

***John 15:4***

"Abide in Me, and I in you."

***John 15:9***

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love."

Last week we talked about the foundations of why we are to abide in the vine and be attached to Jesus. First of all, He is a person and wants us each to be in an intimate relationship with Him, as a person, and not deal with Him as if He is just some strange spiritual being. Second, He wants us to abide in His love because His love is outrageous and has been lavished upon us. Third He wants to unveil to us all the intimate details of His nature, desires, emotions, personhood, and even His own mind; He wants us to know everything about Him. He wants us to know how deep, continual, unconditional, and limitless the presence of His love is in our lives. We also covered 5-reasons why we tend not to abide in His love.

1. Many of us do not draw our worth solely from who we are in God.
2. Many of us are deathly afraid of failure.
3. Many of us don't realize that God is not bothered by sin
4. Many of us don't realize that every command of God comes with His provision to obey that command

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5. Many of us don't realize that Jesus was serious when He said that He will reveal Himself or disclose Himself to us.

I don't know about you, but for me these 5-big reasons why we don't abide in the love of Jesus have been very apparent to me of late and it seems I move in and out of each one depending on the circumstances. But the good news is at least I have been able to rejoice knowing that I am now able to see when I am traveling down the path of wrong belief and unbelief. And, instead of totally freaking and reacting to what is going on in my life, I have been able to work through things with Jesus and make each situation an issue of faith. Sometimes it takes me a bit, but I tend to get there.

In addition to God using these 5-areas to teach me more about what it means to abide in His love, He has also been teaching me about what it means when Jesus said that He will abide in us.

Think about this for a moment, when we abide in Jesus He abides in us. His sap fills our branch so completely and we become so affixed to the vine that there becomes little to no distinction between the two. The branch becomes as strong and as stable as the vine. When this happens, His nature, His character, and the wonderful and amazing attributes of His personhood becomes ours.

As I think about the last 8-years of pruning, what I thought was God being mean and extraordinarily harsh to me was really just God on a relentless task of imbuing me with more and more of His nature so that I don't just call myself a son of God but I get to live as a son of God, secure and stable in His love. As a result, I have come to appreciate that the pruning which God does in our life is very intentional; remember He is the master vinedresser. That means His cuts are very precise and

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are always with the intent of causing us to know Him, trust Him, and further abide in His love.

For example, about a couple of months ago I was struck by something when I was preparing a teaching and reading a passage that I was very familiar with. It kind of jumped out at me and I realized there was this huge aspect of God that I don't think I have ever really experienced. In this passage in Romans 8, God describes our relationship with Him by using a term of phenomenal intimacy—"Abba" or daddy. I was taken back to think that this is not my view of my God.

### ***Romans 8:15-18***

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

In the Greek, this phrase "Abba, Father" denotes childlike intimacy and trust; it is like calling God daddy. I can just picture a kid who is so safe around His dad that He just runs into the room calling daddy, daddy while jumping on to his lap. And as I was thinking about that picture I suddenly realized that I was very uncomfortable calling God my dad, sure I have done it but it was not something that was natural to me. I always had a very affectionate and intimate tone with Jesus but not with the Father.

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I called one of my best friends and told her about what I had discovered. I told her that my experiences with God have all seemed so hard and not like a daddy at all. I feel that He has always pushed me harder and further and rarely just lets me play around Him like a child would play. It seems that for the longest time I have been in training to be this warrior or something and so I am always having to deal with some pretty extreme circumstances in my life; but I get tired and I really yearn to experience God as my daddy. I would like to feel so safe and secure with Him that I could run to Him knowing that He has my back, that He is willing to stand up for me and defend me and position me behind Him so I can look around His legs at those who want to hurt me and say: nanananana, my dad is bigger than your dad. I know it sounds stupid but that is what I want to experience.

Since Jesus abides in my life (*John 15:4*), and the Father is in His life (*John 14:10*), and they have both made their home in my heart (*John 14:23*), then I know that I am to know and fully experience Him as my “Abba Father,” my daddy; and if that is not my experience then there is something wrong with me. There is wrong belief and unbelief that is limiting my ability to truly experience God in spirit and truth.

My friend asked me if I had asked God to reveal to me that part of His nature and I said no but agreed I would. I don’t know why I had not asked. I guess I just felt things in my life are what they are and God is going to do what God is going to do, so I never thought about asking God for something like that. So I started to ask God to let me know Him as my “Abba.”

I was not really sure what that would look like for me, but I did know that this is how my sister relates to God. She views Him as her daddy and she even talks to Him that way. She seems to know how much God loves her and in-turn she is sold-out in love with Him. She always tells me that God loves her most and I should

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just get used to that fact—and believe me, there are times I actually believe she just might be telling the truth.

In her prayers, my sister sometimes calls God “Abba” and other times “daddy” and, honestly, it has always kind of weirded me out. Whenever she says that, it always evokes an automatic eye roll (sorry Louise). But at the same time, her conversations with God are so genuine that I have actually been jealous. When I pray, He has always been “God,” “Father,” or “Lord,” but not quite daddy. I have called Him that before in a prayer, but again it was not at all natural; I was kind of forcing it out. I don’t know maybe I thought that if I called Him that then He would be that to me. I know this kind of thinking is totally backward and ridiculous; but, hey, you all know the joys of wrong belief and unbelief.

When I first started to think about God being my daddy and how that experience was missing in my life, what I did not realize at first is that even this desire to know Him as my daddy, or to even think about this aspect of God, came from Him. I did not come up with it myself; rather, He wants me to be able to confidently call Him daddy. After all, I have read that passage in Romans many times and thought it was amazing, but I never really believed that I could have that kind of relationship with God. But the vinedresser was not happy with me not knowing Him in this way, so through the Spirit He started to poke me, prod me, and finally I began to ask Him to let me know Him as my daddy.

My asking was actually the first step of coming to Him like a child would to their daddy. Honestly, for the longest time I was afraid to ask as I thought that this kind of relationship was for my sister and others like her, but was not something I could have. But after enough poking and prodding, I decided to ask. Remember point number 4: every command of God comes with His provision to obey that

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command. Well, I need to make that 5 and add a new 4 which says that Many of us don't realize that even our desire to obey Him in the first place comes from Him.

***Philippians 2:13***

For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him.

So for the next few weeks I was walking around with this anticipation as I was expecting God to prove to me that He was going to act like my daddy. The problem is that I began to filter everything that was happening in my life through this expectation—but not in a good way. I basically looked at every difficult thing, every stress, every trouble, every opposition, and said: “see, you’re still not that type of a God to me; you’re not acting like a daddy.” In other words, you are still not treating me the way I want you to treat me and you’re not taking care of things the way I would expect You, as my daddy, to take care of things.

Well, I got the prayer right, but after that I let wrong thinking once again deluge my mind. This wrong thinking led to frustration and this frustration led to my trying hard to push it out of my mind so I would not be reminded over and over and over how God is not like a dad to me and once again be disappointed in Him. I know that I am absolutely ridiculous! It’s really so sad!

Ok, God has been teaching us that abiding is not some amorphous concept but it is all about trusting ourselves to the character and nature of God—holding on to who He says He is regardless of what is happening around us. So for me to abide I have to trust that He is my daddy; not that one day He will be my daddy, but that He is. But here lies my problem. I *felt* I had many reasons why I could not trust

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Him as my daddy. After all, what dad would allow His Son to go through the kind of things that He has allowed me to go through especially when He could have easily prevented it or tempered it?

So how am I supposed to pretend that this stuff and call Him “daddy when I know that He was not in total control of everything?” I know that He could have stopped it if He wanted to, but He didn’t. I’m sorry I am not one to fake things. Maybe He would just always be “God” and “Father” to me (some authority to which I was subject) since, as far as I could tell, it did not seem that He was going to change His course of dealing with me, at least not anytime soon.

However, my attitude and my expectations of God were not in alignment with scripture. So I had to stare at myself in the mirror and honestly ask whether or not I was going to let the Word of God be authoritative over my life or if I was going to continue to define for myself who God is and what He is like to me based upon the circumstances He allowed in my life and how I thought, as a Dad, He should act. This brought me back to that passage in Romans.

### ***Romans 8:15-18***

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

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I was struck by the contrasts in this passage. In the first line there is a reference to fearful slaves and in the second and third line there are references to being children of God. And then in the last couple of lines there is a reference about sharing in His suffering contrasted with our future glory. Suddenly I realized I was living on the wrong side of the contrasts.

You see, in my perspective, God has been so harsh on me for such a long time that there is this deep hidden part of me that behaves in this relationship not like a son, and heir to God's great glory, but as a fearful cowering slave—afraid of his master. I also realized that every time I have studied this passage I tended to glaze over the last line about sharing in His suffering. That notion is cool in theory, but extended periods of suffering is not a promise I wanted to hold to; but it was something that God has clearly said would be a necessary part of our lives.

So it was decision time. I had come to grips with the fact that in this area of my life the Word of God was not authoritative so I had to do the forensics to understand why I have been willing to live on the wrong side of the contrasts. I had to understand the wrong belief and unbelief which gripped me so I could choose, by faith, to actively believe the truth. So let's do the forensics together:

1. I have not believed that whatever God allows in my life is because He is the Good Shepherd and He loves me. I am still giving a higher place in my life to what I think is going on verses what my Father is busy doing; this means I am still living by the authority of my own wisdom and not the wisdom of God. Oops!
2. I have not really believed the extent of the darkness that lives within my old sinful nature, so I still act as if I don't understand why God has to



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whack, saw, cut, snip, and trim back my branch. I act as if He is not being so merciful and compassionate to me, as a loving Dad, to remove all that prevents me from abiding in His love.

3. I forget that the vinedresser prunes the branch because He wants the branch to be able to bear much fruit—His fruit. Everything He does is therefore with the purpose of teaching me how to trust Him more so He can bear fruit through me.
4. And since I have for so long been blinded to His purposes, I also did not realize that God does not view His work of pruning through the lens of time but effectiveness. To us time is everything, but to God His fruitfulness in His children is everything. He is patient; remember, that is a piece of His nature. Thus, He will patiently continue to trim and cut no matter how long it takes until I let His work have its perfect result in my life. When I think about it honestly, I have probably been the main reason I have had to suffer so long; not God.
5. I forget that my real life is hidden with Christ in God and that I am not defined by all the events or circumstances of my life. After all, one day I will rule and reign with Christ as a son of God for all eternity. I will share in His glory.
6. I forget that even though what happens to me seems so often to impact others in my life to the negative, He is responsible for working His will and His purpose out in their lives. I have to be ok with God's methods because even though the struggles and difficulties in my life have a serious impact on others, He is big enough to use those situations and events to help them to also learn how to trust Him and abide in His love.

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It is not for me to internalize their difficulty and stress out; after all, He is also their Dad.

7. I forget that if I ask God to help me look through my circumstances I just might be able to see what He is doing by allowing these events in to my life. Most recently He showed me that I needed to know Him as my dad, so He was faithful to reveal what He was doing; I just had wrong expectations of how God was to do His thing and I forgot that He would not stop until I had this aspect of His nature in mine.

Now, that I have done the forensics and put some meat around my wrong belief and unbelief (which always seems to be just a variation on the same issues I have struggled with all along) it all becomes an issue of faith. My ability to know God as my dad will come down to my willingness to actively believe the truth: to bet my life on the Word of God and not just rest in my knowledge of the Word. Therefore, I have to keep these issues at the forefront of my mind and be willing to battle the lies with the truth. I also need to keep these issues at the forefront of my prayers and continue to surrender to God my thoughts of who He should be and how He should behave toward me. I know that as I do this, I will not only know him as my Dad but I will no longer do the eye roll thing and I might actually be free to call Him my Dad.

You might be wondering why I am telling you all about what God has been teaching me. Well, I think it is important to understand practically how to work through these issues in your life. I want you to know what not to do so that maybe you just might choose to believe the truth and not have to learn through much difficulty how to trust in His love.

I know that the vinedresser is always busy over your life; He is always working to help you abide. So ask yourself, what area of God's nature is missing in your life. What part of God's nature does He want you to know and experience. Maybe He wants His characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control to be evident in your life. Maybe the circumstances He has allowed in your life are intended to bring out one or more of these characteristics.

Maybe your eyes are not open to understand what He is doing. Well then open them up and ask Him to show you what He is doing. You do not have to take the long and hard road that I usually take. Instead, you can learn by my example. And remember, He is so vast, complex, and dynamic that there is always some other part of His nature that He desires to infuse into our lives. Just open your eyes and ask.

So what have I learned about God being my dad? Just this week, plans I had been diligently working on with a friend that would provide a way to care for the practical needs in the life of my family came to a grinding halt and I am not sure they are going to start moving again. It was sudden, unexpected, but when thinking about my life not really a surprise I guess; it's kind of how things have gone.

So what did I do? Well, at first my emotions just surged and I started to be anxious and worry and my frustration and intensity levels rose. I realized that I was not nearly as disturbed as I would have been in the past (so that was a good sign) but still I knew that God was not ok with the way I was internalizing these events. I became convinced that these circumstances were purposeful in order to purge from my body the anxiousness, the worry, the intensity and frustration that was in me. Please understand, the circumstances did not cause me to worry, be anxious or

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frustrated, they just acted like a light to reveal the darkness that was already in me; the darkness which was quenching my New Creation.

You see, my New Creation has no reason to be anxious, frustrated, or to worry. My New Creation is in perfect fellowship with my Dad who loves me and never stops thinking of me—my Dad who merely wants me, His son, to overflow with a abundance of His nature and His character. That's not such a bad thing; in fact, it is a marvelous thing.

When I remembered this truth, I started to repent; I started to ask God to help me see beyond what was happening and to let this experience help me understand all the ways in which He is my dad. To my surprise, that night I actually had an amazing restful sleep whereas the night before I had tossed and turned with worry all night long.

I am learning that God always wants me to run to Him as my Dad as my first response and not *react* so quickly by things that are all in His hands anyways—after all, He controls everything. When I *react* I am just running to me. And I have nothing to offer me but rotten putrid flesh and that is why I get intense, frustrated, and so on. But by *responding* to His love for me and choosing to not react like a fearful slave, I can abide in His perfect love, a love which casts out all fear (**1 John 4:18**). This is the divine exchange that He wants me to make: my reaction for His love, my anxiety and my worry for His peace, and my frustration for His patience and rest.

In learning to make this exchange I have also had to learn to tell my emotions to back off and to get back to their proper place. They are always trying to drag me back toward *reaction* and self dependence. Now I did not just tell them to back off and they instantly obeyed; I actually had to learn how to force them back into their

proper place and then practice keeping them at bay. I have done this by giving thanks to my Dad that He is the one who holds all things in His hands, even this business deal. I have thanked Him that since nothing that happens to me is random, this is just another opportunity to trust in Him and experience His love. I have been thanking Him that He is so purposeful and intentional knowing that He wants me to know and experience all of Him (including His peace, patience, and joy) and He is not content with me only having pieces of Him.

I have found that there is something about giving thanks that has the effect of binding my heart to Jesus in an amazing way.

### *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

In everything give thanks—this is “**God’s**” will. Ok, a little confession time. I used to find this passage so difficult to accept and thought that this was just some hyped-up self-help psyche job to convince people that they just need to suck it up and get over their moaning and groaning and, I don’t know, thank God for the grass and the trees—something like that. I mean seriously, how do you thank God for what is happening to you when you are facing some very real, difficult, painful, and distressing circumstances.

But as always, my *reaction* to this passage was a product of wrong belief and unbelief. It is embarrassing how my experience with God has been so limited by what I could touch, see, feel, and reason with my own mind. But as I have learned that His love for me is so much more than I could ever imagine (deep, continual,

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unconditional, and limitless), and that He is always with me right in the middle of all my circumstances, this has become not just some kind of psych job, but something I can legitimately do. It's not so much that I have to thank Him for what is happening to me and pretend like I am not in pain; rather, I can always thank Him for His love, for His presence, for His mercy and compassion, for forgiving me, for giving me His life, for the power and presence of His Spirit, for always being busy, as a loving Dad, infusing me with more and more of His character and nature.

His love for me and His love for you is all consuming and He is always “hands on” in our lives. That is an amazing thing; He never turns His head toward another direction. His eyes are always on you. He is my dad and He is your dad, we just have to learn to rest in this reality and watch Him do His thing—He is going to do it anyway whether you stop and open your eyes or not. But when you open your eyes and see that His love is at work in and through your circumstances to teach you to trust Him, to abide in His love, so that you can bear His fruit; it is not a burden to give Him thanks. It is actually quite natural and releasing!

We are also told to rejoice in the Lord always! Yes, it says always—not sometimes, not occasionally, not when everything is going great and wonderful, but always! *Philippians 4:4* also says, “rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.” I probably don't need to mention that in my flesh I *reacted* to this similar to the command to always give thanks.

However, I have learned that as I fixate on what is happening to me, and I don't look through my circumstances, I find that I become bound by my fleshly reaction—tied up in knots that just seem to get tighter and tighter. Yet, when I fixate on what He is doing, when I see how He is working, I can walk in freedom and I am able to rejoice in the fact that I am His. I mean how cool is it that God is

always working to give me more of Him inviting me to exchange my dark sinful nature for the joy of His light!

I believe we are told to always give thanks and to always rejoice because in order to truly do this, and it not be some religious act or some psyche job, you have to stop and place your eyes on God. You have to choose to *respond* from your New Creation; you have to choose to believe the truth. Authentic thanksgiving and rejoicing cannot be artificially manufactured or sustained. You literally have to choose to remember that God loves you, that He is involved in the midst of your life, and that nothing is happening to you which He does not control. In addition, you have to choose to silence your *reactive* emotions and put them in their proper place. You have to be fully convinced that God loves you. You see, abiding in God's love with thanksgiving and rejoicing is the antidote to worry, anxiety, fear and every other lame way we try and survive this life.

Try it; try and fixate on His love for you. See what happens. Try and meditate on the depth, the height, the breadth and length of His love for you. You will find that it will be so easy for you to give thanks and you just might even find yourself rejoicing and worshiping Him.

Do you know that this is one of the reasons why Jesus asked us to take communion? He wanted us to have a physical act that would always draw our minds and our hearts to what He did for us on the cross when He became sin on our behalf. He wanted us to always be reminded of what He gave up so that we can have Him. He wanted us to realize how precious we are to Him that He regarded our lives as more valuable than His own. He wanted us to know that He chose us before time began and has pursued us all our lives. He wanted us to be fully convinced of His unending and limitless love.

There are so many reasons to abide in Jesus' outrageous love. There are so many reasons to hold on to Him and to not run to self to try and deal with life. He is our life, He is our peace, He is our joy, and He is everything we could ever need. Abide in Him and He will abide in you—His life in your life.

Let's Pray