

## **Abide In Me**

*John 15: 1-8*

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Mother's Day – a day to honor our mothers. But Mother's Day can also be difficult to those who wish to be mothers, but aren't. For this reason, it seems appropriate for me to begin by sharing my journey to motherhood...

When I was young, I never played with stuffed animals – only dolls. I was also obsessed with playing house and my role was to be the mommy. In looking to my future, I could never imagine being anything other than a mommy. I might be a teacher for a bit, but I would be a mommy forever. I never once thought that I wouldn't be.

Fast forward to January of 2008: this was a dark month for me. Among other things, Eric and I were facing the reality that we may not be able to have our own biological children. This was devastating to me and something that had been weighing me down for almost 3 years. On top of our own struggle, we were faced with couples all around us announcing pregnancy – some who desired it and others who could have cared less – in fact, some who didn't want it at all; what felt impossible for us seemed easy for everyone else. This was simply not fair! And although I understood on a deeper level that I didn't have to birth my own children to be a mother, I was not able to shake this intense longing of my heart.

In this struggle I was faced with my own limits – limits that I thought only existed for other people. I am a young, capable woman! I can run a ½ marathon, I can hike the Grand Canyon, I can earn a college degree, I can run a business, I can make a meal to serve 15 people; I can do almost anything I set my mind to – but I can't have a baby. When you break it down, that is one of the most basic things that my body was intended to do. And I can't to it. And it would be fine if I wasn't interested in being a mother, but this is what I have dreamt about since being a little girl! Oh to feel the kick of little feet in my womb!

I wept for this loss. I wailed. I felt like I had drifted off God's radar, floating limply around, unable to reconcile my feelings and desires with reality. And there we were on a happy Sunday morning, sitting in a happy church service, when a lovely couple began to sing a lovely song. The song was called "Nothing is lost on the Breath of God". They had sung no more than those words when the tears started streaming from my eyes, hot and wet. I tried to breathe through it, but the song continued on and my broken heart could not take it anymore. I left the service with my head hung low, the tears uncontrollable. I wanted to yell at these people for singing such a lie! I wanted to yell at God for leaving me to drown in a pool of tears and sorrow. My desires felt lost and I could not decipher God's voice amidst all the static and confusion I was experiencing.

Part of my struggle was in not knowing if having a biological child would ever be a reality. As the months ticked by and then the years, people would try to be encouraging and say it might just take us longer. But the pain and difficulty increased with each passing month. I felt an intense need to know – to **just know** whether or not it was a possibility. If the answer was "no" – then I would surely grieve, but we would move forward in exploring the option of adoption. If the answer was "keep trying; it'll happen one of these days" – then we would do just that with hope. But to not know became unmanageable after a while!

In March of 2008, Eric and I finally decided we were ready to explore our situation and made an appointment with a doctor. This had been something we mulled over for years after it became evident that there may be something going on. Finally, we were ready to take a step forward and see what the options were. Two weeks before our appointment, a woman from the clinic called to say our insurance wouldn't cover anything – not even the initial appointment. Still, we felt it was important to have the knowledge of whether or not biological children would be a possibility.

Then, just one week before our appointment, and much to our surprise, we found out we were pregnant. Laughter, tears. More laughter. More tears. Could this be? We were still sitting with this secret news as Mother's Day came around last year. I smiled a secret smile and breathed in relief of the assurance of God's faithfulness. Eliana was born in December of 2008. I am officially a mother. I praise God for his faithfulness and marvel over the miracle of our little girl. We chose "Eliana" as it means "The Lord has responded" in Hebrew.

Now, of all the characteristics of God that I reflect on, study and hold on to, God's faithfulness is one that has stood out to me above others. And in the past, God has always proved faithful to me. But what does that mean? It means I got what I wanted in some shape or form. Perhaps not in the timeframe that I wanted it, but I still got it. Last Mother's Day could have proved to be incredibly painful – a sour reminder of an unfulfilled desire. But it wasn't. Instead I celebrated how God had blessed us; how God is faithful.

But what if I had never become pregnant? Would I still be able to call God faithful? What if that intense desire was still unrealized? For all of us – all our unrealized desires... whether they be for children, a job, a relationship, a change of heart, healing... **How do we reconcile the unmet longings of our heart with the promise of God's faithfulness?**

Turn with me to John 15:1-8 ~

Jesus says, *"I am the true vine and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. **Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches***

*are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. **If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you.** My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”*

We are not using this passage today as a metaphor for bearing children, but rather as a reminder that we are called to bear fruit – evidence of the life of the Spirit within us, evidence of our reliance on God for all that we are and all that we do. As I reflect on the faithfulness of God, I have to come to terms with the fact that I have a job to do as well. I can't just lounge back hoping for stuff to happen and my life to be fruitful and then get upset with God when it doesn't turn out the way I anticipated... Instead, I need to re-align myself with God – to continue seeking after God so that the desires of my heart are actually God's desires. **“If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you.”** We are called to abide in God, in the vine, and become so entwined and in tune with His Spirit that we find transformation of our heart and our will.

Ah! That word **transformation!** Ha! I just can't stay away from it! During Lent we reflected a lot on the idea of transformation because God doesn't want us to remain as we are. God wants to continually be transforming us – not just during Lent, but always! When we abide in the vine – in God through Jesus, we give space for transformation to occur. In transformation our hearts and minds rely deeply on God and we work out of a divine center. And it is here that we find the strength that we need to go on – even when we don't fully understand what is happening around us. We have the courage to take steps forward – even when we can't tell where that step will lead us. When we abide in God we trust that we have little floaties around our arms to keep our heads out of the water when the rains come down.

Abiding in God doesn't equal a free pass or the easy way out. Instead, abiding in God fills our tank with gas, our refrigerator with groceries; as we abide in God we

are supplied with a never-ending stock of hope and are given a vision of what is possible if we but trust in the Lord.

So what does it look like to abide in the vine? What does it look like to try to align ourselves with God? To break it down, I created an acronym for ABIDE:

**A – Acknowledge • B – Breathe • I – Ignore • D – Depend • E – Endure**

**A – Acknowledge:** As a beginning point, we need to acknowledge our weaknesses, the sins that we have committed, and our own human brokenness. This is never an enjoyable part of the journey with God – it leaves us vulnerable and exposed. But – in our acknowledgement of our brokenness and inability to do it on our own, we open up space for God’s transformation to occur. We begin to weed out the flower bed so the seeds that have been planted can be nourished and grow.

**B – Breathe:** Right in line with our acknowledgment of brokenness, comes our need to breathe in the Spirit of God. You can emphasis first “**breathe in the Spirit of God**” and practice resting in the hands of God through disciplines such as prayer and stillness. We can also emphasis “**breathe – in the Spirit of God**” and practice being renewed by the word of God through disciplines such as reading the scripture and studying. Our journey with Jesus is a living, breathing relationship and we must live it out as such if we want to truly abide in the vine.

**I – Ignore:** This living, breathing relationship with God is counter-cultural. Regardless of how many churches there are world-wide or how many pathways people take to try to understand the big ‘T’ Truth, the small ‘t’ truth is that as humans, we tend to be self-ish, self-seeking, impulsive, greedy, and indulgent (and so the list goes). As we seek to abide in the vine, we have to begin closing windows to the world. I don’t suggest that we become completely ignorant to the world, but orient our lives differently than the world would naturally bend us. At first this can be a challenge, but as we continue to practice limiting the

distractions of the world around us, I believe we find deeper contentment in simply *being*.

**D** – Depend: Abiding in the God means that we must depend on God and trust that God will meet our needs. Because, remember, God is faithful and this has been proven throughout history – through the stories of the Old and New testament as well as the stories of loved ones around us. It is not an easy feat to release our need for knowledge of the future or the unknown, but as we commit to dependence on God, we are able to release control – relax our clenched fists, un-hunch our shoulders and know that God is able and will do it. The cliché “let go and let God” is annoying but applicable.

**E** – Endure: This is a journey. There will be hills and valleys, times when we feel ‘right on’ and times when we feel like we’ve fallen off God’s radar. But as we strive to abide, we must have endurance. Hebrews 12:1 says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” We acknowledge our sin and brokenness, we trust in the faithfulness of God and we keep going – even when the going gets tough. To persevere is to hope in the eternal.

So, how do we reconcile the unmet longings of our heart with the promise of God’s faithfulness? How do we take steps forward when we have no idea where we are going? We Acknowledge • Breathe • Ignore • Depend • and Endure: We abide in Christ and rest in the promise of God’s faithfulness. Our lives will bear fruit of the Spirit at work within us and our hearts will be aligned with the heart of God. Our lips will sing praise and our lives will reflect the goodness of the Lord.

As I reflect on my journey to motherhood and the struggle and difficulty that that journey presented for me, I know I was doing my best to *abide* in Christ. I was

full of anger and questions and sadness, but I knew that at the heart of everything God was making a way. As I sought to acknowledge my brokenness; to breath by taking time for prayer and quiet...as I tried to ignore the world around me telling me I must birth a child to really be a woman...I knew I had to depend on God – that was the only way that I would be able to get through the grief – that was the only way that I would be able to endure the race with hope.

What unmet longings do you hold in your heart? How might God be calling you to abide more deeply with him?

*As the Psalmist writes, “From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor **shall** eat and be satisfied; those who seek him **shall** praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust and **I shall live for him**. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn saying that **he has done it**. (Psalm 22:25-31)*

Because, truly, nothing is lost to the heart of God – nothing is lost for ever; God’s heart is love and that love will remain, holding the world for ever. No impulse of love, no office of care, no moment of life in its fullness; no beginning too late, no ending too soon, but is gathered and known in its goodness.

As we abide in Christ and Christ abides in us, we can proclaim that the Lord has done it! Amen.