

Episode 253

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today is going to be an extra fun episode for me, because if you've listened or watched a bunch of our podcast episodes, you know that we occasionally interview the author of a book, talking about the book, talking about the questions that we get that fit along with what the book is about and so forth. Well, today, Gwen, our Manager of Volunteer Services and Associate Editor, is coming on the podcast to talk about the book that she wrote, and this was just recently published. The book is titled, A Life Abiding, Waiting Well, and Experiencing Abundance in Christ. I'm just excited to have Gwen on, because I've read the book, truly enjoyed it, learned a lot through it, and also, I've known Gwen for, oh, wow, approaching 15 years now. She served as a volunteer before she became an employee of the ministry. In reading the book, I can hear Gwen's voice. I can see Gwen's personality throughout the book, so that made it particularly enjoyable for me. So, Gwen, thank you for joining me on the Got Questions podcast.

Gwen Sellers

Well, thank you so much for having me today. It's, yeah, just such a joy to be able to share this book with the world and celebrate what God has done. So, thanks for inviting me.

Shea Houdmann

You're welcome. So, Gwen, what led you to write A Life Abiding? Why the topic of abiding in Christ in particular?

Gwen Sellers

You know, it's really a fun God story. I actually hadn't really been anticipating writing a book. It wasn't a lifelong dream or anything, but just the season of life that I was in, it felt like everywhere I looked, I was just waiting for everything. I mean, even my church did a year of Sabbath where we kind of cleared the church calendar of events every seventh week and just had an all-church worship night and really sought to rest in the Lord and seek Him in special ways. My dad was in the nursing home in his last year of Huntington's disease and just various other things going on.

Gwen Sellers

And like everywhere I went, I just kept bringing up this theme of waiting. And as part of that, I was invited to speak at a women's event and they asked me to do a devotional. Actually, I was there to share with them about Got Questions, but they also asked me to do a devotional on Psalm 27:14. And

from that devotional and then a few weeks later, I was at a writer's conference and it all just came together.

Gwen Sellers

But for me, as I realized when I was writing it, I realized not only was I being able to process the current season, but it was really bringing up for me these lifelong passions that God has given me, like the word abiding and just being able to abide in Christ and how that leads to abundant life has always been really meaningful to me. And it really shifted my perspective to see in the waiting, I got to really watch for all that God was doing and just have that excited anticipation. So yeah, I mean, it's just a really cool God story that I feel like I'm probably more surprised than anybody else that I wrote a book. So praise God, I hope that He uses it for people.

Shea Houdmann

For sure. I'm confident they will. We get a fair number of questions about, like, what does it mean to abide in Christ? We have an article on that topic and it gets a lot of views. And I don't know how much of it is the word abide. It's kind of a, I wouldn't say it's like a King James type of word, but it's not a word we typically use in normal American English conversation. It's kind of a Christian-easy type of word. So I don't know if a lot of people don't know what the word means, but all that aside, what does it mean to abide? Specifically, what does it mean to abide in Christ?

Gwen Sellers

So abide is such a great word. And really, I think of it as, I mean, it means to dwell and to just be with someone. You think of like an abode is your home, so it's dwelling. And you think of just all the ways that God, I mean, from Genesis to Revelation, talks about dwelling with people. And so abiding is us dwelling with God. And Jesus uses the example of a vine and branches. So, you know, like as the branch is connected to the vine, that's that sense of abiding.

Shea Houdmann

I love the example that with the abode, which again, an abode is your home and abiding is being in that. So it's the sense of peace. There's something about being home that provides you with comfort. And I think that's kind of the same feeling we're going for when we're abiding in Christ that we know God's got this, you know, God's in control of the situation. Therefore, I can just exhale, so to speak, knowing that as much as I love to vacation, usually towards the end of the vacation, I really, really just want to be home. I want to have that feeling. And it's a similar feeling that we're talking about here with abiding, correct?

Gwen Sellers

Definitely. Yeah. And I love that illustration. Like you do think, OK, when I go home, I can just relax and be myself, like I'm fully seen and I'm fully known. I also kind of think of abiding as becoming part of the fabric of something when you are really just like your home. I mean, you know, it isn't your home if you are not part of it. And so kind of the way that that we abide in Christ of, yeah, like we are at home with him and then allowing him to make his home with us and allowing him to really like influence us and. Yeah, and to like really make that kind of difference. So, yeah, excellent illustration.

Shea Houdmann

So when kind of looking at Got Questions, we get questions and we all start off with this before I jump into that. What's the difference between abiding and waiting?

Gwen Sellers

Good question. So I do have to say the English word abide. It makes me laugh because one of the definitions is this like patient endurance. Oh, I can't abide that type of behavior. And I think that's often how we think of waiting of it's just this gigantic waste of time until what we want to happen finally does. But that's not at all the biblical sense of the word. Waiting is this expectancy and this hope. And so you're like eagerly looking.

Gwen Sellers

And my favorite illustration for this is one of my nephews. So when he was three, I was at their house and he was like waiting for his dad to come home from work. And so asked, when is dad going to be home? And it was still going to be 20 minutes away. And I'm thinking, all right, this toddler, this isn't going to happen. But he wants to go outside and wait for daddy. And he just sits on the sidewalk, happy as can be for 20 minutes, looking down the street until his dad's car comes. And so that's the kind of waiting.

Gwen Sellers

And, you know, like, well, so here's the other thing that for me kind of linked this story with Psalm 27 is like he was just so expectant for his dad because he knew his dad was going to come. His dad comes home every day.

And what happens when his dad comes home is he gets to have a little joyride in the car like his dad would stop the car. He'd get in and ride down the driveway. But, you know, he wasn't so much excited about, oh, I get a car ride as daddy's going to be here. And so that's that biblical sense of waiting is we are waiting and looking expectant expectantly for God. And we really are looking for him. I mean, yes, we want what he's going to do, what he's going to move in that circumstance. But it's really just that I know God is going to show up. And so I'm peeling my eyes expectant.

Shea Houdmann

I love that picture. That's just the concept of the biblical definition of hope, a confident expectations, not as a, oh, I hope it's going to happen, but I don't really think it's real. It's like, no, I knowing that and trusting that moving forward is it's powerful. So go ahead.

Gwen Sellers

Oh, I was just going to say, I think that sense of expectancy also helps us see that waiting isn't just like I'm twiddling my thumbs until something happens because we're actively involved, like we're praying. We're looking for God to be on the move. We're abiding in him while we're waiting, developing that relationship. So, yeah. So I love what you said, that sense of hope of there's certainty, but also that like sense of activity within the meeting.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent. Well said. The question I'm kind of getting to is thinking through some of the questions we get about abiding, waiting and so forth. People, how do we not view it as an excuse for inactivity? Like I'm abiding in Christ and for this, I'm waiting on the Lord for this. I'm trusting the Lord for this in the sense of I'm not going to do anything. I'm just going to trust that God's going to handle it.

Shea Houdmann

I remember back in Bible college, one of our chapel speakers talked about like waiting on the Lord is not an excuse for inactivity, that if you you're in college, you need to find a job. It is highly unlikely a company with a job opening is going to just call you out of the blue and offer you a job. You've got to actually get out there and find one. But that does not contradict the idea of trusting God, waiting on God, abiding in Christ. So how do you, how does abiding, trusting, waiting, hoping even, not become just that God's going to do it, therefore I don't have to do anything?

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, that's a great question. And, you know, I think for me, it really is the abiding portion that makes the difference because abiding implies an active relationship. So when I am abiding in Christ, like I am continually coming into his presence and seeking him. And so I'm doing things like praying and I'm seeing where God is moving and I'm seeking wisdom.

Gwen Sellers

The other thing is God has already given us his word. And there's tons and tons of clear instructions in there. I mean, nobody has to wait around to love another person or like, OK, I'm just like waiting to see if God wants me to tell the truth in this situation or not. Obviously, you need to tell the truth. So there are just so many things for what we should be doing that, yeah, that we can't just wait around.

Gwen Sellers

I also think, you know, when it comes to something specific like, OK, I'm looking for a job. To me, often waiting implies more of an attitude and less so it's less about what I'm actually doing and more of an attitude. So if I'm looking for a job and waiting for the Lord to provide, I am doing those responsible things like putting out my resume, making contacts, all of that stuff. And yet I'm not seeking to control. I'm not going to choose second best. I'm not going to compromise my values for, you know, like if I'm bad, like a job offer that you get, that's not going to be ethical because I'm ultimately trusting in God to do it. So it's kind of this both.

Gwen Sellers

And like another passage. I think it's Psalm 131. It's about I have I've not set my eyes on things too lofty for me, but I'm like a weaned child with his mother. And that's how we can be with the Lord is we're not anxious and, you know, like just constantly seeking something or crying or like afraid that he's not going to provide for us. We're just with him and yet still doing things. So, yeah, I don't know. I mean, is that clear?

Gwen Sellers

No, for sure. I think what you said about being more of an attitude than an action or a lack of action, that's helpful. Like waiting on the Lord doesn't mean not doing anything, but it's a matter of what your attitude is. Are you trusting in God? Maybe to go back to the looking for a job type of situation? Well, waiting on the Lord doesn't mean waiting for job opportunities to fall in your lap. It's like waiting, trusting that God's going to provide the right type of job. God's going to provide the job in the right timing. God's going to not going to ask you to take a job that would compromise anything in Scripture, those type of things. That doesn't mean not actively pursuing a job.

Shea Houdmann

So, yeah, that's a struggle I had a few times in my Christian life. And waiting to me turned into an inactivity, like an excuse for, well, I'm not going to do anything until God makes his plan clear. Rather, what God wanted me to do, actively pursue him, and therefore I'm ready when he does provide. I'm not just sitting around, kind of the God-can't-steer-a-parked-car concept, that when you're moving, God can change the direction you're going. But if you're just sitting there waiting, God could just boost the car, get it in action for you. But generally, he tends to divert someone who's already moving rather than trying to get someone to actually move, at least in my experience.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, and I do agree. I will say, like, I think this is for me why prayer is so important, because I do think there are times when God tells us, stop, like

your, you know, it's like your activity is just is toil or is distracting from somebody else. You know, like I think about kind of parents with their adult children and needing to let go. And there's that, OK, I'm not going to be a helicopter parent or like the, OK, I have some really helpful advice, but I'm not going to say that because I'm allowing God to work. So there are times in our waiting, I think that it legitimately is, you know, OK, you've sent enough resumes. Stop. I want you to do nothing for, you know, a certain amount of time. But I mean, we only know that when we're coming to God in prayer and when he's making it, yeah, making it clear to us.

Gwen Sellers

But I do agree with you that I mean, the majority of the times, like, yes, God is calling us to actively participate and do something. And then he directs and redirects. And you're right, when we're actually when we're doing something, when we're seeking the Lord and maybe we're kind of moving in the wrong way, he's certainly going to correct that. We don't have to stand paralyzed in fear that, well, you know, I don't want to do the wrong thing, so I'm not going to move. I think you're right. You start moving. And if it's wrong, God redirects because that's your heart intention is to honor him. And so he's going to help you do that.

Shea Houdmann

So, Gwen, give us an example of time where you were struggling with something, didn't know what God's will was or didn't know which direction to go, where abiding, that attitude of abiding really either confirmed or clarified what God wanted you to do.

Gwen Sellers

That's a good question. Well, so I think for me, what happened, I mean, and this is kind of a roundabout way of answering your question, but for me in the season of waiting that I had, I had to get really honest about here are the things that I actually desire. And I had to allow myself to have actual desires and knowing that they could be totally disappointing. But I just, yeah, I just ended up growing in those desires. And you know what? That is not what God did. He redirected them.

Gwen Sellers

And so I think for me, it was really just wrestling through that of being willing to be honest with myself and to keep pressing that way and to keep having the door closed and say, OK, God, well, what are you doing here? Because clearly it isn't this. So redirect my eyes. Yeah.

Gwen Sellers

And again, it came back for me to prayer. But here was the other thing that was super helpful is community. I didn't do any of it alone. Like I shared with

other people, here's what I'm processing, here's what I'm wanting, here's what doesn't seem to be happening and like what is going on here. And they helped me and spoke truth and could see they could observe the situation and reflect things back to me or ask me questions that helped me really reflect.

Gwen Sellers

And I will say there were also times where I thought, oh, it looks like the thing that I wanted, God is doing that. And I knew he already told me no, but maybe he changed his mind. And I mean, you know, and sometimes God does direct people and and redirect you back to something you thought was a no does become a yes later on. But that wasn't the case here. And so that is exactly what community was helpful. For me is like praying about it and going back to them and saying, like, well, are you sure God told me no? What if it looks like yes? And they could remind me.

Gwen Sellers

So, yeah, I mean, so I guess like the basic things that all Christians need, right, is like you need God's word to be grounded in truth. You need to be with like in communion with him through prayer and you need other people like abiding isn't just me and God. It is that. But it's also other people.

Shea Houmann

I loved your emphasis on community in the book and the two main passages talked about Psalm 27 a lot and also John 15 and John 15, it says, like, I am the vines. God speaking, you are the branches, plural, not just I'm the vine. You are the branch. So the being a branch is a community project. And I love how several times you mentioned I was thinking this, but then my community helped me to correct my thinking or help me clarify my thinking. So John 15, what were some of the key aspects of that passage that really apply to abiding? Obviously, the word is used, but how does that passage fit overall into how God led you to understand what it means to abide in Christ?

Gwen Sellers

Well, you know, I was just rethinking this through in preparation for this interview and like and it just has all of it. I mean, it starts with God is the source. He's the vine. We are the branches. And it also talks about, you know, Jesus says, I have loved you as the father has loved me. So I'm thinking like this fits totally into the whole grander redemptive narrative, right? Like it starts with just God is and then he chooses to create us. And then he's the one who initiates and pursues in salvation. So we've got that basis of, all right, I'm abiding in God.

Gwen Sellers

And then you do have that relational and the one to one, like it's like I personally need salvation and I need to abide in God. And he's the one who

produces the fruit. So it's not about self-effort, but then you also have like as you go through that, Jesus talks about abiding in his word and, you know, common Christian thing. We talk about the Bible, like you need to know God's word. He has revealed it to us. And so we need to be secure in truth is a major part of abiding. Then Jesus talks about prayer. And again, like prayer is a major part of abiding. He talks about obedience to his commands and links that with joy. And yeah, like obeying God is an important part of abiding. We're not really dwelling with him if we're not doing the things he calls us to do. He talks about community. What is Jesus's command? That you love one another. And then it's also so that the world may know, you know, he talks about inviting us into his work in the world, which just astounds me. And I think you also see that from the beginning of creation of people are invited in to participate in what God is doing. And Jesus's high priestly prayer, he talks about believers being one so that the world may know. And yeah, and you see that again in John 15.

Gwen Sellers

So it's like it has purpose. It's not just be this little community of believers and like, and also just you and God. It's it's for a reason so that other people can come in. Yeah. And it also talks about God being glorified. So so actually, as I was rethinking this through, I was kind of shocked at how much is encapsulated in those verses.

Gwen Sellers

And I was also reminded of the way God is just so consistent. I mean, I think I even wrote this in the book of if it sounds like I'm repeating myself, it's because I am because all of these themes just keep coming up over and over like God is who he is. And so he keeps reminding us and keeps telling us like kind of the same things, but in deeper ways. So, yeah, that's what I see in it.

Shea Houdmann

The different chapters you had that were primary focused on John 15, I particularly enjoyed those. That's the passage I've studied and loved over the years. And it's interesting, like not being an agrarian society and like I've never been a farmer. I don't understand vines and branches and how things work, but how the passage describes it's such a beautiful picture of who we are in Christ and where our strength comes from, where and just a vine doesn't have to strive on its own. All of its nutrients, all of its strength comes through the vine. The branch is fed by the vine. It's protected by the vine. It's kept alive by the vine. And that's not something we have to maintain. It's something the vine does. And as a branch, our job is to bear fruit. And just that picture, it's so, so powerful that you described it very, very well in your book.

Gwen Sellers

Oh, well, thank you. The other thing, as you're talking, what comes to mind is, yeah, that idea of like the branch needs to receive the nutrients and that's what flows from it. But also that passage does talk about the vine dresser and pruning. So we also even have that idea of like God's discipline and God's growth and like continual sanctification. So it's not just a one and done kind of thing. Like there's that continual pruning and that continual fruit and even seasons. I mean, it's just a really great illustration, which we shouldn't be surprised like Jesus gave it.

Shea Houdmann

But absolutely. So often I'll close an interview on a book with giving the author. Gwen, here is a shameless plug. Who is this book for? Why should those who are listening or watching this episode, why should they want to read this book? How do you picture it helping the people who read it?

Gwen Sellers

That's a great question. So I wrote it really with people in mind, age and stage in mind. So I wrote it for women kind of like 30s and beyond. I was thinking of my book club as I was doing it. And like I said at the beginning, a lot of it was personal processing. I mean, the book does have like its Bible study and personal story all mixed in together. Somebody described it as like an in-depth Bible study that turns out to be an encouraging coffee date. So it is conversational. But yeah, so I wrote it with women really in mind.

Gwen Sellers

But I think it really is just for anybody who wants like who's pursuing the Lord and who wants to go deeper in relationship. And yeah, and to really like to find rest in him and to yearn for him more. And what I hope people walk away with is that sense of peace for living now. I also hope they walk away with a bigger vision of who God is and a bigger vision of what's happening in history, like just the the overarching redemptive narrative of history has become like so meaningful for me. And I for me, that's what waiting and abiding really gives purpose to is God is doing something bigger here and he's invited me to be a part of it. And so like what I'm doing today is part of God's work. And God's work is this like giant history long mission that he's invited me into. So I hope that people walk away with that sense of excitement for for God's purpose for them and that sense of rest and peace in who he is. And just yeah. And so therefore ability to experience abundance in Christ.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent. Well said, I think that's an excellent description of your book. And so as a man who's read your book, I know you said you had women in mind and no sense to I think it reads as a book for for women. So men, if you want to understand abiding in Christ, I'd say I highly recommend this book for you

as well, speaking as a man. So Gwen, thank you for joining me today. Thank you for writing *A Life Abiding, Waiting Well and Experiencing Abundance in Christ*. And again, to our listeners, I highly recommend this book, not just because Gwen's a friend, a co-worker, but because I really think it describes what it means to abide in Christ very well in both a personal and understandable and practical approach. So, Gwen, excellent job.

Gwen Sellers

Well, thank you so much for that and for having me and letting me get to share with people.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah. So we'll include links to where the book can be purchased in the show notes at podcast.gotquestions.org and also on our YouTube channel when this video goes live. So, Gwen, thank you again for joining me today. Again, the book is *A Life Abiding, Waiting Well and Experiencing Abundance in Christ*. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.