

## **East Hill Church Sermon Discussion Guide:**

### **Abide in Me**

*Guest Speaker: Scott Thomas*

*Date: March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024*

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#### **Introduction:**

Scott Thomas spoke about his personal journey of battling cancer and the profound spiritual insights he gained through the experience. He recounted his initial shock at the diagnosis, the challenges he faced during treatment, and the emotional toll it took on him and his family. Scott admitted that he struggled to maintain hope and even found himself praying for God to take him home. However, through conversations with his wife and friends, he realized that he needed to fully surrender to God's will and abide in Christ to find true peace and restoration.

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#### **Lean into Jesus:**

Scott shared his intense struggle with cancer, highlighting a critical moment when, despite his reluctance, his wife rushed him to the emergency room due to a dangerously high fever. This episode became a metaphor for his broader life journey, where his plans were dramatically altered by his health crisis. Scott expressed a profound sense of disorientation, acknowledging that God's reality for him was starkly different from what he had envisioned. He admitted to a struggle with acceptance and peace, recognizing a need to "lean into Jesus" during these tumultuous times.

Scott illustrated this concept of leaning into Jesus by referring to the agonizing moment Jesus faced in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just as Jesus wrestled with His impending suffering yet ultimately submitted to God's will, Scott emphasized the importance of surrendering to God's plan, even when it diverges sharply from our own expectations. He underscored that leaning into Jesus means embracing God's reality with trust and faith, finding one's place in it, and seeking peace through alignment with God's purposes, especially in life's most challenging moments.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Share a time when you faced a difficult situation that caused you to question God's plan for your life. How did you respond?
2. What does it mean to "lean into Jesus" during times of suffering? How can we practically do this in our daily lives?
3. How can our struggles and pain become opportunities for spiritual growth and deeper intimacy with God?

#### **Supporting Verses:**

**John 15:5** - "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

#### **Context and Reflection:**

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** Jesus spoke these words to His disciples during the Last Supper, preparing them for His impending death and emphasizing their need to stay connected to Him.
- **Theological Significance:** This verse highlights the vital importance of abiding in Christ as the source of spiritual life and fruitfulness. It underscores human dependence on God.
- **Application:** Scott's story of leaning into Jesus during his cancer journey illustrates the practical necessity of remaining connected to Christ, especially in life's most challenging moments. It reminds us that apart from Christ, we can do nothing of eternal value.

**Luke 22:42** - "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

#### **Context and Reflection:**

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** Jesus uttered this prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, moments before His arrest and crucifixion. It reveals His human anguish and His ultimate submission to the Father's will.
- **Theological Significance:** This verse demonstrates Jesus' perfect obedience to the Father, even in the face of unimaginable suffering. It also models for believers the posture of surrendering personal desires to God's plan.
- **Application:** Scott's story parallels Jesus' experience, as he struggled to accept God's different reality for his life but ultimately chose to surrender to God's will. This verse encourages us to follow Jesus' example of obedience and submission, trusting God's purposes even when they differ from our expectations.

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#### **Abide in Me and I will abide in you:**

Scott Thomas recounted a significant conversation with Pastor Keith Jenkins, who asked him what message he had on his heart for the church community. Initially taken back, Scott joked about the pastoral responsibility but soon realized the gravity of the question. As he was called back for a medical appointment, he had 45 minutes to ponder the question, during which God confirmed the message that had instinctively come to him: "Abide in Me, and I will abide in you."

Scott elaborated that this message was not just a theological concept but a profound personal revelation, stemming from his recent experiences. He shared how the previous year had been marked by intense challenges, including his battle with cancer, which brought significant pain and struggle. Through these hardships, he felt God was leading him back to a foundational spiritual truth, encapsulated in the call to abide in Him. Scott expressed his conviction that this message was not only relevant for his own journey but also timely and essential for the congregation, highlighting the deep, reciprocal relationship with God that comes from abiding in Him, which sustains and empowers believers through life's most difficult trials.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What practices or disciplines help you to abide in Christ and maintain your connection with Him?
2. How can we discern when we are starting to drift away from our intimacy with God? What are some warning signs?

3. In what ways has your relationship with God grown and deepened through seasons of suffering or pruning?

### **Supporting Verses:**

**John 15:4** - "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

#### **Context and Reflection:**

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** Jesus continued His teaching on the vine and the branches, emphasizing the necessity of remaining connected to Him to bear spiritual fruit.
- **Theological Significance:** This verse portrays the intimate, reciprocal relationship between Christ and believers. It stresses that spiritual fruitfulness is not a result of human effort but of abiding in Christ.
- **Application:** Scott's message, "Abide in Me, and I will abide in you," encapsulates this verse's truth. His story illustrates how abiding in Christ sustains and empowers believers through life's trials, enabling them to bear fruit even in difficult circumstances.

**Psalms 27:4** - "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple."

#### **Context and Reflection:**

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** King David, the psalm's author, expressed his deep longing to be in God's presence continually, even as he faced various trials and enemies.
- **Theological Significance:** This verse reflects the believer's ultimate desire and priority—to abide in God's presence and seek Him above all else. It emphasizes the beauty and satisfaction found in God alone.
- **Application:** Scott's message aligns with this verse's heartfelt desire to dwell with God and seek Him continually. His story demonstrates how abiding in God's presence brings comfort, strength, and purpose, even in the darkest moments.

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### **Kill your flesh, not your hope:**

Scott shared a vulnerable moment from his cancer journey when his wife mentioned wanting to plan a trip to England and Scotland in 2025. Initially, Scott responded with encouragement, not realizing that she intended for them to go together. He felt that she didn't understand the weight of the uncertainty he faced, living 3 months at a time between appointments to monitor the cancer's progression and treatment effectiveness.

In his frustration, Scott told his wife, "I know you married this crazy, wild dreamer, this guy that always has his feet three, four feet off the ground, floating with helium balloons to the next dream that God's placed in my heart, trying something new. I love you, but that guy's dead." He had lost his hope.

Although his wife backed off, she wasn't going to let that hopeful part of Scott die. Through various interactions with church members during his rare outings, Scott found himself weeping, not fully understanding why. He later realized that he had been killing the wrong part of himself - he had been killing his hope instead of his flesh.

Scott emphasized that the Bible tells us to kill our flesh, not our hope. He stated, "When you admit that guy is dead, and I have no hope, I killed the wrong guy." This realization marked a turning point in Scott's journey, as he recognized the need to crucify his fleshly desires while holding onto the hope that God had placed within him.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How can we distinguish between the desires of our flesh and the hopes and dreams that God has placed within us?
2. Share an experience where God used a painful pruning process to produce greater fruitfulness in your life.
3. How can we encourage and support one another in maintaining hope and trust in God, even in the face of difficult circumstances?

### Supporting Verses:

**Galatians 5:24** - "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

#### Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** In his letter to the Galatians, Paul contrasted living by the flesh with living by the Spirit, urging believers to crucify their sinful nature and embrace the Spirit-led life.
- **Theological Significance:** This verse emphasizes the transformation that occurs when one belongs to Christ—the old, sinful self is put to death, and a new life in the Spirit begins.
- **Application:** Scott's realization that he had been "killing the wrong guy" by losing hope instead of crucifying his flesh illustrates this verse's principle. It reminds believers to actively put to death their sinful desires while clinging to the hope and new life found in Christ.

**1 Peter 5:10** - "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

#### Context and Reflection:

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** Peter wrote to encourage believers facing various trials and sufferings, reminding them of God's grace and the eternal glory awaiting them in Christ.
- **Theological Significance:** This verse highlights God's character as the source of all grace and His faithfulness to restore and strengthen believers after they endure suffering.
- **Application:** Scott's journey of maintaining hope through his cancer battle reflects this verse's promise. His story illustrates how God's grace sustains and restores believers, making them strong and steadfast, even as they navigate life's most painful challenges.

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### Conclusion/Reflection:

Scott's powerful testimony serves as a reminder that in our darkest moments, God is with us, pruning us to bear more fruit and drawing us closer to Him. His story highlights the importance

of authentic community, engaging with God's Word, and sincere worship in the midst of suffering. It encourages us to lean into God during trials, trusting that He is working for our good even when we don't understand. Scott's journey also demonstrates the transformative power of vulnerability and the importance of allowing others to walk alongside us in difficult seasons. Ultimately, his message inspires us to surrender our own desires and plans to God, knowing that He is the true vine and we are the branches, called to abide in Him and bear fruit for His glory.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. In what areas of your life do you sense God calling you to a deeper level of surrender and trust?
  2. How can you cultivate a lifestyle of abiding in Christ, both in seasons of blessing and seasons of pruning?
  3. What steps can you take this week to lean into Jesus and allow Him to bring hope and transformation to the broken places in your life?
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### **Prayer Requests:**

[Share any personal prayer requests, and pray over the week ahead]

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### **References:**

#### **Primary Sources:**

- "Abide in Me" Sermon, East Hill Church, 03/24/2024. Provided by Guest Speaker Scott Thomas.
- Sermon Discussion Guide, Provided by Kelly Paxton, and East Hill Church.
- The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). Biblica, Inc.™, 2011.

#### **Secondary Sources:**

- Contextual and Theological Insights: Derived from general biblical scholarship and commentaries relevant to the verses from John 15, Luke 22, Psalm 27, Galatians 5, and 1 Peter 5.

#### **General Sources on Biblical Studies:**

- Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. "How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth." Zondervan, 2014.
- Keller, Timothy. "Walking with God through Pain and Suffering." Penguin Books, 2013.
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#### **Linguistic and Grammatical Resources:**

- Strong, James. "The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible." Thomas Nelson, 2010.

- Mounce, William D. "Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words." Zondervan, 2006.

**Collaborative Contributions:**

- LLM Contributions: Based on a mixture of licensed data, data created by AI models, and publicly available data, synthesized for the study of the provided biblical verses.

**LLM Training Data:**

- LLM Training Data. Includes a diverse range of texts (books, websites, and other publications) up to August 2023.