

Abiding in Christ

Chapter 6: Live In Christ Not Circumstances

God Only Measures Growth

John 15:7 “If you abide in Me and My word abides in you ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.”

The discipline of abiding is that we learn to live in Christ not in our circumstances. There are times when our circumstances are dire. I certainly know what that feels like in my own life. When some situation that you're in, like for me went on for twelve years, the one thing you realize is that time has no relevance to God. How do you deal with a God Who thinks that a thousand years is like one day? So twenty years is like about 29 minutes if you do the math. For part of that time I'm crying out to the Lord, “Why is it taking so long?” He says, “I don't measure time. I measure growth.” God doesn't measure the success of something by what you achieve. He measures it by the faithfulness that you display.

Ezekiel was given a word right at the start of his ministry; “I'm sending you to a people group who will never listen to a single word you say.” How would you like that as a prophecy when you're just starting out? How do you measure his success? There wasn't any. No visible success. So what is his real success? It lies in the fact that faithfully for over twenty years he stood up and prophesied the Word of the Lord in the purest way possible, to a people group who totally opposed him, were always against him and never listened to him. That is faithfulness!

The Largest Audience Is the Audience of ONE!

So what it all comes down to is that you have to serve an audience of ONE. And you know we're all familiar with doing things and wanting to get at least some recognition for it. That part of us that is yet to come under the rule of the Holy Spirit wants to be applauded. The world is about fame. It's about being appreciated for achievement. It is about being seen. People do things to be seen. Most charitable acts occur only for the recognition by others. There's a very subtle and elegant test that God brings into your life when He takes away from you any and all recognition. He denies it to you. But He gives you Himself. And He says: "There's only one person you have to satisfy and that's Me." You have to learn how to serve an audience of One. If you can make Him happy then everything else actually is quite irrelevant. That's not easy for us.

Sometimes when you're learning about the faithfulness of God, there's no breakthrough for extended periods of time. I've been twelve years in this mode. It'll come to an end for me in a few months time. And in the end, I am realizing that everything is just about the goodness of God. I set my heart, not on surviving ... I was in survival mode for awhile ... and the Lord says, "What if I want you to do more than survive? What if this is your defining moment, Graham? What if I am trying to make you into the man you're supposed to be and all you're bothered about is results and looking good?" And so it's stepping back from all of that need for human applause and coming to understand the faithfulness of God for you. It is realizing that day in day out, week in and week out, when everyone else walks away, God steps in close. And you learn what it is to really walk with the Lord and have His approval.

He doesn't shout about you. He doesn't confirm to anybody else what He's doing in your heart and life. He's silent to everybody but you. That's because, at the end of the day, He doesn't really care much about your reputation. Your reputation becomes just one more thing on a list of things that you have to die to. To God, your reputation is actually quite irrelevant. It has no value relative to the purposes of God. What is relevant is that you're seen by the One Person that does matter. If the whole world never sees you or what you have done, what has that to do with Him? It's nothing. It's meaningless. God will not leave you nor forsake you. You already have His appreciation and applause. Why is it so important for other people to clap for you?

Kill Your Reputation or It Will Kill You

Sometimes you just have to submit to a purpose of God that's killing your reputation. But it's meant to. That's what it's there for. While you are in this place with God, all the prayers you ever prayed about dying to self and "I want to live for God" all come back to haunt you. And so you do all your crying in private and all your smiling in public and you're not a hypocrite because you show your clown face to God. He understands every tear you shed, and it's precious to Him. He denies you the one thing you most want, your good reputation, because He's trying to teach you that the one thing you really most want is Him. So in the end it all comes down to priorities. Who is God for you? And what is it you want from the Lord?

You learn to live in the favor of God when nobody else favors you. In those days, in those times you get to know Who God really is, and what He is for you. And God comes to you at surprising times and in surprising ways and kisses you. And there are times when I've cried on His shoulder and He has wept into my hair. And I wouldn't give those moments up for all the tea in

China. I really wouldn't. So, when you serve an audience of ONE, you get an audience with ONE. That's the deal.

Intimacy Does Not Play on a Public Stage

It's a private thing and personal and extremely satisfying. No one else may appreciate your intimacy, but you certainly do! Love is always in the details. There are moments that you can have with God that make everything worthwhile. To have what I have now, in Christ, I would have gone through something many times worse. I have the bargain of the century. It just cost me twelve years of misery. I'd have paid fifty to have what I have. And to come out of it not having merely survived it, but to have prospered in it, to have grown in it, is like the best and the biggest gift that God could ever give me.

Death to Everything but Jesus in You

God is serious about you. He's serious enough to introduce you to a high place by squeezing you through a low one. He is serious enough about this life He wants to give you, that He is determined and focused to kill everything in you that will prevent you from experiencing that life. Jealous?! You don't know the half of it. He is jealous for you. He wants to give you a quality of life that is beyond your wildest dreams. There's a price to pay. While you're paying it, it's very hard. But on the other side of the misery, you look back and say, "Oh, my goodness that was cheap! I thought that I would have experienced something far worse in order to have this! I'd go through all that and more."

Trust, Trust and More Trust

Two things God is doing in you. One, He wants to bring you to a place where you can trust Him for everything. We're all every day, every week, learning the

lessons of trust. Too much money? Not enough money? Every day we're learning how to trust Him. It's so important to God that you trust him. It is so important to Him that His word is everything to you. It's your breath. It's your food. It's your water. It's your very life. The second thing He's doing is bringing you to a place where He can trust you with something majestic He has in mind for you. He needs to know what your integrity level is. He needs to know that you have the character to handle the thing He wants to give you. Every test that we ever go through in life is about those two things. **1) your trust in the Lord and 2) His trust in you.**

Are you going to stand? Are you going to quit? Are you going to cut your integrity in half and go for expedience? Are you going to take the lesser road, grab something and run? He has to know who you are. He has to know what you'll do. He has to know if He can trust you so that He can release that prophetic word and plan that will catapult you into a whole new dimension of life with Him. More importantly, you have to know it about yourself. And everything comes down to that critical point of crucifixion. Are you really willing to crucify your old life, to say no to yourself and to live in self denial? Are you going to set limits on what beliefs you will let God change for you? Will you limit your development?

Are you gonna worship or are you gonna whine? I was a whiner. The Lord said to me one day: "You know, Graham, it would be a great blessing to Me, if you'd just quit moaning. You know, your whining voice is irritating Me. You're whining Graham. You're a whiner!" "Yeah, but it hurts!" "Yeah well quit whining it's supposed to hurt. How about worshipping instead? What if you could worship and the pain might decrease? It's worth a try."

Who Are You, Really?

He has to know what He has in you and where he can deploy you. Can He put you in the forefront of the battle or is the best place for you at the back with the baggage? Are you a warrior or a baggage handler? Will you bolt when the pressure's on or melt when the heat's on? We have to know these things. We have a battle to fight. We have a world to invest with the gospel. We're not messing around this is serious business. God's not playing at church. This is not about you and your blessing. It's about your calling. Will you ever achieve the purpose of God over your life? What's in your heart?

David was "...a man after God's own heart." God had a word for Daniel. "Daniel, oh man, greatly beloved!" Why? He was a faithful lover of God! What about his three compatriots, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? They were three tasty guys. They knew that, if they refused to obey the edict of Nebuchadnezzar, they were going to die. So they got together and they worked out beforehand what their answer was going to be. Then they went into that meeting with Nebuchadnezzar determined to say, "No," no matter what. They said to him, "God is able to deliver us, O King, from your hands, but even if He doesn't we are not going to bow the knee to this idol. It wasn't a private meeting. Nebuchadnezzar was there to make an example of them. Their public refusal was a death sentence.

And so the king has the fire heated up seven times hotter. The guys who open the door get burned to a crisp as they throw them in. And they enter into the most incredible experience imaginable! They are walking around in a furnace that is super heated, but Jesus is in there. Not even the smell of smoke gets on their clothes. And when the King looks in, he just almost has heart failure. And they come out of that place and take control of the whole

nation! You can dream about things like that beloved. You really can.

So I wonder what heaven's going to say about you on this earth. What are the words God will speak over you? All of the best people in the Spirit have a pre-determined response and they stick to it. "This is me. This is what I'm gonna do. I'm sticking to it!" What if God wants you to be the one? Would you rather be one of Gideon's 300 or one of the others who left? Wouldn't you want to be someone that other people tell stories about, rather than the one who tells stories about other people? All your tests are about you becoming magnificent. They're all about your development. They're all about you becoming the man or woman you are suppose to become.

Getting What You Ask for

"Ask what you will." There is a place of favor set aside for us, and you have to inhabit that place yourself. Now when you have developed the art of abiding you'll never have a problem knowing the will of God. That is because abiding means that your heart is fixed on God. It is fixed on Who He is and what He wants. It's not fixed on what you want or what you need. There is a transformation that occurs that involves the knowledge of what God loves. You become determined to give Him that. Sometimes in suffering and self-denial, your heart becomes attuned to His heart and you develop a deep God consciousness in your thinking and your perceptions. Sometimes when you are going through something that is just allowed, and therefore ordained by God, and it's painful and hurtful, you have to create a value that is greater than your pain and live in it.

Abiding enables us to rest in the peace of God. A strange thing about resting is this. When you're really under stress, great stress, and you're in that place of rest,

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your heart rate actually slows down and you move away from reactive behavior to responsive expression. You lose the tendency to panic. Fear is cast out by the perfect love of God. Speculation dissipates. And the mind of Christ begins to be established through your peace and your rest. You start thinking the way He thinks. You start to see things the way He sees them. Your perspective is more acute. And you discern the will of the Lord as naturally as breathing.

So Jesus says, “Come in here and ask what you will.” It’s not that God is taking a risk. He’s giving you an invitation to have a mature relationship with Him. God wants to be in all your thoughts. His intention is to lift our thinking to a higher level of relationship that enables us to interpret His heart. The language He uses is the language of promise, faith, confession, declaration, proclamation and confidence! God wants you to be confident in Him. He wants you to come through everything knowing that you’re **in** Christ and highly favored. Even when the thing you most want doesn’t happen because somebody else’s will is involved, God will not trespass on their will. The thing you most want can’t happen, because it’s not willed. “God works in us both to will and to do...” Your will is the vehicle for your faith and spirituality. Your will has no emotion attached to it whatsoever. Your will rules your emotions. So to “will” is to make an unemotional choice.

Politically Correct or Correct

We live in a day when people are climbing down from integrity all the time. Opinion polls matter more than truth. We watch the polls and act accordingly. We are courting popularity, possibly not realizing that we’re giving something up that’s way more powerful. The Bible puts it this way, “Let your yes be yes and your no be no.” Paul put it this way in Ephesians 1:17 he says, “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory may give to you a Spirit (Holy Spirit) of Wisdom and Revelation in

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the knowledge of Him (in your current circumstances). That's what you hold on to. And when everybody else stops holding on to you, that's what you hold on to. Hold on until it's burned into your soul and mind (emotions and thoughts). Do not let go. There's no other place to go. "To Whom else can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

There are some times beloved when you just have to hold of God, close your eyes and not let go. And that's it. It ceases to be about time. It's just about knowing God's heart and feeling it beat. It's just about laying your head on His chest. It's about crying into His shoulder and feeling Him weep into your hair. It's just about being held and hugged by God. It is about developing and maintaining intimacy with God as passionate as we have with our most significant other.

Holy Spirit: Comforter Par Excellence

Every one of us can have a brilliant relationship with the Holy Spirit as Comforter. There are not too many of us that really know the full depth of what the Comforter is in the Person of the Holy Spirit. It's because we are so used to taking short cuts. We have been so passive toward the Holy Spirit. We go so far, endure just so much and then just give up. Why did I have twelve years of wandering around trying to know what God was doing? I had to learn what it's like to be comforted by the Comforter. For me it was about developing an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit and understanding what He is really like. And why did Jesus say, "Guys it's better for you if I go away." He was essentially saying, "The Holy Spirit is better than Me in this next phase of your life. You need Him to come because He can live inside of you. And when He comes, He'll show you who I really am."

This is very important. If we are going to live in high places of favor, comfort will be one of the things that

take us there. You will feel the comfort of God when nobody else has a good word to say to you. Even your friends, some days, will be mystified by your comfortable reaction to adversity and humiliation. Some of them will abandon you because it's embarrassing for them to identify with you. In those moments the Holy Spirit alone will be able to comfort you. You will come to a place of dependency on Him as comforter. And when you come to that place and you live through that place and you take that onboard, then and only then, will you come into a higher place of favor.

Revelation Comes from Intimacy with God

Revelatory understanding opens our eyes, specifically the eyes of our heart. It is so important that you follow your heart and not your head. When you were 'born again,' you didn't invite Jesus into your head. You invited Him into your heart. You have to see with the eyes of your heart. You have to understand your place in His affection, especially when you're not getting affection anywhere else. Revelation leads to process and most of us are just looking for an outcome. We get into situations and we want to get out of them as quickly as possible. We're looking for a result. But, it's the process that makes you rich. It's not about the destination, it's about the journey! It's about how you walk with God. It's about what you see. It's about what you become on that journey. You get to die for sure, but you so get to live. You get burned, but then you get healed. And in the end it's not about what people do, it's about who you become. It's not about the wounds. It's about how quickly you get healed. No more whining.

It Is about *How* You Journey, not *Where*

The Christian life is a journey without a destination. It is not about where we are going. It is about how you make people feel when they meet you on the way.

The ultimate is that all who you encounter feel loved by you. 1 Corinthians 13 says, "Love doesn't recognize when others do it wrong." It isn't that I do not know that others were purposely trying to hurt me. It's that my response (not my reaction) is grief over their misery and misunderstanding. My greatest chance to show them the kindness of God is to pray for them rather than strike back. I will not be hurt by them because Christ within me is not hurt. His love compels me to love them and pray, as Jesus did for the Pharisees who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!" It is only the unconditional love of God shown by Jesus that produces grace. And it is His grace that distinguishes God's unselfish love from our selfish love. Jesus' only command to His disciples is "...love one another as much as I have loved you!"

I want to be like God in that regard. I don't want to talk about being wounded because all that would do is prove my immaturity. I want to be child-like, not childish. I want to be a blessing. I want to move in the opposite spirit of what's coming against me. I want to bless those who persecute me. I want to pray for those who use me and abuse me. I don't want to be afraid of being persecuted and abused. I've gone into some things with my eyes wide open. And people have said to me, "You know, that guy's gonna take you to the cleaners." But I'm thinking, "Yeah, but at least I'll be clean." More than anything I want to be whole-hearted. If that means I get abused, I'm available. I'll just get healed.

The Favor of God Is His Grace Bestowed

Favor means we can grow consistently toward spiritual maturity and be trusted with the high things of the Lord. What I learned in this last twelve years is to have a radiant idea of God. I never got what I wanted. I lost it, but I got something I wasn't even thinking about and I'm

all the richer for it. A radiant idea of God solves the human soul. I got to be comforted by the Holy Spirit and I got to know Him. And I can't begin to describe to you the difference that has made in my life and who I am as a person. "My Father is glorified by this that you bear much fruit. So prove to be My disciples."

Everything in your life comes down to the glory of God. What have you discovered about Him that makes your life glorious? How do you feel about Him? What is God inviting you into? What is it He wants to show you about Himself? If you are gonna be anybody you have to see the glory of God for yourself. Don't go to a conference to see it because you won't. It's not an event. It's a personal transaction. God's glory is in His nature and His character living in you in the Holy Spirit.

God seeks to blend His nature with our governed desires. When you live in the will of God your desires are governed by His heart for you and over you. He knows best and He plans best. And the best kind of life with God is a submitted one. "Not my will but Yours be done." God desires unbroken fellowship and passionate intimacy. People draw near to the Lord when they see His goodness. He has manifested Himself in you when He is magnified by you. If you want the Presence of God, then magnify Him, rejoice always, give thanks in everything and love the person next to you. If you want the Presence of God, just do the simple things with an awareness of His presence within you. When people see God they marvel at Him. They are astonished at Him. When they behold His beauty they want to be changed.

Seeing People As God Sees Them

It is very important that you look at people the way God looks at them. You can diminish a person's life by having a negative perception of them. You can improve

a person's life by having a positive perception of them. Remember the story of Zacchaeus? Jesus comes walking into a village and the most hated man in that community is up a tree. This guy is the most obnoxious little rat you've ever met in your life. He has defrauded that whole community. He was not up a tree because he was small and couldn't see over the crowd. He's up the tree for protection because he knows if he stands still for more than two or three minutes in a crowd, somebody's gonna stick a knife between his third and fourth ribs. Everyone hates him.

Yet there's something in him that wants more in life. So he scrambles up a tree because he's heard about this Jesus. He's been wondering about Him. I think a lot of people out there are wondering about Him. Does He love me? Does He really care about me? Does He know me? Does He even see me? It's approaching dusk and everyone in that village wants Jesus to dine in their house and be up close and personal with them. Jesus connects with your heart. He connects with your deepest longings and desires. So Jesus sees Zacchaeus up in the tree and He doesn't see the guy who has defrauded everybody. He doesn't see this man who totally doesn't care about anybody except himself and his own wealth. Jesus sees the longing in Zacchaeus' heart for love. Everyone on earth has the same human needs, to be loved, to belong and to be significant.

Jesus looked into his heart and saw the longing and just called out to Zacchaeus, "Come down. I must eat with you this evening." He honors the one person that everybody else hates. In the time it takes for Zacchaeus to get out of that tree and scuffle up to Jesus' side, something has changed in his heart. The first thing he says is, "I want to give half my goods to the poor and everyone I've defrauded I want to pay them back four times as much." In that moment the whole village wins the Lottery. The whole village is affected. Their quality of life is incredibly improved because Jesus just said one sentence.

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Astonishing!

Jesus said, "I only say what My Father is saying. I only do what My Father is doing." Jesus came to put a face on God. We are here to put a face on Christ. One sentence and that whole community won the Lottery. Can you imagine the days afterwards when Jesus has left and moved on? There's Zaccheus walking around to all the houses of the people he's defrauded knocking on the door. People open the door and there's the most hated person in their life. He is one of the reasons they are poor! He stands there on the threshold with tears in his eyes and he says, "I am so sorry for what I did to you. I know I can't make it up to you. I want you to have this money." And he gives you back four times what he stole from you.

He has just taken your family out of poverty into prosperity. Can you imagine all the poor people that he has not defrauded, because they actually had nothing to take, being called to the local bank. And the bank manager says, "There's a benefactor who's just given me this amount of money and I am going to divide it between all of you." Even the poor come into a place of having plenty. This is a legacy of Jesus that comes through one sentence. That's power I think. And later He says, "... greater things than these will you do!"

Love Loves for Love's Sake

Is there a Spirit of adventure in your heart that would make you want to go risk your safety and maybe even your life for God? Well it starts in terms of who you are and who you want to be. My question for the last twelve years of my life has been, "How do you love when love is not returned?" That was my question. "Graham, how do you love when love is not returned?" Well, the short answer is, love doesn't seek a return.

Love loves for the sake of loving. That's it. The reality is that God's love for you creates a value that's

greater than your pain. My value was, "I am what I love not what loves me." But it's not about what comes back to you, what you receive. It's about what you give selflessly. It's about you being a gift. It's about you becoming love whether love is given back or not. Each one of us has some things that only we can do. But before you can really do them, you have to become someone different in God. And everything in your life is about becoming that person so that God can trust you with something to give others.

Our present circumstances are about finding and holding on to God and not letting go. You may be in dire circumstances. I know what that feels like. I know what it feels like to lose pretty much of everything and have to start all over again. You don't want to go through that more than once. But these present circumstances, when they're compared to what God wants you to become, they're nothing. We need to stop playing at Christianity and become the real deal. Stop messing around in pews, prayer meetings and Bible studies while the world is going to Hell. Get serious about the kind of life you want the kind of person you want to become.

There is a grace here for every one of us that is all sufficient. There's a life that God wants to give you which requires that you give up the one that you have. You just have to kneel down and kiss the ground God walks on. You must say, and mean it, "Not my will but Yours be done." And whether it comes through God doing something or your own stupidity or other people betraying you, who really cares as long as it comes?

Blaming Never Helps Anyone

Blaming other people for **where** you are and **who** you are is not really sane. Get over your bad self! That line of thought is condemning you to a misery that you don't want! Just stop it! Either Jesus is Lord or He's not! Make a decision! It wasn't you who said, "Come!" It was God. But behind every victory or personal transformation is the fine

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hand of God. “I can’t fix you. I can’t fix me. Only God can fix either of us. But God will not change me unless and until I admit that I need to be changed and give Him permission to do it.” Why am I saying these things? It’s because “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free!” However, it is the truth about **you** that will set **you** free. The truth about me or anyone else doesn’t help you at all. Do you really want to “be conformed to the image of God’s Son?”

You’ve made Him Savior but He wants you to make Him Lord. You’re being squeezed and God has His hand on you and it hurts right now, but there’s a masterpiece He wants to make you into. He’s not messing around. He’s going to kill your selfishness and he’s not apologizing. So in the words of one of my mentors...”Die quietly; nobody wants to hear you whining or screaming.” But it’s also about you accepting the comfort of the Comforter. It’s about Him making you laugh on the days you feel like weeping. It’s about you getting a brilliant relationship with the Holy Spirit.

We’ve looked for every short cut we can find. We’ve tried everything. We’ve been prayed for by all kinds of people. But God has His hand on you and you’re going through this adversity because He sees something in you that he knows is glorious. And He has chosen you for this season of suffering and denial, because He has something powerful and majestic to give you. But you must give Him what He wants, and that’s your heart, all of it. Just say, “Yes!” to His Lordship.