

How Is Abiding in Christ Shown in How We Love One Another?

Abide Series, March 23 & 24, 2024 (Palm Sunday) | John 15:12-17

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How does one become a friend of God?

Abraham was a friend of God.

Abraham was the patriarch from whom all of Israel eventually descended.

In the book of Genesis, after sin became rampant on the earth, God chose Abraham and promised to give him a land and to multiply his descendants into a great nation and through that nation to bless all the people of earth.

God was revealing his plan to save us through Jesus.

When God called Abraham, Abraham believed him and obeyed. Consistently.

Genesis 15:6 says,

And he [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he [the LORD] counted it to him [Abraham] as righteousness.

God spoke to Abraham multiple times. In fact, when God decided to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, God wondered if he should keep his plan to himself or share it with Abraham. In **Genesis 18:17** we read:

The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do ..."

That's a friendship. God considered Abraham to be his friend.

Isaiah the prophet confirms this friendship. **Isaiah 41:8** says,

***But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend ...***

Abraham was a friend of God.

Moses was a friend of God.

God used Moses to rescue his people Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Then Moses led the people of Israel out of slavery toward Canaan, their promised homeland.

In the wilderness, God continued to meet with Moses, to speak to him, to tell him how to lead, to tell him who he was, and to tell him what God expected from his people.

Exodus 33:11 describes the relationship between God and Moses:

Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. ...

Moses was a friend of God.

How do I become a friend of God?

In some ways, Jesus is describing a change that has already happened. If you are a disciple of Jesus, then you ARE a friend of his because of what he has already done.

Plus, he is describing a lifestyle we can choose to lean into or away from. If we obey his commandment, then our friendship will grow and prosper.

So how do I become a friend of God?

Jesus identifies loving one another as his commandment.

Jesus identifies loving one another as his commandment in John 15:12:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Jesus boils the commandments down to two: love God and love your neighbor.

When Jesus speaks about his commandment, he is never speaking about the totality of the Old Testament with all of its law and the traditions surrounding those laws.

When Jesus speaks about his commandment, he never seems to refer to even the totality of the Ten Commandments.

When asked about the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus said in **Matthew 22:37-39:**

... "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus added in **Matthew 22:40:**

"On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

It's not simply that these two commandments summarize the Law. All of the details of Law flow from or hang onto these two commandments: Love God and love your neighbor.

Then Jesus boils down his own commandment to this one commandment.

Jesus said it right here in John 15:12. He said, "This is my commandment."

This isn't just one commandment among others; it is Jesus' commandment.

This isn't the first time Jesus gave this commandment. In **John 13:34** Jesus said:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

The book of 1 John tells us more.

1 John 3:11 tells us that this commandment is the essential message that we have been hearing from God all along and the essence of the Gospel:

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

There is a strong relationship here between loving God and loving one another.

1 John 4 puts this relationship plainly.

First, **1 John 4:19** tells us that everything is grounded in God's prior love for us:

We love because he first loved us.

But then we have to wonder, why is it that if we are to boil the entire Law down to one command that the commandment is not that we love God wholly?

1 John 4:20 answers:

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

We can't love God and hate one another.

If we love God, then we must love one another. **1 John 4:21** explains:

And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

There is a strong relationship between loving God and loving one another.

That's why Jesus makes loving one another HIS commandment.

Jesus commands us to love one another as he has loved us.

To get the force of what Jesus says, we need to re-read John 15:12 along with verse 13:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

What does Jesus mean by "love"?

Jesus isn't talking about romantic love, family love, or even friendship love.

He is talking about a kind of love that is a choice.

Jesus isn't talking about a kind of love that is based on feelings, relationships, or proximity.

He is talking about a kind of love that is based on actions.

Jesus isn't talking about a kind of love that makes distinctions.

He is talking about a kind of love that applies to those who are near and far and that gets extended equally to friends and enemies.

Jesus isn't talking about a kind of love that takes or puts us first.

He is talking about a kind of love that puts others first, a love that serves and endures.

Jesus shows us what this kind of love looks like.

Jesus' love is shown in his leaving heaven to come to earth.

It's shown in taking on human flesh, being born as a baby, living as a peasant, living among us, and teaching us.

Jesus' love is shown best in his allowing himself to be betrayed and arrested; in his submitting to a trial and to condemnation; in his crucifixion and death.

Jesus said, "You go and do that, just as I have done."

Jesus says that there is no greater kind of love than laying down one's life for one's friends.

He means that all the other kinds of love are less than this kind of love.

Romantic love is not as profound as this kind of love.

Family love is less than this kind of love.

Love for friends, love that's built in shared work, and love of country are all lesser loves.

When we think about laying down our lives for something, these are the kinds of things we normally think about laying down our lives for.

We might lay down our lives for the love of our country or for a great cause.

We might lay down our lives for our friends.

Many of us would say that we would lay down our lives for our family or for our spouse.

But Jesus says that all of these kinds of love are less than godly love.

Godly love means laying down your life for one another. That's the greatest love.

All other kinds of love pale in comparison to God's kind of love, which he extends to us.

Jesus calls us "friends."

Jesus changes our title in John 15:14-15:

"You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

Jesus changes our title from "servant" to "friend."

Before, Jesus implies, his people were his servants.

That's not a shocking, demeaning kind of title, though. Go back to Isaiah 41 and you will see that God calls Israel his servant, but that is still a chosen and exalted status. **Isaiah 41:8-9** says:

***But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off" ...***

Just to be a servant of God is to be exalted.

However, Jesus is changing our status. He is elevating us. Now he calls us friends.

We are like Abraham and Moses!

The difference comes down to Jesus' making God known to us.

There are many things that characterize friendships.

Here, for Jesus, friendship seems to come down to change in knowledge.

Jesus says that servants don't get to know what their master is doing. They don't need to know why, and they don't need to know the bigger plan. They just do what they are told. Jesus is saying that this was what it was like to be under the Old Covenant.

But something has changed. Jesus has made God known to his disciples. He has shown them who God is, he has told them what God wants, and he has disclosed God's plans for the future.

We aren't simple servants anymore. We are more. We are friends!

News of this changed relationship is what drew me into ministry in the first place.

I experienced the first inkling of a call to ministry when I was in elementary school, but I put the idea out of my head at the time.

The next time the thought came to me was when I was a sophomore in high school. How it happened is a story for another day.

Suffice it to say that I set aside the summer after my sophomore year to pray and think through what I thought I might be hearing God say to me.

As I prayed and thought, I kept thinking, "I don't have anything to say. God, if you were calling me to the ministry, I'm pretty sure you would give me something to say."

I prayed that prayer a bunch of times. Late in the summer I remember distinctly sensing God saying to me, "Tell them that I love them. That's what I want you to tell them."

I remember feeling absolutely overwhelmed by that message.

I knew that I had heard it before. I'm sure my pastor preached it to us hundreds of times when I was growing up, but it still struck me as something I hadn't heard or understood before.

"Tell them that I love them." That's what I heard God saying to me, and it so struck me that I knew in that moment that God had called me to the ministry and that I would spend my life serving him in whatever way he saw fit.

And that's what Jesus is saying here. I used to call you servants, but now I call you friends. And I'm going to lay down my life for you, my friends. He loves us!

It's the most compelling thing he could ever tell us, told in the most compelling way possible.

This is the heart of Jesus' offer to you.

Jesus is offering to call you his friend.

I hope you will think about accepting this offer from Jesus today.

God who created you, Almighty God, the Eternal King offers to call you "friend."

You will never get a more consequential offer of any kind from anyone.

Let's be good friends to Jesus by loving one another.

Loving one another is the canary in the coal mine of the spiritual life.

If you've ever heard the phrase "canary in the coal mine," you may have wondered exactly what it means or where it came from.

Coal mines were and are dangerous places. Sometimes miners would run into poisonous gases. Accidents and deaths happened because some of the gasses were odorless and colorless, carbon monoxide for instance.

Scientists tried to come up with an early warning system so that miners would know that danger was around and could evacuate.

One scientist proposed using animals as warning systems.

Canaries are uniquely suited to the job. They require great amounts of oxygen to enable them to fly high and keep moving. So, their bodies are designed to process oxygen quickly and to reprocess it. That means they show signs of poisoning before miners do and give the miners plenty of time to evacuate.¹

Canaries in the coal mine tell miners the condition of the air.

¹ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/what-happened-canary-coal-mine-story-how-real-life-animal-helper-became-just-metaphor-180961570/>

In a similar way, our ability (or lack of ability) to love one another is a good indicator of the quality or condition of our spiritual lives.

At least, it is for me!

When I am doing well spiritually, I am able to love the people around me pretty well.

I enjoy serving, I like to listen, and I don't get offended easily. When I'm doing well spiritually.

But there are times when I get offended or discouraged or frustrated.

And when I do, my spiritual life suffers.

My prayer life gets focused on me and my needs and my offenses (real and imagined).

And when my spiritual life begins to suffer that way, it comes out in my ability to love others.

I become easily offended. I get angry, and I may lash out at people.

My wife, Tammi, and I have a phrase we use with each other. We say, "You're leaking." That means, you've got some bad stuff going on inside, and you think you've got it bottled up, but it's leaking out, and it's getting all over the place.

My ability to love others is a good indicator of the quality or condition of my spiritual life.

Why? Because love for one another and love for God affect each other.

How I love God affects how I love others.

When I love God well, I am more able to love others.

When I am struggling with God, I struggle with others.

How I love others affects how I love God.

When I love others well, I am more able to love God.

When I am struggling to love others well, it makes loving God well more difficult.

There is a strong relationship between loving God and loving each other.

We want to abide in and with Jesus.

Yes, we are still talking about abiding.

We want to abide in and with Jesus.

In terms of our Scripture reading today, we want to be friends with Jesus.

We want to grow in our friendship with Jesus.

Loving God helps us to love one another.

Loving one another helps us to love God.

So, let's love one another well.