

November 5, 2023

## Abide: Discipleship (John 15)

*Commit to being a Fully Devoted Follower of Christ.*

### Hook – How Often? (5min)

- Welcome (online), Notes and app
- Roman Empire
  - o Strange new conversation going around...how often do men think about the Roman Empire? Studies have shown that men think about it between every day to once a week. This is baffling to many women.
  - o What about you?
  - o Corollary for women, according to my friend – how often do you think about Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce?
- Fifteen years ago, a different thought was on my mind...if I were to start a new church, what was God calling it to look like?
  - o I knew it wasn't supposed to be vastly different than what I had done for the previous 15 years in youth ministry – all about Jesus, challenging people to live their faith, and developing leaders.
  - o But it was going to be an extension...more.
  - o This SEED verse would grow into a sapling, then tree, then tree that planted other trees.
  - o This is what I have thought about every day for the last 15 years – and tried to get everything in our church back to.
  - o JOHN 15:5 – I am the Vine...
- My prayer as God is sending me to Minnesota to oversee church planting and leadership development – that you and this church would ABIDE in Christ...DFM.

### Prayer

### Our Church is Centered on Jesus. (10min)

#### • John 15:1-5

<sup>1</sup>“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. <sup>3</sup>You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. <sup>4</sup>Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

<sup>5</sup>“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”

*“To transform religious and irreligious people into Fully Devoted Followers of Christ.”*

- **Story – Launch Team**

- After the Lord had given the “seed verse” for Covenant Grove, we took a year to pray and gather a Launch Team for the church. It surprised me that almost no one from the Youth Ministry came with me. Instead, 44 people said “yes” whom I had very little connection with. But they all had one key thing – **THEY WERE DEVOTED TO JESUS.**
- When we were challenged to serve in ministry – everyone did.
- Wake up early to drive to scout a church plant and learn – everyone there.
- Challenge to Life Groups or evangelism – people loved Jesus and lived it.
- **ABIDE \* DEVOTION** – that is what has made this church health, strong, and missional. JESUS is the center of Covenant Grove.

- **\*Seven habits (on banner).**

- **\*Our Vision: To transform religious and irreligious people into Fully Devoted Followers of Christ.**
  - Good habits are stronger than good intentions.
  - Training is stronger than trying.
  - **You can know everything about how important brushing your teeth is, but if you want to have good oral hygiene, you have to ...actually brush your teeth every day (or twice a day).**
  - Discipleship habits – Worship, Generosity, Devotion time – about receiving God’s love and loving Him in return.
- **\*Bible – spending time with Jesus.**
  - Soaking in His love – hearing His voice more than any one else’s.
  - I did this with letters from Hannah. I do this with God’s Word – every day for over 30 years. I read the Bible MORE now.
  - Making the time – make it happen. You do this with brushing teeth, showering, and eating – you can make it happen (connect it to a habit you already have).
  - **This church has done daily devotions for 14 years – I love this!**
- **\*Generosity – Finances are part of relationships...and part of love.**
  - Friendships – doing things together, presents for birthdays.
  - Dating and marriage. Kids – definitely!
  - Jesus – He doesn’t need our money, but we need to give.
  - Giving is about obedience and trust. It is ALL His money.
  - **This is a generous church – we give sacrificially to Jesus even when it is hard. That has blessed our lives, our community, and people around the world. How great is that?!**
- **\*Worship – experiencing God in community.**
  - **I grew up in church and sang the songs. But one day an adult said to me, “Scott, you are totally tone deaf!” It was a joke, but it hurt, and I sang less.**
  - **When I gave my life to Christ, I chose to worship Jesus. The first step was to sing again. Even if I was tone deaf! I sang in church, in my room, and in my car. I was singing TO SOMEONE.**

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- One day a worship leader challenged the congregation to be more expressive – if I raised my hands for sports, why not God? (And it was in the Bible to do so!) It was hard, but I did it. And the chains came off one by one. I raised my hands, closed my eyes, moved my feet, and eventually began dancing.
- This is freedom. And it is the joy of my life when I see those I love learning this freedom.

- The center of this church is Jesus.
  - What has made this church amazing has never been a person – it has always been Jesus AND people willing to ABIDE in Him through devotion and habits.

## We Follow Christ Even When It's Hard. (10min)

- John 15:5-8
 

<sup>5</sup>“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. <sup>7</sup>But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! <sup>8</sup>When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.”
- Fruit matters.
  - There is fake fruit (Matt 7), and seasons of sorrow.
  - But in Christ we bear fruit – love, joy, peace.
  - Cultivated through HABITS.
- Story – The Inner Life
  - I have had many conversations with leaders who have loved our emphasis on the inner life. But I have had a few with people who struggled with it. Why are you asking about my devotions? Isn't that private? Can't I just show up and do my job?
  - My answer, “Look at our key verse and logo. The emphasis is always on the Roots.” *This is not about running the church but transformation and making disciples of JESUS. Your faith matters more than running the church. We need disciples who are willing to be trained to make disciples.*
- Three (hard) ingredients that have made a big difference.
  - **CG expects leaders to have deep roots, consistent habits, and lead people more than programs.**
    - Evangelism one of our key habits.
    - A church that puts people into leadership who are not living that habit will eventually stop being evangelistic.
    - So many hard conversations over the years about this – membership, Life Groups, generosity, and more.

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- **CG deals with conflict in biblical, healthy, and constructive ways.**
  - JESUS is the only approval I need.
  - You can deal with it because you ABIDE in Jesus.
  - We have taught on conflict every year, based on Matt 18 and our Relational Covenant – very few people in our world know how to do this biblically or in healthy, constructive ways.
  - Early on, we did Preview Services, and one of our Life Groups was “evaluating” them. That wasn’t right. I went to visit and asked questions. They said they were doing it to “help.” How did this help? It was gossip. The goal of the Life Group was to study the Bible and talk about their own shortcomings. Each Team was doing their own evaluation. **Don’t rock the boat if you aren’t willing to row.**
  - I am so proud of what we have done together.
- **CG is anchored in hope through the storms.**
  - Covenant Grove was started in the Great Recession – people losing jobs, homes, and HOPE. We were a place of hope – anchored in Jesus.
  - Recession ended but people still experienced loss, death, hurt, and the Dark Night. We taught on these often – especially about breaking through the Wall and getting over the false “transaction” that God never agreed to.
  - Our core story is JESUS – promised hard times would come – He makes us resilient, suffers with us, and gives us His peace.
- Following Jesus can be hard – but keep following.
  - You were never here to follow me.
  - Don’t be a consumeristic Christian – take the challenging path that grows perseverance. Keep following Christ.

## Our Vision is Devotion and Transformation (10min)

- John 15:8-11
 

<sup>8</sup>When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. <sup>9</sup>“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!
- The Vision is for each person to be transformed into Fully Devoted Followers of Jesus.
  - Non-religious people need transformation. Jesus is real and He really loves you.
  - Religious people need transformation. Not about rules but devotion.
  - Devotion is more than obedience – it is about LOVE.
  - Devotion includes obedience because Jesus is LORD.

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- ***Jesus will use even this transition to help you become more Fully Devoted – if you press into Him.***

## Punch – I Will Follow.

- I grew up in a Christian home but I wanted people to like me – so I changed my behavior and even my morals to fit in. But I went to church and tried to look like a good Christian, too. Then one day God used a speaker in a retreat to convict me – it was like he was reading my soul. I made the choice to follow Jesus...no matter what.
  - Everything changed. I stopped trying to please people and lived to please Christ alone.
  - I lost some friends but gained the respect of a lot of other people.
- I started reading and studying the Bible an hour a day. This initially grew my faith but then led to a crisis of faith – I had mental doubts. Great mentors answered my questions and challenged my thinking. This took my faith to a whole new level.
- Then the Lord called me into vocational ministry. We are ALL called to serve Jesus, and every job can be done for His glory. But the Lord called me to be a pastor. I didn't totally want this career, but I follow JESUS, not myself.
  - I went from Southern California to Chicago to Minnesota to Southern California (again) – then to Modesto.
  - I had never been to Modesto before I interviewed for the job – but this is where Jesus led me for 17 years.
- I didn't want to be a church planter, but Jesus called me. I was fine being at Modesto Covenant with a comfortable ministry. But the Lord knew a church plant was needed in northeast Modesto, and so we started – in the Recession – and I lost my home too. But I never stopped trusting in Jesus.
  - Covenant Grove is here and hundreds of lives have been transformed because of Jesus – and people following Him.
- Now I am being sent by Jesus. I am not leaving – I am being sent, and I will follow. We are all sent people. This church has been sent as missionaries to Modesto. Don't lose that Vision.
  - ABIDE in HIM – and everything will be incredible.

- **Invitation/recommitment to Jesus.**

- A sermon about Jesus – where are you with Christ?
- Never asked Him to be Savior and Lord of your life – you can do that now.
- Living the halfway Christian life? Make a fully devoted commitment today.

### Prayer

## Testimony?

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## Communion

### Benediction – John 15:5

- Invite others
- Prayer Team available