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Abiding in the Vine

John 15.4-7

Series: Signs of Life

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Rev. Andrew Hawkins, Senior Pastor

I. Introduction

- A. Dave Williams ruined our lives
 - 1. Now you don't know Dave Williams
 - 2. But when we say Dave Williams ruined our lives, we say it with our tongues firmly planted in our cheeks
 - a. And smiles on our faces
 - 3. For we have great affection for our friend Dave Williams
- B. We met Dave when we moved to Morgantown back in the early 80's
 - 1. He and his family were in the Morgantown C&MA church
 - 2. Dave was doctoral student at WVU in composing
 - a. He had been doing a lot of the composing and arranging for the WVU marching band
 - b. And had been composing his own original works for the WVU symphony orchestras
 - c. I served on his doctoral committee for his dissertation – it was customary in most universities to have someone outside of one's discipline to review dissertations; I was the non-music faculty member
 - 3. But the bottom line is that Dave Williams is a brilliant guy
 - a. We think of him as a walking encyclopedia
 - b. His awareness of, not only the arts, but of philosophy, history and culture was simply remarkable
 - c. He introduced us to Francis Schaeffer's film series "How Should We Then Live – The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture"
 - d. And yes, it was a film back in those days – long before CD's
- C. The problem came after Dave left WVU and moved his family up in PA somewhere
 - 1. But not long after that, he picked up an adjunct job back at WVU
 - a. Teaching the courses that his mentor had been teaching
 - b. His mentor was the composer-in-residence at WVU and had taken a sabbatical
 - c. So they hired Dave to teach
 - 2. But Dave had moved and had no place to live
 - a. So we offered him our guest room on the third floor of a house we had built outside of Morgantown

and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

- d. 7 “If you **abide** in Me, and My words **abide** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
2. Seven times in four verses the word abide occurs
 - a. We better understand what Jesus is driving at when He concentrates so much on that word

II. **The Vine, the Branches, and the Vinedresser**

- A. This text is set in the context of Jesus’ teaching about one of His great “I am” sayings
 1. **“I am the true vine” – John 15.1**
- B. In this passage He details the relationship between three key persons
 1. The vine
 - a. The branches
 - b. And the Vinedresser
 2. **He Himself is the vine**
 - a. The true vine
 - b. As we saw last week, He was the true vine as He fulfilled what the OT vine – Israel – failed to fulfill
 3. He identifies the **Father as the Vinedresser**
 4. And **believers are the branches**
- C. We saw last week how the Father – the Vinedresser – graciously works to create fruitful branches
 1. How He lifts up branches that are foundering in the ground
 - a. How He prunes the fruitful branches of things that are obstacles to fruitfulness
 2. And in doing so, He purifies the branches so they can bear more fruit
- D. **John 15:1–3** (NASB95) —
 1. 1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
 2. 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away [lifts up]; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.
 3. 3 “You are already clean [pruned] because of the word which I have spoken to you.
- E. We learned that the pruning, the purifying, the cleaning, takes place because of the word of Christ
- F. But how, exactly, does that happen?
 1. It happens by abiding in Christ
 - a. By abiding in His word

III. **The Meaning of “Abide”**

- A. So what does “abide” mean
 1. The basic meaning is to remain
 - a. **To continue**

2. The idea of making one's home with another provides an appropriate visual image of what is entailed
 - a. When our friend Dave Williams came into our home, he wasn't just visiting
 - b. He lived with us
 - c. And in the process, changed our schedules, our routines, and in some ways, our lives
- B. When we abide in Christ, we live with Him
1. We stay with Him
 - a. We engage with Him
 - b. We are in contact and in relationship with Him
 2. Not just occasionally, but with great regularity and frequency
- C. And this requires a conscious, intentional act of our wills
1. To put ourselves in position to engage with Christ
 - a. It doesn't just happen serendipitously or accidentally
 2. Ray Stedman: When our Lord says: *Abide in me* he is talking about the will, about the choices, the decisions we make. We must decide to do things which expose ourselves to him and keep ourselves in contact with him. This is what it means to abide in him.
 - a. We have been placed into Christ by the Holy Spirit. Now we must choose to maintain that relationship by the decisions we make – decisions to expose ourselves to his Word in order to learn about him, and to relate to him in prayer wherein we converse with him.
 - b. Decisions to relate to other believers in Body Life experiences; that is, bearing one another's burdens and confessing our faults and sharing in fellowship with one another, wherein we learn about and see Christ in one another.
 - c. All of this is designed to relate to him – *Abide in me*. If we do that, we are fulfilling this active, necessary decision of the will to obey his Word, to do what he says, and to stay in touch with him.
- D. In my former life as a professor in physical activity and sport sciences we taught a principle that guides us in planning exercise programs
1. That if you really want to enhance your physical condition by an exercise program, you need to follow this principle
 2. **The FITT Principle**
 - a. Frequency, intensity, time, and type
 - b. **Frequency** – you need to engage in the exercise program with enough frequency to cause genuine benefit
 - c. **Intensity** – you need to engage in the exercise at a high enough activity level to cause benefit
 - d. **Time** – you need to do it for a long enough time
 - e. **Type** – you have to do the right kind of physical activity to produce the changes that you want
 3. Good way of looking at what it takes to abide in Christ
 4. Frequency – we have to engage with Christ with great frequency – at least

- daily engaging with Him
5. Intensity – we have to approach the activity with the kind of energy and abandon that will correspond with the kind of devotion we have for Christ
 6. Time – we have to spend enough time with Christ for Him to do His work in our lives
 7. Type – we have to do the right kinds of spiritual activities to lead us in developing a growing relationship with our Savior
 - a. Not just any activity will do
 8. FITT – Frequency, intensity, time and type
- E. The year was 1979
1. We were living in Maryland
 - a. The Presbyterian church we were attending at the time happened to do a lenten devotional series
 - b. The whole church was encouraged to use a lenten devotional together
 2. The devotional began the time with prayer
 - a. Then we studied a scripture passage
 - b. Then we read a commentary on the passage
 - c. Then we made application of that passage to our lives
 - d. Finally we concluded the time with prayer
 3. The devotional was published by Scripture Union
 4. When lent was over, we were introduced to the **Scripture Union *Encounter With God***
 - a. The Bible study devotional that follows the same format
 - b. And if you continue in it, in 5 years you study the whole NT twice and the whole OT once
 5. I began using *Encounter With God* that spring, in 1979
 - a. And I've been using it ever since
 - b. 42 years
 6. It's the same *Encounter With God* we're using in Study with the Pastor
 7. And I can tell you that whatever the ups and downs have been in my walk with the Lord or in the ministries I have been involved in
 - a. *Encounter With God* has kept me abiding in Christ
 8. A conscious decision in 1979 to put myself in a position every day to engage with Christ
 - a. Has been the mainstay, the ballast, the center of gravity of my walk with Christ
 9. It has been the key to abiding
- F. Make several observations about abiding that come to us from this text

IV. **The Command to Abide**

- A. The first observation is that abiding in Christ is a command
1. Not a suggestion
 - a. Or even an exhortation or an admonition
 2. This is a command to all believers

- a. Not reserved to a special class of believers
 - b. Not just for pastors or elders
 - c. Not just for church leaders or committee chairs
 - 3. Abiding in Christ is to be the norm for everyone who calls himself or herself a Christian
- B. In fact, abiding is the very definition of the Christian
 - 1. **John 8:31** (NASB95) — 31 ... “If you continue [abide] in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine...”
 - 2. Who are those who are disciples of Jesus?
 - a. Truly disciples of Jesus; genuine disciples of Jesus?
 - b. Those who abide in, continue in, the word of Christ
 - 3. Abiding is not an option
- C. What do you need to make the conscious decision, the act of your will, to put yourself in a position to engage with Christ?
 - 1. To decide to engage with the frequency, intensity, time and type of activity that will cause you grow in your relationship with Him?
 - 2. How about the fact that He commands you to do it?
 - a. That the Savior of your soul
 - b. That the Lord of all the earth
 - c. That the King of kings
 - d. That the One who gave His life so that you would have life
 - e. That this One, the supreme God incarnate, commands you to abide
 - 3. Isn't that enough?
- D. Isn't that enough to put yourself in the Word?
 - 1. To study the scriptures with your fellow believers
 - 2. To engage in acts of mercy with your brothers and sisters as you're able
 - 3. To present yourself in worship with the body of Christ
 - 4. To join your brothers and sisters in times of corporate prayer like we do on Wednesday evenings
 - 5. To meet with Christ personally and privately in your daily devotional times, in your secret closet
 - 6. To gather in the ordinance, or some would say sacrament, of the Lord's supper together
 - a. **John 6:56** (NASB95) — 56 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”
- E. Those are the kinds of things that enable you to abide in Christ
 - 1. Is not His command to do just that enough?

V. **The Promise of Abiding**

- A. Second observation is the promise of abiding
- B. Jesus, first of all, promises that if you abide in Him – **He will abide in you**
 - 1. **John 15:4** (NASB95) — 4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. ...”
 - 2. He will reside with you
 - 3. He will occupy you as His residence
 - 4. And in the process, He will change you

- a. He will transform you
- b. He will make you into His image
- 5. But this is a conditional promise
 - a. None of that transformation happens without your abiding in Christ
- 6. Remember – the gospel of John says much about the incarnation of the Son of God
 - a. God come in the flesh
 - b. Do you remember how John put it in Chapter 1?
- 7. **John 1:14** (NASB95) — 14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
 - a. Dwelt = tabernacled
 - b. We become the dwelling place of God
 - c. The abode of God
- 8. **John 14:23** (NASB95) — 23 ... “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”
 - a. The Father and the Son living in you and me!
 - b. The presence of God in us – what a promise!
- 9. In fact – the indwelling of Jesus is the “hope of glory”
 - a. **Colossians 1:26–27** (NASB95) — 26 ... the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
- 10. Abiding in Christ promises His abiding in you
 - a. His presence in you
 - b. To change you
 - c. To transform you
- C. The second promise is that of **answered prayer**
 - 1. **John 15:7** (NASB95) — 7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”
 - a. Answered prayer is the promise for all believers who abide in Jesus
 - 2. This is not the first time in the Upper Room Discourse that we have seen the promise of answered prayer
 - a. **John 14:13–14** (NASB95) — 13 “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”
 - b. So Jesus promises to answer the prayers of believers if we ask in the name of Jesus
 - c. In the name of Jesus – according to His will, in accord with His precepts, His examples, and His commands
 - d. And He promises to answer prayer as we seek the glory of the Father
 - e. Those are conditions for the promise of answered prayer for

believers

3. And now we have another
 - a. “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” (John 15.7)
 - b. Notice “and My words abide in you”
 - c. We need to be in the word of God, study the word of Christ, in such a way that those words abide in us
 - d. And the more those words abide in us, the more our impulses and inclinations are to act in accord with the will of Jesus
 - e. And the more likely those prayers will be answered
- D. So abiding in Christ comes with promises
 1. The presence of Christ
 2. Answered prayer

VI. The Necessity of Abiding

- A. John 15:4–5 (NASB95) —
 1. 4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, **so neither can you unless you abide in Me.**
 2. 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for **apart from Me you can do nothing.**
- B. There is no fruit-bearing – which is what this section of John 15 is all about – apart from abiding in Christ
 1. We are spiritually impotent apart from the abiding presence of Christ
 2. The branch – that’s us – cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine
 - a. Why?
 - b. “Apart from Me you can do nothing”
 3. Luther: “Nothing is not a little bit of something”
- C. You may believe in Jesus, accept Him as your Savior
 1. You may have every intention of following Jesus
 - a. Of fulfilling the commands of Christ
 - b. Of completing the Great Commission
 2. But if you try to do it on your own – you’re wasting your time
 - a. You can have the best of intentions
 - b. You can have all the right goals
 3. But you can achieve nothing without the presence of Christ abiding in you
 - a. And Christ abiding in you depends on you abiding in Christ and in His word
- D. Perhaps the greatest fruit that believers can produce is love
 1. And the only way we can produce love is by having the One who is love dwelling in us, motivating us, enabling us
 2. Remember what the love chapter says about the necessity of love
 3. 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 (NASB95) —
 - a. 1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

- b. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
 - c. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.
 - 4. Nothing
 - a. We can do nothing – no thing
 - b. Apart from abiding in Christ
- E. Abiding in Christ is necessary for any enterprise of kingdom value
 - 1. Our natural talents and capacities – as impressive as they might be the secular world
 - a. Are completely impotent in spiritual matters
 - b. Apart from indwelling, abiding presence of Jesus Christ
 - 2. Abiding in Christ is absolutely necessary for a fruitful life

VII. **The Consequences of Abiding**

- A. So what are the consequences of abiding in Christ?
 - 1. Simply put – fruit
 - a. That’s what this entire section has been about
 - 2. **John 15:2** (NASB95) — 2 “Every branch in Me that does not **bear fruit**, He takes away; and every branch that **bears fruit**, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”
 - 3. **John 15:4–5** (NASB95) — 4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot **bear fruit** of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he **bears much fruit**, for apart from Me you can do nothing.
 - 4. **John 15:8** (NASB95) — 8 “My Father is glorified by this, that you **bear much fruit**, and so prove to be My disciples.”
- B. And what is fruit?
 - 1. Essentially the fruit of the Spirit
 - a. The abiding Christ dwells in us by His Spirit
 - b. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ
 - 2. **Galatians 5:22–23** (NASB95) — 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control...
 - a. Let me ask you, do those things characterize your life?
 - 3. The fruit of the Spirit is different than the gifts of the Spirit
 - a. The gifts of the Spirit (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4) are each given to different individuals
 - b. Not every individual gets the same gifts
 - c. **1 Corinthians 12:7–10** (NASB95) — 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the

word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.

- d. Not everyone gets the same gifts
- 4. But every fruit of the Spirit is meant to be embraced by all believers
 - a. Every believer is to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit
- 5. And the fruit of the spirit is the fruit that Jesus is referring to in John 15
- C. And it is the fruit of the Spirit that is eminently attractive to a dysfunctional, disintegrating, chaotic world
 - 1. Just think of it –
 - a. How unusual for the world to run into people who are
 - b. Loving – even to the unlovely
 - c. Joyful – even during challenging circumstances
 - d. Peaceful – content when life’s trials seem overwhelming
 - e. Patient – in the context of an instant gratification oriented world
 - f. Kind – who are always looking out for the interests of others before themselves
 - g. Good – who care to do that which is right and true even when it is against their own interests
 - h. Faithful – who keep their commitments and promises in a world where you can hardly trust anyone
 - i. Gentle – who are exude the kind of meekness which was so characteristic of Jesus
 - j. Self-control – in the midst of people who seem driven by their impulses
 - 2. How amazing are such people as exhibit the fruit of the Spirit!
- D. And it is by abiding in Christ that we are able to produce fruit like that
 - 1. Is that your reputation?
 - a. Is that list a description of your character?

VIII. **The Failure to Abide**

- A. **John 15:6** (NASB95) — 6 “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”
- B. As if you didn’t need anymore motivation Jesus throws in this warning
 - 1. You don’t want to abide in Christ
 - a. You don’t want to do what is necessary to maintain a connection with your Savior
 - b. You don’t want to engage your will to encounter Christ in the study of His word, in the worship of God, in the fellowship of His saints
 - c. You don’t want to abide with Christ with the frequency, intensity,

time and type of activity necessary to really prosper your relationship with Him

2. You're toast
 - a. Thrown away like a dead branch
 - b. Cast into the fire as just so much organic waste
- C. There's been all kinds of ink wasted on this verse debating whether this refers to one's salvation which is at risk, or whether its just the fruit that gets burned up
 1. **1 Corinthians 3:15** (NASB95) — 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.
- D. But I would urge you, brother and sister – be careful about playing fast and loose with the warnings of scripture
 1. Are you really going to try to explain away the implications of the warning?
 2. Because you really don't want to abide in Christ?
- E. **John 15:8** (NASB95) — 8 “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”
 1. Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?
 - a. A genuine disciple?
 - b. Who willingly submits to His will as you understand it?
 2. Then don't put yourself or your works at risk
 - a. But abide in Christ

IX. Conclusion

- A. Abiding in Christ
 1. Connecting with Christ in an intentional, willful way
 2. Commanded by the Savior
 3. Attendant with promises
 - a. Abiding presence of Christ
 - b. Blessing of answered prayer
 4. Necessary because of our spiritual impotence
 5. With the consequence of bearing much fruit
- B. Will you pursue the abiding presence of Christ by abiding in Him?