

Abiding in Christ

Chapter 1: Fellowship & Relationship

What You Think About God Is Most Important!

I honestly believe that what you think about God is the single most important thing in the world. There is nothing more important than that. How you perceive God is everything. Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" He got back four distorted images. "Well, you're Elijah, or Jeremiah, or John the Baptist. You're one of the prophets. I don't know." Four distorted images. Then He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter just pipes up and says, "You're the Christ, the son of the living God." His name was Simon then but his name was changed on the strength of what he said. When you have a correct understanding of God, your whole identity changes. You, as a person, change. Your persona and your character change. Your destiny changes. It's on the revelation of who Jesus really is that the church is actually built. And we're coming, I believe, into the day of a real strong revelation of who Christ really is.

My testimony will be successful living, that is, bearing fruit for God's kingdom that is based on the reality of who Jesus truly is. Putting that sense, of whom God is, what God is like, and what the heart of God is really like towards us is the very spirit of prophecy. And by prophecy I don't mean just the prediction of future things, but also the revelation of the true nature of God and His love to others when God reveals it to me. Revelation 19:10 "...the

testimony of Jesus is the very spirit of prophecy. In other words, the testimony of Jesus is what He came to do, what He said about Himself and what He has revealed about the purposes of God. Your testimony of Jesus, is the very essence that drives your prophetic gift, which enables you to encourage another human being.

Significance of the Cross

So, what the cross is for Jesus, it cannot be for you. The cross was death for Him and it's life for you. The cross was punishment for Him and forgiveness for you. The cross was judgment on Him and it is freedom for you. So when we come to love the cross and to stand before the cross, the cross is not a symbol of our pain, it's a symbol of His suffering for us. When Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me," He wasn't talking about pain or suffering. That was His deal with the cross. It's not ours. He was punished so that I could go free. He suffered so that I didn't have to. The cross is a symbol of your freedom, your forgiveness, your acceptance, the love of God, the generosity of God, the kindness of God, the mercy of God, the beauty of God. When He said "Take up your cross," He said, "Take up everything that's beautiful about me and follow Me." "Take up everything that's marvelous about my love for you and come and walk with me. Come follow after Me."

You know, the early Christians used to put a cross on their building because it was a sign to everyone. If you're in difficulty, if you're in pain, if you're suffering, just turn around on your heel 360

degrees and look on the skyline and wherever you see a building with a cross on it, you can go there and get set free. You can go there and get delivered. You can go there and find yourself. You can go there and discover who you really are.

Relationship and Fellowship

You know, there is a difference between relationship and fellowship. Relationship is being of the same blood. We are blood bought children of God. We are also legally adopted children who can never be disowned. We have a relationship with God. We are his children. 1 John 3:1-3 (NASB) "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope (divine expectation) fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." We can call Him Abba, which means Daddy, because we're real children. We can call Him Father because we are growing up not just to be children, but we are growing up to be adult sons and daughters.

We are learning how to grow up in all things in Christ. Our relationship is based and built upon unconditional love. And relationship with God is possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus. So in relationship, we stand in His righteousness and He gives us family value in the eyes of the Father. So, our relationship with God is never in doubt. We

belong to God by issue of blood. I taught this to my children when they were small. They all had to learn the difference between relationship and fellowship. They learned that no matter what they did, no matter what they became, they would always be my kids. My relationship with them was never in doubt. But sometimes fellowship was difficult during times of punishment for disobedience. I remember one time when my son was clinging to me sobbing and saying, "Daddy don't you love me?" and I said "Son, absolutely, you are my son." I hugged him until he was settled and had almost forgotten why he had been punished. By enveloping necessary punishment in the assurance of love restored the fellowship.

God takes care of the relationship. We take care of the fellowship. That's our business; to walk with Him. It is our business to know that He loves us even when we are rebellious and require punishment. The cool thing about God is that He's always ready for both. You know, when you are having a bad day with God, He is never having a bad day with you and God doesn't get disillusioned with us because He never had any illusions about us in the first place. He's always known who we are and what we are like and He has so set his heart on loving us. Yeah? He is constant. He never changes. You always know exactly where you are with God because He never changes. He's always the same yesterday, today and forever in relationship.

What changes in the dynamic is nothing that is coming from God. What changes the dynamic for us is our ability to have fellowship with God's unchanging nature and that's where the Holy Spirit

has come to enable us to become established in our relationship so that our fellowship is as consistent as our relationship. They are one and the same. He takes care of the relationship; we take care of the fellowship with the help of the Holy Spirit. Jude 21 (NASB) says, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." In other words, know where the line is in relationship and don't cross it. Stay in fellowship. The process for staying in fellowship is called abiding.

Abiding in the Vine

John 15:1-11 (NASB) "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2) Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3) You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5) I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in Him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7) If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8) My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9) Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10) 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. 11) These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in

you, and that your joy may be made full."

The word abide in the Greek language is *meno*, and it means to stay in a given place of relationship and expectancy. God has put us into Christ in relationship, the process of staying there and abiding is what we call fellowship. So learning to abide in Christ is a key discipline of discipleship. When we do not consciously abide, we suffer a disconnection in our fellowship with God. Keep yourself in the love of God means, pay attention to dwelling, to remaining, and to abiding in the fellowship of God's love.

So we are on a journey in relationship and fellowship; from "Daddy" to "Father"; from being childish to being mature adults. In order to increase your maturity you'll need to become more childlike. Not childish, that's what we've been; but childlike, fun-loving and enjoying the love of the Father. You see, the more childlike you are, and the more astonished you are about God, the more mature in the Spirit you can become. We are just as children learning the fellowship disciplines of how to become a fully mature son or daughter in Christ. The beauty of this whole process is that Father's love is unconditional. So our relationship is totally secure. His love is continual. He provides it freely in all of our challenges. Love is always available because He wants us to abide there. Abiding in love means never allowing your conscious state to lose its focus on who God is or what He has provided, enormous, unconditional love.

Always-There!

Abiding in Christ - cooke-clarkson

It's a wonderful thing to be able to count on God in every situation you face. So, He never leaves you nor forsakes you. He's always there. He's always present. I always find it intriguing that God says, "Seek me." My questions, "How do you seek someone who is always present? How do you seek someone who never leaves you nor forsakes you and He's always there? What is seeking about?" It's not seeking as if you're looking for something that isn't present. That's not what we're doing. God never leaves us, He is always there. When He invites us to seek Him, what He's saying is "I've got something for you. You need to come and deliberately stand in my presence. Look around. Spot where I am. Come walking over to me. I've got something to say. I've got something to give you." So when God invites you to seek Him, it's an invitation to receive something. Yeah? He's not hiding. He's inviting you into a moment with Him that will make an incredible difference in your life in the circumstances that you're presently in.

So abiding is to stay in a place of fellowship (relationship expectancy). So expectancy is like the faith part of abiding. In this relationship in Christ, the fellowship part of abiding has a positive intention because it knows that God will provide. So my question to you right now is, "What is it that God wants to be for you now in your current circumstances that He couldn't be for you any other time and what is the gift that is available to you now that maybe you're not seeing?" Some of us in this moment are going through some tough circumstances. So what's God up to?

We know that God allows in His wisdom what He can easily prevent by his power. So quit bemoaning your fate or your current condition. Never ask God, "Why?" He's never going to answer that question. It's a victim question and you're not a victim. You're in Christ. Truth to tell, you don't live in your circumstances. You live in Jesus. He lives in your circumstances for you. Christ **is** your life. So get over your bad self. I have actually come to believe that there is only one answer to the 'why' question. It is always the same. "Why?" Answer: "This is happening in order to fulfill God's purposes in all things!"

The Two Best Questions

The two best questions you can ever ask are, "What does this mean and what must I do?" Seeking God is exactly this. Seeking God's face is to know what He is doing and what I need to be doing in order to align myself with His purposes in it. My favorite question is, "Father, what is it you want to be for me now that you couldn't be at any other time?" Yeah? What is that and I'm so camping out on your doorstep until you tell me, which is what He loves. The question, "Why?" is an invalid question. It makes you an invalid, and you're not one. You're not an invalid. You just might be a victor in waiting. So what's going on guys? What's God up to? Don't you want to know? What's He plotting in that scheming brain of His? What's He up to?

Eavesdropping on Heaven

The great thing is that He invites you into a place of prayer that has certainty all the way through

it. So you discover through personal experience that Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). He ever lives to make intercession for us. So there's Jesus, at the right hand of God, praying for you right now. Wouldn't you like to know what He is praying? Aren't you curious? What if prayer is finding out what God wants to do then asking Him to do it? Then of course, you've got the Holy Spirit who also makes intercession for us. So He's praying. What's He praying? He's praying in agreement with Jesus. So you have two members of the Godhead praying in stereo. Don't you want to know what that conversation in heaven is all about? What if there is an invitation for you to take part in that conversation in heaven about your life?

That's exactly what Isaiah did in chapter 6. He's in heaven, you know like you are. It's a normal Tuesday. It's a bit of a slow day, go to heaven. Great!!! He listens in to this conversation. And they're saying, "Who shall we send to tell the people our plan?" And the prophet pipes up, "I'll go." That's exactly how I see prayer now. It is a conversation in heaven. And I'm listening in to it. That's what prayer is for me. I want to find out what Jesus is saying. So what if prayer is not praying in order to get an answer or specific result? What if it's about praying with the answer or knowing the plan? What if it's not about praying towards God, but it's about praying with God. What if prayer is you listening in to Jesus and the Holy Spirit in stereo, praying about you coming to a place of agreement so that when you pray the same thing, something moves. Yeah? There's no doubt about the answer when prayer is simply listening and

agreeing with God.

Love Connections

God's love is unconditional, it's eternal, it's ever present, and the experience of God's love comes out of our fellowship and abiding. Living constantly aware of the love of God, your heart is melting all the time. Your heart is soft towards God and tender towards people. If I don't abide, I suffer a disconnect. I don't suffer a disconnect from God because I can't get disconnected from God. He's the one holding on to me. The disconnect is when I disconnect from the 'present moment' experience of his love. There's no disconnect in relationship. There is a disconnect in fellowship. The Holy Spirit's job is to remind us of His presence within. It is the awareness of Him that is the essence of abiding.

The Brilliance of Repentance

God gives us the privilege of repentance. And you know what, it's impossible to repent unless you first receive the goodness and kindness of God. Even when you get disconnected in your fellowship, God in his relationship showers you with goodness and kindness so that you can get reconnected. So we can repent, which is to change our thinking. Think again. I love that whole concept of repentance. So often I'm saying to people who are in a place of disconnect with God, "So all your thinking has brought you to this place that you don't like?" Well, have another thought. I mean that! Think again. That's what repentance is. So, that thought's not working out then. eh? So how about having another one? It's not

rocket science. It's not quantum physics. This is the simple message of the Gospel. God gave us the freedom to repent. Change our mind. Think something different. Think how God thinks. That's what repentance is. So, your line of thought is not working out. How about taking My thoughts and thinking those and see where that gets you.

Repentance is not groveling in apologies or regrets. Repentance for salvation is to change your mind about sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16). If you ever repent of that decision, you are forever lost! (See apostates in the book of Hebrews.) Notice also that Romans 12:2 states, "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind!" That means that our transformation into the likeness of Christ requires a change of mind (thought). When what we believe, that isn't true, is discarded in favor of God's new revelation of Himself to you, transformation happens.

Remember as well that the very definition of insanity is "to continue doing the same things and expecting a different result." Most people are miserable because they believe something that is not true. This leads to unmet expectations. But, huh! If my expectations are unrealistic (not in line with truth), they cannot possibly be met. You have permission, actually you have a commission, 'change your mind (repent) from false beliefs regardless of how well-meaning the people were who taught you to believe them.' Every time I exchanged a false or partially false belief to align with God's truth, I became more connected to God.

Nothing Originates in You

So a spiritual principle here is, always to let God love you. Nothing originates in you. You are not the author of your salvation and you are not the author of your experience with God; He is. Nothing originates in you. That's what John says in John 3:27 (NASB) "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven." James put it this way, "Every good and perfect thing comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." James 1:17 Paul's version of it is found in Romans 11:35, "Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?" It's a rhetorical question. The answer is nobody. Then he says this, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things."

You see everything comes from God, through God in you and then you give back to God the very thing He gave you. It takes God to love God. Only God can love God, or as John put it, "We love Him because He first loved us." Everything originates in God. So everything that God commands of you, He intends to give you because that's how it works. So every command of God is also a promise. So when God says something like "Be holy even as I am holy." How do hear that in your spirit? Is it a command, a suggestion, a whisper of an idea? It is also a promise, "Hey, I've got something for you." "Be holy." Every command is also a promise. Why, because everything originates in God.

So He will never demand anything of you when He has no intention of giving you something in

the first place, because He knows that you cannot fulfill those commands by yourself. So every command is therefore a promise. You will love the Lord your God. Yeah? You will. Hey listen, you will love the Lord your God because here it is, whatever He wants from you, He intends to give you. Yeah? Everything originates in God. Only God can love God. So God comes to you and loves you and you give back to God the very thing He gave you, His love.

How many of us who are parents, when it was our birthday, we gave our kids money to buy us a present. So come on, where did you get that from? It's in your flipping DNA. God put it in your DNA. He's the creator. He established that as an element in your DNA and you just do it naturally. Why, because you know your six year old little Johnny hasn't got enough cash to buy you a present. So the very thing he lacks, you intend to give. Whatever you want to give to God is always preceded by Him giving you something. I love this life.

Give It Away Regardless

So a rule of the Spirit then is what? Whatever you need the most, be the first to give it away. If you're sick, go find someone who is sicker and pray for him, because you've got a great chance of being healed if you give healing away. You cannot sow potatoes and reap rhubarb. What you sow, you reap. Yeah? So we're encouraged, "Give, give, give, and give. Give and it can be given to you. It's the principle of heaven. God wants love from you. So what? He gives love to you. Short of money, too

much month, not enough money? Go find someone who is worse off than you and give them something, maybe some of your money.

Astonishment

If God calls us to things for our benefit, He calls us to things because He has a plan and a purpose that's way beyond our current level of thinking. When He says, "I am able to do exceedingly and abundantly beyond all that you ask or even think." Well, what's beyond thinking? Well, that would be dreaming for me. What if God wants you living a life that is like your best ever dream? It has always been his intention that you would live a life that is so powerful, so crazy, that your imagination can't even conceive of it? "Eye hasn't seen, ear hasn't heard, that which God has prepared for those that love Him."

I wonder what God has prepared for you in this next season of your life? What if it's a radical adventure? What if it's an amazing lifestyle? The only way that you can enter into it, and live in it, and enjoy it, and not get weirded out by it, is by learning how to abide in who He is for you? You can come into a place of relationship with God, where your fellowship goes up to levels that you didn't think could exist in this life. What if the only true state for a Christian is astonishment? What if astonishment is the norm?

Born to Magnify

What if living a life that magnifies God is the only life that you're supposed to live? To magnify is also in your DNA? You were created to magnify and

it is in you, and you can't escape it. You are always going to magnify. You are either going to magnify the problem: you know, turn a mole hill into a mountain; or the solution: to move the mountain. To magnify means to see something bigger than it is. That's one description of it. To magnify also means to see someone as big as he is. You were created to magnify and you will always magnify something. So what's it going to be? Are you going to magnify your circumstances and problems? Are you going to magnify the God who allowed the circumstances to teach you to magnify?

You were born to give value to something, to show appreciation. To magnify; it's the only way to live. Twelve spies went out. Ten of them magnified the problems they found. And when you magnify something other than God, you are always diminished by it. These were the special forces of their day; the tough guys. They were handpicked; the best from each tribe. Ten of them came back unmanned. They magnified the problems they saw out there and they became like grasshoppers in their own sight. What you magnify that is not of God always diminishes you.

Two of them went out there with a huge idea of God and saw nothing out there to disturb that revelation and so they came back with, "Yeah, we can do it." "Yeah it's going to be tough, but, God's tough." "Yeah! We can do this." "If God is with us, we can do anything." They came back with their revelations not only intact, but actually the problems out there in their correct proportion. You were created to magnify. It's in your DNA, and you

magnify all the time. We just have to make sure that we are magnifying the right thing.

Discipline of Abiding

You see abiding is a spiritual discipline which, when practiced constantly, will provide us with several critical experiences. One of them is the ability to be present with God, right now, this moment. Another one is the capacity to hold on to the Lord and be embraced by Him no matter the circumstances. It is to look beyond the circumstance and see Jesus smiling and waving. He is always there. The last one is the anointing to know God's love, to know God's joy and to know God's peace as permanent emotions.

Benefits of Abiding

One of the benefits of abiding is that there is an internal anointing in wisdom. Wisdom is far superior to knowledge. One problem I have with mainstream evangelicals is that they are eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and not from the tree of life. Wisdom is more important than knowledge. All knowledge comes out of wisdom. Wisdom cannot come out of knowledge. Wisdom is the understanding of how God sees, how He perceives, how He thinks and how He likes to do things, so that you can align yourself with how He thinks, how He sees and how He likes to work.

That wisdom enables us to see every crisis and every contradiction as in the will of God, so that the Holy Spirit can generate faith in us when everything is

against us. Wisdom, knowing what God wills, enables you to just stand there and will it with Him. Sometimes victory is simply about being the last man standing. The reality of 'Christ **in** you,' is that we are not occupied with the enemy, but that He is occupied with us. Why would you want to be occupied with the enemy when you can be occupied with Jesus in you?

Our job is **not** to bring down the enemy. Our job **is** to bring down the presence of God, so that He fights for us. So we are wholly occupied with who He is and we serve this one true great God. We are here to bring God down, and when God comes down, He displaces the enemy in our midst. So we are wholly occupied with who He is. When we abide, we stay connected to the supply line that is always operational in Christ Jesus. So abiding means I stay connected to the provision that God had released for me and has promised to me in these specific circumstances. Abiding means I get to become conformed to the image of Jesus because you become what you behold. So when we are occupied and preoccupied with Christ, we become as He is. When all of our attention is fixed on Him we become intimate, we become worshipful, we become engaged, and we become overwhelmed by who He is. And He has this way of blotting everything else out.

Abiding means you get look into the face of Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of faith. Whatever faith you need right now, it's in the face of Jesus. You look into his face and faith will rise up as a consequence. You can't avoid it. You behold Jesus and faith rises. Don't ever try to have faith. Don't try to manufacture faith. Look into the face of Jesus. It

is your right and privilege. Intimacy is the place where we find faith. It's the place where we find favor. That intimate connection comes through abiding. You know. What God starts, He finishes. "He who began a good work in you will also complete it." Phil. 1:6

Abiding is a spiritual term that is used about eighty times in John's writings. That's why John was the disciple whom Jesus loved. John set his heart on loving Jesus wholly. And Jesus' relationship with John was noticeably different from the other guys. It was different enough for it to receive comment in Scripture. Abiding is a continued, uninterrupted relationship with the Lord Jesus and in John 15 we have the essence of what it means to abide.

The first thing you've got to note is the language that Jesus uses. He uses the overall God term, I Am. I Am the true vine and my Father is the vine dresser. So He's using the constructive 'I Am' that God used in Exodus 14, "I Am that I Am." This term is used eight times by John in this Gospel. John was the friend who laid his head on Jesus' chest because he knew Jesus intimately.

Wouldn't you like to be 'beloved' too?

You can! By being these three things:

Constantly 'aware of His presence within you,'

Immediately 'available to drop everything and do what He asks.'

Consistently 'accepting of His will and accepting others "as-is" without making them change anything'

AWARE! AVAILABLE! ACCEPTING!

Abiding in Christ - cooke-clarkson