



ABIDE

ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU ...
JOHN 15:4

WEEK ONE: COMMUNITY



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ABIDE IS SIMPLY AN ENVIRONMENT FOR US TO EXPERIENCE, DISCOVER, AND LEARN ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW JESUS AND LIVE IN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. IN OUR TIME TOGETHER, WE WILL SHARE ABOUT OUR LIVES AND STUDY GOD'S WORD TO DISCOVER HOW TO LOOK TO JESUS, LISTEN TO JESUS, AND LIVE FOR JESUS.

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

LOOKING TO JESUS.

LISTENING TO JESUS.

LIVING FOR JESUS.

THAT IS WHAT **ABIDE** IS ALL ABOUT.

PREPARATION

- › Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- › Pray for the upcoming group meeting, including yourself, your group members, and their receptivity to the lesson.

HIGHLIGHTS

BIBLICAL EMPHASIS: Psalm 133:1 reads, “How wonderful it is, how pleasant, when (Christians) live together in harmony!” Our time together today will help us settle in to just how great life together with other Christians can be.

TEACHING AIM: We are all people with a story worth telling and worth knowing. God has brought us here, is working in us, and has a plan for each of us. Our hope is that through community groups at theChurch, we will realize that our story is a part of a bigger story, and that we will be transformed by God in light of this truth. By being a part of a community group at theChurch, we are saying that it is our hope to connect with others and their stories and to grow in our faith journey.

The Christian simply cannot take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

CONNECTION TIME

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

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- Begin your time together with the icebreaker “Your Best Story in Three Words.” Each person uses only three intriguing and descriptive words to describe his or her “best story.” After engaging the group with those three words, he or she then takes 2-3 minutes to share the complete story.

We are all people with a story worth telling and worth knowing. God has brought us here, is working in us, and has a plan for each of us. Our hope is that through community groups at theChurch, we will realize that our story is a part of a bigger story, and that we will be transformed. By being a part of a community group at theChurch, we are saying that it is our hope to connect with others and their stories and to grow in our faith journey together.

LOOK TO THE WORD

Use the following activities or questions to advance towards the focal point.

- Have someone in the group that has been a part of a community group or small group in the past share positively about their experience. Specifically, why was that group important to them?
- Ask someone in the group to read Proverbs 13:20. *“Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.”* How does this verse apply to community groups?
- What do you hope to gain by being a part of a community group at theChurch? If you’ve already been involved in a community group, what do you want to gain from this ABIDE study?

COMMENTARY: Proverbs 13:20

We are who we spend time with. People who are wise bless the people they spend time with. In contrast, things generally don't go well when we choose to hang out with fools.

- Have you ever not followed through on a commitment you've made? How did that scenario play out? What did you learn in that experience?
- Have you ever had a strong conviction not to do something but that you eventually did anyway? What did you learn in that experience?

For most if not all of us, we want to follow through with our commitments and hold true to our convictions, but sometimes we fail. We are prone to drift from our commitments and convictions like a boat not tied to the dock on a lake.

But redoubling our efforts does not keep us from drifting. We need God's help, and one of the primary ways He has provided that help is through community with others.

Read Hebrews 3:12-13.

“BE CAREFUL THEN, DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. MAKE SURE THAT YOUR OWN HEARTS ARE NOT EVIL AND UNBELIEVING, TURNING YOU AWAY FROM THE LIVING GOD. YOU MUST WARN EACH OTHER EVERY DAY, WHILE IT IS STILL ‘TODAY,’ SO THAT NONE OF YOU WILL BE DECEIVED BY SIN AND HARDENED AGAINST GOD.”

- Do you think the author of this verse takes community seriously or casually? Explain.
- Have you ever had a person or group of people speak into your life in a way similar to what this verse describes? Have you ever been that person for someone else? Share about that relationship with the group.

COMMENTARY: Hebrews 3:12-13

First, these believers were urged to provide mutual encouragement. They were to encourage one another. If the readers of Hebrews tried to live in isolation, subtle temptations would overwhelm them. If they came together for common worship, they could keep their hope and commitment burning brightly like charcoal embers warming one another. Christians grow better as a part of a fellowship (Heb. 10:25). If they live separately, they may retreat into halfheartedness and compromise and fail to realize their own lostness.

Second, these people were warned that sin is deceptive. Sin deceives by exaggerating the benefits of disobedience and hiding its consequences (Gen. 3:1–7). Sin may have deceived the readers of Hebrews by blinding them to the follies of their past life and giving them a nostalgic wish for returning to their previous lifestyle. A return to their previous practice of Judaism would demonstrate that they had never trusted Christ.

- What are some obstacles that keep us from the kind of community described here?

The kind of community the Bible teaches isn't a community of the unknown or the disingenuous. A willingness to be known and know others, as well as a desire to be authentic, are crucial elements to biblical community. Sometimes we hold back. Maybe we're afraid we'll hurt someone's feelings by speaking into them, or we're afraid of being hurt if we open up to others. We always want to be wise and follow God's lead, but we can't let fear or discomfort determine how we live in community with others. We must trust God and His Word when it comes to living in community.

Read Romans 15:7.

"THEREFORE, ACCEPT EACH OTHER JUST AS CHRIST HAS ACCEPTED YOU SO THAT GOD WILL BE GIVEN GLORY."

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- What do you think it means to accept someone? How did Jesus accept us? How can we be like Jesus when it comes to accepting others?
 - How can we balance accepting each other with encouraging one another to grow in our love and good works?

Read Hebrews 10:24.

LET US THINK OF WAYS TO MOTIVATE ONE ANOTHER TO ACTS OF LOVE AND GOOD WORKS.

COMMENTARY:
Romans 15:7

The word "accept" presses the idea of "wholehearted acceptance." If Jesus has accepted someone, are we to say that we will not take him or her in as a Christian brother or sister? Our attitude to others must flow from the transformation Jesus achieved in us.

- How do you like to be motivated? What types of motivation do you not respond well to?
- Are there any types of “good works” or “acts of love” that might require more motivation for you? If so, what are they?

COMMENTARY:**Hebrews 10:24**

The appeal to think demands concentrated attention. The goal of this attention was to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. As Christians we have a corporate responsibility. We must help others who stumble and falter. We must concentrate on the needs of others and not on our individual salvation only.

We can spur people toward either good or bad works. Hebrews calls us to lead others to a practical expression of love and an attractive display of unselfish deeds.

APPLICATION AND MISSION

Biblical community does not have to be complicated. Over the next few weeks, we will dive into the deeper components of what it means to abide with Jesus and abide in a faith community at the Church. Here are next few steps for us to consider.

- 1 We need to agree upon a set of shared values by discussing the group covenant. All member should agree to the covenant so that all can make the most of the community group experience. (Covenants are included with this leader guide and the participant guide.)
- 2 We need to make sure that the group leader has everyone's contact information. (A contact information form is included with this leader guide and the participant's guide.)
- 3 We need to verify that everyone is on the same page with the calendar and child care for the semester. Social nights? Service projects? Sharing responsibilities? It's not too early to begin planning at this meeting!

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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- 4 We need to ensure everyone is aware of what is entailed in the sharing of life stories next week. Use the included “Personal Life Story Guide” to help you articulate your story. All participants need to go through this before attending the next group.

We are going to allow adequate time for every individual to share and decide as a group based on the size of our group how much time we are going to give to every individual (at least 10 minutes but more time is preferable). We will be willing to extend life stories into another week if some in our group are not able or willing to share in week two. There should be an interaction time after each individual shares to clarify and to encourage each other take time to thank God for their story and the work that He has done in their lives.

PRAY

Close your group time in prayer. Specifically pray for everyone’s preparation for sharing their life story at your next gathering.

PERSONAL LIFE STORY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Read through the following after week one and complete this exercise so that you can better share your Life Story during week two.

Your Thoughts

The primary goal of this exercise is to help others know the real you. Rather than simply using words, you will use four different objects that illustrate four key things about you (examples to follow). Discovering what those “things” will be is an adventure in self-discovery itself. Sharing those “things” is an adventure in faith.

Understand that all are “in process” and this time is designed to help all group members better know and understand each other in this process. It can be a powerful time of enhancing authentic Christian community, but it is in no way intended to mandate transparency or force relational intimacy.

There are two parts to doing Life Stories effectively: sharing your story and listening to the story of others. Both must be done prayerfully and well to get the most out of our time together. Sharing your life story should take about 10 minutes, but more time may be necessary. You should try to honor the amount of time set aside by your group so that others have time to share their story.

THINGS TO REMEMBER AS YOU PREPARE YOUR LIFE STORY

⌋ This is the “Cliff Notes” version of your life. You are presenting four objects that represent who you are, and why you are who you are. You are saying to the group, “For you to know the real me, you need to know these things...” Focus on the majors of life, those things that capture the essence of your life experiences.

PERSONAL LIFE STORY GUIDE

- 2 The purpose of sharing your story is to reveal yourself, not conceal yourself. Be honest, be real and be authentic. With that said, however, do not share anything that you do not feel comfortable sharing, that is inappropriate in a small group setting, or anything that would embarrass your spouse if you are married.

- 3 Focus on those experiences that are germane to your life, versus those of friends, relatives or your spouse. Your story will involve the good, the bad, the exciting, and the mundane. All of these combine to tell your unique pilgrimage and reveal the hand of God in your life.

- 4 Pray and ask God to bring to mind and show you what events, circumstances and experiences tell your life story. Think creatively about objects that will communicate insight into your life. As we will discover, even before you came to know Him personally, God's fingerprints were all over you.

Your Thoughts

INSTRUCTIONS

The following worksheet is intended for use as a tool to help you identify the major points in your life story. Use it to jump-start your thinking and help you retrace some of the significant events in your life. You don't necessarily have to follow it when you are sharing.

You do not have to fill this worksheet out completely. Use only what is helpful to you. Remember: you will not share all the information in the worksheet; you will only share four (or more) key pictures of your life. Answers to some of these questions will help you share why the objects you choose are appropriate.

PERSONAL LIFE STORY GUIDE

LIFE STORY WORKSHEET

A. Beginnings (Birth through elementary School)

1. Where were you born, how many siblings do you have, and what adjectives would you use to describe your family?

2. What are 2 - 3 major relationships/experiences/events that you can recall from birth up through elementary school?

B. School Years (Junior High, High School, College)

1. Where did you grow up during these years?

2. List 3 adjectives that describe the real you during these years (that maybe no one else really knew):

3. What are 2 - 3 major relationships/experiences/events that you can recall from Junior High through College years?

C. Career Years (Post High School or College to Present)

1. Where did you take your first job and what was it? How long did you stay?

2. What decisions did you make in your 20's and 30's that significantly shaped your life?

3. What are the most significant emotional "highs" and "lows" that you experienced during this period of your life?

7. Looking back over your answers, complete the following sentences:

- a. I really do enjoy...

- b. Some of my greatest satisfactions in life have been ...

- c. One of my greatest fears in life is ...

- d. Some adjectives that friends would use to describe me are ...

- e. Some adjectives I would use, that others would not, which describe me are ...

8. For someone to know the real me, they would need to know these four things about me:

- a.

- b.

- c.

- d.

E. Brainstorming for “Objects”

Begin listing some “objects” that could represent the things you listed in #8 above. List as many as you can, then determine which ones are best suited to tell and illustrate your Life Story. Take the top 4 and use them to help you tell your story! Be creative and unconventional!

You can also look at the examples below. These examples are given only to get you started. We just wanted you to see what someone could choose to represent his or her Life Story with only four objects. Be playful, creative, and think outside the box!

Example One:

Object: Frame with no picture in it. “This represents that I grew up without a dad.” “My dad left when I was 5 years old.”

Object: Football. “This represents where I found significance, happiness, and everything else I needed growing up.” “Sports was my life.”

Object: Wallet. “This represents the next place I found significance.”

Object: Glasses. “This represents that I’m learning more and more about myself.” “I am someone who needs to “see” to believe.” “I am a skeptic at heart.”

Example Two:

Object: Yardstick. “This represents how close I am willing to let people get to me: about three feet.”

Object: Clock. “This represents how I live my life: I am always trying to figure out what I can accomplish and when I am going to do this or that.”

Object: Picture of parents. “This represents the family I grew up in. My parents weren’t perfect, but they were awesome.” “Family is so important to me.”

Object: File Folder. “This is indicative of my need for everything to have a place, which can drive some people crazy.”