

## **Abide**

January 6-7

### **Introduction`**

Aloha everyone and welcome to the kickoff of a brand new year! How is everyone doing? How are we feeling about the New Year? I had something happen recently that sums up my feelings about another year.

I was driving up to Church one morning, and because it's winter the sun was still tucked beyond the horizon. But I could see the golden light from the rising sun just hitting the top of Mount Ka'ala as I drove past the pineapple fields toward Dole.

The sky was starting to brighten, the country side awakening all around me, and I began to soak in its beauty — a brand new day.

But suddenly, in my rearview mirror I notice a set of headlights. A car is coming up the hill and gaining on me quickly. I glance down at my speedometer and I'm driving right at the limit. But of course, in our culture, going the limit is slow, and 10 over is normal.

My feelings of tranquility and serenity are instantly replaced by a new feeling — hurry. I don't want to be an obstacle — a Sunday driver. Suddenly the frenetic energy of the driver behind me spreads through my car like a contagion and I catch a case of urgency. I involuntarily begin matching their speed, and just like that, the moment is lost.

As I reluctantly embrace the hurry, my mind automatically shifts to the checklist of to-dos waiting for me once I reach Church. The beauty that had enveloped me mere moments ago fades into the backdrop of responsibilities and tasks ahead.

Sometimes the to-dos and responsibilities that come with another year can feel like a hurried driver bearing down on you. Your soul tells you to go at a slower pace and to be present in the moment. But our culture says that slow is unacceptable. So we get caught up in the frenetic pace of the world that forces any beauty around us to blur into the backdrop.

We've had an amazing first week of daily devotions together and one sister in the Church beautifully reflected,

“Rest in Jesus, is something I wasn't able to do. Our technology brings us too much stuff, non-stop work, social media, friends and family in the palm of our hands, never gives us a break. It seemed like doing the right thing but it took away my time for Jesus. This year I want to intentionally rest in Jesus and learn from Him together with our New Hope Ohana.”

How many of you would say 'amen' to that? You are not alone. There is a growing resistance to the status quo of how our world says we ought to live. The world says you need to go harder, faster, stronger! Rid yourself of all dependency. Be a self-made woman, a self-made man. Chase the latest. Get up and get after it!

### **Jesus' Invitation**

This why Jesus' invitation is so profound. He says to those who would follow Him,

<sup>28</sup> “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls,” (Matthew 11:28-29).

Jesus is offering us a different pace — an entirely new way to do life that will bring rest to your soul.

## **ABIDE**

This weekend we are launching our very first series of 2024 centered around our theme for the new year — Abide. Our focus is to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and live the way He lived.

Our theme verse for the year comes from John 15:5 where Jesus tells His disciples,

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you ABIDE in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing,” (John 15:5).

Last week we discovered that in order to live fruitful lives for Jesus we need to abide in Him. Not strive for Him but to abide in Him. Big difference! This year, don’t strive, abide. Striving leads to dying but abiding leads to thriving! So let’s abide and thrive as we stay connected to Jesus all year long. Abiding involves more than just a weekly immersing but a daily submerging that completely transforms us. In other words, we want to pickle in Jesus until there’s nothing left of us and we are completely saturated in Him. Colossians 2:6-7 puts it this way,

<sup>6</sup> “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in Him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness,” (Colossians 2:6-7).

Paul is saying that receiving Christ Jesus as Lord is only the beginning of the Christian life. We need to continue [everybody say ‘continue’] [turn to your neighbor and say ‘continue’] to live our lives in Him. How? Rooted and built up in Him (Abiding and Thriving). Strengthened in our faith and overflowing with thankfulness. So watch this, John 15:5 says, “First you Abide, then you thrive” Colossians 2 says, “First you root, then you fruit.” You gotta root to fruit. Wherever you root, determines your fruit. All of us root our lives in something this year. And it is evidenced by our fruit.

**Work/Career** - Some people root themselves in their work or career. While this may yield the temporary fruit of recognition, stability, and achievements. It might also yield burnout, neglecting personal relationships, and an imbalance in one’s time and energy.

**Consumerism** - Others root themselves in material wealth, which may yield status and temporary happiness. But you might also reap excessive debt, a constant impulsivity for the next new thing, and a sense of fleeting fulfillment.

**Social Media/Technology** - Some people root themselves in social media and technology. They seek validation, connection, and self-worth. But with that can also come the fruit of comparison, addiction, and a distorted sense of reality.

**Self-care/Wellness** - A lot of people these days root their lives in health and wellness. While this may yield some benefits it can also produce obsession, anxiety, and a skewed sense of self-worth tied to one’s appearance or health.

**Political Identify** - This year we will see many people root themselves deeply in political movements and find their identity in politics. It is a cry for purpose and belonging that can yield the fruit of polarization, division, and an “us verses them” mentality.

There are many things you could root your life in this year (Work, materialism, politics, media). But Jesus calls us to root in Him, abide in Him, and we will experience true fruit, fruit that lasts and brings rest to our souls. We need to abide to thrive. Root to bear fruit.

### **How to Abide in Jesus**

So how exactly do we abide in Jesus? “I’m not sure if you’ve noticed Pastor Mark, but Jesus hasn’t exactly been around in well over 2000 years.” This is the exact predicament the disciples found themselves in when Jesus told them He was ascending back into heaven! Yet look at the radical promise Jesus makes about how they will continue to be with Him!

<sup>15</sup> “If you love Me, keep My commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see Me anymore, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you,”

(John 14:15-20).

Jesus is saying, “Look, I know this sounds bad, like I’m leaving you behind as orphans. And yes the world will look for Me but will not see Me. But you will still be with Me and I will still be with You. In fact, I’ll live within you. We will be one in a way that is better than it is now!”

It sort of reminds me of that scene from the first Star Wars movie, *A New Hope* where Obi-Wan Kenobi is dueling Darth Vader on the bridge of the Death Star. And in the middle of their battle Obi-Wan makes a curious statement. He turns to the dark lord and says, “You can’t win, Darth. If you strike me down I will become more powerful than you could possibly imagine.” And then, with his friends watching, he lowers his lightsaber and allows Darth Vader to strike him down! And Luke Skywalker freaks out and starts shooting everyone with his blaster. “Nooo!”

But did Obi-Wan die? No! He just became a Force Ghost. Now he could train Luke Skywalker wherever he went, he was no longer bound to a physical body, he could influence events from beyond and even thwart the plans of the Emperor. Obi-wan did not cease to exist, he simply took on a different form of existence — a greater form!

In a similar way, Jesus promised that it is for our good that He leaves because only then will the Holy Spirit come. Jesus did not cease to exist, He simply took on a different form of existence — a greater form. Now He can be with each of us every moment of every day, leading us, guiding us, and influencing our world from beyond.

Jesus knew that when He left, His disciples would be tempted to return to religion. Instead, Jesus was calling them to remain in relationship. A relationship through the Holy Spirit. Jesus has not walked the earth in over 2000 years. Many of His followers have replaced Him with religion. But we were never meant to return to religion. We were always meant to remain in relationship with Him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life was never meant to be a list of do’s and don’ts. The Christian life is all about having an intimate and personal relationship with the Creator of the Universe.

Imagine a young woman, raised in a small, remote village, taking her first steps into a bustling city, eyes wide with wonder at the dazzling array of lights. She belonged to a tribe where simplicity was the norm, but the city’s brilliance captivated her.

In awe of the electric lights, she packed her bags with light bulbs and switches, eager to bring this newfound marvel back home. Back in her village, she strung up the bulbs, hanging them outside her home and in the trees of her neighbors. When questioned about her peculiar actions, she simply smiled and promised, "Just wait until nightfall."

As darkness enveloped the village, she excitedly flicked the switches, expecting a radiant transformation. Yet, to her disappointment, the bulbs remained lifeless. She hadn't known about electricity—how these bulbs were useless without a connection to power.

Often times, we chase after societal expectations adorning our lives with education, career, family, possessions—believing they'll brighten our lives. But when life's darkness descends, when we seek meaning and fulfillment, many find themselves flipping switches to no avail.

Jesus likened this to our dependence on Him. He said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing." How many of us are like those unlit bulbs, disconnected from the source of true light and purpose?

You and I were created to be connected to something greater than ourselves. Our lives can only truly shine when we are connected to the source of life.

### **Keep Your Eyes on Jesus**

This year I want to encourage you to stay connected to the source of life. Throughout this year we are going to get practical on how to remain in Christ and experience His fruit in every part of our lives. But it begins with knowing Jesus and having a relationship with Him. Otherwise you'll just be living your life according to a set of rules and religion. Remember, striving leads to dying but abiding leads to thriving. My prayer is that you would know Jesus for yourself. Nothing else can sustain you.

Story goes there was a young new Christian who was visiting the home of an elderly believer. He had heard that this old man had never lost his first love for Jesus after all these years.

The elderly man was sitting on the porch with his dog taking in a beautiful sunset. The young Christian posed this question to the old man, "Why is it, sir, that most Christians zealously chase after God during the first year or two after their conversion but then fall into a complacent ritual of attending Church once or twice a week and end up looking no different from their unbelieving friends and neighbors? I have heard you are not like that. I've been told you have fervently sought after God throughout all your years. People see something different in you. What makes you different?"

The old man smiled and replied, "Son, let me tell you a story. One day, I was sitting here quietly in the sun with my dog. Suddenly, a large white rabbit ran across the yard right in front of us. Well, my dog jumped up and took off after that big rabbit. He chased the rabbit over the hills with a passion. Soon other dogs, attracted by all the barking, joined him. What a sight it was, that pack of dogs barking across the creeks, up stony embankments, and even through thickets and thorns.

Gradually, however, one by one, the other dogs dropped out of the pursuit. Discouraged by the course and frustrated by the chase. Only my dog continued to hotly pursue the white rabbit. In that story young man, lies the answer to your question."

The young man sat confused in silence. Finally, he said, "Sir I don't understand. What is the connection between the rabbit chase and the quest for God?"

“You fail to understand,” answered the seasoned old man, “because you failed to ask the obvious question. And that is, ‘Why didn’t the other dogs continue in the chase?’ And the answer to that question is...they had not seen the rabbit. They were only following the other dogs. Unless you see the prize, the chase is just too difficult. You will lack the passion and determination necessary to keep up the chase.”

My question to you is this, “Have you seen the Lord? Have you truly seen the Lord? Are you connected to Him? Will you keep your eye on Him as your prize? The prize being Jesus. It’s not enough to simply follow a list of rules or religion. Striving will get us nowhere. Only through keeping our eyes on Jesus and remaining in Him will we endure till the end.

### **Conclusion**

I love the revelation another sister in our Church shared this past week through our daily devotionals. She shares,

“I’m learning more and more about God and His love. I used to think rest meant to relax but now I feel like rest in this context is to pray more.”

Another Brother shared this through our daily devotional,

“For me, the idea of rest seems ever more unattainable as life seems to get busier and busier. But I think to the life of Jesus and the practical busyness of all that He accomplished while on earth and am realizing that rest isn’t necessarily as finite as I tend to look at it. Yes, physical rest is important, but there is a truer sense of resting in the spiritual where I can abide with the Father just like Jesus did that is so much more important. I definitely want to take the fresh start that comes with a new year to grow in the discipline of abiding in Him.”

We are taught that to rest is to simply cease working, to relax and recreate. And those are all good things. But Jesus tells us that true rest can only be found in Him. I want to encourage you to make time this week to be with Jesus. Abide in Him through our daily time in the Word. Invite Him into that space to speak to You. Spend time in prayer this week where you just sit in His Presence and worship Him. Whatever it looks like, prioritize that time and be intentional about making space for Jesus. Remember, we want to remain in Jesus all week long and we will continue to grow in that together. We will also continue in our 40-day fast. I pray that removing certain things from your life has allowed you to make more space to be with Jesus. The temptation will be to fill that space with other activity but be intentional about spending that extra time with Jesus.

Before fasting from recreational media it would be so easy for me to fill the hour or two after the kids went to sleep with mindless scrolling, sending memes to my wife who was sitting right next to me, or throwing on a movie. Now the nights are completely free to spend time in God’s Presence, pray with Jalee, and be rooted in Jesus. I’m believing as we root we will see fruit and as we abide we will thrive.