

# Abide

## *It Takes A Village*

21.07.18 | Priscilla Shirer

Well, for about 10 years or so, my family and I lived in a fairly rural part of the Dallas-Fort Worth area. We planned it that way when our children were little. I've got giants now. My oldest is 18, like six foot, three inches tall. Then I've got a 16-year-old. He's about six foot, two inches tall. And then I've got a 12-year-old, but he stands the exact same height as me. So, I am being outgrown very quickly in my household. When they were younger, we spent 10 years living about 10 minutes away from the city so we could get there quickly, but we felt like we were worlds away. We would drive back to our home that was on a lazy little, two-lane road. And we enjoyed it back there because, you know, there were things that three sons need in their lives like bugs and mud and trees and stuff like that. Anytime the boys would come to me when they were growing up and say, "Mom, I'm bored." I would say, "No, you're not. You see that tree out there, go and play with it. I don't care what you do with the tree. You can play tag with the tree. You can eat the tree. I don't care what you do, but you're not going to be bored out here in the country. Enjoy yourself."

One of the things I loved most about living out there was that my neighbor, who happened to be one of my closest friends, she has a pond in the front of her property. I cannot tell you how much we have enjoyed this pond. We would go over and fish as often as we could. We would go and throw sticks out on the pond. Her dog would go out and swim into the middle of the pond and go grab the sticks, retrieve them and bring them back. I mean, my boys had so much fun growing up by that pond. But do you know, it was very interesting as we lived there one year after the next, one Texas summer after the next. There was one summer in particular where I noticed that, during a drought, when the skies were shut up, there was no rain, that Rachel's pond (Tom and Rachel were our neighbors) still had water in it.

The level was a little low, but there was still water there. The reason why this was particularly intriguing to me was because there were other neighbors throughout this particular area of the city that also had ponds. When I was jogging or walking

with my children or when I was driving around, I could see other properties that also had ponds beside or in front or even in the back of the property. And during that same summer, when my neighbors across the street still had water, even with low levels, in their pond, I noticed that some of these other ponds had no water at all. It actually just began to look like a big hole that was sitting in front of their property. No rain coming down, no water filling it up.

There was only one difference, I would learn, between Tom and Rachel's pond and some of those other manmade ponds in the neighborhood. Tom and Rachel's pond was a spring-fed pond. That meant that down there at the deepest parts, about 15 to 20 feet down, there was this continual bubbling water supply, an internal water reserve that offered continued fulfillment and continued sustenance and continued nourishment. So that, regardless of what the atmosphere was like, regardless of what the weather was like, it still could maintain its water levels. Different ponds, but they're in the same environment, experiencing the same deficiency, the exact same lack, the exact same insufficient supply of precipitation. And yet they have two very different results. And the difference is one has an internal supply and the other one does not.

I wish I was face-to-face with you right now. Because if I was, I would lean over and look at you eye to eye. In fact, if we were sitting with each other, just one-on-one with a cup of coffee between us, I would lean over and look at you eye to eye and tell you something from this vantage point of life that I am so glad was emphasized to me over and over and over again when I was 20 and then at 25 and then at 30 and then at 35 and at 40. The people that loved me the most and cared about the nourishment of my soul emphasized to me something that I want to express to you as clearly as I possibly can in these few moments that we have together. The older and older I get, I realize that without an ongoing effervescent, fervent nourishment coming up on the inside of you, you will not be able to have the sustained hope and peace and joy and contentment and grace and fulfillment that you are going to require when the atmosphere of drought swirls all around you.

If there is one thing that this last season that all of us have been through has taught us, you know. With all these disappointments and all this hardship and all this isolation and all this division and all this unrest and all of this sheer,

unprecedented drought of recent times, it has shown us this undeniable truth: that we need something on the inside of us that does not require external circumstances in order to keep it steady and in order to keep it strong. This is one of the messages that was so critical and so important that Jesus wanted to express to his disciples that, 24 hours before his crucifixion, this is what he wanted to tell them. That an internal source of fulfillment was going to be the thing, the only thing, that was going to be able to sustain them through what he knew was coming next. Their hopes were about to be dashed. Their dreams were about to be squashed. Their hearts were about to be broken. In 24 hours or so, Jesus is about to be arrested and crucified. All their hopes were pinned on him. Jesus knew that this disappointment was coming. And so, in one of his final messages, he expresses to them the need to have something that is independent and does not rely on external fulfillment in order to continue to sustain and nourish.

Now, I want you to consider how you would feel if a loved one, somebody that you care about deeply, has some final words that they want to share with you. And they know that their time is coming to an end. They know that they only have a few words that they can share with you, only a few more hours that they are going to have in your presence. If you had that type of opportunity, wouldn't you lean in and listen more closely. Wouldn't your ears be more peaked because you don't want to miss anything that that individual that you love so dearly and desperately is going to say to you. Not in their final words, you don't want to miss anything. The disciples are leaning in because Jesus is carefully and very decidedly and intentionally sharing with his 12 most beloved friends exactly what he wants them to know before he is crucified. And then of course is raised from the dead and then is ascended away from them. He has just finished what would be the last supper. He has just washed their feet. He has just predicted his betrayal. He has just told them, ***“Let not your hearts be troubled.”*** He has just reminded them that, ***“In my father's house, there are many mansions.”*** He has said to them that I'm going to ask my father to send another helper to you, the Holy Spirit. He has said to them, ***“My peace, I am going to leave with you.”***

And on the heels of this meaningful meal, he leads the disciples away from the dinner table and out of the city, through the winding streets of Jerusalem, up toward the Kidron Valley on the way to the Mount of Olives. The Garden of

Gethsemane is within the Mount of Olives. Everything that is about to transpire next in terms of the crucifixion is going to begin in the Garden of Gethsemane. They are on their way there toward the Mount of Olives, down these dirt paths, where they would have passed through the familiar community that the disciples knew so well. The flat top roofs that they would have passed while they were on their way. And as Jesus led the disciples, they would have passed by something that would have been extraordinarily familiar to them. Something that they would have seen day in and day out on every regular day when they were passing through this city. They would have passed well-blazed trails, tidy rows of masterfully planned and manicured vineyards. They would have passed grapes.

And I want you to consider the possibility that Jesus paused by one of the many vineyards that would have dotted along the path that they would have been traveling towards the Mount of Olives. Consider that he stopped beside one of these vineyards that represented joy and festivity and really did highlight the abundance of any community. He stops by one of these working vineyards. And he says these words to them in John 15: 4. Seven words, but if you can absorb it and hear it and align your life to it and take it seriously in your teenage years and then in your twenties and in your thirties and your forties, your fifties and beyond, it can keep you well-nourished even when there's a drought outside your window. Jesus said, ***“Abide in me and I in you.”***

Simple yet profound in its implication. He said, “I'm going to tell you something that is going to be one of the most critical messages I leave with you, my beloved disciples. If you don't do nothing else, abide in me. And I promise to abide in you. When the atmosphere around you dries up, when your health fails, when your friends betray, when the endeavor you've worked so hard on falters, when you're not appreciated or even noticed, when the road gets tough to traverse, when your loved one dies, when your ministry flounders, when your heart is broken,” Jesus says, “there is only one thing that will give you the continued sustenance and nourishment that you need to have a well of joy and hope that overrides during times like these, abide in me and let me abide richly in you.”

This word “abide” was very important to this author, John, who gives us this gospel and also gives us three letters (First, Second, and Third John). We know it's important to him because throughout the gospel, he used the word abide or a

rendition of it, about 40 times. And then throughout First, Second and Third John, upwards of 27 times. He says, "abide, abide." The original word is *meno*. It means simply "to remain." It means to stay. It means to hang out with. It implies an interconnectedness and an intermingled relationship. It means to be immersed and enmeshed, one with the other.

One of the things I love to do is drink hot tea, I like a Jasmine green tea to be specific. And I probably have a mug of it most every single day. And I'm one of those people that, you know, I put the tea bag inside and then I fill it up with hot water and I let it sit there for a second. Maybe put a dollop of honey in or so, as I go about doing a couple of other things for a couple of minutes in the kitchen. Then, I'll grab my mug with tea bags still inside and I'll sit down for just a few moments and enjoy the cup of tea. The tea bag is still in there, just abiding, just remains in the cup. It just hangs out there. I noticed one day when I was at a coffee shop, having a cup of tea with a friend, she also had a tea bag inside her cup. But as we talked, she was just sitting there, dipping it in, in and out, in and out, over and over again. I was just kind of watching her as we were talking, a little bit distracted. I kept looking down at her hand, going in and out, picking the teabag up and putting it back down. I said, "Girl, you know, you could just leave the tea bag in there. Right?" She said, "Yeah, but, but I don't like to do that. I like to dip it in and out. And the reason is because if I leave it in there too long, the tea will get too strong."

The strength of your life depends on whether or not you will choose to remain, to stay rooted and steady, to not dip in one year and dip out the next, dip in during one season and dip out the next, dip in when it's trendy and cool and you're applauded and appreciated and dip out during those secret hard years where you're just plowing, unnoticed and uncelebrated. You've got to make a decision right now in your life, and I've got to make one in mine, that we're going to continue to deepen our relationship with Jesus every single day, every single week, throughout every single season, the good seasons but also the bad, hard seasons.

And listen, it's not as complicated as we make it, because it really is just about this abiding, is about deepening your friendship with him. It's about talking to him. Do you talk to him? Do you take enough time when you were in prayer, talking to

him to actually pause, to give margin for him to talk back to you? Do you know there's some things that your friend, your brother, your Lord, your savior wants to also say to you? He wants to take your roots down deep. Do you make time through the scriptures and through the Holy Spirit's conviction to actually hear and sense and listen to what it is that your God wants to say to you? Do you take time to remain with him, to hang out with him, to let your life be immersed with his and his with yours? To deepen your friendship with him, to obey him, to pause and to heed that conviction of the Holy Spirit that's on the inside of you? Holy Spirit, why is my heart burning within me? Where are you leading me? Where are you guiding me? What is it that you want me to do or say? What is it that you want me to not do or say? Do you take time to talk, to lean in, to hear the voice of God in your life and then to respond in obedience?

The thing is, a message like this on a friendship with Jesus, on abiding with Jesus, is nothing new. If you've been to Passion before, whether we were in a physical arena or you were viewing online, like we all are this year, or even if you're in a Bible-teaching church, no matter how small or large, or you have participated in Bible study, or even your own, maybe discipleship, just one-on-one with someone who's been mentoring you, then likely, if you've been in a healthy context like that, then you have heard this sort of encouragement before. It seems like something that we keep on hearing and we keep on coming back to, but we can never hear it enough, because our capacity to be able to be sustained over the long haul depends on whether or not we wrap our minds and our hearts around what it is that Jesus was teaching his disciples then, and what it is by his Spirit, his teaching to his disciples today, "Abide in me." Make your friendship with Jesus the priority of your life over and above every other ambition that you may have, every other calling or mission that may be good things that you were doing and that you have been assigned by God in your life. But never let them circumvent and take priority over your friendship with Jesus. The well you're going to need to keep you filled up when there's a drought in the world around, you can only come from that abiding relationship.

I'll never forget watching an interview once with Michael Jordan, the great Michael Jordan, and I remember him being asked about his success as an athlete. And he said, "You know what? The minute you get away from the fundamentals, the bottom will fall out of whatever you're doing." He was talking about

basketball but the only thing I heard was something about my life, a lesson for my life. The minute we get away from the fundamentals, Michael Jordan was saying, "Listen, all of the tricks that I do and all of the gravity-defying dunks, and all of the aerodynamic leaps that makes for good TV. But to the extent that I do all of that, but pull away from the fundamentals of the game, I recognize that that can't sustain my success over the long haul." And listen to me, brothers and sisters, the spiritual aerodynamic leaps and gravity-defying religious dunks, that may seem stunning because it fills conferences, conference arenas, or it sells millions of books, or it gets us followers on Instagram or on Facebook. Those things will not sustain us over the long haul. Our overriding ambition must be, as Paul said, to please Christ and Christ alone, to abide with him and to have a relationship with him.

A philosopher named Sam Pascoe, he said something that I can never forget. He said, Christianity started in the land of the Bible as a fellowship, a relationship. Then it moved on to Greece and it became an institution, a place you go. Then it moved to Rome and in Rome it became a philosophy, a way people think. Then from Rome it moved to Europe, and it became a culture, a way of life. Then from Europe, Christianity came to America, and it became an enterprise, a business. Now it's just what we do. And Lord help us if this relationship with Jesus becomes a business. It's what we do, but it's not who we are.

Jesus would say, ***"I am the vine (in verse one) and you are the branches. And my father is the vine dresser."*** I want you to see this clearly, if you take time and I hope you will, to read through all of John chapter 15. At the beginning, there, he paints this whole landscape and scenario of a working vineyard, and he points to three players on the landscape of his illustration. Picture the possibility that, as he maybe paused there with the disciples, that he ran his hand up the trunk of a grape vine, and he says, ***"I am the vine."*** And then maybe pause right at that connecting point where one of the tendrils, the branches would shoot out from this huge trunk of the grape vine. He says, "I am the vine, and you are the branch, the part that bears fruit." Consider that he paused right there at that tender connecting point where the branch was enmeshed with, and immersed with, the vine. He says, "This is me. All the nutrients, the sap, the moisture, the nourishment that is needed for this branch to be able to stay steady and to flourish and to produce the fruit that it was designed and planted to produce, all

of that is available to the branch, if it will just concentrate on staying connected. And by the way, not superficially connected because it was possible for the skin of a branch to remain connected to the surface layer, the skin of a vine, and yet the inner veins and the inner workings of those two parts of the vine not to actually be immersed with each other. So superficially, cosmetically, they can be connected without actually having nutrients being passed from one to the other.

Jesus says, "If you want to be able to produce fruit, you don't have to strive for it. You don't have to work for it. You don't have to manufacture it. You don't have to lose sleep over it. All you have to do is concentrate on abiding. And I am going to pulse to you, give to you, offer you everything that you need to be able to live a fruitful, productive life that brings me glory." So, he says, "I'm the vine, you're the branch. My father is the vine dresser." The vine dresser is tending to everything, consciously working day in and day out to make sure that every branch in his garden is exactly where it needs to be to get the right amount of sun and the right amount of water, to lift it off the ground, to post it up against the lattice work, to make sure it's positioned correctly.

He points to these three players on the landscape. The vine does work, pulsating nutrients. The vine dresser does work, walking around to position everything correctly, gardening, tending, tilling, and he points to the only thing in a working vineyard that does not work, the branch. And he says, "That's you. My father is doing all the work, I've done all the work. You rest in me. That is your job. Receive from me. Build a friendship with me, make sure that the inner workings between us remain connected so that you're not just artificially grafted in just on the surface, but so that there's actually life pulsating between the two of us. You concentrate on this friendship and I'm going to yield such a robust harvest from your life. Come to me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, rest and receive. I got your back, be still and know that I am God, everything you need." Second Peter 1, pertaining to life and godliness: ***"I've got it for you. If you'll just make sure to remain connected. Abide in me and I will abide in you."***

I want to tell you that this day, last year, man, it was a tough one for me. I was arriving back at my home this day last year, at about 8:00 AM. I had been up all night long and previous nights leading up to that particular night. I'd been up a lot because we were taking care of our mother. And on the night before this day,

about 2:00 AM and 4:00 AM. I was laying with my siblings and my father in our mother and dad's bed. And actually, she was literally laying in my lap as she took her final breaths. We were there with her as she went to see Jesus. And I arrived home later that day after the emotional exhaustion of that, just came home to shower and then get back to my dad to help him through all the things that would need to be figured out. And it was my birthday, December 31st, the day after losing my mom. I didn't even really recall that it was my birthday, I was so delirious from the emotional exhaustion of it all. And, in fact, losing our mom last year, this time was right in the middle of a string of very difficult losses to date. Over the past two years, we have lost eight family members.

Talk about a drought, one bit of grief after the other, one loss after the other. I'm here to tell you that a well is not dependent upon external resources. The only way that you're going to be able to be sustained. And in this last moment, can I just tell you how I know that? I know that because of my mom's final days and final weeks, as we sat with her and spent every waking minute with her and leaned in to hear anything she would want to say to us, she told us about the hope she had in Jesus. She told us about the joy that she had, an expectation of meeting him. She told us about how she knew beyond any reasonable doubt that heaven was real, and she told us never to ignore and never to put aside, cultivating a relationship with Jesus. Never to let ministry, the pursuit of ministry, override just the fundamental friendship that we got to have with him. And in the end, in those last days, my mother died with her heart and eyes filled with hope and joy at the expectation of seeing Jesus. What kind of internal reserve do you got to have, even in the face of death, to still be hopeful: whatever kind of well that doesn't run dry. My mama had it. That's the kind of well I want too. So, I invite you, Jesus, not to just know him for salvation, but to know him in deep, intimate friendship every single day, until you see him face to face.

In Jesus' name. Amen.