

Friends of the Father

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Date: 19 March 2017

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[0 : 00] Ever find yourself saying the things that you never swore you would say that you heard from your parents?

! Yeah, I'm there. I've been there. I continue to live in that space. How about some of these statements?

Don't look at me with those eyes. Quiet down. I can't hear myself think.

Or, as long as you're under my roof, you live by my rules. Or, shut the door. We were raised in a barn.

Or, stop crying. This is my favorite. Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about. I think I've said that more than once.

[1 : 01] No means no. And that's all no means. Or, I'm going to count to three. And one that we use quite often at our home is, If you eat too many snacks, you might ruin your dinner.

Well, I want to key in on that last phrase because I think that's probably true in the Christian life as well. Over the last couple weeks, we've been talking about the significance of fruitfulness and talking about the importance of our abiding relationship in Christ.

And I think what stands in the way more than anything else in life is that we fill ourself up with all of the good things of life and we have no space left for the best thing in God.

What stands in the way of an abiding relationship with Christ is that we find ourselves abiding and satisfying our heart and soul, at least temporarily, in everything else other than Christ.

So we have no room left in our hearts for Him. We have no room left in our life to be filled up with the real soul-satisfying life source of Jesus.

[2 : 25] And so, because of that, we do not abide in Christ. And because of that, we are barren in life. We are empty in our fruitfulness.

And we wonder why we can't find the kind of rest and satisfaction and contentment our soul really needs.

C.S. Lewis puts it this way. It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and pleasure and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

We are far too easily pleased. And yet, as we look into the scriptures, we see that the psalmist, in particular, his heart was filled up with a deep, satisfying relationship with God.

He says in Psalm 1611, There is fullness of joy at his right hand, our pleasures forevermore. Is that your experience this morning?

[3 : 53] An experience of being filled up with the pleasure and wonder of God today? We have been spoiling our dinner, as it were.

The things that were meant to nurture and encourage and comfort and give us joy and peace and meaning and purpose in life are spoiled by the things of life we fill ourself up with to kind of salve over the hurt and the anxiety and the pressures that we feel from day to day.

We run to the well of the world rather than running to the true life source that can be found in God. When we come to our text this morning, in John chapter 15, verses 12 to 17, and I have to be honest, it was really difficult this week for me to get my arms around this passage.

Not because the truths that are in the passage are difficult to grasp, but there seems to be so much interplay between concepts that seem to interact with one another.

And it's hard to know what comes first and hard to know what follows afterwards. What stands as the starting point for the fruitfulness that God wants us to have?

[5 : 22] And how do we, as God's people, live in a way that is pleasing to him? The challenge comes to us because of two things, I believe.

First, the challenge comes because most of the words that we read and most of the concepts that we'll find in this passage of Scripture are familiar to us.

And that's a challenge because we have grown up with them. From the time that we were in church, from the earliest points of our life, we've heard about the love of Christ.

And so as soon as we hear about the love of Christ, we figure we can just flip that switch. We've heard this message, we know this truth, we can check out and just think about what's happening the rest of the week.

There's a familiarity, but there's also something that is quite foreign about this passage. When we talk about an abiding relationship, when we talk about dwelling and existing in God, we don't comprehend, it doesn't quite compute because we know doing, but we don't know being.

[6 : 27] How can we do being? How can I accomplish that in my life? And that's what makes a passage like this so difficult, is the competition between the familiar and the foreign.

Well, I wish I could tell you that I have all the answers, but I trust that through our time this morning, there will be at least a little clarity in our understanding of the Scripture. So if you would, please turn to John chapter 15.

John chapter 15. Let me read for us, beginning in verse 9, and I'll read through verse 12. If you're a guest with us this morning, it's on page 901 in the Pew Bible in front of you.

I'm starting in verse 9 because it provides a little segue into our discussion for this morning. He says this, excuse me, it's 902. As the Father 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 His love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

[7 : 44] 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.

You are my friends if you do what I command. 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. You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you.

These things I command you, so that you will love one another. Well, one thing is absolutely clear in this passage.

There is something to be understood in relationship to love. As a matter of fact, the Gospel of John is so incaptivated by this concept of love, 57 times John talks about love throughout his Gospel record.

[8 : 57] Four times as many as any of the other Gospel records. And in these few chapters, from chapter 13 to 17, in these last final hours, the final moments of Jesus with His disciples, Jesus is talking about love 34 out of those 57 times.

Almost 60% of the time He spends talking about love, He is dealing with the issue with His disciples. He wants His disciples to know that there is staying power, there is buttressing strength, there is fortification for a life of a disciple.

As He comes to understand and to dwell in the love of Christ, it will accomplish the objective that God has for them. If they come to terms with what He means about this important concept of love.

And so in these final moments, these final hours of Jesus with His disciples, before He will go to the cross, He wants them to appreciate what it means to be filled up with the love of Christ.

This morning, as we approach this passage, I want to ask this pertinent question. The question is, are you a friend of God?

[10 : 27] And I ask you that question because we come to that in the middle of this passage, and what will robe our life, the fruit that will be evidenced from our life will demonstrate whether or not you are truly a friend of God today.

Well, we find something about friendship through these verses, beginning in verse 12. It begins with, This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Front and center, we see that the friendship with God comes because you are cherished by Christ. You are cherished by Christ.

Notice, everything that will follow from their life is a result of the initiating love of Christ for them. This is my commandment, that you love, how?

You love as I have loved you. Their ability to bear the fruitfulness of love will come as a result of understanding and steeping themselves in the love of Christ, as I have loved you.

[11 : 43] We saw that the key for fruitfulness is this abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus begins to put some flesh on that in verse 9, where he begins to be more specific about what does that abiding relationship look like.

It's not just abiding in Christ, it's abiding in something very specifically. Abiding, as it says at the end of verse 9, in His love, which will produce a changed life, a pure life, a holy life.

Well, you might say, that sounds like doing to me. How do we do this? What does it mean to have an abiding relationship with Christ that is abiding in His love?

Help me understand. How do we exist in God's love? How are we aware of this love and come to appreciate this love?

Is it about being satisfied with Him? Is it about being secure in His love? What is this really about? How does one arrive in this place?

[12 : 58] This is where the familiar moves into the realm of the foreign. And whatever the answer is, Jesus is proposing that the key to fruitfulness is this concept of loving.

So whatever will come from our life in terms of fruitfulness is dependent upon understanding the significance of abiding in His love. And the Apostle Paul reinforces this significance in Ephesians chapter 3.

Listen as I read from verses 14 to 19. Paul is praying for the church of Ephesus. He says, For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being.

Now this, So that Christ may dwell, same word, in your hearts through faith. And what does it lead to? That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

This is not only a significant concept for the church of Ephesus to understand, but it was something that they still hadn't quite come to terms with. And so Paul is praying that God would do a work in their life to help tune them in to the significance of this abiding relationship with Christ, abiding in His love.

[14 : 36] And we know this is important because John, this beloved apostle, actually deals with the church of Ephesus in Revelation chapter 2, and it's clear that this church had forgotten the significance of what Paul was telling them.

Jesus, through the gospel writer John, says this in Revelation chapter 2 about this church. I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and have found them to be false.

All sounds good on the surface. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my namesake and have not grown weary. Still very good.

But, he says, I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Somehow in all of their orthodoxy, somehow in all of their purity of doctrine, they had forgotten the significance of this abiding relationship with Christ, abiding in his love.

So whatever this is that we need to know about abiding in the love is foundational for everything in the Christian life. It stands before obedience. It stands even before relationships with our brothers and sisters.

[16 : 04] It stands before our mission. But what is it? And how do I obtain it? I'd like to suggest that the way to nurture this abiding relationship with Christ, abiding in the love of Christ, is for us to put away other loves and to be filled up with the love of God.

Clearly, Jesus says in verse 9, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Jesus himself set the model of drinking at the well of the Father's love so that he could pour out the love of God for his disciples.

We see throughout the course of the Gospel of John that Jesus himself had been ministered to by the love of the Father. And as a result of being ministered to by the love of the Father, was able to dispense that love on the people that he was surrounded with.

So, how do we pursue an abiding relationship with Christ? Like everything else, we have to develop a taste for it. You have to develop a taste for the love of Christ that is sweeter and better than any other love.

And I would suggest that you do that in a similar way that you do anything else. That if you're on a diet and you're getting rid of salty foods or sweet foods, you do that by immersing yourself in the diet and learning to enjoy those new foods.

[17 : 48] If you are trying to become more fit and just be more physically fit in terms of endurance, you go and you may start by walking and then you'll go into running and you'll develop an enjoyment for the exercise that overcomes the pain.

Similarly, when we develop a taste for God that overcomes other tastes, even a taste for family or a taste for jobs or a taste for hobbies or leisure, I think one way for us to do that is to lay aside good things so that we can enjoy the best things in God.

And I think fasting is one way for us to begin to nurture a love for Christ and to enjoy love of Christ.

Fasting is a way for us to demonstrate that God has our attention. we sing, tune my heart to sing your praise, to sing your grace.

It is the posture of our heart to lay aside for a time other enjoyments, other pleasures for us to sit and to bask in the encouragement and the love of Christ.

[19 : 12] John Piper puts it this way, he says, fasting is our way to express our deep longing for God, our supreme dependence and to look to Him for further direction, greater presence and fuller taste for Him.

The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but the apple pie. The greatest adversary of love to God is not His enemies but His gifts.

and the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil but for the simplest pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God Himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable and almost incurable.

Do you understand? we fill ourselves up with the good gifts of God that take up the space for the best things of God Himself.

We fill up our moments and our days with good activities, even the kinds of things that God has commanded us to do. Good things that cover up and cover over the best things that enjoying who God is and saturating our lives in the love of Christ.

[20 : 41] Finding that He is sufficient, finding that He is able to provide comfort, that He is able to meet our needs, that He is better than that sport or that good thing that you enjoy.

Setting it aside for a time so that you can just appreciate and treasure Christ. I don't know if you've ever gone for an extended period of time in fasting and putting aside food, but let me tell you, it's a little scary just to think about it as a possibility.

And if you're anything like me, there's a number of good reasons not to have that exercise. Like, I've got to work today. How am I going to have the energy that I need to carry on the duties of my day, whether I'm a mom or whether I'm an employee or all the pressures that exist on my life.

And yet, Piper goes on to say, the strongest, most mature Christians I have ever met are the hungriest for God.

It might seem that those who eat most would be least hungry, but that's not the way it works with an inexhaustible fountain, an infinite feast, and a glorious Lord.

[22 : 08] The more deeply you walk with Christ, the hungrier you get for Christ. I would like to suggest that the discipline of fasting that is so elusive for us as people may very well be the very thing that stands in the way of us enjoying and savoring this abiding love of Christ.

Letting it thrive, letting it be nurtured, letting it grow in our life. I would encourage us to consider the significance of fasting, of putting away other loves so that you can revel and marvel at the love of Christ and see that he is able and sufficient to meet every need.

second, we find here as we continue to move on in verse 12, it says, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. We find that we are not only cherished by Christ, we find that we are commanded to love.

We are commanded to love. This is my commandment that you love one another. Now, this ought to sound really familiar to us as we started our year and as we set forth the initiative of the art of neighboring, we talked about the significance of loving the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Now, the gospel writer John doesn't mention that those commands anywhere in his gospel record and yet here in these final moments he addresses the significance of love to his disciples and they stand here at the forefront.

[23 : 57] Loving God leads to loving one another. You want a fruitful life? Abide in Christ's love. Plug in to true love.

It will change you. You will become a channel for the love that Christ has poured into your life and it will flow out everywhere you go.

He mentions here love for one another. Almost as many as 60 times throughout the New Testament we find the significance of love for one another.

We find the significance of our relationship within the body of Christ. We find various commands like we are to pray for one another. We are to bear one another's burdens.

We are to sing to one another and comfort one another. Confess our faults to one another. Prefer one another. Be devoted to one another. Forgive one another. In order for us to express the love of God, it has to happen as we are in community with one another.

[25 : 05] God calls us to this kind of life. It pours out on the people that God has communicated his love to and it will be shared amongst those people.

The love of Christ and the spirit of Christ create harmony within the body of Christ. That's how it works. And Jesus gives us a real practical example of how that plays out in verse 13.

He says, Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. Again, Christ is the perfect illustration.

In just a few hours from this point in Jesus' conversation with his disciples, he would do that very thing. He would lay down his life for his disciples.

Lay down his life for the world. He was calling his disciples to the same kind of love. He's calling his followers to the same kind of love.

[26 : 04] The ultimate expression of love in being willing to lay down your very life love for the people who are part of the body of Christ.

And we can talk about this ultimate example of love, but certainly if this is the epitome of love, certainly it should be easier for us to love in the spaces in between, right?

In our sharing with one another. In our forgiving of one another. In our preferring of one another. In being willing to see their preferences in deferring to them.

In not harboring bitterness. In not speaking evil. In not demanding our way. All of these ways for us to demonstrate this love of laying down our life for our brothers.

for one another. We may also talk about laying down our preferences and serving behind the scenes. We might talk about laying down our agenda to make a hospital visit or making a meal for someone who is in need.

[27 : 22] We might talk about laying down our comfort to reach out, to talk to that person that you've seen for so many weeks and maybe even years here at the church, but you've never reached out and gotten to know them personally.

What do we need to do to lay down our life for the sake of loving the people that God has put right in front of us? Are you a friend of Christ?

It will show up in the way that you love others. Moving on now to verse 14. It says, 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.

You are called his friends. Now this was a revolutionary concept for the disciples. The disciples who knew themselves to be servants, who had been called the servants of God.

[28 : 33] And not just any servant, but the word in the Greek is actually the word doulos, or the word for slave. It was the word for submission.

It was the word for total surrender. It was the word of conformity to the master, of following his orders, and doing what he expects.

And Jesus moves them from this position of submission and surrender to a position of friendship. Now this is not to suppose that they are now somehow equal with God, but to demonstrate their unique function as partnering with God in this special role that he has called them to.

The privilege of representing God in the earth. Throughout the Old Testament, we see examples of how Moses and Nehemiah prayed about the people of Israel as being servants or slaves of God.

And now Jesus is helping his disciples to understand that not only are they disciples, which is a notch up from being a servant, but they are even called to be a friend of his.

[29 : 55] And as friends, God has let them in on this mystery of the word of the Father to them. Jesus has opened the floodgates of knowledge, the knowledge of God to his disciples.

It's staggering to consider that every word that was uttered by Christ was given first and foremost by the Father to those to whom Jesus was speaking.

we see that in John chapter 8 verse 26 it says, I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but he who sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things which I heard from him.

Jesus communicated the very words of the Father to his disciples and to the people he was speaking to. This was the revelation of God to let them in on who God was and to fill them up with a knowledge of God that would help them to come to a fuller and deeper love for him.

It's going to lead them to a new relationship, help to nurture this love for Christ and love for God through revelation. God had privileged these people by helping them to come into the know, to be part of the mystery that Paul refers to.

[31 : 31] They were people who were called friends, friends because they were part of the revelation of God. And finally, as we move to verses 16 and 17, we see that they were chosen to fulfill his purpose.

Verse 16 says, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

This word for chosen is the word for God's work in a life of selecting them out.

It was an active process of God to choose them out of the crowd and to set them apart for a special mission. So we have seen from this text, it answers the question of origination.

Whose mission are we talking about? Who is going to get the credit? Who is adequate for this job? How will we have the staying power for what we're called to do?

[32 : 40] We'll be able to do this because we understand that Christ is the source. Christ is the life source and Christ is the love source for us in terms of accomplishing the objectives that he's called us to fulfill.

So why go and bear fruit? We go and bear fruit because it's a representation of our God. It is the channel, the source of love that comes to us from Christ shows up in the world.

I like how John Piper puts it. He says mission is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't.

Worship is the ultimate, not missions. Because God is ultimate, not man. Worship therefore is the fuel and goal of missions.

It is the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white hot enjoyment of God's glory. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching.

[34 : 02] You cannot command what you do not cherish. And the more we come to bask in the glow of the love of Christ, the more it will propel us into the world to demonstrate the love of Christ to the world.

You can't command what you do not cherish. Do you cherish Christ? Are you caught up with the love of Christ today? If you are, then it will lead to verse 17, which is where Jesus ends this portion.

These things I command you so that you will love one another. How does that happen? Well, it doesn't happen because of duty. It happens because you have been filled up with love, and so what you have to give is the love of Christ to the world.

Are you full? Are you abiding in the love of Christ? Christ, and if so, it will lead to a love for the world.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the love of Christ. This familiar concept that is so hard for us to miss.

[35 : 20] We talk about it almost every week. We sing about it in our songs and in our worship. We hear about it on the radio. It has become so familiar, but God, I pray that you would bring us to the point of enjoying the love of Christ in a way that we have never enjoyed it before.

God, I pray that you would move us to the place of setting aside other loves for a time so that we can begin to appreciate the greatest love, the love of Christ, who is sufficient for all things, sufficient to meet our needs, sufficient to comfort us in our hurts, sufficient to deal with our anxieties, sufficient to bring peace in the midst of the storm, sufficient to help us in our relationships, sufficient to encourage us in the midst of hard things.

Lord, wherever we find ourselves this morning, I pray that you would help us to connect into this wonderful love of Christ.

And as we fill our lives up with an understanding and an appreciation for the love of Christ, Lord, I pray that you would help us to become conduits of that love to the world around us, wherever we are.

Whether we're in the grocery store, whether we're getting our car fixed at the mechanic, whether we're stopped by the side of the road, wherever we might be, God, I pray that you would help us to be so full of the love of Christ that we see opportunities to convey that love to the people you put in our path.

[37 : 10] God, we praise you for your enduring love. Thank you for forgiveness. Thank you for patience. Thank you that even when we fail day after day, there is new mercies.

We praise you, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.