't try to make up words. Rather, we express things just as we see them. We know that our friend will listen respectfully and respond with kindness and sometimes with challenge—whatever is needed. That's how it is with God. He doesn't want our ceremonial compliments, but he does want our broken hearts to be poured out with their sin and weakness, finding peace in him.

Praise Power

Possibility of Praise

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). To us, this is impossible and impractical. To God, it is possible and powerful. Praise to God—especially in our worst times—changes our perspective so we can see God’s view, not just our own view. Praise can be the hardest thing we do, but also the most life-changing thing we do. It’s a devil-defying choice of attitude, an act of faith that connects with Heaven and changes everything. How effectively praise dissipates darkness! Jesus said that if people don’t cry out in praise, rocks will. Let’s get ahead of those rocks.

More Praise, More Souls

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening” (Acts 16:25). We shouldn’t assume this was easy. The two were fresh from humiliation, stripping and beating. Bruised and bloodied in a dungeon, they praised God. This so startled Heaven and Earth that it caused an earthquake. And it shook perhaps a dozen people out of unbelief and into saving grace. Praise is not natural, but supernatural. It’s “a mighty force in projecting the Gospel” (E. M. Bounds). It’s our most effective means for soul-winning. What a fascinating formula: More praise, more souls. Let’s praise!

More Praise, Less Worry

Adoration. Confession. Thanksgiving. Supplication. The acronym ACTS, and the character of our prayers. Two of the four have to do with praise. Is praise anywhere near half my praying? Pray with thanksgiving, wrote Paul—it’s your antidote for anxiety (Philippians 4:6). I can be filled with worry or filled with praise to God, but not filled with both. This process is not mental trickery or reality denial. Rather, it is consciously pouring each concern into God’s big bowl of compassion. We believe, don’t we? “Lord, here are my concerns for today. . . . They’re yours now, not mine. Deal with them as you wish. Thank you! Praise God! I rest in you. Hallelujah.”

Extreme Praise

“Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20). Always? For everything? This is extreme praise. We have extreme sports, so why not extreme praise? To give thanks to God for virtually everything—there’s an adventure into places we’ve never been! For years I argued against such an exercise. Irrational. Futile. Stupid. Then, some tough things happened that made me try it. I could at least thank God for the chance to trust him. I could thank him for strength in weakness, presence in pain. Extreme praise in the name of Jesus. Here’s what I found—the blessings that follow are just as extreme.

Daily Bread

The Actual Life of God

“Give us this day our daily bread.” It’s in the heart of the Lord’s Prayer, and in the heart of our experience. Not daily cheesecake, daily coffee, daily TV, daily work or daily shopping spree. Daily bread. In all cultures, bread speaks of what’s basic. Necessity. Simplicity. Life. The right combination of flour, water and yeast produces a mysterious dynamic of growth and beauty. Taken into the body, the dynamic is replicated. We are nourished. We grow. We develop. We become strong and we nourish others. No wonder Scripture uses bread as a symbol of the actual life of God in us personally and in the church. “Lord, give us this day our daily bread.”

Heaven’s Bread

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Bread is everywhere in the Bible. About 250 verses. The manna in the wilderness. The feasts and sacrifices. The temptations of Christ. Two massive miracles of multiplication. No wonder Christ used bread as a symbol of himself. At the Last Supper, he broke bread and said “Take it and eat it; this is my body”. Jesus is not only the Rock, strong and unbreakable. He is also the bread, fragile and broken. “I am the bread of God, the bread of life, the bread from Heaven. Eat this bread and never go hungry. Eat this bread and live forever.” We pour lots of things into ourselves. Will we make room for Heaven’s bread?

From the Mouth of God

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Bread speaks of what’s basic. It speaks of Christ in Person. And it speaks of scripture. “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). “I have treasured the words of [God’s] mouth more than my daily bread” (Job 23:12). In medieval times, Bibles were rare and expensive, chained to pulpits. Today, Bibles are lying around everywhere, while we chain ourselves to everything else. Work. Family demands. Material stuff. Poor relationships. Addictions. “Lord, break our chains! Free us to follow our hunger to the table of the Lord, to be filled with Heaven’s bread.”

The Gospel in the Prayer

“Give us this day our daily bread.” The word “give” is deliberately chosen by our Lord. Christ is our bread from Heaven, and there is nothing we can do to pay for him—he is given. The scriptures are our daily bread, and there is nothing we can do to manufacture them—they are given. Our forgiveness and our holiness are gifts from God. Why do we feel we must do some work to make ourselves worthy of them? Everyone around us says, “Work hard and pay to get what you want.” But God says, “I am what you want; I stand before you as a gift.” Will you respond to the gospel in the Lord’s Prayer? “Lord, give me this day my daily bread.”

Power in the Spirit

The Spirit and the Earth

In the beginning, Earth is empty—but wait! God’s Spirit trembles with life-giving energy (Genesis 1:2). At the end, Earth is ruined—but wait! The Spirit speeds out with explosive power (Revelation 5:6). In the middle, Earth decays—but wait! God commissions his Spirit for revival. Spirit-filled believers take the wonder of Christ to the ends of the Earth, and eternal life springs up in all sectors of humanity. (Psalm 104:30; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 1:8.) The Spirit is Heaven’s electric throb, its personal dynamic power. Without the Spirit, Earth dies. With the Spirit, Earth lives. It’s equally true for the church. Knowing this, what will you do with God’s Spirit today?

The Spirit and the Wind

Jesus finds himself face to face in the darkness with a rigorous defender of historic belief. To Nicodemus he says: “You must be born again. A restart. A reboot of your inner drive. A life-changing encounter at the Cross. A blast of the Holy Spirit. Nothing less will do.” The Spirit is mysterious, Jesus says, like the wind. He drives and empowers and refreshes and cleans. It’s hard to see his work, easy to spot his results. Some time later, Jesus’ discouraged disciples have the same need—a new start, fresh wind, holy power. A hurricane from Heaven blasts through the room, filling them with the Spirit. A church is born. And today, it must be born again.

The Spirit and Fire

Have you been baptised? It’s an easy Yes or No—or perhaps not. Listen to John the Baptist: “I’m baptising you with water, but the one coming after me will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Jesus’ own baptism was with water and the Spirit together (Luke 3:21-22). But in our experience, complete baptism may take a while. (Acts 1:4-5; 8:15-17; 11:15-16; 19:1-6.) The baptism God wants for us is about both water and fire—not only cleansing, but also empowerment. We are cleansed, but are we fired up? Perhaps years ago you said Yes to a baptism of repentance and water. Are you now saying Yes to a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire?

The Spirit and Water

It was the climax of the Feast of Tabernacles, which included a commemoration of the time when water came from a rock. Jesus stood up and shouted above the din of religious observance. “Thirsty? Come to me and drink. Believe in me, and a torrent of living water will flow from you.” John explains that by this he meant the Spirit. Here we see that it’s not enough to have our own spiritual thirst quenched. We drink not just to satisfy ourselves, but until we overflow with the power of the Spirit for people around us. Church, how is it for us right now? Let’s drink deeply from Jesus, and ask him to make us a torrent of blessing for a thirsty world.

The Power and the Glory

Filled with the Glory

The word “glory” appears more than 300 times in the Bible. But have you studied the subject, or heard a sermon about it? Glory means brilliance, splendour or honour. It refers to something that blazes with its own substance, weight and power. Things we need—since spiritually speaking we are empty, weightless and weak. Moses asked God to show him his glory. God replied, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you. I will have mercy, I will have compassion. I am slow to anger, I abound in love, I forgive.” This is God’s glory! The glory should thrill us. It’s time for the glory to fill our churches, and roll out into the world.

The Glory in Jesus

“Fear God, and give him glory” (Revelation 14:7). Glory is power, glory is light. How do we give God glory? The primary answer can be overlooked. The same John who wrote Revelation says this in his gospel: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only.” This is the answer. The glory of God is found in Jesus. All through the New Testament, “glory” and Jesus are together. Jesus is power for a world of weakness. Jesus is light for a planet in darkness. The church that eagerly expresses Jesus in word and life—that’s the church that gives God glory.

Glory through the Spirit

Ezekiel made his way into the temple. In the temple, the glory filled the building. It also filled Ezekiel, and it spilled to the outside. (Ezekiel 43:1-5.) What drove Ezekiel into the glory? The Spirit. The Spirit of God and the glory of God are together. Jesus linked them when he said the Spirit would bring glory to him by taking what was his and passing it on to believers (John 16:13-15). Are you receiving what Jesus passed on? Like Ezekiel, are you willing to receive the Spirit and be driven by the Spirit? The Spirit can fill you, fill your home, fill your church, and spill to the outside. Being filled with God’s Spirit—that’s how we’re able to give God glory.

The Glory of the Believer

The glory of God is the blazing beauty of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But there’s something added on to this—something astounding. Even though we’ve fallen away from God’s glory, we’re told more than forty times in the New Testament that we may come all the way back into God’s glory, through Jesus and by the Spirit. “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:22). Today, you can enter into God’s glory, which is his goodness and mercy. Then you can go out with Heaven’s compassion written all over your own face. This is good, because you and I live in a world that’s in desperate need of God’s glory.

Glory Shines!

The shepherds think they've seen it all—but no. It's deep night. Suddenly an angel of the Lord shows up. "The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified." The Glory is the presence of God. The church of the time was happy to have the Glory contained behind a curtain in the temple. But now, the Glory has escaped. It surrounds the shepherds! No wonder they are terrified. But the angel says, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy." Our Earth is in its night-time. It needs the Glory. It needs the good news of great joy. Are you willing to spread it? Now is a very good time to bring light into the night of somebody, somewhere.

Glorious Giving

Just when the shepherds were overwhelmed with one angel of the Lord, a whole company of angels showed up! All together, they did what angels do—sang enthusiastic praise to God. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests." The greatest gift you and I can give at this time is praise-filled living that invites people around us into Heaven's peace and favour. Research in Australia shows thirty per cent of gifts are never used after Christmas Day. Seventy per cent are thrown out by New Year's Day. We are the disposers in a disposable society. Let's help Heaven's economy by receiving and giving the gifts that last.

[See also LifeSpots 2009 and LifeSpots 2010]