

## **“ABIDING IN WORD AND PRAYER.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Text: John 15:1-11**

### **Introduction.**

How many of you made resolutions for the New Year? How many are still keeping some of them? How many of you didn't make any resolutions for the New Year? How many of you are keep that?

The changing of the years strikes us as a natural time in life to evaluate and make positive changes in our lives. We make resolutions because we are dissatisfied with some aspect of our lives and we desire to do better. We resolve to lose weight, to eat better, to get organized, to spend more time on what's important, to curb some sinful habit, to improve ourselves.

All of these are good desires, so why do we have so much trouble keeping our resolutions?

One of the reasons we fail in our resolves is because we attempt them in our own strength. We think if we can turn that will-power screw one more good turn, if we try harder we can do better and be better. And when we fail again or fall short of the goal we are discouraged.

A couple of weeks ago Brian Bunn mentioned Jonathan Edwards who was famous for his 70 resolutions and for how diligently he kept them. At the top of his list he wrote these words:

“Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God's help, I do humbly entreat him by his grace to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake.”

Edwards knew no amount of resolve and no amount of good intentions would do any good apart from the grace of God at work in us. Whatever our goals and resolutions, we must humbly depend upon Christ.

As Jesus said, apart from me you can do nothing but whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit (John 15:6).

### **John 15 and Abiding in Christ.**

In John 15 Jesus is talking about what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is defined here as a person who abides in Jesus. Here we have a definition that uses a word that needs definition. What does abide mean?

We know it must be important because not to abide in Jesus comes with an ominous warning, that He will cut off such a branch and throw it away.

We know that it has something to do with a close relationship with Jesus, a relationship as close as the relationship between a vine and a branch.

The relationship between a vine and a branch is absolutely vital. If a branch is separated from the vine it has no life of its own, it will soon die. The sap that flows from the vine to the branch is the secret to its strength, beauty and fruitfulness.

The union between Christ and a Christian is just as close and real. In ourselves we have no spiritual strength or growth or fruit. All that is spiritually life-giving and good comes from Christ. As long as we are connected to the vine, then all that is in the vine is in us.

There are some branches that appear to be connected to the vine, they might even say they are, but there is no true fruit. There are professing Christians, people who have been baptized, even made profession of faith, attend church, listen to sermons, received the sacraments, but they lack one thing. A vital relationship with Jesus such that there is the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Where there is no fruit, there is no life. If they don't repent and get the sap flowing they live in danger of being cut off and thrown into the fire.

Abiding means a persisting, steadfast, enduring relationship of genuine repentance and sincere faith, evidenced by a fruitful holiness in life and conduct.

It should be obvious to all of us that there are many differences from one Christian to another. All are saved by grace through faith in Christ, all know they are sinners and repent often; all strive to be more like Christ and to reflect His character in their life and conduct.

But Christians differ widely in their degree of attainment of these Christian virtues and fruits. Christians vary greatly in their joy or hope or peace or faith or spiritual fruit or spiritual influence in the world. Why is this? It's a question we should ponder and the answer isn't hard to find. The difference is the degree to which a Christian abides in Christ, and Christ abides in him.

Who is in earnest? Who is pressing in? Who is striving toward the goal, further up and further in? Who is asking, seeking, knock? Who is making a habit of close communion with Christ?

I want to focus on two aspects of abiding, perhaps the two most important aspects of abiding found in verse seven.

**John 15:7** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

### **Abiding in the Word, God's mouth.**

If my words abide in you. How do we get His Word to abide in us?

The same way we get history or math or science in us before a test. The same way we get football or baseball statistics in our heads. The same way we get fertilizing facts or breeding information or tax rules or marketing strategies in our heads.

By constant association, reading, pouring over, thinking about, meditating on, talking with others about, being around those wise in these matters.

God's Word gets in by constant association, constant use, constant reading, listening to, meditating on and memorizing.

The more we do these things the more it becomes a guide to our thoughts and actions, our daily conduct and behavior, even down to our attitudes and outlook.

Jesus abides in us as His opinions abide in us and His truth abides in us and His commands abide in us.

This is not a small thing, it's not a trivial thing, it's a matter of life and death. To not abide is to die. Our life depends on this. "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:9,11)

For the sake of your soul, for the sake of your life, for the sake of your joy, love the Word and get the Word into you.

Our God is not silent, our God is a speaking God. We hear His voice in His Word.

### ***Read the Word.***

Find a quiet, undistracted place. Find a time, early, mid-day, late, meal times, some time. Make a simple plan to read the Bible, use our reading plan or any of a dozen others available on line.

It's not too late to start our reading plan. Today we are finishing Amos. We leave five or six days at the end of each month to catch up, so you can go back and get Hosea, Joel and Amos if you want. Or just start today and go forward.

## ***Memorizing the Word.***

If you can spare five to ten minutes a day you can memorize a lot of verses. It's basically repetition, read it, say it, repeat it, review it. Over and over.

Parents, help you kids. Memorize the verses they are memorizing from school or church. Have some family verses. Memorize the monthly verses we put in your boxes.

Let me challenge you all again to consider memorizing as much of James as you can. It's hard work but well worth the effort.

James is just 108 verses. The first chapter is the longest and it gets easier from there.

Start by reading James out loud several times. Then take a month to memorize it, that's about four verses a day. Then repeat it out loud each day for a month. For about 20 minutes a day you could have the entire book of James memorized in three months.

This year let His Word abide in you. These are not a dead man's words, not some old words from long ago and far away, these are the words of the living Christ who is with us and who wants His life to abide in us as our living Savior and Lord. This is His life for you.

## **Abiding in Prayer, God's ear.**

After God speaks, God listens. He has a mouth and an ear. He wants us to talk to him.

How is your prayer life? Would you say there is power in your prayer life? If not, why not? Power in prayer comes through close connection with the source of prayer's power, who is Jesus.

Jesus ever lives in heaven to make intercession for us. Jesus is the great pray-er, the great advocate in heaven before the Father. The sap of prayerfulness runs through His veins. Get connected and stay connected and His power will begin to flow through your prayers.

John 15:7 If you abide in me, and ***my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*** 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

## ***Planning to pray.***

A growing difficulty with our generation is an inability to focus. The constant distractions of social media and the quick clicks from one to another and all over the internet are making us inexperienced in sitting still and thinking long thoughts or praying for very long.

The real test of whether we are abiding or not is our private prayers. Those with a genuinely real relationship will want to spend time in intentional, thoughtful, reflective prayer.

And if you don't desire to pray, prayer is the remedy for that problem. Ask God for what you lack, ask Him for what you don't desire but know you should desire.

***There are a few practical considerations that will help.***

***First***, find or create a space for prayer, an uncluttered corner, a room, by your bed, some place where you can quiet your heart and mind and be undistracted. Don't take your cell phone with you.

***Second***, prayer is a conversation, not just a one way asking. So start the conversation with God's Words, let Him start the conversation. Start with reading some Scripture, use the reading guide, or some passages of prayer. And then pray some of those words back, make them your own.

Pray the Psalms, pray the prayers in Scripture, pray the prayers of Paul in in Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians.

***Third***, it helps to have some guide to organize our thoughts and keep us focused. Martin Luther recommended praying through the Lord's Prayer and expanding on each of those petitions.

Also a very popular form is ACTS, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication.

Another is concentric circles from yourself to family to friends to church/community and out to nation and world.

Make prayer lists, things you don't want to forget to pray for. I have a resolution to pray through our church directory, praying for each of you and your children by name. Pray I can keep it up.

Trying writing some of your prayers and see how that focuses you and how it opens up new thoughts.

Ask God to help you to pray. Borrow other people's prayers. I have recommended many times the book *The Valley of Vision*, compiled by Arthur Bennett. Get Spurgeon's prayers, or Matthew Henry's *A Method of Prayer*.

Then keep it up throughout the day in spontaneous prayers. Let prayer precede and permeate all your activities, as you head out to the barn or to the office or to school, as you head into an appointment or a visit at a coffee shop, as you work in the laundry room, as you head to an event with your child or come to worship. It can be spoken or silent, but pray.

Have a disciplined time of prayer and spontaneous times of prayer.

### **Application and conclusion.**

Nothing is more important and nothing will bear more fruit. I can't desire anything more or better for you than to be a praying Christian and a praying congregation. Do whatever it takes, ask for help, please don't neglect this privilege and necessity.

Being a Christian and abiding in Christ is impossible without Word and prayer and growing as a Christian is impossible without Word and prayer, and getting to the end 2015 better than how we started is impossible without Word and prayer.

All that you hope or dream or desire for this year is impossible apart from God and apart from taking it to Him in prayer. "You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

Make this one of your highest priorities for this year. We have an extraordinarily attentive Father who is eager to "give good things to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:11).

Our God is not like the deaf and dumb idols. Our God is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. God delights to glorify Himself by answering our prayers, so we experience His grace and His lovingkindness.

We have His ear, we have His undivided attention. Make the most of it this year and you will see fruit and your joy will be full.

The greatest need in this church and the greatest work is prayer. I have said before one of the reasons God has given us so many senior saints who can't do all the things they used to do, is so that they will do the one most important thing that remains to be done, prayer to Almighty God for the spiritual needs of this flock.

If our sun would suddenly go out, in eight minutes and 20 seconds the earth would fall into a frigid darkness. All plants would stop producing oxygen, all the water would freeze and within a week life would begin to cease on this planet.

As dependent as we are on the sun, that is how dependent we are on Word and prayer. If we don't abide in Christ we will die. A life without Word and prayer will be a failure in the end.

What's the bottom line of abiding in Word and prayer? Is it so we will know what's in the Bible better? Is it so we will pray and get more? No, the bottom line is we will know God and His love for us, and His joy will be in us and our joy will be full and complete.

For the sake of your life-giving joy I call us and urge us to abide in Christ through His Word and prayer.