

N A T E S W E E N E Y

ABIDING *in* CHRIST

Learning to Live Your Identity in Jesus

SERMON TO BOOK ESSENTIALS COLLECTION

Abiding in Christ

Learning to Live Your Identity in Jesus

Nate Sweeney



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About the Author



Nate Sweeney would be considered an average person, someone who loves his family, community, and church. The major factor that sets him apart is his passion to know Christ and make Him known. This vision is at the forefront of Nate's daily focus and drives him to stay connected to Christ and share that relationship with others. Nate pursues this vision in his home with his wife, Monica, and their three kids.

Nate has served in many ministry capacities since he graduated from Bible school in 1997. He is the directional leader of Catalyst Church in Bentonville, Arkansas. He is also the founder and directional leader of The Abiding Network, and he sits on the Influencers Ministry global board as a church relations leader.

Nate speaks with experience, as he has led his church to be transformed into an Abiding Church, and his role is supported by the great leaders who have been raised up in this church. At the time of this publishing, Nate has mentored, coached, and helped disciple hundreds of church leaders nationally.

Through Nate's ministry, people are challenged to experience God daily and grow in their relationship with Him while discovering what He has

called them to do in life and sharing His love in practical ways.

About The Abiding Network

Nate is the founder and CEO of The Abiding Network.

The vision of The Abiding Network is to assist leaders in creating environments of discipleship to encourage followers to know Christ and make Him known.

Our goal is to network individuals, churches, non-profits, and other groups to support their Kingdom calling. We offer a system of biblical accountability, encouragement, relationship building, and resource sharing to assist in their health and long-term success.

The intent of Abiding Network members should be to unite in the common vision to know Christ and make Him known. We want a unity of the Spirit that celebrates what God is doing in our world today.

Website: abidingnetwork.com

Facebook page: facebook.com/abidingnetwork

What Others Are Saying About Nate Sweeney

From reviews of Nate Sweeney's book *The Abiding Church* on Amazon:

Nate Sweeney has a Spirit-led passion for the Body of Christ. This book is a must-read for church leaders, lay people, and the church body in general. It is a ministry and word that reminds us, encourages us, and teaches us what abiding in Christ truly means. An inspiring book written from a deeply rooted passion for those called by God to lead the church body.

A culture of Christianity is just as [much a challenge] for the 21st-century church as any other cultural or political challenges it faces. Many Christians have become professionals at being Christian while remaining amateurs at following Jesus. *The Abiding Church* aims to highlight this disparity and call all Christians to what should be

their number one priority: abiding in Christ. Nate Sweeney makes this truth inescapable through a well-written and challenging exegesis of Jesus' words in John 15.

If there ever was a generation that needed to hear the TRUTH about Christ's Church, it is the one we are living in today. Nate Sweeney, in his book *The Abiding Church*, shows from the Word of God a biblical model for how the church should function. His boldness and courage to speak up is astounding and refreshing, especially since he is many times addressing some of the most prominent leaders in our churches today. Prophets do not always tell us what we want to hear, but they boldly proclaim God's Word to the church and call the church back to God. This is an exciting and powerful book and has something for every individual in the body of Christ. It is abundantly clear that the Lord has been working in his heart for many years so that he could bring forth this message today!

An insightful look [at the church] to bring the church back to the basics and a re-evaluation, as well as an uncovering of beliefs that have not served to build a strong foundation for the Body of Christ in today's world. *The Abiding Church* also gives wise direction, instruction and encouragement for the Body of Christ to function as God intended—to be the hope of the world.

In Luke 12, Jesus challenges the spiritual leaders of His day to discern the times. If Jesus were living in today's world, He would be saying the same thing. *The Abiding Church* is a call and a challenge for all in ministerial leadership to discern the times, for Jesus will not pour His new wine into old wine skins (Matthew 9:17).

If you are hungry to keep in step with the current move of God, then *The Abiding Church* is a must-read.

INTRODUCTION

The Key

I have written this book with the purpose of helping you abide in your identity in Christ. The phrase “abide in your identity in Christ” may seem a little strange to you, but through my studies of the Bible, especially John, I have learned that it is the key to a thriving relationship with God.

This book is a slim volume, but I hope that you will find it packed with truth that will help you understand what it means to abide in your identity in Christ. There is much more to be said about this topic than can fit in these pages, or even in our lifetimes, but I hope that you will consider this a helpful primer for the Christian life.

If you are a new believer, this book is intended to provide a Bible-based introduction to the new life you have in Jesus Christ. If you have been a believer for many years, my intention is to help you see your salvation and God’s promises from a new angle, grow in your knowledge of Him, and abide in your true identity.

I refer to many Bible verses in this book, but unlike in its lengthier companion volume, *Abiding in Identity*, I have not copied out most of those scriptures here. Instead, I encourage you to open your own Bible alongside this book and study the verses for yourself. If your desire is to abide more fully in your identity in Christ, you’ll find that self-feeding on Scripture is an invaluable habit.

As you read this book, pray over Scripture and ask God to speak to you. I encourage you to journal about what you are learning. My prayer is that God will use His Word and the concepts introduced in this book to change your life and help you develop a deeper relationship with Him.

CHAPTER ONE

Salvation: Finding Your Identity in Christ

Before you can understand how to abide in your identity in Christ, you have to understand how you get to Him in the first place.

The Gospel Explained

In this world, we are tempted to find our identity in many things, including our career, our marital status, our race, our sexuality, and our class. But God is the only One who can define you. Your identity should be swallowed up in His identity. He loves you where you are, in spite of where you currently find identity. That love will transform you into His image, moving you away from other identities.

The purpose of this book is to help you replace your current identity, whatever you think that is, by abiding in your identity in Christ and living in righteousness. If I can help you expose some faulty theology, then you can build on a proper foundation and abide in your true identity in Christ. In order to have that foundation, you need to understand who you are and who God wants you to be.

Within humanity, there is a sin problem. All of us are born with a sin nature (Romans 3:23). We search for righteousness and self-justification. Most of the world's religions and institutions have been created to answer this problem.

Most people try to do good and try not to do bad in hopes that this will balance out the scales and please whatever god they believe in. I believe that most churches are filled with people who are simply doing their "Christian duty" in hopes that their good works are enough to appease God and eradicate the sin problem in their lives. They hope that their good works will outweigh the bad works and that God will save them based on these works, but the sin problem is not reconcilable without God's intervention.

In this fallen state, the identity that you have is bleak and depressing. According to the Bible, all human beings are born with the sin nature that was introduced to us by the first Adam (Romans 5:12). We are "by nature children of wrath," slaves of sin, and our father is Satan (Ephesians 2:1–3). This has many devastating implications, but the most damning of all is that sin separates us eternally from a holy God (Romans 6:23). There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves; we are in dire need of a savior.

Many in the church today miss this important part of the gospel, the depth of sin's consequences. We try to gloss over the wickedness and hopelessness that fill our lives when we are outside of Christ. If you don't recognize your sinfulness, you will never look for a savior. You cannot be saved if you do not first acknowledge your need for Christ. You must understand that you cannot save yourself. No amount of good works will be good enough to redeem you from sin (Isaiah 64:6).

Because of this, we are under the heaviness of God's wrath. Since God is perfectly just, He has to punish sin, one way or another. His invitation to you is to put your faith in Christ, who bore God's wrath for sinners on the cross. Christ takes the punishment your sin deserves, and He makes you right with God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Faith in the New Testament is an action word. Faith that is not active is dead (James 2:20). Active faith responds to God's Word. When you respond, there is an action on your part. You receive Christ's salvation. You do not earn it, but reach out in faith to receive it (Ephesians 2:8–9).

When you receive Christ's salvation in faith, you are promised eternal life:

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

—1 John 5:11–13

You no longer have to worry about what tomorrow brings. You simply abide in your identity from now into eternity. But what does that mean? What exactly is your new identity in Christ as a believer?

Your New Identity in Christ

It is uncomfortable to be reminded of how sin kept you separate and distant from God, but you can rejoice all the more in who you are in Christ. Colossians 1:12–14 makes it clear that you have been delivered from darkness, forgiven, and redeemed. Now you are qualified to partake in this

inheritance. Once you have been found by Christ, you are born again, and your nature is changed (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The previous covenant, based on the law and works, is fulfilled by Christ and credited to you, and now you are under a new and better covenant (Hebrews 12:24). Not only do you have Christ's righteousness as your new identity, you also have access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ, your High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–16). When you are in the righteousness of God, there is nothing that stands between you and Him. You have full access to Him all of the time.

This is a love story of God bestowing His righteousness upon you. If we leave out this part of the gospel, then we are only preaching half of the gospel. Why would we deny the benefits that God shows us are part of the life of a New Covenant believer?

Understanding Your New Identity

During my years of experience in the church, I have seen two common lines of faulty thinking on the topic of righteousness. These paradigms look at the same Bible but come away with completely opposite interpretations of what is meant in the text.

The first extreme view of righteousness denies human worth, insists that we have no role in our salvation and that our choices in life don't matter, and claims that God's holiness keeps Him distant from us, even when we are Christians. The other extreme view of righteousness holds that our salvation is up to us and we have ultimate control. According to the second view, we earn righteousness when we obey God, we can gain godlike righteousness through our good works, and God is bound by our faith to do what we want. Neither of these views is biblical.

The Greek word rendered *righteousness* in the Bible generally indicates a state of being justified or acceptable to God. ^[1] You are the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). It is only because of Christ's great act on the cross that you are accepted and not found guilty before God (Romans 5:1–2).

Biblical righteousness accomplishes two main things. First, righteousness restores all that was lost at the fall of Adam and brings you into a father–child relationship with God Himself (Romans 8:15–17). Second, righteousness moves you to love others fervently because you have

experienced the tremendous power of God's love. Your response to receiving God's love is to extend that love to others, knowing that love covers so many things (1 Peter 4:8).

Remember that God's imputed righteousness is not based on your behavior but on Christ's finished work (Romans 4:24). God's love is without condition. It does not waver based on whether you choose obedience or disobedience (Romans 8:38–39). As a Christian, you cannot be any more righteous than you are right now.

Embrace Your New Identity in Christ

I want to help shed light on some of the things that may be getting in the way of you embracing your new identity in Christ. When you refuse to find healing from pain through the biblical process, you eventually find your identity in that sin, hurt, habit, or hang-up, and you become a victim. You can only be truly healed and delivered from these things when you abide in your identity in Christ.

Even though our experiences help to shape who we are, we must learn to walk in our identity in Christ and not base our identity on what has happened to us. I would never try to minimize anyone's pain or experiences. However, I have yet to find a pain or experience that was beyond the grace and mercy of our loving God when people find their true identity in Him instead of in their past. When you view yourself as a victim, you see your sin as something that you need healing from instead of something that God needs to help you rid from your life.

Being born into a sinful world with a sinful nature is not a prescription for how God wants you to live. Our sin nature is a fruit of the fall of humanity. Christ did not come to affirm our sinful nature but to redeem us from it

and restore our fellowship with the Father (2 Corinthians 5:18–19).

Instead of living as a victim, you must embrace your true identity and abide in the fullness of the New Covenant. One of the gifts of redemption is a pure heart (Hebrews 10:22). Don't allow anyone to deter you from the promise of a pure heart or keep you from living out your righteousness in Christ.

God looks at you with love in His eyes. He created you in His very image and likeness (Genesis 1:27). Sin marred that, which distorted the

image. When you were born again, God restored the marred image and recreated you in “newness of life” (Romans 6:4). However, you look in the mirror and see the sinful person instead of the person into whom He has transformed you. God is saying, “Look in the mirror of the Spirit of God and see that I truly created you in My likeness.” We must not gloss over this fact if we are going to abide in Christ and find our identity in Him.

Colossians 3:8–10 says that we are to bear the image of Christ. Did you know that you actually reflect the image of Christ? You are newly created in Him. Are you starting to see the power of abiding in your identity? If you will receive this revelation, it will transform you forever.

Don’t fall for the lie that you are the way you are and continue to live in your sinful nature. Dare to accept the call to discipleship, the call to die to yourself and live for Christ (Colossians 3:1–11). Dare to abide in your identity in Christ with personal abandonment and absolute trust. If you do so, it will change everything.

CHAPTER TWO

Sanctification: His Righteousness Becomes Your Identity

Abiding in your new identity in Christ isn’t a one-and-done proposition. It’s a process that you learn over the course of your entire lifetime! The Holy Spirit empowers this process of sanctification and helps you to live in your new identity in Christ.

The Transformed Heart and the Holy Spirit

When you become a Christian, God loves you too much to allow you to stay where you are, pursuing your sinful habits. He intends greater revelation and transformation for you as you learn to abide in your identity in Him, but you can't do this on your own.

An amazing gift that God has given us as we abide in our true identity in Him is the person of the Holy Spirit. There are volumes written about the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives, but here are just a few verses that speak to the power of the Holy Spirit.

First John 2:27 describes the Holy Spirit teaching us and applying God's Word to us as we abide in Christ. John 14:16–17 calls the Holy Spirit a "Helper." John 16:12–15 explains that the Holy Spirit will reveal truth and God's glory to us.

I encourage you to open God's Word for yourself and study these verses, as well as others about the Holy Spirit, in order to understand what a gift you have in the Holy Spirit and how He can help you abide in your true identity. You will need the Holy Spirit to help you understand exactly what this righteous identity is, because it's so easy to misunderstand.

Do We Get Righteousness Wrong?

Consider this common scenario. After a careful study of the Scriptures, a new believer rightly determines that he needs to pursue righteousness. But how should he go about this?

First, he cleanses his life of anything that causes him temptation. Second, he analyzes his relationships and identifies the people in his life who would benefit his journey by being good examples. He also notes the people who could potentially, either knowingly or unknowingly, sabotage it. He then makes a point to nurture the beneficial relationships while exercising caution with the others. Third, he practices disciplined routines and habits. He never misses church on Sunday, he volunteers at a local soup kitchen, and he tithes regularly.

A year passes, and he is at a loss. He has cleaned up his life and is living as a remarkable example of Christ, but he doesn't feel much closer to God. He has checked all of the boxes that he thought would bring him righteousness. What has he missed?

One of the problems is that this new believer, with good intentions, developed a manmade system to make himself righteous. Unfortunately,

these manmade paths to Christ get in the way of how we are intended to experience Him. These half-truths will keep us from all that God has for His children.

Search the Scriptures to affirm what is being said to you concerning the Christian life. When you take hold of these revelations and abide in your identity, your life will never be the same. You already have all that you need to abide in righteousness.

Biblical Righteousness Defined

Many people try to interpret the topic of righteousness through their theological leaning or personal perspective instead of simply seeing what the Bible has to say about it. I would like to undertake an unbiased examination of righteousness and let the Bible define it for us. The following explanation is based on biblical texts.

Biblically, *righteous* means justified, in good standing with God, innocent, or morally upright. In contrast, *unrighteous* means unjust, in the wrong, guilty, or wicked.^[2] Finally, *self-righteous*, which we will explore in more detail later, describes people who are trying to find their own way to God. Self-righteous people, “being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3). Going forward, I hope that these definitions give you a good framework to understand what righteousness is and is not so that you can apply these concepts biblically.

The Carnal Christian

When we misunderstand biblical righteousness, we can become “carnal Christians.” Carnal Christians tend to remain stuck in their bad habits and sin rather than abiding in their new identity in Christ. They pursue spiritual milk instead of meat (1 Corinthians 3:1–3). This leaves them malnourished and unable to grow into all that God has for them. Carnal Christians live in the works of the flesh instead of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19–25).

Mature believers are not the ones who have all of the knowledge, but the ones who accept by faith to walk in the knowledge they do have. Mature believers abide in their identity in Christ.

First Corinthians 3:12–17 makes it clear that how you build your life will eventually become evident. If you invest in earthly, fleshly things, it will be exposed when God requires an account of your life. Don't be one who lives in carnality and does not abide in your true identity, then is exposed for what you are on Judgment Day (Romans 14:10–12). Be someone who abides in Christ. Be a believer who “fight[s] the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12). Fight to renew your mind and allow your inner person to lead you (Romans 12:2). Fight to crucify your flesh and put it under complete control (Romans 8:13).

The Self-Righteous Christian

I think that it's prideful and falsely humble to deny the very things God has given us in our new identity in Christ. Pride and confidence are entirely different. Pride entails arrogance, and when we act pridefully, we are seeking honor for ourselves. By contrast, when we receive from God His gift of righteousness through faith and this drives us to walk confidently in obedience to His Word, it honors and pleases Him.

Self-righteousness is putting trust in our own ability and striving to be right by our own ways. Receiving the righteousness of God by faith is a biblical gospel response (Romans 4:3; Philippians 3:9; Hebrews 11:7). Love is freely given, not earned (Ephesians 2:8). However, love must also be received for it to have any effect. God has freely given His love, and if we choose to receive that love, it will manifest fully in our lives.

When you don't walk in the righteousness of God, being either self-righteous or a carnal Christian, you will easily fall prey to ignorance of His promises as well as rebellion against His words. In the book of Judges, the children of Israel were not intimately connected to the Lord firsthand, but had only heard about Him from the previous generation. This led to their ignorance and ultimate rebellion against God's desires (Judges 2). That is why understanding this topic is essential to your spiritual maturity.

Forsake Your Old Identity

James 1:14 tells us that “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” If your mind is not renewed by God's Word, your desires will not be His (Romans 12:2). The desires of the flesh will

end up drawing you away and enticing you. When desire conceives, “it gives birth to sin,” and sin produces death (James 1:15).

Do you see the subtlety of the damage that an unrenewed mind can do to your identity in Christ? When you walk outside of a renewed mind, you have no one but yourself to blame for the sin you commit.

So, in what do you find your identity other than in Christ? Here are some examples of things that may keep you from abiding in your true identity in Christ if you put them above your identity in Him:

- Your denominational leaning or religious group
- Your reputation with others
- Your family or marital status
- Your race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status
- Your gifts and talents
- Your occupation, hobby, or favorite sports team
- A political party or social justice movement
- The toleration of sin in your own life or the lives of others in the name of “love”

If you want to abide fully in your identity in Christ, it will mean utterly forsaking your old identity (Ephesians 4:22–24). You cannot keep one foot in the identity of your old nature and one in your new nature and expect to abide in your identity in Christ. If you are double-minded, you cannot expect to receive anything from God (James 1:6–8).

What are some of your excuses as to why you have not made Christ the Lord of your life and submitted to His kingdom? “This is just how I am” is a common excuse. If you truly believe this statement, then you must wrestle with the question of whether God created you that way or you are living in your sinful nature.

Abide in Your Identity in Christ

A lot of people have a hard time digesting the revelation that God would, and did, make us righteous. Most Christians live with a sin consciousness

even after they are born again. This means that the awareness and thoughts that speak to right standing with God are overshadowed by sin in the mind (Romans 7:13–25). Many Christians, in my experience, would not confess, “I am the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What God says about your salvation here and now is enough to transform your life to a place you have never been. The promise of His presence alone should be enough to convince anyone of the righteousness provided through Christ.

You have a choice to love the things of the world or the things of the Father (1 John 2:15). If you do not renew your mind, you are doomed to live in the lust that is in the world (1 John 2:16). This will stunt and cripple your new identity in Christ.

The renewal of your mind is an act of your will. There are no magic answers to this. Renewal comes down to you making the choice to do things differently. You must actively replace your old thinking with the knowledge of God.

Romans 12:1–2 speaks about continually renewing our minds in the process of sanctification. Abiding in your identity is a lifestyle. It’s not about a one-time decision, a once-a-week church service, or a once-a-year resolution. It’s about daily abiding in intimacy with Christ.

This new life and identity will be contrary to the way you lived your entire life prior to salvation. The change will take discipline and intentionality. You must determine to live in the Spirit all day, every day. That is why it is called abiding in your identity. You must continue to remain there (John 15:1–10). The minute you are pulled aside to another identity or driven by fleshly lust, you start to live outside of who you are in Christ.

If we understand and live in our identity in Christ, we can seek, pursue, and see the Father’s heart to view our world through that lens. Wake up every day and ask the Lord to show you His heart in your decisions. Prayerfully navigate His Word. Sanctify the Word of God in your heart and have a defense for the hope in you (1 Peter 3:15). Live in personal abandonment and absolute trust in God, knowing that He is “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

When hell is breaking loose around you, dig into your identity, seeking His perspective and hearing His heart. Love the hell out of people, for love

covers sins (1 Peter 4:8). Love allows us to look past our disagreements and agree on the Father's heart (1 Corinthians 13:4–7).

Be cautious of what voices you are allowing to speak into your life. Every voice has a purpose and an agenda. Don't let people around you, political parties, evangelical leaders, patriots, or any other voices influence your heart away from God. Make sure that your anchor and center is Christ—His Word, His identity, His perspective, and His heart. Do not be pulled away into intellectual deception that goes against the peace in your heart from God. Take every thought and influence in your world captive to the Word of God (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Living Out Your Identity in Christ

There are three fundamental aspects to living out your identity in Christ: experiencing Christ, growing in Christ, and sharing His love with others.

As you learn to abide in your identity, you should find a way to experience Christ in every aspect of your day. This can happen in a time of prayer, worship, or devotion, or it can mean involving Him in everyday activities. Abiding in Christ takes a big commitment. There are many things fighting for your time, and the tyranny of the urgent usually wins out. You must make Him the priority, including Him in every part of your day. Remember that Christ should be the center of your life, not just the first item on a list for the day.

When you are spending time with God every day, you will grow in your relationship with Him. You will grow in your perception of who God is and who you are in relationship with Him, and you will grow in the gifts that He has given you. You will grow in the knowledge of the Word, in your faith, and in righteousness.

This process of sanctification will equip you to share the love of Christ in practical ways with those in your circle of influence. When you experience and grow in God every day, sharing Him will be a natural outflow of your life. When you abide in your identity in Christ, you accept that love should be your response to people in every situation. You gladly give this love because you are operating out of a transformed heart (Romans 13:8–10). You also realize that love puts others' needs before yours (Philippians 2:3–4). Servanthood becomes a joy to you as you model Christ, because your identity is wrapped up in Him (Galatians 5:13–14).

Remember, sanctification is a process that happens over a lifetime. Be patient, but be hopeful that God will fulfill His promises to you as you abide in your identity in Him.

CHAPTER THREE

Holiness: Christ's Identity Shining Through You

Many people think that living in our identity in Christ somehow takes away from the glory of God. This is not the case! Living in our identity in Him celebrates His heart for His children.

God is sovereign and supreme. We are His offspring, who carry His nature and show His glory through our transformed lives (Acts 17:28). When we walk in our identity in Christ and reflect God's image, He is glorified. We become holy people, set apart for Him (1 Corinthians 1:2).

What Is Holiness?

As we've already seen, the topic of righteousness is one of the most misunderstood topics in the Christian community today. Righteousness is directly related to holiness. Until you understand and walk in righteousness, sin will dominate you. Living in holiness is not something you can accomplish through striving. It is a fruit of an intimate, abiding relationship with Christ. In other words, holiness is the fruit of righteousness. Although righteousness cannot be earned, it should produce a change in you that leads you into good works and eventual holiness before God. This is a process that happens over your lifetime (Romans 6:14–23).

Which Kingdom Do You Live In?

Either we live in worldly kingdoms, where sin continues to reign and hold us back from what God desires for us in our walk with Christ, or we live in God's kingdom as we abide in our righteous identity in Christ, producing the fruit of holiness.

The first worldly kingdom is the kingdom of self. Many in the church today are deceived by what they believe is their place in the body of Christ. Many have called upon Jesus to save them from hell, but they have not progressed past that point. They understand Jesus to be the One who saves them from things, gives them things, and blesses them with things. However, there is no lifestyle of repentance, submission, discipline, or obedience. These people think that life is about them and their kingdom. All roads in their kingdom lead to self. They only invite others into their lives who will serve their kingdom desires.

The second worldly kingdom is the kingdom of religion, politics, and society. The people who live in this kingdom are self-righteous. They follow the rules and organizational principles upon which their kingdom was founded. They find comfort in their ability to look a certain way and align their behaviors with a certain set of beliefs.

Citizens of this second kingdom do not have the joy of the Lord or of their salvation. Many in this kingdom do not subscribe to the biblical gospel. Their way to God comes through a works-based mindset. Their kingdom places the traditions of men before the Word of God (Colossians 2:8). As a result, they view manmade traditions, institutions, and entities as the objects of their religion. They believe that if they adhere to the rules, they are righteous before God. People who live in the second kingdom are distant from the heart of God.

Look at Christ's kingdom in contrast to these two. In order to live in Christ's kingdom and make Him Lord, you must abide in your identity in Christ. When we make Christ the Lord of our lives, we become true disciples of Him. But this is not easy. It is a call to deny yourself for the sake of following Christ (Luke 9:23). This is the initial step that moves a believer who has called on God for salvation to call on Him as Lord. In my opinion, you're not automatically a disciple because you believe. Many believers are not disciples.

Lordship takes commitment and sacrifice. Discipleship will take you the rest of your life. Christ's goal is that you, through intimacy with Him, will be a fully devoted follower of Him.

Salvation costs you nothing. It is the free gift that God gives to everyone who believes (Ephesians 2:8–9). Discipleship will cost you everything. It is a call to die (Galatians 2:20). You no longer are living for yourself but for Christ.

I want you to see the great gift of righteousness that has been bestowed upon you in Christ. Stop taking this gift for granted. Don't take this knowledge and live as you have lived in the past. Live as a child of the King, transformed from the inside and empowered by His Spirit (Romans 8:12–17).

Your Identity Is Holiness in Him

You are called to be a part of this holy, called-out people of God. You are identified by His presence and holiness. You have been called out of darkness. You once were lost in this world, but now you have your identity in Christ (Ephesians 5:8–14).

John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...." The same gospel was preached to all, but it was only the ones who took the knowledge and applied faith who received any benefit.

The word *right* in this verse is *exousia* in the Greek, which generally indicates power or authority.^[3] We have the authority to call ourselves children of God! Again, we are talking about appropriating the promise of the righteousness of God in our lives. If you don't have the full truth about this, you will neglect to walk in the fullness of your identity.

I encourage you to study these scriptures carefully and let them speak the value of God over you. Step out in faith and receive the fullness of your identity in Him. Don't allow anything to stand in the way of full righteousness in Christ. Don't settle for half of the gospel truth.

God created us to find our acceptance in Him. We are so desperate for love and acceptance that we often choose bad love and bad acceptance. When we don't understand biblically defined righteousness, it is easy to find our identity in horizontal, earthly things.

As a disciple of Christ, you should find great joy in your identity in Him. If you are finding your identity in anything outside of Christ, then you are not experiencing the fullness of abiding in His identity.

God Helps You Accomplish What He Commands

For too long, we have taught believers that the battle against sin is not something that can be overcome on this side of heaven. This should not be the case. Our identity in Christ gives us new affections and fruits of the Holy Spirit. He lives in us and will empower us to live in obedience and holiness (1 John 3:9; 1 John 5:18). Praise God for this blessing! This is a huge part of the gospel message. The wages of sin amount only to death, but the free gift of God is obedience, holiness, and everlasting life (Romans 6:23).

Do you see the power you have over a sinful lifestyle when you abide in your identity in Christ? God calls you to holiness, and He will make provision for you to walk in it (1 Peter 1:3). If God commands it, then He will provide a way for you to live in it.

The truth of God's Word does not condemn you unless you reject it. The Word of God will bring conviction when you begin to understand that a change is needed in your life. When God exposes a false identity in your life, it is an act of His grace. He is giving you the opportunity to see the truth and make the necessary changes to walk in it.

To say that God loves us in our sin, in spite of our sin, and just the way we are is biblical. However, to say that God affirms and blesses our sinful lifestyles is not the gospel. Loving you in your sin is not the same as blessing or condoning your sin. The power of the gospel is that God loves you too much to allow you to live in your sinful identity. People who live as their own lords want God to bless whatever they do, even when their desires go against His holiness.

These people never experience the fullness of an intimate, abiding relationship with Christ. They never experience the joy of submission to Christ and the love and security that come with that. They strive in their unrighteousness, never fully abiding in their true identity.

Unfortunately, in my experience, a large majority of church people today live in this mindset. They live according to their own kingdoms, their own

rules, and their own perspectives.

I want you to take what you've learned here and abide in your identity in Christ. Don't settle for less than what God has promised you in the gospel: salvation, a life empowered by the Holy Spirit, and deep, abiding intimacy with Christ.

CONCLUSION

Continual Abiding

No matter how long we have been Christians, we should never stop learning about and reflecting upon what it means to abide in our true identity in Christ. Abiding in our identity in Him is a process that occurs throughout our entire lives. We should always seek to understand more about God, self-feed on His Word, and pray for His continuing work in our lives. We can never do too much in these regards.

My prayer is that this book has better equipped you for ongoing growth in Christ and that you experience deeper intimacy with Him that overflows into others' lives.

You may have come to the end of this book feeling daunted as you consider how much more you have to learn about abiding in Christ. At least, that's what I hope has happened! If you want to learn more about your identity in Him, I encourage you to check out the expanded treatment of this theme in my full-length book *Abiding in Identity: Who I Am Because of Whose I Am* .

[Click here to delve deeper into who you are in Christ with *Abiding in Identity*!](#)

ABIDING *IN* IDENTITY NATE SWEENEY



ABIDING *in* IDENTITY

Who I am Because of Whose I Am

NATE SWEENEY

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Notes

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