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ABIDE

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E

 **KNOWING HIM**



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**Abide in Me, and I in you...**  
**John 15:4**

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Jesus is very clear to those who come after Him that in His school of discipleship there are no graduates. You are forever growing as a follower of Christ.

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For those of us that strongly disliked our school days, this may evoke great fear of a life of continual studying, tests, failure, and the like. For many individuals, this is their experience with Christianity. Rules, right behavior, and personal successes or failures place a strong emphasis on what we can do or can't do. If you look past these misconceptions to the cross and to a simple verse like John 3:16 – “God so loved...” – you will see something radically different.

Psalm 139:18 says that God has more thoughts of me than the number of grains of sand! Does this reality overwhelm you? Mathematicians at the University of Hawaii tried to guess how many grains of sand there are on the world's beaches. They came up with 7,500,000,000,000,000,000 or seven quintillion, five quadrillion grains of sand. It is simply overwhelming to even fathom that number. To put this number in perspective, you would have to live a hundred years and hear 2,376,657,346 thoughts from God every second of your life to even reach it. Then, multiply this number by the 6.5 billion people living on this planet. Wow! That is a lot of thoughts!

The Bible says in Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Does this make you stop and think about your life, God, and his love for you? He is God; we are not. In order to know Him we must trust Him, serve Him, surrender to Him, and follow Him all the days of our lives. This can't be by our efforts alone, but only in cooperation with the power and work of His Holy Spirit in our lives.

It is through the Bible, in Romans 10:7 that we learn, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” If you have never taken this first step of abiding, we would strongly encourage you to take this first step now. The words of your confession are less important than the heart of your response to God's love. Don't leave on this journey with us, without fully trusting and committing to The Guide.

Whether you are new to following Jesus, or have followed Jesus most of your life, we hope that the next four weeks will be a catalyst in helping you know your Lord and Savior even more, by learning to continually abide in Him.

Chris Campbell  
Advance Pastor

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# 01 COMMUNITY

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It is so easy in our culture to do life alone, especially as Americans. We have a cultural tendency to “bootstrap” it ourselves, mitigate all risks, and live in our ever technologically connected world, without a clue as to what community actually looks like. It is easy, even in a church setting where one of the greatest commandments is to “Love our neighbor as ourselves,” to not even know our neighbors. We walk into a church service and then walk out with no formable relationships made and no genuine interaction experienced. At BattleCreek, it was understood from the beginning that, in order to be a church resembling the early church, we needed small groups. From the beginning, small groups have been a priority. We often say that we are not a church with community groups, but a church of community groups because they are our lifeblood.

You might ask if connecting is worth the trouble? Why can't you just power your way through life as a self-contained individual? Why bother with the New Testament's call to love one another, encourage one another daily, forgive one another, carry one another's burdens, and a host of other “one another's” (John 15:12, Galatians 6:2, Ephesians 4:32, 1 Thessalonians 5:11)? Why invest your life in people who are flawed and sometimes downright annoying?

A genuine connection with God and his family is worth the investment. It is where faith can meet life and your world can be forever different because of it. We have experienced at BattleCreek, either through giving 6,000 children toys for Christmas or funding dozens of microloans in Egypt, that we can collectively impact our community and the world in a way that one individual cannot. We hope that you will commit to this journey of community, realizing that it will not always be utopia and it will have its ups and downs. But, it will be worth it to see the church, be the church.

## **CONNECTION TIME [20 minutes]**

Your life is a story, a story worth telling, and a story worth knowing. You may not believe it, but we do. We believe that God has brought you here, is working in you, and has a plan for you. We hope that through community groups at BattleCreek, you will realize that your story is part of a bigger story and that you will be transformed, along with those around you. By committing to a community group at BattleCreek, you are saying that it is your hope to connect with others and their stories and to further develop in your faith journey. With that in mind, we are going to take time every week to share a part of our story with one another, in order to help us get to know one another in a deeper way.

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# 01

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- 01 Have someone in the group that has been a part of a community group or small group in the past, share about why it has been important to them.
- 02 Would you consider this step of coming to a community group at BattleCreek as a starting point, a turning point, a returning point, or a restarting point? Explain why.
- 03 What role has God played in your story until now?
- 04 Have someone read Proverbs 13:20. How do you think this verse applies to community groups?
- 05 What do you hope to gain by joining and participating in a community group at BattleCreek? Or, if you have already been involved in a community group, what do you want to gain from this semester?

## THE FOCAL POINT [30 minutes]

We all have times in our lives where we are really committed to do something. Have you ever had a time where you didn't follow through with your commitment? Or, have you ever had a strong conviction not to do something and you did it anyway? We want to follow through with our commitments and we want to hold true to our convictions, but sometimes we fail.

So dare to admit it. We are all prone to wander. Commitment and conviction are not enough to keep us from drifting. If they were, we would be the biggest loser and the next millionaire. It is obvious that there is something missing from the equation and it is community. Community is like the anchor on a ship that keeps us from drifting.

“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (Hebrews 3:12-13).

The Greek word that is translated into English as “encourage” is not the equivalent of a slap on the back. It’s not a casual “way to go,” or “good luck,” or “hang in there.” Rather, it’s an urgent appeal, an exhortation – a begging. The author implores us to join with a group of people, willing to do whatever it takes to keep each other faithful.

### Discussion Questions

- 01 What are some obstacles that keep you from true community, even if you have participated in a “Community Group” in the past?
- 02 Read Romans 15:7. What does it mean to accept someone?
- 03 Read Hebrews 10:24. How can we balance accepting each other where we are with encouraging each other to be all that God wants us to be?
- 04 If someone was trying to spur you on to love and good deeds, how would you like them to go about it? Is there anything you would not like them to do?

### LARGE GROUP WRAP-UP [10 MINUTES]

Community doesn't have to be complicated. Over the next weeks, we will dive into deeper components of what it means to abide with Jesus Christ and abide in a faith community. Would you commit to this community group for at least the next eight weeks, or maybe commit for the whole semester? There is a lot of freedom with community groups at BattleCreek. All of our groups are “open”... meaning you can try a new group at anytime. It means that you can visit multiple groups, but in the end, we encourage individuals to make a commitment to a group. This commitment allows time for relationships to develop and growth to occur. So what are the next steps?

- 01 First, it is important for every group to agree upon a set of shared values. Take time to discuss the community group covenant. This week is your time to evaluate if you are committed to the journey. Next week, if you choose to participate, we ask that you agree to the covenant so that we can make the most from our community group experience.
- 02 Make any necessary decisions about such issues as refreshments and child care.
- 03 Make sure your group leader has your current contact information. They will keep you informed about group news and upcoming events.

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# 01

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04 Finally, as a group, take the time to ask the question, “How can we pray for you this week?” Take time in either groups of guys and girls or maybe groups of three, to pray for one another. Anyone that isn’t comfortable praying out loud, should feel free to offer prayers in silence. If you are new to prayer and you’re feeling brave, try praying just one sentence, “Thank you, God for...”

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## NOTES

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## 02 ABIDE IN HIM

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### CONNECTION TIME [20 minutes]

In order to support each other on this journey of abiding with Christ, it is important for us to continue in developing further connection as a group. One way we do this is by continually sharing pieces of our lives with one another. Keep in mind that each one of us is a work in progress and God can work in each of our lives. Please share your answers to the questions below. Try to limit your answers to less than a minute so that we will have plenty of time for the rest of the study.

- 01 Who is someone in your life that you really enjoy being around and why?
- 02 Think of a season in your life when you really felt like you were growing spiritually. What were some of the ingredients that helped you to grow?
- 03 It is important for every group to agree on a set of shared values.

Discuss the community group covenant at this time and, if you have not already, make any necessary decisions about such issues as refreshments and child care.

### THE FOCAL POINT [30 minutes]

The concept of abiding is a serious matter for any Christian to consider. Webster defines abide as: “to continue in a place or in a condition; to remain; stay; dwell.” John 15 illustrates the abiding life Jesus has called His followers to live and experience. The idea of branches attached to a vine, in order for fruit to grow and mature, gives us a powerful mental image. We must remain attached to the Lord in order to live spiritually productive lives.

Jesus does not simply suggest that if we want to be happy, then we need to abide. He says without abiding in Him, we are separated from Him. There are so many applications and truths to be gleaned from this illustration of the vine and branches. For time’s sake, we will examine just four.

First, the relationship of the branch to the vine is vital and essential. Jesus is the vital and essential Life of His people. He lives in His people, by the Holy Spirit, and is the Vine from which the branches receive their sap and nourishment. The flow of life is from the one to the other. In the event that the branch is severed from the vine, it will produce nothing and inevitably wither and die. The branch must remain attached to the vine in order to live and bear fruit. So, we too must remain in Christ. In order to live, we must keep looking to Jesus for, as the Bible states, “Without Me you can do nothing”

(John 15:5). However, Scripture also promises that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:3).

Second, the abiding of the branches in the Vine is the only way both will thrive; it is a relationship of partnership. God does not need us; He can do as He wills. However, He calls us to share in His work. He shows us our purpose by describing us as branches. The branches are where the fruit is born. In some wonderful way, He uses us to accomplish His purposes on the earth. We are God’s fellow workers (1 Cor. 3:9). As workers together with Him, we plead with men to be reconciled to God (1 Cor. 5:20; 6:1). We do this by relying on the Holy Spirit working in and through us like sap flowing in and through the vine. As we take time to study the Bible, to know Jesus, and to follow Him, the Holy Spirit does a work within our hearts. The more we Listen to His Word and become doers of the Word, the more fruit we will produce (Rom 2:13 & Jam 1:22).

Third, a healthy vine is known by the fruit its branches produce. We don’t often get the opportunity to see a lot of grapevines in Oklahoma, so I have to use this next example with a more familiar plant. Have you ever seen a healthy tomato plant that was loaded with nice, ripe, red tomatoes and thought to yourself, “Look at that tomato branch?” No, of course not. Instead, your response would more likely be, “Wow, now that’s a nice tomato.” We should live in such a way that Jesus shines through our lives, that others see our moral excellence and our good, noble, and praiseworthy deeds, resulting in honor, praise, and glory being given to the Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

Fourth, a healthy vine is a growing vine. The inner working of the sap flowing through the vine is something that isn’t visible to the natural eye. Yet we know this takes place because we see physical growth in the size and strength of the branches themselves. Over time, the branches’ ability to produce more fruit and withstand the added weight becomes a nourishing crop of fruit for all to enjoy. This will be true in our lives as the Holy Spirit leads, teaches, and strengthens us in the “inner” man – our human spirit. As we learn to keep Looking, Listening and Living in Him, we continue to grow.

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**LOOK TO THE WORD: READ JOHN 15.1-17****Discussion Questions:**

- 01 What is the “fruit” that Jesus is referring to?
- 02 In this passage, what does Jesus say you must do to remain in His love?
- 03 Salvation is a free gift from God through Jesus Christ. You can’t earn it; you just trust and believe what Jesus has done and said. Yet in this passage, Jesus refers multiple times to the necessity of bearing fruit. How do you fit together these two realities? Salvation as a gift, but yet the work associated with obeying His commands and bearing fruit?
- 04 In verse 17 of this passage, Jesus says “This is my command, love each other.” How has love motivated you to come to God?

**MISSION FOCUS [10 minutes]**

Jesus was asked the question in Matthew 22:36 by an expert of the Jewish Law “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” As we also saw in John 15:17, Jesus emphasizes in these two commands an importance on not only abiding in Christ but then also abiding in community. God actually may bring someone to your mind who you know is struggling to run the Christian race alone. Take the time to pull an open chair into the circle of your group as a symbolic representation of someone that is missing from your group.

Who could this person be? Think about family members, friends, neighbors, parents of your kids’ friends, church members, coworkers, and the persons who share your hobbies. Take a moment now to prayerfully list one or two names, and then share the names with your group.

Would you commit to making a call to them this week? Why not? By far the greatest way someone comes to a small group or to BattleCreek is through a personal invitation. You may even want to invite him or her to ride with you.

**SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT [30 minutes]**

In this time, we encourage you to divide into guys and girls to further discuss, get to know one another, and challenge each other in further abiding with Jesus Christ. The following is a list of discussion questions to help you further grow and develop in your faith. Remember that the more willing that you are to be honest and transparent the further you as a group can go as a group. At this time, also remind each other about the covenant that you committed to.

01 There are many spiritual practices that can help you stay focused and grow deeper in your walk with Jesus. Over the next few weeks of Abide, which one or two aspects listed below would you like to focus on in this season of your walk with Jesus? Why?

**Prayer:** commit this week to write down prayer requests and to pray daily.

**Bible Study:** subscribe to a daily devotional, read from the one-year Bible or a daily reading.

**Surrendering to the Holy Spirit:** what is the last thing you know He has asked you to do? Would you be willing to do it this week?

**Personal Time with God:** Attempt to designate a time every day to spend with God. Maybe set three appointments this week for 15-30 minutes to read, pray, or worship.

**Accountability:** set up some time to meet with a spiritual partner this week.

**Journaling:** commit to writing down some of the things God is teaching you.

**Personal Worship:** designate time to get alone and sing along to a worship song or try it Acapella. Consider even a prayer walk if the weather is good and praise Him for the things that He has made.

**Sharing your Faith:** look for ways to share your faith story this week with another believer or non believer.

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**LOOK TO THE WORD: READ JOHN 15.1-17**

02 In the John 15 passage Jesus talks about the process of pruning and cleansing that God does in a believer's life to make it more fruitful. What are some of the things that you believe God has done to make your life more fruitful or that have helped you focus in on what is most important? In other words, how has God pruned you?

03 Take the time as a group to ask the question "How can we pray for you this week?" Split up into groups of 3-4 and spend time praying for each another. Anyone that isn't comfortable praying aloud should feel free to offer prayers in silence. Or if you are new to prayer and you're feeling brave, try praying just one sentence: "Thank you, God for..."

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**NOTES**

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## session 03 preface : from chris

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We tried really hard this last year to start a garden. I say we, but it was more my lovely bride and children. I am not much for gardening and everything green that I have had in the past has died. The pastor that married us told us in our premarital counseling that we should try keeping a plant alive and then a pet alive, before we started having kids. Good advice, but we failed at the plants, skipped the pets, and so far, have kept our four kids from killing one another. So, the garden was quite an adventure for us. I was convinced by Ashley that it would be great for the kids and a whole lot of fun. It has to be fun to convince me to do it!

Everyone in Ashley's family is a great gardener and I am not above asking for advice. With the aid of my brother in-law and a rented tiller, we were able to get the soil ready for planting. We worked into the soil a mixture of nutrients, planted all sorts of seeds, and then, patiently waited for a bountiful harvest. I have to say we worked pretty hard. OK, let me clarify again, my wife worked pretty hard. Every day, we would go outside and look to see if we had any fruit or vegetables. One day, AHA! We had some strawberry buds that turned into decent sized fruit for a first year crop. Later in the season, we actually ended up with more vegetables than we could eat.

To be honest, our garden paled in comparison to some of the others in Ashley's family. Her granddad has been featured in the newspaper several times because he always has some of the best vegetables in town. He knows when to plant, has soil that he has worked and developed over many years, and even has tips on tapping tomato plant blossoms at appropriate times to get them to pollinate. Because of his great love and meticulous inspection of his plants, Bill's whole neighborhood knows him because he is constantly supplying them with fresh produce. What a great example of what our lives should produce for the kingdom, an abundance that blesses not only our immediate families, but our communities and the nations.

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## 03 LOOK

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### CONNECTION TIME [15 minutes]

It is important again to emphasize developing further connection as a group. Continuing to share parts of our story will help us grow and understand one another better. If someone is new to the group this week, please take time to provide an overview of the covenant and provide them with a copy.

One of the biggest components of developing real and genuine relationships is trust. For many of us, our life experiences legitimately make it more difficult to trust, subsequently making it more difficult to develop new relationships. To better gauge where we are at as a group, we are going to try the following exercise:

Have everyone in the room share their “trust factor” from 1-10 – “10” being complete trust with willingness to share all components of one’s life, and “1” being, “I am not sure if I am willing to give you my address because you may be a stalker.” There is not a good or bad score in this exercise and try to be honest with your number. Everyone is different in this, because of a variety of factors. At this time, go around the room and have everyone share their number.

01 What are some of the reasons for the varying numbers?

02 What could we do as a group to improve our “trust factor?” What could reduce it?

03 Are there situations and context where we can be too transparent?

### THE FOCAL POINT [30 minutes]

Last week, we talked about John 15 and the “fruit” mentioned in that passage. When those kinds of results are produced by our lives, God is glorified, “When you bear much fruit, My Father is honored and glorified, and you show and prove yourselves to be true followers of Mine” (John 15:8). Our lives are to be an open display of God for, “The fruit of the Light consists in every form of kindly goodness, uprightness of heart, and trueness of life” (Eph. 5:9).

God’s will is for us to produce fruit and lots of it, that is what we were created for. The goal of the vinedresser is to cultivate as much fruit as possible. When there is an abundant crop, he is satisfied in the results of his labor. God is the Faithful Vinedresser. He is constantly pruning, shaping, watering, protecting and all other necessary activities to see that we are conformed to the image

of His Son. To see the fruit of Jesus reflected in our lives satisfies the Father and brings glory to His labor. Listen to one of Paul's prayers, "That your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11). This week, we want to take a little more time to look at Jesus Christ and encourage you to do this on an ongoing basis as He is the Author and Perfector of our faith.

## LOOKING TO THE WORD: READ HEBREWS 12.1-2

This passage is loaded, and you really need to spend time examining it more closely, but for now, let us focus on one phrase "looking unto Jesus". This is such a simple expression, easy to understand, but full of content. There are several translations of that phrase which give us more insight into its meaning.

- \_ Looking with undivided attention (Analyzed Literal)
- \_ Looking away (from all that will distract) to Jesus (Amp.)
- \_ Simply fixing our gaze upon Jesus (Darby)
- \_ Looking off and away to Jesus (Wuest)

Looking to or fixing comes from the Greek word *aphorao* which means, "to look away from other things and intently look toward a distant object." This use in Hebrews is a present tense verb and describes a habitual, continual attitude and not just a single act. *Aphorao* conveys the idea of having eyes for no one but Jesus.

The way the phrase is used in the Greek speaks of a runner who is virtually oblivious to his surroundings. He doesn't notice the crowds in the stadium, the other runners in the race, or the weather. He is focused on one thing, his attention is fixed on finishing the race. From the starting blocks he can't see the finish line, but he knows that it is there and so he runs in order to achieve the victory promised those who finish. We, like the runner, must have our eyes focused on Jesus, and we must continue running so as to cross the finish line.

What does it mean to look to Jesus? How can I look to Him when He is in heaven? You must look to Him by faith. True believing from the heart is the “looking” of which the writer of Hebrews is describing. That is why it follows chapter 11, which defined faith and recorded examples of those who lived by faith. Faith is the eye of the believers’ soul.

One of the main goals of ADVANCE at BattleCreek is to help you see the world through a better set of lenses than you started with. Being able to see properly greatly impacts how you live. If your vision is blurry, without color, or in 2D, it greatly affects how you live and the steps in your faith journey that you are willing to take. Here is a clever way to improve your vision. Put on 3D glasses and commit to look at life in a new way, based on the 3 D’s. Here they are:

What He has Done.

What He is Doing.

What He is going to Do.

#### Discussion Questions

Take time as a group to talk about these three “D’s”. Feel free to use the Bible or your own personal experiences as a reference when elaborating on the three “D’s”.

01 What has Jesus done?

02 What is He currently doing?

03 What is He going to do?

## LARGE GROUP WRAP-UP [5 MINUTES]

Is there an ending to all that He has done, is doing, and going to do? He has done so much. John said that there were so many other things that Jesus did (just while He was here walking the earth) that not even the world could contain those books that would be written! (Jn. 21:25) Where do you begin, eternity past, as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world? In the beginning, creating the heavens and earth with a simple “let there be”? How about Him becoming the fulfillment of nearly 300 Old Testament passages related directly to His coming? What about His death on the cross? Because of it, He was able to say “It is finished” and a way of salvation for sinners was made.

## MISSION FOCUS [10 MINUTES]

Matthew 5:14 states “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden”. You and your group can be an instrument of light to a dark world. It is through your life and sometimes through the work of your community group that the world can be impacted with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Turning your groups energy outward, as well as inward, can also deepen your connections with one another and speed your spiritual growth.

Who are some of the people in your life that need to see the light of Jesus? Maybe it was someone that you thought about last week, that you could invite to your community group. If there are several names, think of one that you have the ability to connect with this week. Write at least one name here.

If you feel comfortable, share the name(s) you wrote down with the group. Compile all the names into one prayer list and commit to pray for them. Also, as a group, consider hosting an event in the near future that you could invite people too. Consider a community event that might provide a catalyst for this (the Superbowl, a holiday, a neighborhood activity like Police’s Night Against Crime, or a local festival). Use this activity as a way to connect with

individuals and introduce them to others in the group. In the same way your trust grows with your group as you share your life together, so it does with those outside of your group. We often refer to this at BattleCreek as invest and invite. It is through our investing in people's lives that we are able to gain favor with them and invite them to take steps into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.

List the names of those individuals here.

### **SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT [30 MINUTES]**

In this time, we encourage you to divide into guys and girls for further discussion, get to know one another, and challenge each other in further abiding with Jesus Christ. The following is a list of discussion questions to help you further grow and develop in your faith. Remember that the more willing that you are to be honest and transparent, the further you can go as a group. At this time, also remind each other about the covenant that you committed to.

Many seasons of God's people have ended in spiritual blindness. Blindness, all throughout Scripture is a spiritual metaphor for the inability to see God's truth.

The Bible also uses the illustration of light and darkness along these same lines. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 5:8, "You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of the light."

01 Talk about a time that you felt like you were in spiritual darkness and what resulted from it.

02 What are some of the sins or hindrances that currently keep you from being fruitful and living in God's truth? Even things that are not sins can be affecting you. Money, career goals, time commitments, areas of your past or present that you hold more dearly than Jesus Christ.

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# 03

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03 Read 1 John 7-10. Discuss this passage and what we can learn from it.

04 In light of this dialogue and this passage, take time to break up in groups of three or four to pray for one another that we may abide more intimately with Him.

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## NOTES

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# 04 LISTEN

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## CONNECTION TIME [20 minutes]

Tonight hopefully most of you are participating in some type of group social event. We have designed the curriculum for LISTEN to be done individually before or after your group meeting, but have also included some components that could be accomplished at your social event. As we have said before, in order to support each other on this journey of abiding with Christ, it is important for us to continue in developing deeper connections as a group. We strongly encourage you to find part of the evening where you make time to connect with one another. You can do this either as a large group, a small group, or on a one-on-one basis.

### Large Group Questions:

- 01 What makes someone a good listener?
- 02 How do you know if someone is listening?
- 03 How does being a good listener relate to a relationship with God?

### One-on-One Discussion:

- 01 Talk about one or two key events in your life that had a profound impact on you that people in your group may not know about.
- 02 Talk about one or two key people in your life and how their life made an impact on you.
- 03 Lastly, share some of the answers about your personal story of encountering God from the focal point section below. Ask someone at your SuperBowl party something as simple as “tell me about when you first started trusting Jesus.”

## THE FOCAL POINT [20 minutes]

From even the beginning of the Bible, in the book of Genesis, Moses tells us that God took Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. Later, he uses Adam to give names to all the animals. What was the point of all of this? Did God really need Adam to do this? Later, after Adam and Eve sinned, God came looking for them. You read in Genesis, “The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden

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## 04

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in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" It wasn't a God in the clouds, at a distance, talking from within a cloud or in a lightning bolt. Instead, it was a God that walked among what He had created, calling out to man for communion. It was and is like a lover who pursues his bride. We see this pursuit in Song of Solomon and throughout the Gospels. Why was God pursuing Adam and Eve in the garden even after they had sinned? Why is God pursuing us now?

Jesus' desire for close fellowship with us is also expressed in His words, "Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

What parts of this verse stand out the most to you?

Some honestly wrestle with the idea of God speaking to us directly, but we saw it in the Garden in Genesis and you see it in Revelation, God actively speaking to His children. If you are a Christian, you are living proof that God does speak, because you have heard the voice of God calling you.

Where were you when God spoke to you about accepting Jesus as your Savior and Lord? Was His call to you a single, powerful word from Him or was it a growing sense of His call to you to receive Him? How did you respond? Did you share what you were sensing or experiencing with a friend, a parent, a community group leader or pastor? If so, write the name(s) below:

## LISTEN TO HIS VOICE [10 MINUTES]

“Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10).

Take time now either as an individual or as a group, to practice this idea of being still and listening to God. Put on a worship song or take some time to get alone. You may even want to begin this time with a simple prayer, “Lord Jesus, I thank you for loving me and calling me to you. I give all that I know about me to all that I know about You!” Then, take time to be silent and listen for His voice.

Did you sense God speaking to you? Jot below impressions you sensed to be His voice.

As you hear Christ speaking, realize He is not far away. He is speaking from within you. 1 John 3:24 says, “And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” The Apostle Paul said that this was the “great secret” or “mystery” of the Christian message, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Jesus has taken up residence in your heart. See also (Ephesians 3:16). Because of this, you can talk to Him at anytime. In Ephesians 1:18, the Apostle Paul prays that “The eyes of our heart may be enlightened...” If only God would open us up to the reality of what it means to have the fullness of the Deity working and communicating to us from within!

If there is talking and there is no listening, then your whole Christian experience will devolve into routine, ritual, and religion.

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# 04

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## HOW TO CONTINUE LISTENING [10 MINUTES]

Here are some practical suggestions to guide you as you learn to listen to the voice of Christ within:

- 01 Be completely open to God. Don't avoid areas that you don't want Him to tamper with. Let Him speak His direction into every area of your life. Often, taking this step immediately causes you to hear His voice.
- 02 Realize that at the first signal from us, God runs to greet us. Remember that Jesus is at the door waiting for you to open it.
- 03 Find a consistent quiet place where you can meet with Him to minimize distractions. Follow Jesus' example as best as you can in this (Luke 5:16) You can begin your listening time with a simple prayer like what the Prophet Samuel prayed even when he was a child: "Speak; Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10).
- 04 Wait quietly for His promptings. Don't get impatient. Sometimes His Word comes immediately. At other times, God waits for us to enter into a greater silence before speaking so that He has our full attention.
- 05 Go to the Bible. The Spirit that inspired the Scripture is the same Spirit that is working inside of you. The Bible is one of the most powerful tools in helping you both have clarity on what you hear from God, and what God is saying to you.

## MISSION FOCUS [5 MINUTES]

I will always remember that on my way home from a trip, stopping at a gas station outside of Shawnee, Oklahoma. My friend and I had just got in the car and I clearly heard the Lord speak, not audibly, but VERY clearly that I was supposed to go back into the gas station and share my faith with the clerk at the store. What? Seriously? The guy doesn't know me? Excuses rattled off in my head. I hesitated, started the car and proceeded to drive off. My friend stopped me in progress and said, "Hey Chris, I got to go back in the gas station. God is telling me that I need to share with that clerk." Humbled, I knew that I missed out on truly listening to God and responding to Him. What is the last thing that God asked you to do that you didn't do. Nothing may immediately come to mind, but dialogue with the Lord on this. Often, at the end of our response and obedience to God is someone else's response and obedience to Him. That is just how He works. If you know something immediately that God is asking you to do, write it down. Is it a relationship

that you need to reconcile, a step of faith you need to take, baptism? Write it down and ask the Lord when and if there is a right time to follow through.

### **SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT [25 MINUTES]**

In this time, we encourage you to divide into guys and girls to further discuss, get to know one another, and challenge each other in further abiding with Jesus Christ. If you are doing this study as an individual, take the time to answer the questions yourself as part of your listening time with Him. The following is a list of discussion questions to help you further grow and develop in your faith. Remember that the more willing that you are to be honest and transparent, the deeper the Lord can work. At this time, remind each other about the covenant that you committed to.

01 How can you know if it's really God's voice you're hearing? Share your suggestions.

02 Do you do all the talking in your relationship with God? Why or why not?

03 What are some of the challenges that keep you from listening to God?

Although we sometimes sincerely seek to follow Christ with all our hearts, there are hurts, habits or long-standing attitudes that still need Christ's healing and freedom. Sometimes these areas of our lives are easily overcome, but at other times, they are long-standing strongholds that prevent you from actively abiding in Christ and having an active victorious relationship with Him. As you listen to God and spend time with Him, He may have revealed these things to you. Consider a few of these resources that can immediately help you.

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- 01 Purchase a Daily Devotional Guide, “Beginning the Journey” by Ralph Neighbour. Start on page 24, in Unit 3, titled “Receive Christ’s Freedom.” These short daily devotions can help you individually work through some of the obstacles in your life.
- 02 Consider joining an upcoming seven-week study on Freedom in Christ that begins February 14th. Although February 14th is the last week of Abide, we feel it is so important for you to experience true freedom in Christ that we would encourage you to plug into this group. If you’re interested in this experience, contact Fonda Cole at [fcoble@tcabc.com](mailto:fcoble@tcabc.com) or call the church at 355-3699.

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## NOTES

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## 05 LIVE

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John 10:10 – “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Spoken by Jesus.

Acts 17:28 – “For in Him we live and move and have our being.....” Spoken by Paul.

John 14:23 – “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” Spoken by Jesus.

Luke 11:28 – “Blessed are those that hear the word of God and observe it.” Spoken by Jesus.

I am not a car person. I will always remember growing up and my dad trying to get me involved with car mechanics. It was just not my thing. It is still not my thing. I try to fix something on a car and it almost always inevitably ends with me throwing something, breaking something, and costing me more than what any mechanic in town would have charged me to fix it. I do have an appreciation for a nice vehicle though. I don't drive one, but I have an appreciation for it when I get in one. The one thing that I never understood though is having a car, especially a sports car, and never driving it. Now, I know there are some good reasons for it because of the value of the car and such, but come on. If you never get the car out of the garage, how can you really appreciate what it was made for?

This is the one thing that has always impressed me about my father in-law. He loves Corvette's. And what I appreciate most is that the Corvette that he owns doesn't just sit in the garage, but he drives it. He has let me drive it, too! I will always remember the last time he let Ashley and I take it on a date. We had the roof down, Top Gun playing on the stereo, and were headed down beautiful Lynn Lane in south Broken Arrow, just to enjoy ourselves. What I think is a total blast, is that he has even taken the car down to the Texas Motor Speedway and made laps around the track.

If your Christian life ends with Looking, and Listening, and never develops into Living, you are like the high performance sports car that has never left the garage. Living is truly where the rubber meets the road.

**CONNECTION TIME [20 minutes]**

It is important again to emphasize developing further connection as a group. Continuing to share parts of our story will help us grow and understand one another better.

- 01 What is one risk that you have taken in life that has turned out positively? Would you do it again?
- 02 Who is someone in your life that seemed to live the Christian life in victory? What stood out about their life that made it attractive?
- 03 How has this community group or Abide helped you grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ?

**THE FOCAL POINT [20-30 minutes]**

As we abide with Christ by Looking, Listening, and Living out this Christ-focused life, there is a new reality that Paul tells us in Romans 12:2 that is supposed to take over “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

This verse clearly says that we are transformed by the renewing of our mind. Like our bodies, when working correctly, are made to renew certain parts of our body that are injured. Wounds can be healed, tissue can be redeveloped. Muscles can be broken down but they can heal and become even stronger from the process. In the same way as we are transformed by Looking, Listening, and Living out God’s plan for our lives, we can be transformed into something stronger, more victorious, and more pleasing (deeply satisfying).

**LOOKING TO THE WORD: READ 1 JOHN 5.3-4****Discussion Questions**

- 01 How do we deal with the reality that life does not always feel victorious and sometimes God’s commands do feel burdensome?
- 02 Knowing that our efforts can easily slip into self righteousness which God views as filthy rags, (Isaiah 64:6) how do we live a life that pleases Him?

03 How can our faith help us overcome the world?

04 What role does abiding in Christ, specifically living by the Spirit, play in us living victoriously?

### **LARGE GROUP WRAP-UP [10 MINUTES]**

Our hope for you is summarized in a statement made by Paul, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain”. We want this truth to become even more real and alive in you as you take this faith walk of abiding with Christ. That you would have a new reality of how you see the world understanding that truly we have nothing to offer to God other than Jesus living inside of us. This is also why Paul could say “to die is gain” because of the reality that he understood of what is being promised to those that are in Christ.

Every season of every year, a grapevine goes through the same growth process. The sap flows up from the root, through the vine, out to healthy branches, producing fruit. The gardener dresses the vine by pruning and tying up branches so that the vine can carry more fruit. After the fruit is harvested, in the cold months of the year, the sap returns to the roots waiting to start the fruit bearing process all over again the next season. Like the vine, we must go through a process of growth in order to bear fruit. That means that we must continually be abiding in Jesus. To sum up the process, it is an ongoing faith journey of looking, listening, living, and learning. Looking to Jesus. Listening to what He says. Living it out. And Learning, gaining wisdom and insight while deepening our faith.

### **MISSION FOCUS [5 MINUTES]**

One of the new realities that we learn as we abide in Christ and as we are transformed by him is that we are not only God’s workmanship but are “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Knowing this reality what are some works that you feel through your abiding relationship with Christ that God is leading you to do this week?

## **SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT [15-30 MINUTES]**

In this time, we encourage you to divide into guys and girls to further discuss, get to know one another, and challenge each other in further abiding with Jesus Christ. The following is a list of discussion questions to help you further grow and develop in your faith. Remember that the more willing that you are to be honest and transparent, the further you can go as a group. At this time, also remind each other about the covenant that you committed to.

So often we attempt to get the car out of the garage, and then we run into something like this in James 4:17, “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.” Blast it! To me, it seems like the Lord can throw the check engine light on whenever He wants to, even though I thought I was going for a joy ride. I realize I have to take the thing to the shop for repairs. It can easily make you feel like you’re driving in an Oklahoma ice storm, you know, going from one ditch to another.

- 01 What is one of the big risks that you have taken in life that turned out negative?
- 02 How does the fear of failure effect how we live?
- 03 How can difficult circumstances push us to abide with Christ?
- 04 How can we consider it “pure joy” whenever we face trials? (James 1:2)
- 05 In light of the dialogue, take time in groups of 3 to pray for one another that we may live victorious in Christ and through Christ.

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## **NOTES**

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# WHAT'S NEXT?

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We hope you would continue to commit to the lifelong process of continuing to abide with Jesus Christ. Realize that you are not on a journey where you suddenly arrive. This type of mindset only places the emphasis on what you can do. It very quickly diminishes the cross of Christ, creates pride and legalism in you, and honestly, makes you useless in this world for the kingdom because it is not Christ living in you but you trying to make it work. So, what is the alternative?

A life of faith and trust that helps you overcome the world. This faith and trust makes Jesus bigger by your realization of more and more areas of your life in which you need Him to abide and take ownership.

The next step in ADVANCE is Nucleus. ABIDE is about knowing Him, Nucleus is about serving Him. You see this type of discipleship process in Jesus and His disciples. They got to know Him, and then they served alongside Him. This on-the-job-training of sorts, helped them have better clarity of who He was, but then, also who they were. If God says we are His workmanship we ought to know how we were handcrafted for His purposes. So if you have never experienced Nucleus we encourage you to sign up for the next Nucleus class.

As a church we are going to go one step past serving him to the “C” piece of ADVANCE called “CHARGE”. This experience is all about trusting Jesus further with all parts of our lives and understanding that we are blessed to be a blessing with everything that we are in charge of. Get ready for the ride.



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# RESOURCES

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## Questions about Advance or Community Groups:

Church Office: 355-3699

Chris Campbell, Advance Pastor  
ccampbell@tcabc.com

Fonda Cole, Community Group Coordinator  
fcole@tcabc.com

## Support Ministries:

Pastoral Care or Counseling  
Vic St. Clair, Team Leader  
Vic\_StClair@yahoo.com

Premarital Counseling  
Pat and Alan Gates  
activemarriage@aol.com

Financial Stewardship Courses  
Al and Glenda Baugher, Team Leader  
glenda7032@cox.net

Personal Financial Money Coaches  
Rick Teague, Crown Money Map Coach Coordinator  
CROWN@tcabc.com

Benevolence  
Jessica Smith, Missions Coordinator  
jsmith@tcabc.com

Job Assistance Ministry (JAM)  
Jim & Dianne Choate, JAM directors  
JAM@tcabc.com

Food and Clothing Assistance  
Julia Leinen, Safe Harbor Coordinator  
Jleinen@gmail.com

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