

How Are Abiding in Christ and Loving God Linked?

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Life together is better.

Clownfish and sea anemones know the benefits of life together.

Sea anemones live on coral reefs.

Their tentacles are lined with stingers that release toxins when a small animal touches them.

The toxins paralyze the animals, allowing the sea anemone to haul them in and eat them.

But clownfish bodies are covered in a mucus that keeps the stingers from firing.

So, clownfish are able to swim around comfortably right inside the anemone.

There, they are safe and sound from predators. The clownfish benefit from life together.

And the brightly colored clownfish are lures that attract unsuspecting would-be predators to the stingers of the anemones. The anemones benefit from life together.¹

Life together is better. Particularly, life together with God is better than life apart from him.

Jesus is God come to be with us.

The Bible tells us that when we were created, we were able to see God face to face.

But after we sinned, we could no longer be face-to-face with God. Because God is holy and we are sinful, we cannot be in His presence. We can't just see God.

So, we experienced God as apart from us. We were tempted to conclude that He is against us.

Then, when Jesus was born, God the Son, the eternal Word of God, took on flesh.

Jesus is Immanuel: "God with us."

Then, in Jesus, we human beings could experience Him and experience God in the flesh, face to face as we long for. We had life together, and life together is better.

But then Jesus said that He was going to die, rise again, and return to heaven.

We wouldn't see him face to face any longer. Would we have life together?

Before his crucifixion, Jesus said that He would be with us always.

In John chapter 14, Jesus told the disciples that God -- he Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- would come to us and make a home with us. Always.

He clarifies what that looks like here in John chapter 15.

He is promising to abide in and with us, and He is inviting us to abide in and with Him.

That's what we were created for: Life together with God.

So how do we get life together with God?

¹ <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/symbiosis-art-living-together/>

Jesus links abiding in Him with loving Him.

Then He links loving Him with obeying Him.

And He finally connects obeying Him with getting joy.

That means that obeying Him is an important key that unlocks a love relationship with Him, life together with Him, and the joy that we are longing for.

Jesus assures us that he loves us.

In John 15:9, Jesus assures us that He loves us.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.”

Jesus assures us that He loves us.

Don't let this insight pass by too quickly.

Jesus says that He loves us. He has loved us. That answers the question we were wondering about. Is God -- whom wH can't see -- for us or against us? He is for us.

Jesus says that he loves us. God, who created us, loves us!

It's one of the most significant things we will ever hear.

Jesus' love for us is modeled on the love between God the Father and God the Son.

When Jesus was baptized, God the Father spoke and proclaimed that Jesus is His beloved Son and that He is pleased with Him.

In **John 3:35** Jesus adds that the Father who loves him has given him all things:

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

And Jesus proclaims His own love for his Father and what that love looks like. In **John 10:37-38** Jesus says,

“If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.”

The love between God the Father and God the Son is the model for Jesus' love for us.

Jesus is inviting us into the life of God.

I can't stop marveling at this thought!

The life of God is in us; we are being infused with divinity!

We are invited to participate in the life of God; we are being surrounded by divinity!

It is an invitation from Jesus to an entirely higher and bigger way of living.

God, who is infinite, created us. Then he gave man a position of honor and glory within creation.

Now, Jesus tells us, he loves us and fills us with His very life and invites us to share in His life.

Do we get this, or are we missing it? To understand what we may be missing, consider an ant.

Ants live in an ant hill, an underground colony.

In that underground colony, they go about their daily business. They create tunnels and rooms.

Some ants come out into the bigger world to forage for food and to push back threats. But life centers around the ant hill. Some ants will live almost exclusively underground in their colonies. They think that is life in all its fullness. What they do not fully understand is just what a big, beautiful world exists above ground. Nor do they understand fully just how much their lives below ground are influenced by what happens above ground in the big, wide, sunny world! And we are like those ants in an ant hill. We are consumed with our everyday and physical lives like the ants are consumed with life in the colony, as if that's all there is. But beyond us, just beyond our sight, is the spiritual realm and the life of God. It's bigger and beautiful. And it impacts our everyday lives in ways we don't always understand. And God is inviting us to do life with Him in that much bigger, more beautiful realm. Do we want to live like ants? Jesus invites us to do something more.

Jesus invites us to abide in His love.

The word "Abide" is a rich word that may require some explanation.

We don't use the word "abide" in English very often. It's one way to translate a word in Greek into English. Like the word "abide," that word in Greek is rich with meaning. Jesus tells us to abide in his love. What do we mean by abide?

To abide in Jesus' love is to: Remain, not leave.

In fact, some translations use the word "remain" instead of the word "abide" here. This is reminiscent of the call elsewhere in the New Testament to endure in Christian living. Since the Christian life can be difficult, strenuous, and even costly at times, the New Testament frequently tells us to keep on and to not stop. The call to abide in Jesus is also a call to remain, to stay, and not leave or quit. But that's just the beginning of the possibility.

To abide in Jesus' love is to: Connect, not disconnect.

Jesus is inviting us into a relationship with Him. This relationship is personal, meaning that it is person-to-person, Jesus-to-us. It is not face to face, but more. It is spirit to spirit. Jesus, God the Son, wants a connection with us, a relationship with us, and time with us. And that is the point of what we sometimes call the spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines are things like studying the Bible, praying, memorizing the Bible, fasting, worshipping, and the like. These spiritual practices bring us into contact with and relationship with God. We can either actively connect with God, or we can disconnect from God. Jesus is calling us to connect with Him, and that leads me to ask: How you are doing at the spiritual disciplines or practices in your own life? Are you studying the Bible, praying, and somehow connecting with God?

If you're not, is it because you've just stopped? Do you think you're busy? Do you think you've got something more important going on in life? Jesus, the Son of God, is telling you that He wants to connect with you, that He wants you to be "in" Him and to connect with Him, and He is telling you that He wants to be "in" you and connect with you. Now, what is more important than connecting with and being filled with the life and power of God daily?

If you're not connecting, is it because you don't know how? Then don't you think it's time to get someone to teach you? Stop making excuses.

To abide in Jesus' love is to: Draw life from Him, not from the world.

Last week we read that Jesus called Himself "the vine" and called us "branches."

Branches don't get water and nutrients from themselves. They draw them from elsewhere.

By telling us to abide in Him and that He will abide in us, Jesus is telling us to draw our life and nutrients from Him, not from somewhere else.

If we are not attached to Jesus the true vine, then we are probably trying to attach to something else, trying to draw life and nutrients from it. To be blunt, if we are not attached to the King and the Kingdom of God, then we are probably attached to the kingdoms of this world. We are drawing what life we can and what nutrients we can from the world.

That means that we are being filled with the polluted life of this world and the nutrients that come from this world. We are probably drawing from the culture, values, and customs of this world. We are building our lives on them, making them more and more a part of ourselves.

And that's going to lead to bad stuff now. We become polluted, shells of what we were meant to be. It's going to lead to an even worse fate later on because we are not abiding in Jesus.

To understand what Jesus means, think about a lamp. We are kind of like a lamp.

A lamp may be pretty on its own.

On its own, though, that lamp is not much good at giving light.

However, plug that lamp in, and if electricity flows and there is a lightbulb, then that lamp can shine and give light.

So, what does He mean by tell us to abide in him?

He means that we are to get plugged in, stay plugged in, draw electricity, and shine.

Jesus calls us to abide in his love by obeying him.

In John 15:10, Jesus calls us to abide in His love by obeying Him:

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."

Jesus' relationship with His Father is the model once again.

Jesus obeyed his Father's will perfectly in His earthly life. He was sinless in every way.

Even in His death on the cross, He openly stated that He wanted to avoid the cross if possible.

In **Matthew 26:39** Jesus prayed,

... "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ..."

But then He went on to say,

"... nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Jesus always did his Father's will, and He is the model for what He wants from us.

Jesus tells us to keep His commandments.

What does Jesus mean by His "commandments?"

Does He mean all of the Old Testament Law with its ritual obligations? No.

Does He even mean the entire moral law, particularly the Ten Commandments? Not exactly.

Jesus has a different take on what it means to obey His commandments, God's commandments. We will look more closely at what His commandments are next week.

For now, Jesus tells us that to abide in His love, we must keep His commandments.

He has said this before. In **John 14:15** Jesus has already said,

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

He has already linked loving Him with obeying His commandments. What is it to love Him? It is to obey Him.

To understand what Jesus means, let's consider the opposite. Let's think about what life with God is like when we disobey Him.

It's tough to imagine that we have a close connection with God when we are deliberately, frequently, and flagrantly disobeying Him. Quite the opposite.

We can sin, and we know that we will be forgiven, but if we are sinning intentionally and habitually, we are straining the limits of our love relationship severely.

How do we get life together with God? Obedience is the key that unlocks life together with God.

And Jesus has already made it clear that His full presence is linked with obeying His commandments. In **John 14:23** Jesus said,

... "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Here, in chapter 15, Jesus is expanding on and clarifying what He has already said.

The fullest and deepest sense of us abiding in God (remaining in Him, connecting with Him, and being filled with His life) depends on us keeping His commandments.

And the fullest sense of God abiding in us -- God filling us with His life and doing life with God -- depends on us keeping His commandments.

When we obey God, we make God welcome and at home in our lives.

Obedience is the key that unlocks life together with God.

Jesus offers us joy if we abide.

Then in John 15:11, Jesus offers us joy if we abide in him.

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

When Jesus' love comes flooding our lives, joy comes into our lives as well.

Obviously, Jesus isn't calling us to live a life that is dry and lifeless.

He is life itself, and He has come that we may have life and have it abundantly!

When Jesus' love comes flooding into our lives, we get joy too!

When Jesus dwells in and with us, we get His love and His joy too.

Joy is certainly at stake!

Jesus wants us to have His joy and the fullest kind of joy, but that joy is not guaranteed.

It's tough to have Jesus in us and with us in the full sense when we are disobeying God.

So, it's tough to have Jesus' love in us, and with us to the maximum degree possible, when we are disobeying God and doing our own thing.

That means that it is tough (OK, impossible) to have Jesus' joy and the fullness of joy in our lives when we are disobeying God, pushing Him away, and making ourselves lords of our lives.

If we want joy, then obedience must be part of the process.

Are you missing the joy you really want?

Many of us are.

We want joy. We want love. We want life.

But we are walking around with something else.

We're walking around with worry, with bitterness, and with flatness in life.

We're missing joy, love, and life.

Are you missing the joy you really want in life today?

How do we get joy? Again, obedience is the key that unlocks the joy we want.

We won't have Jesus' joy and the fullness of joy we are looking for, as long as we disobey Him.

We won't have Jesus' love in us and with us as we want, as long as we disobey Him.

We won't have God's presence in us and with us as is possible, when we disobey Him.

Obedience is what enables us to abide in Jesus and enables Jesus to abide in us.

Obedience is the key that unlocks life together with God.

Obedience is the key that unlocks joy.