

“Abide in God”

1 John 4:7-21, John 15:1-11

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Deep sea divers that dive deep, really deep, immerse themselves in total darkness. Without their flashlight and instruments it is impossible to keep from becoming disoriented and confused. It seems terrifying to be underwater, unable to see your hands in front of your face and not knowing which way is up. The only comfort is in knowing that no matter what, divers can always trust the bubbles. Bubbles always drift to the surface. When divers are disoriented and unsure which way to go, they know they can always trust the bubbles to get them safely to the top.

It is easy to get disoriented, perplexed by choices, and overwhelmed with options. Whenever this happens, you can trust love. Follow your heart and let it guide you. Perfect love casts out fear. Love harmonizes you with God. Love fills you with joy.

John wrote **1 John 4:7-21** “**7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent God's only Son into the world so that we might live through Jesus. In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in God and God in us, because God has given us the Holy Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent Jesus as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as God is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from Jesus is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”**

The word abide is used six times. We are to abide in God. Whenever we love in anyway God is abiding in us. God's love abiding in us enables us to love.

What does it mean to abide in God? Webster defines abide as to stick, to adhere. That definition reminds me of a skillet that Leslie uses when she makes eggs. The egg shrapnel certainly abides in the skillet. It sticks and it adheres. I soak it, scrub it and scrape it with elbow grease to get it clean so I can keep the egg from *abiding* in the skillet.

Abide is also defined as to stay, dwell, conform, to acquiesce in. Abide is to reside with, to continue in permanent relationship, to sojourn with, to connect with a promise. To abide in God is translated a few different ways throughout different bibles. It is to remain, stay with, live in, continue, make your home in God. Abide is a mutual indwelling in which God nourishes us with life, with blessings, with taking care of our needs, and filling us with love.

Jesus, in less verses than John, used abide 8 times. Jesus said, **John 15:1-11 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. God removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit God prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in God's love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.**

Apart from Jesus we die. Severed from God's love we will wilt. Abiding in Jesus we will thrive. Abundant life, joy and love, flows from abiding in God. We find abundance in life as we are connecting with God and connecting with one another in a loving community. However, abiding is counter cultural. We live in an age of disposable products. Abiding in one career by mutually abiding between employer and employee is rare. Even many of our friendships, over time and distance, fail to abide. Abiding is preserving, continuing and remaining connected to God through thick and thin. Abiding in an intimate relationship with Jesus provides us with vision, purpose, direction and energy. Abiding in God fills us with love. Abiding in God causes love to bubble up within us to overflowing, and *that* love will cast out our fear and guide us into a most excellent way of life.

So how do we abide in God? The abiding begins with the grace of God. God first loved each and every one of us. God showed God's love through Jesus. God kept on loving us even when loving us became tough and even almost impossible. Because of our sin, God loved us enough to die on the cross to redeem us. God's love for each of us is endless, and perfect. God is able to forgive us of everything and able to renew us from any predicament. God's love sustains life. Love overcomes death, even our own death; Love will unite all for eternity.

Abiding Godly love never quits; Abiding love grows stronger; Abiding love unites together when the going gets tough.

In a marriage, you don't know if you have abiding Godly love by your feelings or even by what you say at a romantic candlelight dinner. Frederick Buechner says abiding Godly love comes into play when the sink is full of dirty dishes and the bills haven't been paid and it's 2:00 a.m. and the baby starts crying and someone has to get up and change a diaper and you and your spouse have a head cold, exhausted, neither of you want to get out of bed. That is where you need to abide in God. Apart from God's love you roll over and fake sleeping. Abiding in God's love you say, "I love you" and get up and care for the baby.

Abiding love enabled Jesus to say, "God forgive them for they know not what they do" on the cross. Abiding love compelled Jesus to appear and reunite with the disciples who failed to abide in Jesus during his crucifixion. Abiding love causes God to see through your every blemish, to see you as a beautiful masterpiece. Abiding love is revealed in our behavior shaped and formed not by our needs, our priorities, our desires, rather by love's imperative to passionately love like God loves us.

The gospel of John proclaims that love is at the heart of reality, love is the center of the cosmos. When you peel back all the layers, at the heart of all is the love of God. All life, all goodness, all light, all beauty and blessings, all flow from God's loving heart. Paul Tillich said "The first duty of love is to listen." We begin to abide in God when we perceive, listen and enjoy God's love for us; When we listen to Jesus, see Jesus love in action and are grateful for Jesus sacrifice and resurrection for us. Pastor Brett Younger said, "The degree to which we fail to recognize God's loving presence is the degree to which we waste our lives." Time not spent in love is wasted.

We abide in God by saying no and yes. Saying no to that which distracts us from love. Saying yes to love. Saying no to our human made little god's, to idols and to self-reliance. Saying yes to reliance on God. Saying no to darkness, confusion and fear. Saying yes and following the rising bubbles of love.

Abiding in love looks like a vine. Jesus is the true vine offering, an endless supply of love. We are the branches. Connected to Jesus, the vine, we are eternally nourished in love and overflow with love as we produce fruit. God is the present active in our life. The vine grower lovingly pruning us so we can receive the utmost love. God helps us to produce the utmost fruit, having the utmost love for all. God is the loving, tender vine

grower, whose focus is on helping us use our energy in ways that are meaningful, abundant, joyful and loving. Pruning begins with God cleaning out all our baggage, pain, misgivings and sin. Pruning is removing any obstacle that prevents discipleship. Pruning is removing unproductive drains of our loving energies such as holding onto troubles, grudges and anxiety over the future. Pruning is quickly cutting off hate, jealousy, materialism, self-centeredness, greed, envy and the debris of our messy lives. God will clip off racism, arrogance and self-righteousness until every Skid Row is replaced with avenues of compassion and streets of productive work for all and interstates of love for every person and all of creation. God lovingly prunes us to shift our priorities so we are less drained by unloving roots, and more abiding in God's endless love.

Elaine Emeth pictures God as a gardener who grieves while watching a violent storm rip through her prized garden. Afterward the gardener tenderly prunes injured plants to guarantee survival and to restore beauty and harmony.

John Buchanan preached, "There's one line in there that always gets to me when I read or hear it: "I am the vine, you are the branches. . . . Abide in me as I abide in you," and then this: "Apart from me you can do nothing." The Book of Common Worship even suggests that during communion we say those words to one another as we are serving the bread and the cup: "I am the vine, you are the branches; apart from me you can do nothing at all." And I always want to say, "Come on now. Nothing. I can't do anything without you, Jesus. Surely you don't mean that." Well, in my better moments, I conclude that Jesus does mean that. That apart from Jesus connecting you and me to the heart of the universe, the ultimate reality which is the God who is love, you and I really aren't alive. And I conclude that people who do abide in love and therefore abide in God, whether they name it or not, are really alive. And I conclude, every day of my life, that I can't do this on my own—in fact don't come close to loving everyone God wants me to love, not to mention people I don't much like. So, yes, I need help. I need the vine. I need the nutrients and energy and power of God's love. I need God's love to empower my own meager love."

When we are on our own and love gets tough, we wilt; We roll over and fake sleeping. Abiding in God; Love courses through us, bringing heaven to earth. Abiding in God, day by day, we mature in love. We begin caring for neighbors, serving others, generously giving, compassionately sharing, courageously helping, joyfully healing, reaching out, forgiving and extravagantly loving. Abiding in God is receiving love and abounding in love.

Proverbs declares **Proverbs 21:21 Whoever pursues righteousness and unfailing love will find life, righteousness, and honor.** John Buchanan preached. "I know that for me and for every one of us there will come a day when everything else is failing and when we will need powerfully and urgently to know that at the center there is a loving heart, that God is love and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." All

of us will have times when all is dark, confusing and difficult. Before fear seizes you follow the bubbles of love, they will elevate you to an abundant, joyful life. Amen