

Getting Started Part 2 - The Gospel Life

Today I get to share with you something that has been an absolute breakthrough in my life and what I believe is going to be a breakthrough for many of you today. We are in part 2 of our April series we are calling "Getting Started" and the idea for the series is that by the end of the month of April, if you will lock in each weekend, you should have a clear understanding for what the Christian life looks like. Now, I realize there is a danger that I sound like some beach body fitness video that's like...you'll be ripped in 7 minutes if you try these 3 tips. I am not promising you will be spiritually shredded by May 1. Mainly because I have no idea what that would mean. Think of this more like basic training. Basic Training tears down bad habits and builds new healthy ones. That's what Jesus spent a bulk of his ministry doing. Revealing the deficiency with the way people viewed the world & showing them a better way that would give them joy.

- The rich young ruler down at his core had a love of money problem. And Jesus revealed that the love of money will leave you unsatisfied. You'll never have enough. And then taught how God's love actually will satisfy your soul and free your grip on money. Money can then become a good tool instead of a bad god.
- The woman at the well down at her core found her identity in her relationship with men. Jesus reveals that she will never find

- true happiness there. She had a deficient worldview. He tears that down and replaces it with himself. And says with him as Lord she will finally find the life she's been seeking for
- He did it with his followers. Martha thought Jesus was a good teacher, even a healer. But he was too late to offer help since her brother Lazarus had already died. To Martha, Death was final. And Jesus revealed the deficiency of her view of him by raising Lazarus from the dead 3 days after he died. He wanted her to see he wasn't a teacher, he was God.

Time and again this was Jesus' MO. Show you how your current way of operating in the world is deficient and then offer you a better way. That's what he still does today. To those just listening in and to those who follow him his words show you a better, more fulfilling life by first turning yours upside down, then rebuilding with a better foundation.

That's what is happening in this series. We are letting Jesus tear down our lives, even our religious backgrounds, and rebuild. It's like Chip & JoJo for your faith. And today might be demo day for some of you because today I'm going to show you how Jesus says to follow Jesus. This is 101. I'm talking this afternoon and tomorrow and the next day and everyday until you die you need to put into practice this one lesson from Jesus & everything else flows from it. He taught it to his disciples in John 15. Everything you need to have a fulfilling JOYFUL life comes from this first lesson right

here today. I'm going to sum it up in two words: **ABIDE & OBEY**

That is the title of the sermon today. **How to follow Jesus with Joy: Abide and Obey**

Just about every time I talk with someone who is struggling spiritually I find they've wandered from this basic-training, getting started lesson from Jesus. Abide and Obey. Let me read you the passage and then we'll get into why we make it harder than it is.

[1] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. [2] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. [3] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. [4] 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. [5] 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. [6] If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. [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. [9] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. [10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. [11] These things I have spoken to you, that my

joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. John 15:1-11

Alright I'm going to divide this sermon into two parts. I know its going to be a real shocker to you what the two parts are. The first part is Abide. And the second part is Obey. So if you are taking notes, there is your outline.

First, Abide.

This idea of abiding is tucked inside of a word picture. I think part of the reason this word picture hits me so hard is that I really enjoy gardening. I was raised in a suburban setting where everything grew in a box at food lion. Then I met Courtney who was raised on a farm where everything grew on plants. I learned that mashed potatoes were not flakes from a box...they were actual potatoes from the ground that you then mash up. Crazy. Anyways so now I grow food. And we just moved into a suburb neighborhood so I can't wait till mid august when my corn stalks are swaying 7ft high and my neighbors are like what is this guy doing. So since I'm an experienced agricultural expert, you can trust me as I explain this very difficult metaphor to you.

You ready? Let's use tomato plant as an example. It's got a main vine and then branches that shoot off. Now, what I've found in my expert opinion is that the branches only grow fruit when they are attached to the vine. That's because all life-sustaining nourishment comes from the vine. Any branches that break off from the vine withers and dies. Now...aren't you glad you have an expert here to help you understand that?

[4] 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. [5] 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.

Now Jesus is abundantly clear right. HE IS THE VINE. WE ARE THE BRANCHES. Which means if we want to bear fruit, if we want to see God move in our lives, if we want power to overcome sin and actually change more into who God is calling us to be, if we want to experience the JOY of all the promises God has offered to us in Christ...we have to abide in the vine.

Never once, in the history of vines and branches, has a branch broken off from the vine...and then started producing fruit. When my kid snaps a tomato branch off of the vine I don't say OH no biggie just go put it in your room and in a month it will start making tomatoes. No. Apart from the vine it will die. Apart from Abiding in Jesus you will die spiritually.

So what does it mean to abide in Jesus? Good question. He gives us a very important additional thought to that in verse 9

[9] As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Abide in my love.

Abide in my love. I want you to highlight that, underline it, whatever you need to do. The word abide means to "live or make your home in." Where do we see Christ's

love for us? We see it in the gospel. Romans 5.8 - This is the love of God for us, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. 1 John 4.10 - this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his son to pay the price for our sins.

Listen in...don't let this wash over you. The love of God for you, Christ's love for you, is found in the gospel that he died for you and rose for you. Remember last week? JESUS FOR YOU. You didn't deserve his love, you didn't earn his love. No Christ didn't die to save friends and followers he died to save his enemies! And he offers salvation as a free gift for us to receive.

That's the gospel. Jesus for you. And the effect of abiding in that love is amazing. Making your home in that love is where the POWER for real lasting change, bearing real spiritual fruit, in the Christian life comes from.

Now what does it mean to ABIDE in that? What does it mean to make our home in that? I actually love the CSB translation because instead of translating it "abide" it says "remain." Remain in my love. and the reason I like that is because as Christians we tend to think of this incredible gospel truth as just the starting point, or as we say around here we think of it as the front door to the Christian house. So we walk through the door and then leave the gospel behind because we've already walked through that door. We think "growth" comes by increasing in knowledge & activity. That's NOT GROWTH! We must learn that the gospel is not the front

door to the Christian life, it's the whole house! And we gotta make our home there.

Let me explain it with this image that was really helpful for me. Regardless of your age, when you trusted Christ the cross divides your life into two periods: you as a believer and you as an unbeliever



And what one word describes what an unbeliever most needs? We would suggest it is the word “gospel.” You need to hear Jesus died for your sins and if you come to him in faith you can find forgiveness from your sins. Now your timeline looks like this:



But then what I often find is that there is this assumption that our need for the gospel STOPS at our moment of conversion. The theological term for that is our justification. The gospel justifies us. We are no longer guilty, we are made righteous before God because we receive Christ’s righteousness. And yes that Justification is a one time thing at the moment of conversion. But what I often find is that most believers operate like the message they most need to hear is “discipleship.”



After all Jesus said make disciples right? That’s the great commission. As believers we are continually challenged by the demands and duties of discipleship. Bible study, church attendance, prayer, giving, serving the poor, etc. After all these are God’s commands to his church. And there is plenty of room to argue we need



much more emphasis on discipleship here in our church and in churches in general.

BUT. There is something more foundational Christians need to hear. Because if all we hear is what to DO, we will break off of the vine and try to bear fruit on our own. It is ONLY the JOY of hearing the gospel and being reminded that our sins are forgiven in Christ that will keep the demands of discipleship from becoming a drudgery!

It's subtle but when we forget the gospel, when we stop abiding in Christ's love, our hearts will start to believe God's approval is based off of how you perform. Here's how I see it happen: take 2 days this week.

Monday - wake up early. Read your bible for 1 hour. Stop on way to work to help a stranded driver. Crush it at work. Buy a co-worker lunch. And you've got coffee scheduled with a non-christian friend that night and

you've prayed all day about it. You've got a chance to share gospel.

Tuesday - Wake up late. No bible. Speed to work (breaking the law). You are snippy with your boss because you can't believe she's mad you are late. So you twitter burn her. Turn in what you know is half-way done work hoping boss lady doesn't know it. And at 7:50 your phone reminds you that you have coffee with that unbelieving friend in 10 minutes to share gospel. Racing out the door you go.

Now...in which one of those scenarios is God more likely to work through you? THE ANSWER IS BOTH! Because God's approval of you and his ability to use you are NOT BASED on your religious performance that day!

See the gospel keeps us from falling into good day or bad day religion. Good day religion thinks that God will approve more of me more than he does others because of my religious performance that day. That's what the Pharisees in Jesus' day did. That's pride, not gospel. Bad day religion is the overwhelming feeling of guilt because I can never seem to live up to God's standards set for me.

BOTH have forgotten the meaning of the gospel. Of grace. And have slipped into performance based religion. But the gospel..the love of God for you...THE VINE you are to abide in. To remain in. It says something completely different. The gospel says

Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace.¹

When you drift into Good-day-bad-day religion you know what you do? You go put yourself back into the courtroom, back to trying to defend yourself before God. And maybe you do that because you have this internal sense of Justice that cannot believe God accepts Jesus' payment for your sin. You still feel like you need to prove yourself. Listen, Jesus already settled the case! His performance, not yours, makes God approve of you.

It's so easy to slip into this ya'll. I did it THIS WEEK. I think Sunday night Courtney and I got in an argument and per usual I was in the wrong. I realized that and then I thought "well, I am in no place to be used by God."

Now, while this is freeing to Christians it is something different to those of you who are not Christians. The gospel says you cannot be a good enough person to EARN God's acceptance. God is perfect & infinite. So one sin makes you imperfect no matter how much you do to try and outweigh it. That'd be like me saying to Courtney "I've been faithful to you 98% of our marriage." That's waaaaaay more faithfulness than unfaithfulness. Will she celebrate that? NO. She'll crack me over the head with a cast iron skillet. Same with your sin and God. One sin puts you in God's eternal debt

and you cannot pay that debt on your own. This is why every weekend we put in front of you to RECEIVE. Not earn, but RECEIVE the offer of forgiveness from Christ. That is your only way forward with God.

Watchmen Nee, a Chinese pastor who planted about 200 churches in China from 1923 - 1950...he said You cannot move forward as a Christian unless you are SITTING in God's grace. CAR ILLUSTRATION.

And I know some of you are so steeped in performance based religion you'd say...well then what keeps us from living a life of complete disobedience to God? If our performance doesn't matter then who cares? Well, first I'd say nothing curbs enthusiasm for Jesus like guilt. You start hanging guilt and fear over people and see how much true joy they find in Christ. Secondly I want you to hear Paul's words in

"For Christ's love compels us." 2 Corinthians 5.14

Should we obey God? YES! But the challenge to obey needs to be based on the gospel, not on duty or guilt. Ya'll this has revolutionized my life. Here's how: When I became a Christian I was given a check-list. And each week my accountability partner would ask me if I had done the things on the list. And weekly check-ups on obedience was my Christian life for YEARS! We even created different consequences for failure. Didn't read the bible...\$1 per day. Go to far with a girl? \$10. SO

¹ Jerry Bridges. The Discipline of Grace (Navpress Colorado Springs, CO 1994) 19. The diagrams come from this book and the inspiration for my words in the "Abide" section can be attributed to bridges as well. This book has quickly become an important one for me.

you'll be shocked at what I did (sarcasm)...I started LYING about my performance. Because I didn't want people to know that I was just TIRED of being a Christian. I didn't LIKE reading so I didn't like the bible. My money was my money. I liked girls! And a fear and guilt religion was a burden I didn't want to carry. And I went to college planning to throw it off. When God in his grace caught me early on through a friend that introduced me to what I'm sharing with you today - the gospel life. Where Christian growth is all centered on abiding in Christ's love for you.



Now I know what you are thinking: How do I abide? 3 things to do every day:

1. Repent of your sin - I'm not promoting a faith that doesn't care about sin. No instead one that cares more. That hates it because Christ's love turns my heart against it. And to repent is to say I am turning from my sin and coming back to God's love. Lord's Prayer sermon.
2. Believe the gospel - Rehearse it. This is the primary reason we tell you to read your bible and pray every day. So you can once again encounter a love not based on your performance. You can remember you are not saved because of how committed you are to Jesus. You are saved because of how committed he was to you.
3. Obey Jesus - that actually leads me to the second part of the sermon.

ABIDE...Second, obey

[10] If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments

and abide in his love. [11] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Now how fascinating is that? Just after telling them that the way to bear fruit is to abide...he says the way to abide is obey. And when you OBEY you will abide and there...when you are abiding and obeying..there is where you find JOY in the Christian life.

Now some of your brains are in a pretzel cause you are like that sounds like a contradiction but its Jesus so it can't be but...WHAT? Ok here's the thing. Abiding in Christ's love comes first. We must abide. And when we really do make our home in his love, we will desire to obey his commands. But listen, every time we obey his commands we are putting trust in him. Trusting that things will go well for us when we take this step of obedience. AND RIGHT THERE when we are trusting him...that's where he starts to give us JOY in the Christian life.

And listen I've found many times I'm talking to a Christian who says "Man I'm abiding. I read my bible and pray...but I just feel dry spiritually. God seems distant. I'm not feeling it. And my response is...how have you radically obeyed Jesus lately?" And usually, not always but usually the answer is they haven't really obeyed Jesus in a way that was risky or a real step of faith at all. And then they go obey Jesus...they step out and risk themselves trusting him to make it go well for them...and then they experience Joy...that then lights up their hearts for Christ. Let me give you examples. Steve Addison in his book What Jesus Started lists out seven

clear commands Jesus gave his followers. And when we obey them, we find joy & wind up abiding in Christ again:

Repent and believe

This is what I just said so I won't stay here but Mk 1.15 says discipleship begins with repentance and believe. And some of you have never taken that step. You must start here! Believe the gospel. I did this at the age of 13 and that DAY God gave me JOY. He lifted that weight of performance off of me. Maybe today you are ready to take that step. Several have done so the last few weeks and today that could be you

Be Baptized

The first step of obedience to Jesus, after you repent and believe, is baptism. Jesus says to his disciples: baptize & teach them. Peter says to people who want to believe "Repent and be baptized." we love celebrating baptism around here. I've never seen someone sad after being baptized. Why does it bring you joy? Because you are obeying Jesus! So this month we are giving everyone the chance to obey Jesus through baptism if you haven't yet. On April 29th we are going to baptize and I want to challenge you to take that step. Today you can begin taking that step by letting us know you want to get baptized. That's what that card is for. Hopefully that's clear. End of Service we are going to pass buckets and EVERYONE is going to drop the card in. So you can drop yours in, filled out, and we'll follow up with you and let you know next steps. It's going to be an awesome way to finish out this "getting started series."

Love one another

John 13 Jesus gets down and washes the disciples feet and then he says do likewise to your brothers and sisters in the church. And too many Christians feel dry spiritually and I learn they are serving no one but themselves. “too busy.” Try obeying Jesus! They start serving others and in doing so it brings them JOY & motivation that leads them back to abiding. Listen we should never need to recruit ministry team members because you guys should be climbing over each other to serve. Because serving is a way to obey which, while abiding, will bring you joy!

Pray always & do not give up

Jesus was always talking to God. Always putting himself onto the father and then commanding his disciples to pray always. And I’ve found this is the first thing we stop obeying when our hearts grow cold to God. And plenty of times in my own life it has been praying & fasting that has brought me JOY in Christ. Not surprising I find joy in it because I am obeying God!

Give

Mark 4.19 Jesus says watch out, the deceitfulness of riches will choke out the word in your life and will make your life unfruitful. This one and the next one I’ve watched revolutionize many Christians. Maybe you don’t know this but God calls you to give of your money to his mission. And when you do so the love of money starts to loosen its grip on your heart making room for you to start loving God...to start abiding in his love. And you will find Jesus to be better than money. I know a guy in

his 50s, said he’d been a Christian since college, but had never been told God calls him to give. Somehow missed it in scripture. And so I challenged him to start giving. He said how much? I said enough that you feel it. OT giving is 10% and we have more to be thankful for than they did. But start with enough that you feel it. Within 2 months he was a different man. His marriage was different. He finally was experiencing the joy of obedience!
Some of you need to take this step. Start giving. Again not for Mercy’s sake but for your joy!

Go

Ever come back from a short term mission trip all excited? Most people do. Not always but a lot of the time. And the reason you are on a “mission trip high” is because you’ve been obeying Jesus for a week or two! You can actually obey him here as well. And experience the joy from doing so!

I’m telling you this idea is so simple there is a danger you miss its power. Are you abiding in Christ? Are you obeying Christ? These are the two pillars of discipleship. You need someone asking you these questions every week. Someone you trust. Seek out someone in your community group and say I need a sparring partner. Will you help me abide and obey?