

Abiding in Christ's faithfulness

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A new year, a new season, a birthday ... any of these can be times for thinking about new and exciting things. Perhaps you want to get a new job, graduate college, cook more or read a new book. While new things are exciting and setting goals is a valuable practice, it's important to remember the truth that never changes. We must never allow the pursuit of newness to sidetrack our pursuit of God and his word. Let us read this section of 1 John together:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also 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 been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. 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. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:7-21)

This passage is bursting with truth that we could talk about for hours, but for today let us focus on the prevalence of love and abiding in Christ. The pandemic and its aftermath have brought so many upheavals, it has been difficult to see and feel God's love. However, his love is every bit as present in this moment as it was when Jesus breathed his first earthly breath. Let us allow ourselves to remove the expectations we place on God for showing his love and instead look with fresh eyes to see how he has chosen to *reveal* his love. If we cannot see it, let us ask God to help us and show us how he is loving us even in this painful time. His love is always present, and he will accomplish his purposes even in the midst of these crazy times (see Isaiah 55:10-12).

When setting goals, it is important to wrap them around Christ and his kingdom. As important as earthly goals are, they pale in comparison to God and his kingdom values. Let us prioritize abiding in Christ over checking off every last item on the to-do list and allow Christ to lead us as we make plans and carry them out in his timing. I hope the following questions will allow you to take a deep breath and focus on the abounding love God has for you as you abide in him.

Questions to ponder and discuss

1. In what ways has God shown his love to you in recent months?
2. How might you anticipate him revealing his love to you in coming months? In what ways might you be placing expectations, or specific hopes, on how God will reveal that love?
3. What are some of the ways you can change your goals to make them in line with abiding in God? What are some ways you can be flexible to adjust according to his daily calling?
4. How might you ensure that you are more concerned with abiding in God than with accomplishing your goals?
5. What is one way you can look for God's love this week?
6. Identify a time this week where you can put aside other things and sit in the Lord's presence (even for a few minutes).
7. What are some ways you can abide in God in the midst of a full life? (Notice that John was living an engaged life even as he was writing to abide in God. We can abide in God in stillness but also in noise; there is balance and grace to be found!)