

Week 5 ~ Active vs. Abiding

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.'"

(Exodus 14:15, NIV)

It is right and good that we go to God with our cares and concerns. In fact, it's what He wants us to do—cast our cares on him for he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). But at some point, we have to put feet on our prayers.

The single woman can pray for many years that the Lord bless her with a godly husband, but if she rarely interacts with single men her chances of seeing the blessing of marriage come to pass in her life is unlikely. A godly man is probably not going to just knock on her door some evening asking if his bride awaits him, and they live happily ever after.

The couple burdened with debt can pray for the Lord to help them become debt-free, and certainly He will help and provide, but that goal will never be realized if they do not change their spending habits and how they view their finances. While it may be possible that they could receive a financial wind-fall from heaven, it is not very realistic.

There certainly are those things that only the Lord can do, miracles only He can provide. But many times, there is much we can do—that He wants for us to do—in seeing his Kingdom at work in our lives.

So what is it you need to “move on” in the wake of prayer? Wisdom? Perspective? Motivation? Determination?

May you find your prayers answered as you partner with God in their fulfillment.

Active prayer and abiding prayer. It's likely that you have a tendency toward one over the other and it probably has a great deal to do with your personality and your church background. I'm an active type of gal. I like to be “involved” in the prayer process; and much of this 8 Week Experiment is of an active sort.

Active prayer is wordy and expressive. It requires the individual to be outwardly expressive and involved. If the pray-er has a need, active prayer would include petition, confession,

praying Scripture, perhaps, and maybe even fasting or spiritual warfare. Abiding prayer, instead, holds the need before the Lord and keeps it there; that's it.

Abiding prayer is concerned with presence. Where active prayer does, abiding prayer is. Abiding prayer strives to simply be with the Lord, holding ourselves and our needs before Him, letting Him do all the doing. Abiding prayer is contemplative, quiet, and reflective in nature. Not that active prayer isn't those things, but the solitude, focus, and peace expressed by simply resting and sitting in God's presence is of a different sort than that in active prayer.

Let me use the example of interacting in and with nature to better illustrate the difference. For the outdoor enthusiast, active participation would include such activities as hiking, rafting, planting trees, tracking animals, learning bird calls and songs, catching butterflies, and any other number of activities that help a person explore the wonders of creation better. And while those are wonderful and delightful activities, abiding would be to simply discover a quiet spot in a secluded outdoor location and sit there, soaking in the sounds, sights, and smells of the area. Then, by returning to that sight over time, one develops an intimate knowledge of the area and its inhabitants simply by becoming a part of the landscape. Instead of impressing oneself on the natural environment to gain insight and delight, abiding allows nature to make its impression on the individual for the purpose of insight and delight. The surface result is the same, but the underlying transformation that happens by arriving at via different means is the real goal.

The same is true in prayer. Any time we pray, we meet with God, in some sense. God will answer our prayers, one way or another, regardless of the method used; however, by employing different means, we open different parts of our beings to experience God. And by doing so, our hearts become more enlarged for him, parts of us that were previously asleep become roused to connect with our Lord and King.

So this week, I am asking you to spend time abiding with God in his presence. The time you would regularly spend talking to and asking of the Lord, instead spend it being quiet contemplating on and connecting to his Spirit through his Son. It is important to note that if this is something new to you, this week could possibly feel like a waste of time. You may not feel like anything is happening and will be tempted to connect to God through active prayer instead. But do not get discouraged, action does the talking, abiding does the listening.

If we are to become the people God desires us to be, to have the relationship with God that He desired from the very beginning, we have to train our hearts to listen just as much as, if not more so, than we have to train our hearts to openly express. Do not be fooled, our spirits connect to God long before our emotions register the connection. Trust that the Lord is doing things in the deep parts of you and taking care of your burdens and concerns in ways that are mysterious and wonderful.

A few ideas to get you started:

- If you have a need you would like to bring before the Lord, imagine holding it in your hands while the Lord ministers to that need. Remain focused on that person or situation, whatever it might be, that you hold in your hands until you feel compelled to let it go.
- Turn the lights down in a quiet room, sitting in the silence. Invite God into the space and trust He is there. Sit in the solitude and shadows without expectation.
- Place another chair, stool, pillow next to where you will sit. Imagine the Lord occupying the other seat. Sit in the comfort of his presence. As with old friends, comfort doesn't require conversation.
- Set a timer for a specific amount of time—maybe more than you're used to—and wait. You will not move, speak or even deeply think for fear that you may miss the Lord in the event He may show up. You don't want to be distracted and thus miss him, however brief his appearance may be.

Reflection Questions

1. What did you most enjoy about prayer this week?
2. What was most challenging? Why?
3. In what ways did you connect to the Lord that were new to you by simply abiding?
4. Were you more or less aware of God's presence through prayer this week? What might be the reason for that?
5. What revelations, if any, did you receive in prayer this week? Were any directly related to praying in this way?
6. What are you most likely to take away from this prayer exercise?
7. How likely are you to continue the practice of abiding prayer in conjunction with active prayer?