

Abiding Love

Wasn't she like a movie star or something? What happened?" asked Irvin the mechanic. He was talking to Dale about his customer Roderick's wife.

Dale had been pleasantly surprised to see Roderick walk into the garage. He shook Roderick's hand and sent best wishes to Nala, Roderick's wife.

After Roderick left, Dale explained, "She was an actress. She had a few roles in drama series and was a regular cast member in one of those soap operas."

"What is she doing in Cleveland?" asked Irvin.

"She came back home because her mother was diagnosed with stage two breast cancer," explained Dale. "Later, after her mother's death, she stayed to help family."

Nala had told Dale and his wife that she had enjoyed her life in Los Angeles, but felt God was calling her back home. The beautiful, talented actress gave up her soap opera role so she could direct her energies to another one of her passions—young people. She founded her own non-profit drama arts foundation that emphasized Christian principles.

Then at the age of 48, Nala and her new husband adopted her niece's newborn twin boys. Because her niece was sentenced to prison, she was keeping the boys from being put into the care of the state.

"Wow! That's a lot," said Irvin. "And to think, she could have stayed in Hollywood and been a big star."

"She said she was glad she didn't," said Dale, "because she would have missed out on all the beautiful things God produced in her life."

1. *What are some of the greatest acts of love you've seen demonstrated?*

2. *What does it require to exhibit this type of love?*

3. *Why is it important that we demonstrate significant and sacrificial love?*

A Crucial Connection

John 15:4-8, KJV

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

John 15:4-8, NIV

⁴“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Jesus’ disciples would have been familiar with the use of the vine as a symbol. Not only was agriculture a dominant feature of local life, but also the Old Testament writers had often referred to Israel as a vine (see Ps. 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15; 19:10; Hos. 10:1). In this case, Jesus referred to Himself as the only true source of life and power, the only true vine, through which God, the gardener, brings forth fruit for His kingdom. In the same way a gardener prunes a grapevine in order for the plant to yield the maximum number of grapes, our heavenly Father removes and discards deadwood and trims productive branches.

Apart from the life-giving resources of the vine, no branch

can bear fruit of itself. In the same way, Christians must wholly depend upon God to live productive lives.

Jesus promised to give the believer whatever is asked, with certain conditions. First, abide in Him so your desires will be in line with God's will. Second, remain obedient to His teachings so you will pray for the things God wants, and He will give them to you. When you show that you are Christ's followers by the fruit you bear, you bring glory to God.

4. *How are a vine and its branches a symbol of the connections we should have to Jesus?*

5. *What must we do as disciples if we want to bear the type of fruit that God wants?*

A Clarification of Purpose

John 15:9-13, KJV

9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:9-13, NIV

⁹"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Although Paul would point out later that there are many qualities that come from having a healthy "fruit-bearing" relationship with Jesus (Gal. 5:22-23), he as well as Jesus emphasized the priority love has on the list of these. Love is

the first aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) and has precedence over the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13).

Love originates with God. It is demonstrated first in the love the Father has for His Son; it is revealed in the ways that His Son Jesus loves us; it is exemplified when we love others the same way that Jesus loves us.

This type of love will occur only if we remain in a personal, intimate, and committed relationship with Jesus. For this to occur, we must be obedient to Him. Some think of obedience as a cross to bear rather than an opportunity to experience God's best. The result of obedience should be joy, the second quality of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified so that we could experience the joy that comes from having our sins forgiven. Although Jesus' disciples did not comprehend the full implication of this until well after His resurrection, they would eventually understand that love is best expressed by a willingness to lay one's life down for the benefit of others.

6. *What is the importance of love in our relationship with Jesus?*

7. *What is required in order to love others the way that God loves us? What should it result in?*

8. *How is love best expressed?*

A New Relationship

John 15:14-17, KJV

14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

16 Ye have not chosen me, but I

John 15:14-17, NIV

¹⁴"You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose

KJV

have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

NIV

me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.”

Jesus told His disciples that He considered them friends and not slaves or servants. Servants don't need to know anything about their master's goals; the only responsibility they have is obedience. Jesus wanted to be in partnership with His disciples so they knew His goals and what part they played in helping to get them achieved. This type of partnership would be possible only if they kept a healthy, fruit-bearing relationship with Him.

One result of having a relationship with Jesus like this is a more productive prayer life. Jesus wants our prayers to be oriented toward what will help Him to accomplish His will. When our prayers are more closely aligned with what He wants and less with what we want, it is more likely that our prayers will be answered.

Jesus finished by returning to the importance of loving others if His disciples wanted to be bearers of fruit that lasts. He reminded them that they did not come to Him in order for Him to help them achieve their goals, but that He chose them so that they could help Him to achieve His. This could be accomplished only if they remained in a fruit-bearing relationship with Him, were obedient, and loved like He loves by being willing to lay down their lives for others.

9. *Why is important that we consider ourselves to be friends of Jesus rather than His servants or slaves?*

10. *What would make our prayers more productive?*

11. *What is required if we want Jesus' will to be accomplished in and through us?*

Give It Up!

Although some who read today's passage may have been in a situation where they had to risk their life for someone else, few of us will be asked to make this degree of sacrifice. But though we may not be asked to physically die in order to save another, all of us will at times be challenged give up something we place significant value on so that someone else can benefit from what we're willing to sacrifice.

One of those things is our time. Sometimes we hold on to our time as if it's our own or act as if none of it belongs to anyone else. Though having some "alone time" is important (Jesus often went off by Himself to pray), one measure of our love for others is a willingness to sacrifice significant portions of our time so that others can have more of it.

Another thing we are often asked to lay down for others is our financial resources. Some tithe and conclude that this is enough. But laying down one's material possessions for the sake of someone else may require giving beyond the minimum. It may require saying "No" to something we want and to use what we save for the benefit of someone else.

We may also be asked to give up our right to be honored or rewarded so that someone else can be honored or rewarded; we may be asked to forgo following a particular path so that others can follow theirs; we may be asked to sacrifice our comfort so that others have more of it.

Loving others like Jesus loved—love that is significant and sacrificial—may require letting go of something we're holding on to that we treasure. We need to be willing to "give it up" so that others can see through us what Jesus is like.

12. *What are some ways you can demonstrate significant and sacrificial love?*

13. *How would others benefit if you were willing to do so?*

14. *What would help you be more willing to demonstrate this type of love?*

Love Extravagantly!

Love is perhaps best expressed when we are willing to go beyond what is easy or mundane and for the sake of others, do what is uncomfortable, inconvenient, or even painful. This is the type of love Jesus demonstrated when He laid down His life on a cross to secure our redemption. And it's this type of love that He wants us to express toward others—love that is significant, sacrificial, and sometimes extravagant!

► *What can you do this week to demonstrate significant, sacrificial, and extravagant love?*

KEY VERSE

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. —John 15:5, KJV

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” —John 15:5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

November 9 through November 15

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Thessalonians 2:1-10—Example of Faith and Obedience.
- Tues.** Ephesians 5:8-16—Then Darkness, Now Light.
- Wed.** John 3:16-21—Live by the Light.
- Thurs.** 1 John 2:28—3:10—Children of God Love One Another.
- Fri.** 3 John 1-4—Walking Faithfully in the Truth.
- Sat.** 3 John 9-12—Imitate What Is Good Not Evil.
- Sun.** 1 John 3:11-24—Believe Jesus Christ; Love One Another.