

[illegible]



INTRODUCTION:

More than trying harder

“I don’t think I can do this anymore.”

I muttered those words to my wife, Stacey, as I sat at the bottom of the stairs in our home. I was leaving early the next morning for a mission trip to Thailand, so naturally, she assumed I was talking about the trip.

“You don’t think you can go to Thailand?” she asked. “I don’t know,” I said. “I just don’t think I can do any of this anymore.” I could barely bring myself to stand up. I was emotionally empty, physically exhausted, and spiritually dry. I felt as though I had reached the end of myself and had nothing left to give.

The confusing part was that, from the outside, I seemed to be doing everything right. I was reading my Bible regularly, praying often, I was part of a life group with some other guys, and I wasn’t knowingly living in any major area of sin. I was even taking a day off each week . . . for the most part!

I had been trying hard to live for God. I had been trying hard to lead well, serve the church, love my family, and meet the needs of those around me. However, somewhere along the way, my relationship with Jesus had begun to feel more like a responsibility to manage than a life-giving relationship to enjoy.

I was doing so many things for God, but inside, I felt barren and far from Him. Stacey asked if I wanted to back out of the trip. “I don’t know if I can,” I told her. “And I don’t know if I should.”

We prayed together, and even in my exhaustion, I sensed that I was still supposed to go. The next morning, Stacey drove me to the airport, prayed over me, and watched as I reluctantly boarded the plane. I was heading across

the world to minister to others and share the love of Jesus, while privately wondering whether I had anything left to offer.

An invitation in an unexpected place

When we arrived in Thailand, I almost immediately retreated to my hotel room. I took a short nap, hoping that sleep might lift the heaviness, but when I woke up, the weariness was still there, plus the effects of a little jet lag.

So I lay on the floor and cried out to God. I took some time to worship with my favorite worship songs blaring from my iPhone. I prayed and called out to God, and prayed every spiritual warfare prayer that I knew to pray. Then I sat in silence. I didn't have an impressive prayer or a spiritual breakthrough strategy. I had simply reached the place where I knew I could not keep going in my own strength.

Eventually, I opened my Bible and happened to land in John 15. As I read, the words of Jesus seemed to rise from the page with invigorating power: *“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)

I had read those verses many times before, but that day they felt deeply personal. Jesus was not rebuking me for failing to do enough. He was inviting me to come closer. He was showing me that the answer to my exhaustion was not greater effort; it was deeper connection.

In that quiet hotel room in Thailand, I heard the invitation of Jesus calling me to a life of abiding. To begin living a life of relationship with him that, for the very first time in my life, was not built on trying harder, but on staying closer.

Over the next several days, God began to restore my soul. He reminded me that I was not created to produce spiritual fruit through relentless effort. I was created to remain connected to him and allow his life to flow through mine.

I began to understand that I had slowly confused activity for intimacy throughout the earlier seasons of my life in ministry and as a believer. I had been serving Jesus, but I was not always receiving from Jesus.

I was even working for him, but I was not consistently resting in him and his gracious love. I was effectively producing ministry, but I had neglected the health of the roots beneath it. That trip became a turning point. God began to teach me what it means to live from an abiding place in his presence rather than merely working for his purposes.

The trap of trying harder

“You are the Branch. You need be nothing more. You need not for one single moment of the day take upon you the responsibility of the Vine. You need not leave the place of entire dependence and unbounded confidence. You need, least of all, to be anxious as to how you are to understand the mystery, or fulfill its conditions, or work out its blessed aim. The Vine will give all and work all. The Father, the Husbandman, watches over your union with and growth in the Vine. You need be nothing more than a branch.”¹ Andrew Murray

Many Christians believe spiritual growth happens primarily by trying harder. We might not say it out loud, but we often live as though it is true: if I pray more, read more, serve more, give more, attend more, and sin less, then maybe I will finally become the person God wants me to be.

To be clear, trying harder is not necessarily all bad. Growth does require intentionality, obedience, and discipline, but trying harder is not the invitation Jesus gives us in John 15. : His invitation is much simpler and much deeper: *“Abide in me.”*

The word *abide* means to remain, to dwell, to stay, or continue. It describes an ongoing life of connection with Jesus. Abiding is not a momentary spiritual experience. It is a lifestyle of staying close to the one who is our source.

Jesus gives us the metaphor of a vine and its branches to help us understand what this is functionally about, telling us in John 15:5 that he is the vine and we are the branches.

Jesus does not say, “Produce fruit for me, and then you can become part of the vine.” Instead, what he’s saying is, “Remain in Me, and fruit will come.” That order changes everything! The Christian life does not begin with what

we can accomplish for Jesus. It begins with what Jesus desires to produce in and through us as we remain connected to him.

Fruit cannot be forced

Think about the image Jesus gives us: A branch does not strain to produce fruit (John 15:4). It does not wake up each morning feeling guilty because it has not produced enough grapes. It does not compare itself to the branch beside it. It does not create a detailed plan to manufacture fruit through its own effort.

The branch simply remains connected to the vine. It's from that connection that it receives everything it needs. Life flows from the vine into the branch, and over time, fruit begins to grow. Fruit is not the result of the branch trying harder! Fruit is the natural outcome of connection, and the same is true in our relationship with Jesus.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control cannot be manufactured through willpower alone. They are the "fruit of the Spirit." They become the evidence that the life of Jesus is flowing through us.

To clarify: this does not mean we become passive. Abiding is deeply intentional! As we abide, we choose to make room for Jesus and arrange our lives around his presence. As we live this way, we become more responsive to him and to the work he is doing within us.

In the life of abiding, our activity flows from connection, not condemnation or striving. We do not obey so that Jesus will love us, but instead we obey because we know he already does love us.

As we practice these spiritual rhythms, they are not a means of earning God's presence. Rather, they are like the tools of a vineyard, cultivating the soil, pruning what hinders growth, and creating the conditions for healthy, fruitful vines. In the same way, these rhythms help us cultivate hearts that are attentive and responsive to God. They position us to receive what he alone can provide, allowing his life to flow through us. As we practice them, we discover they are not ends in themselves, but pathways into a life increasingly saturated by his presence. After all, his presence is the place where we were created to live.

This book is not about becoming more religious

The goal of this book is not to make you a more devoted or disciplined Christian. It is a book about becoming a more connected Christian.

Discipline matters, but discipline by itself cannot transform the human heart. As we will see, you can read your Bible and still remain proud. You can also pray and still be a judgmental person. You can even serve and give financially while still remaining a bitter and resentful person.

Spiritual practices are powerful, but only when they lead us into a deeper relationship with Jesus. The goal is not to master a collection of religious habits, but instead to know and remain in Christ, while increasingly becoming more like him.

Throughout this journey, we will explore several rhythms that have helped followers of Jesus remain rooted in him for centuries:

- Spending daily time in Scripture
- Developing an abiding life of prayer
- Practicing fasting
- Building authentic community
- Serving others
- Sharing your story and the good news of Jesus
- Living generously
- Worshiping and participating in the life of the Church

Again, these rhythms do not save us or earn God's approval, nor do they prove our spiritual maturity. They simply help create space in our lives to recognize his sweet presence, receive his grace, and follow his leading in our lives. These incredible rhythms which we will be learning about are not ladders we climb to reach God; they are pathways through which we learn to walk with our heavenly Father who has already come near to us in love.

Connection produces transformation

The central truth of this journey is simple: **Spiritual transformation is not produced by trying harder; it is the fruit of staying connected to Jesus.** When we remain in him, Jesus promises to accomplish what we could never accomplish on our own.

As our relationship with Jesus deepens, he does within us what our own strength cannot. He shapes his character in us and renews our minds, replacing broken patterns of thinking with his truth. He gently heals the wounds hidden deep within our hearts and purifies our desires until we begin to love what he loves. In his grace, he exposes unhealthy habits, attitudes, and motives—not to condemn us, but to lead us into greater freedom. Then, by the power of his Spirit, he gives us both the desire and the strength to obey his Word. As a result, day by day, he nourishes our souls with his presence, producing a life that bears lasting fruit.

When you become a believer, you often begin with a sense of excitement as you discover what it means to have a relationship with God. Yet eventually, you come face-to-face with your humanity and limitations. And you realize that growth and transformation do not come easily. Perhaps you've spent years trying to become a better Christian, fighting the same battles, weighed down by guilt, making promises you couldn't keep, failing, asking God for forgiveness, and then beginning the cycle all over again. Maybe you've wondered why lasting change seems so difficult, even though your desire to follow Jesus is sincere. If that's where you find yourself, Jesus offers a wonderfully freeing invitation. He doesn't begin by saying, "Try harder." He begins by saying, "Abide in me." As you remain in him, he promises to do what you could never do on your own: transform you from the inside out.

Over the next eight weeks, my prayer is that these rhythms become more than spiritual exercises. My prayer is that they become pathways into a deeper friendship with Jesus.

I pray that you will learn to recognize his presence in ordinary moments, hear his voice through Scripture, depend on him in prayer, grow through his people, and allow his life to flow through every area of your life. Most of all, I

pray you will discover that the life you have been trying so hard to produce is found by remaining close to the one who is life himself. Because that is what abiding has always been about.

A prayer to begin: Jesus, I am tired of trying to live this life in my own strength. Forgive me for the ways I have confused activity with intimacy and effort with transformation. Teach me to remain in you in the weeks to come. Help me to slow down, to listen to your voice, and receive your love more fully. As I begin this journey, draw me closer to you and produce in me the fruit that only you can produce. Amen.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

How to Use This Book

This book was written with you in mind. From the beginning, my prayer has been that it would help followers of Jesus move beyond a life of simply trying harder and into a life of daily abiding in the peace of God's presence.

I encourage you to engage with this book each day over the next two months. Resist the urge to rush through it. Instead, allow each day to become part of a journey that deepens your relationship with Jesus and reshapes the way you live with him.

If possible, do not make this journey alone. Read and reflect with your church, a small group, or even one or two friends. My prayer is that, together, you will discover the beauty and power of abiding with Jesus and walking alongside others.

At our church, we plan to explore some of these themes more deeply through intentional learning environments, including a prayer experience and the Abide Conference. These gatherings will offer practical teaching on prayer, the Holy Spirit, and living in freedom each day. If you are unable to participate, you will find additional instructional resources in the appendix. If I am not your pastor, I encourage you to explore these topics with your pastor or local church community. Few things will shape your life more deeply than learning to abide daily with Jesus.

Each day's reading includes space for reflection and personal devotion. You may also want to set aside a journal as your Abide journal. This can be a place to record what God is showing you, write your prayers, and reflect on the steps he is inviting you to take. My hope is that it will help you continue living a life of abiding long after you finish this book.



WEEK 1 – Abiding in God’s word – *How do I hear God?*

Weekly memory verse: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”
Psalm 119:105

Abiding Principle: Read God’s Word consistently and prayerfully, inviting him to speak to you, transform your heart, and guide your decisions.

Day 1 – Where abiding begins – <i>Daily Devotions</i>
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“If you remain in me and my words remain in you . . .” John 15:7

“The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into him, that they may delight in his presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God himself in the core and center of their hearts.”² – A.W. Tozer

One of my earliest memories of church involves the weekly Sunday school assignments we were given as kids. Every week we received a worksheet that included Bible reading, scripture memorization, crossword puzzles, and a few questions to answer. If you completed the worksheet and brought it back the following week, you earned “Bible bucks” that could be redeemed for all sorts of life-changing treasures from the Sunday school prize cabinet.

One week, however, life got busy, and I forgot to complete my worksheet. The problem was that I desperately wanted my “Bible buck.” So, I did what any faithful church-going boy would do; I forged my parents’ signature and turned in the worksheet anyway. Unfortunately, my plan had a fatal flaw. My Sunday school teacher decided to turn the assignment into a pop quiz. She

asked me a question about one of the chapters I had supposedly read, and I was busted! Let's just say things didn't go particularly well at home that afternoon.

For a long time, my view of Bible reading resembled that worksheet. It felt like an assignment to complete rather than an invitation to receive. The problem wasn't that I lacked desire. The problem was that I lacked understanding.

Many followers of Jesus approach the Bible in the same way. We know we're supposed to read it, and we feel guilty when we don't. We try harder for a few days, then fall behind and become discouraged. However, daily devotions were never meant to be another item on a spiritual to-do list. They are one of God's primary invitations into a relationship with him.

When Jesus spoke about abiding in John 15, he connected our relationship with him to his words remaining in us. Abiding is not simply spending time with Jesus; it is allowing his Word to take root in our hearts and shape our lives. Through scripture, God reveals his character, his promises, his wisdom, and his heart. As we spend time in God's Word, we begin to recognize his voice and learn to walk in his ways.

There are a few key steps that will help daily devotions become a practice that helps us cultivate an abiding relationship with Jesus:

✚ Read the Bible.

There is tremendous value in the Christian resources that are available today, but nothing can replace opening the Bible for yourself.

The Bible is not merely a textbook filled with information. It is God's inspired word, written through human authors over centuries and woven together into one incredible story of redemption. Through its pages, God reveals who he is and how he relates to his people. The more time you spend in scripture, the more familiar you become with God's voice in your life.

✚ Read consistently.

Spiritual growth rarely happens through occasional bursts of inspiration. It happens through faithful, daily rhythms. We all know that a single workout

won't make you healthy, and one meal won't sustain you for the rest of your life. In the same way, one meaningful day of devotions won't sustain spiritual growth forever. What you do consistently determines who you become. Over time, small daily encounters with God produce profound transformation.

✚ Read with a prayerful spirit.

Before opening the Bible, pause and invite the Holy Spirit to speak. Ask God to reveal himself to you, and to help you understand what you are reading. Then, ask him to show you how it applies to your life. Bible reading is not merely about gathering information. It is about meeting with God. Come to Scripture not only to learn, but come to listen.

✚ Invite God to transform your heart.

God's goal is not simply to fill our minds with knowledge. His desire is to shape our character and help us become people who look more like him in this world. As we read the scriptures, God will comfort, encourage, correct, convict, and ultimately transform us. He will reveal areas where our attitudes, priorities, and actions need to become more like Jesus. Transformation happens when we allow God's word to move from the pages of the Bible and into our hearts.

✚ Invite God to guide your life.

The Bible describes God's Word as “. . . *a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*” Psalm 119:105

As you read, ask God to speak to you, and be open to what step of obedience he might be asking you to take. The goal is not simply to hear his Word, but to live it. Every act of obedience will strengthen our connection to Jesus and will deepen our ability to abide in him.

As you begin this journey, remember this: daily devotions are not about earning God's approval; they are about enjoying God's presence. As you open the Bible, listen for his voice, and respond with obedience. As you do, you

will discover that the one you are reading about is slowly shaping the person you are becoming.

Reflection: How would your time in Scripture change if your primary goal was to meet with Jesus rather than simply finish a reading plan?

Daily Devotion: Read Psalm 19:7–10

Day 2 – Why doing daily devotions matters

“I promise you: If you will develop a daily self-feeding program from the Bible and allow yourself to be daily, hourly mentored by God’s Holy Spirit, your life will undergo an unprecedented change for the better.”³ –Wayne Cordeiro

One of the reasons daily devotions are so important is because they are deeply rooted in the pattern we see throughout Scripture. God has always desired for his people to depend on him daily rather than occasionally.

When Joshua was preparing to lead Israel into the Promised Land, God gave him a clear instruction: “*Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it.*” Joshua 1:8 (NLT)

Notice that God did not tell Joshua to visit his Word only when he faced a crisis or needed guidance. Instead, the scriptures were to become part of the daily rhythm of his life. The same pattern appears in the early church: “*All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. . .*” Acts 2:42 (NIV).

The first followers of Jesus understood that spiritual growth would require consistent exposure to truth from the heart of God. They didn’t treat God’s word as an occasional supplement; they made it a regular source of nourishment. Jesus himself reinforced this truth when he quoted Deuteronomy during his temptation in the wilderness, saying, “*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” Matthew 4:4

Just as our bodies require daily food, our souls require daily nourishment from God. Perhaps the clearest picture of this principle is found in the story of God’s provision of manna in Exodus 16. Each morning, God would provide bread from heaven to feed the Israelites. They could gather enough for that day, but

they could not store it up and live on yesterday's provision. Every morning, they had to return and receive fresh bread from God.

The lesson was simple: God wanted his people to learn daily dependence. The same is true for us. Yesterday's sermon cannot sustain today's challenges, and last week's devotion cannot provide today's strength. God invites us to come to him regularly and receive fresh encouragement, wisdom, and direction through his Word.

I recently saw a humorous commercial featuring an adult who still wanted to be treated like a baby. He expected everyone around him to feed him, care for him, and meet his every need. The commercial was meant to be funny, but it reminded me of a spiritual reality that faces many Christians today.

Many believers never learn to feed themselves spiritually. They depend entirely on pastors, podcasts, worship services, and Christian books to sustain their relationship with God. While all of those things have value, they were never meant to replace personal time in God's Word.

Part of spiritual maturity is learning to feed yourself. Paul writes that maturity involves putting childish ways behind us (1 Corinthians 13:11). As followers of Jesus, one of the ways we grow is by developing the habit of opening up the scriptures for ourselves and hearing God's voice speak to us personally.

Healthy disciples don't merely consume what others have prepared; they learn to gather their own daily bread. As you begin this journey of abiding, no matter your background with reading the Bible, ask God to increase your hunger to hear from him. The more you feed on his Word, the stronger your relationship with him will become.

Reflection: What would it look like for you to depend on God's Word today as intentionally as you depend on food each day?

Daily Devotion: Read Deuteronomy 8:2–5

Day 3 – What you can expect from daily devotions

For those who have struggled to start or maintain a regular devotional habit, you'll want to pay close attention . . . Nothing drains motivation faster than a mindset of religious duty with no clear outcome. If daily devotions become just another item on your spiritual checklist, it won't be long before you lose heart. The remedy for that problem is the promises of God. His promises anchor us in something greater than our present feelings and circumstances.

Pastor David Jeremiah once said, *"The promises of God are His guarantees amid life's uncertainties. They are the basis of all our life of faith."*⁴

Missionary Adoniram Judson is similarly quoted as saying, *"The future is as bright as the promises of God."*⁵

So, what promises does God's Word give to those who regularly spend time with him through the reading of his Word? Here are a few promises to explore:

+ Spiritual life

The first promise comes from the prophet Isaiah: *"Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David."* Isaiah 55:3 (NLT)

God promises that when we come to him with open ears and receptive hearts, we will find life. Not merely information or inspiration, but life! He promises that through his Word we will experience his presence, receive his love, and be spiritually renewed.

+ Growth and flourishing

The psalmist paints a beautiful picture of the person who delights in God's Word:

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers." Psalm 1:1–3 (NIV)

Notice that the Psalm offers the promise of a life that is rooted, fruitful, and flourishing. Trees planted by streams of water don't have to strive for growth; they simply remain connected to the source. In the same way, those who delight in God's word and meditate on it regularly will experience spiritual growth and lasting fruitfulness.

+ Prosperity

At the end of Psalm 1, the psalmist says, "*Whatever they do prospers.*" God makes a similar promise to Joshua: "*Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*" Joshua 1:8 (NIV)

This is an incredible promise! Those who meditate on God's Word, speak it with their mouths, and obey it will prosper and succeed.

This does not mean life will be free of problems or challenges, but rather, it means that God's purposes will prevail because your life is anchored in him and his Word. Success in God's kingdom is not the absence of adversity, but instead it is faithfully accomplishing God's purposes regardless of adversity.

Jesus echoed this principle when he said that the person who hears his words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Storms still come, but the foundation holds (Matthew 7:25–27).

+ Prepared

Finally, Paul reminds us: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" 2 Timothy 3:16

Paul's promise is simple: when you spend time in God's Word, you will be equipped for every good work in this life. I've never been known for having a green thumb; therefore, we've never had a full-fledged garden. However, a few years ago, we started planting a few things in pots such as peppers, herbs, tomatoes, and berries.

What has always amazed me was how predictable the process was. If the seed packet said “pepper,” a pepper plant grew; it didn’t produce apples or carrots. The seed always produced what it promised.

God’s Word works much the same way. Every time you open your Bible, you’re planting seeds in the soil of your heart. Those seeds may not bear fruit overnight, but in time they produce exactly what God promises. His Word produces life, growth, and flourishing. Even more, it produces success in God’s purposes, and prepares us for every good work.

So don’t underestimate today’s time with God. Every verse you read, and every promise you embrace is a seed being planted. Because when God’s seeds are planted in a receptive heart, the harvest is only a matter of time.

Reflection: Which promise from today’s reading do you most need to believe in this season of your life, and how would your daily time with God change if you expected him to fulfill it?

Daily Devotion: Read Isaiah 55:10–13

Day 4 – How to start abiding through daily devotions

For much of my adult life, I have had good intentions when it came to exercise. I’ve had gym memberships, weight benches, barbells, rowing machines, pull-up bars, workout DVDs, and enough fitness equipment to stock a small gym. Yet for many years, despite all my good intentions, my follow-through was brief, and therefore, the results were often disappointing.

What I eventually discovered is that desire alone doesn’t produce growth. Growth requires a pattern. The people who become physically healthy are rarely those with the best intentions, but instead they are the ones with the best habits. They will establish a simple, repeatable pattern and follow it consistently. The same thing is true when it comes to those who are spiritually healthy.

If we want to develop a life of abiding in Christ, the method really does matter. Not because one method is sacred, but because healthy patterns help us

consistently put ourselves in a position to hear from God. There are several ways we receive God's Word.

One is through **hearing**. Paul writes, "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*" Romans 10:17. We hear God's Word through preaching, teaching, podcasts, and conversations with other believers. We live in a time when biblical teaching is more accessible than ever before.

Another way is through **study**. Paul instructed Timothy to "*do your best to present yourself to God as one approved*" 2 Timothy 2:15. Studying the Bible helps us gain a deeper understanding and equips us to rightly handle Scripture. Both hearing and studying are important, but today I want to focus on the patterns that help cultivate an abiding relationship with Jesus.

Two practices have been especially meaningful in helping me learn to abide. The first is a daily rhythm of **reading and reflecting on Scripture**. Over the years, structured journaling methods have helped me engage more deeply with God's Word. Yet I have also discovered that even a helpful method can become more about completing a process than cultivating a relationship. We developed SOAR to offer a simple devotional pattern that keeps our focus on connecting with Christ through Scripture.

SOAR is designed to help us move beyond merely studying God's word and begin responding to him personally and prayerfully. As you follow the Abide reading plan, you identify a verse that speaks to you and work through those four movements in a journal. The four movements can then flow together in one prayer.

S – Scripture: What verse or word stands out to me?

O – Observation: What is God revealing about himself or his ways?

A – Application: How should this change the way I think or live today?

R – Response: How will I respond to God in prayer?

SOAR keeps the focus on abiding rather than merely completing an exercise. Each day, begin by asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you through his Word. Read the selected passage(s) slowly. Highlight phrases that stand out. Read

it again, perhaps two or three more times. Then open your journal and **write a prayerful response** to God based on what you've read. Make your entire journal entry a conversation with God.

Recently, I was reading 2 Chronicles 20, where King Jehoshaphat learns that a vast army is marching against him. Rather than giving in to fear, he seeks the Lord and declares confidence in God's power.

My journal entry looked something like this:

A Victorious Mindset

Lord, I see how Jehoshaphat faced an overwhelming situation, yet he resolved to seek you. He did not allow fear to determine his response. Instead, he declared confidence in your power and faithfulness. Father, I confess that I sometimes allow fear and anxiety to shape my thinking. Forgive me. Today I choose to seek you and trust you. Help me maintain a victorious mindset regarding my future. I welcome you into every situation that concerns me. Power and might are in your hands, and I trust you.

That's what it means to SOAR. It isn't complicated. It is simply a prayerful interaction with God through his Word. The goal is not to check boxes or complete an exercise. The goal is to hear from God, respond to him, and remain connected to his heart.

As you continue through the Abide journey, I encourage you to practice this pattern each day. We've included a daily Scripture reading and space for you to write your response. You may use the space provided or continue the practice in a separate journal.

Tomorrow, we'll explore a second pattern that can strengthen your walk with Jesus. For now, begin today's reading and trust that as you seek him, he will meet you there.

Reflection: What is God showing you through this passage, and how can you respond to him in prayer today?

Daily Devotion: 2 Chronicles 20:3–9

Day 5 – How to start abiding through daily devotions – Part 2

The second devotional pattern that is essential to abiding is **memorizing scripture**. Some of you may have just reacted like a high school sophomore who was informed there would be a surprise biology quiz. Panic sets in, and all the escape routes are evaluated. Excuses start piling up in the mind. If Joshua once prayed for the sun to stand still, you're praying for it to speed up so the bell will ring and save you!

For many of us, memorization feels like schoolwork. Therefore, we often see it as something difficult, tedious, and of little practical value. But imagine for a moment that I offered you \$1,000 for every Bible verse you memorized. My guess is your attitude toward memorization would change rather quickly.

Before you decide to skip today's reading, allow me to share a few reasons why hiding God's word in your heart through memorization will produce tremendous rewards and deepen your relationship with him.

1. **Scripture memorization gives you power over temptation.**

David wrote: *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."* Psalm 119:11

It's one thing to know you shouldn't be watching certain things or saying certain words. It's another thing when the Holy Spirit brings a specific verse to mind in the moment of temptation and reminds you of the heart of God.

Perhaps you're struggling with worry because of difficult circumstances. But because you've memorized a verse such as Colossians 3:2—*"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things"*—the Spirit of God can bring that verse to mind and keep you from being overcome by anxiety.

Jesus modeled this behavior perfectly in Matthew 4, when every temptation that Satan presented was met with the same response: *"It is written . . ."* Jesus fought temptation with scripture that he had purposefully stored up in his heart.

One of the greatest advantages of memorizing God's Word is that it places truth within reach of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Then, in moments of weakness, he can bring those verses to mind and strengthen us to choose obedience and remain close to God.

2. Scripture memorization strengthens your faith.

Life has a way of testing our confidence in God, whether through unexpected circumstances, delays, or disappointments; they can all challenge our faith. Proverbs 22:17–19 says: *“Pay attention and turn your ear to the sayings of the wise . . . keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips, so that your trust may be in the Lord.”*

Notice the progression:

- Turn your ear.
- Apply your heart.
- Keep God's Word within you.
- And then your trust in the Lord grows.

That's the heartbeat of scripture memorization! I remember a season when our family suddenly needed another vehicle after our long-time car had completely died. We sensed God was asking us to wait rather than rush into a car loan, but waiting wasn't easy. During that time, there was one verse that kept echoing in my heart. It was one I had memorized years earlier:

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19

That promise steadied my faith when circumstances tempted me to worry, and I was grateful it did, because before long, someone felt prompted by God to give us a vehicle! God's word strengthened my faith and sustained me until his provision arrived.

3. Scripture memorization provides guidance.

Memorizing God's word doesn't simply give us strength; it gives us direction. Psalm 119:24 says: *“Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.”*

Think about that statement: God's Word is your counselor. I've lost count of how many times I've been talking with someone who was hurting or confused or needing wisdom, and a verse I had memorized came to mind at exactly the right moment. What I had stored away years earlier became something God used in a given situation to encourage, guide, and strengthen another person.

When God's Word is hidden in your heart, it is available not only for your own journey but also for helping others. Think about it: a firefighter doesn't pull out a training manual while standing inside a burning building. The training has already been stored up within him. In the same way, life's biggest challenges rarely give us time to search for truth. Scripture memorization places God's Word inside us before the crisis arrives, so that when we need it most, it is already there.

Most people assume they simply have a bad memory, so they never attempt scripture memorization. However, memorization is less about ability and more about consistency.

What you need is commitment and a plan. One of the best examples is Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators ministry. Shortly after giving his life to Christ in 1926, he began memorizing one Bible verse every single day.

At the time, he drove a truck for a lumber company in Los Angeles. While making deliveries, he would repeat scripture aloud and review verses he had already learned. During his first three years as a believer, he memorized over 1,000 verses.⁶ If Dawson could memorize hundreds of verses while driving a lumber truck, I think most of us can memorize a few!

My challenge is simple: make Scripture memorization part of your daily devotional routine.

Here is a practical plan:

✚ Pick a verse.

Start with the weekly verse to memorize from this Abide journey. They will be at the beginning of each chapter.

+ Write it down.

Write the verse on an index card. Sometimes adding a relevant simple drawing, such as a heart, a cross, or a star, can create a visual reminder.

+ Put it somewhere visible.

Place the card somewhere you'll see it every day. Mine often end up beside my bed or near the bathroom mirror.

+ Memorize it exactly.

Learn the verse word-for-word, including the reference. It may feel harder at first, but it greatly improves long-term retention and confidence.

+ Review daily.

Begin with one verse per week. Continue reviewing previously memorized verses for at least a month before moving on too quickly.

+ Invite accountability.

Tell a friend, spouse, family member, or your small group leader about your goal. Let them encourage you and celebrate your progress. Make it enjoyable.

When you consistently read God's word and store it in your heart, something powerful begins to happen. Scripture moves from being words on a page to becoming part of who you are.

The verses you memorize today may become the very truth that sustains you tomorrow. Whether you are beginning a devotional life for the first time or renewing a habit that has grown stale, I encourage you to embrace the practice of scripture memorization. As you do, you'll discover a deeper closeness with Jesus and a greater sensitivity to his voice.

As you continue this Abide journey, my prayer is that a fresh expectancy is growing within you; that God's Word would come alive in your heart and draw you into a richer, more intimate relationship with him.

Daily Devotion: Psalm 119:9–16

Reflection: What truth from God’s Word do you need to hide in your heart during this season, and how might it strengthen, guide, or protect you?

Day 6 – Pitfalls to avoid in daily devotions

As we conclude this week focused on developing a regular practice of daily devotions, it’s important to spend a little time talking about some potential pitfalls.

A few years ago, I began a master’s degree program alongside about twenty other pastors and ministry leaders. On the very first day, after a few introductions and greetings, the program director stood up and began describing how difficult the journey ahead would be. I remember thinking, *“If this is supposed to be a pep talk, it’s not working!”*

But as the first semester unfolded, every challenge he warned us about eventually appeared. Looking back, I became grateful for his honesty because his warning prepared me to endure the difficulties and keep moving forward until I could enjoy the rewards of the journey.

Proverbs 22:3 says, *“A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.”*

In the same way, every spiritual discipline has obstacles that can hinder our growth if we are not prepared for them. Throughout the Abide journey, we will identify common pitfalls so that each of us has the best opportunity to continue growing in our relationship with Jesus.

Pitfall #1: Letting it become optional

Whenever we begin implementing a new practice, it is usually competing with an old one. As you start practicing daily scripture reading and memorization, you will likely discover a little voice inside your head trying to talk you out of it. It will offer excuses, distractions, and reasons why today isn’t the best day to begin.

One of its favorite lies is: “*You don’t really need this.*” Maybe that’s for super-spiritual people. Maybe it’s for pastors. Maybe it’s for people with more time than you. However, when something becomes optional, it eventually becomes expendable.

One of the words often used to describe the practices we are learning in the Abide journey is spiritual disciplines. I have intentionally used other language so far, because sometimes the word discipline can sound harsh or uninspiring. Yet it is actually a beautiful word. It shares the same root as the word *disciple*. A discipline is simply a training activity that helps us become who we desire to be.

Paul writes, “*Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.*” 1 Timothy 4:7.

A spiritual discipline is something we intentionally choose to do, even when we may not feel like it, because it develops a depth of character and relationship with God that would not happen otherwise. Every time you open your Bible, memorize a verse, or spend time with God, you are investing in the person you want to become. Don’t let these practices become optional. They are part of God’s process of forming Christ in you.

Pitfall #2: Letting it become burdensome

The opposite danger is turning your devotional life into a heavy obligation. Hebrews 12:11 reminds us, “*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*”

There will be days when reading Scripture feels exciting and life-giving. There will be other days when it feels ordinary. Remember, faithfulness often looks ordinary before it bears extraordinary fruit.

Imagine a married couple who only talked when they felt emotionally inspired. That relationship would eventually struggle. Healthy relationships, however, are built through consistent connection, not just emotional highs, and the same thing is true with God.

Some days your devotional time may feel powerful, while other days it will feel routine. When that happens, I urge you to keep showing up. Don’t focus

only on the immediate experience; focus on the long-term harvest God is producing in your life.

Pitfall #3: Making it more about behavior than being with God

Perhaps the greatest danger of all is when you allow your devotional life to become more about checking a box than cultivating a relationship. It is possible to read the Bible every day and still miss the heart of God.

In John 5:39, Jesus confronted the religious leaders of His day and said, *“You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!”* They had missed the heart of God!

The goal of daily devotions is not simply to gain information, improve behavior, or complete a religious task. The goal is to know Jesus. Think about receiving a handwritten letter from someone you love. You wouldn’t read it merely to analyze grammar or count words. You would read it because you want to hear the voice of the person who wrote it. Similarly, the call to regularly read scripture is God’s invitation to know him more deeply.

As you read, don’t just ask, *“What should I do?”* Also ask, *“What does this teach me about God?”* Then get more personal, continue asking questions like *“What is he saying to me?”* Or *“How is God inviting me to walk with him today?”* Because the purpose of abiding is not performance; it’s presence.

As you begin establishing a rhythm of daily devotions, resist the temptation to let it become optional, burdensome, or part of behavioral performance. Instead, approach God’s word as a daily opportunity to meet with the one who loves you most. Again, the goal isn’t simply to read the Bible every day; the goal is to meet with Jesus every day.

Daily Devotion: Psalm 63:1–8

Reflection: What would change if I approached daily devotions not as an obligation to fulfill, but as an opportunity to seek and enjoy God’s presence?

Day 7 – From learning to living

Daily Devotion: James 1:22–25

Take a little time today to reflect on what God has been showing you through this week's lessons. Growth often happens when we slow down, think about what we're learning, and invite others into the journey with us.

Spend a few moments answering these questions personally and then discuss them with your Abide group.

Reflection Questions:

1. Before this week, what did your devotional life typically look like?
2. What challenges have you experienced with daily Bible reading or scripture memorization?
3. What has been most meaningful or helpful to you this week?
4. Is there anything you are still struggling to understand?
5. What specific commitment are you making regarding your devotional life during this Abide journey?
6. Who are you inviting to support and encourage you?

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for inviting me into a daily walk with you. Help me not simply to learn about you, but to know you and remain close to you. Give me the discipline to be faithful, the desire to know you more deeply, and the courage to invite others into this journey. Teach me to abide in you and depend on your presence each day. Amen.

My Abide Commitment

Before moving on, write one simple commitment describing how you will practice abiding in Jesus this week.

My commitment and reflections:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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