

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK EIGHT - DAY ONE

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 15:11-17

READING: Romans 1:7 NLT; 1 John 3:1 AMP; Psalm 25:14 ESV

INTRODUCTION

“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 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.” John 15:12-15 ESV

The parable of the Master Gardener, the Vine, and the Branches in John 15 is about relationship. It's a relationship built on the foundation of love, and the byproduct is fruitfulness. God calls you to a relationship with Him. And in today's devotional, God is calling you into a friendship kind of relationship — “A Friend of God.” Jesus highlighted two qualities of friendship in John 15. The first is obedience: “*You are My friends if you do what I command you.*” The second is sacrificial love: “*someone lay down his life for his friends*”.

"Why is God's calling often framed as a task to be accomplished rather than a relationship to be cultivated?" The most important calling on your life isn't something you do. Your most important calling isn't to a role. It's not about regulations, rules, or rituals. It's not even a religion. Your first call, above all else, is to a relationship with God. God wants you to be a part of His family. He wants you to be His child. The most important thing that'll ever happen to you isn't something you'll do. It's something God will do. He'll call you, His child! He wants you to know Him and love Him and be His beloved son or daughter. The Bible says it like this:

“What an incredible quality of love the Father has shown to us, that we would [be permitted to] be named and called and counted the children of God! And so, we are!” 1 John 3:1 AMP

As you follow God, you don't have to check off all the things you think you should do with your life. Focus on your relationship with God, and He will not only reveal your unique calling, but He will also show you how to do what He wants you to do. The Lord is inviting you to enter into five distinct relationships with Him. The first is to know Him as your **FATHER**. A Father and son/daughter kind of relationship is defined by **LOVE**.

The second is to know Him as **GOD**. Knowing Him as God means you are His creation. A Creator/creation kind of relationship is defined by **STEWARDSHIP**. The third is to know Him as **KING**. As His subjects, we become citizens of His kingdom. Knowing Him as KING is defined by **DOMINION** – “Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done”! The fourth is to know Him as a **JUDGE**. God knows you will go through injustices in this life, and He doesn't want you to be the judge. Rather, present your case to Him, and let Him judge in righteousness and justice. Knowing Him as Judge is defined by **JUSTICE**. And the last one is **FRIENDSHIP**. Being a friend of God is determined by God, and being a Christian doesn't automatically make you a friend of God. Friendship with God is defined by the **FEAR OF THE LORD** and **SECRETS**. You become God's secret-bearer.

Psalm 24:14 put it this way:

English Standard Version: *“The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He makes known to them His covenant.”*

Good News Translation: *“The LORD is the friend of those who obey Him, and He affirms His covenant with them.”*

New International Version: *“The LORD confides in those who fear Him; [Friends] He makes His covenant known to them*

RESPOND

As a child of God, what are some of the truths you can claim for your life?

How does your family background shape your concept of being a “child of God”?

"Why do many people prioritize religious tasks over a relationship with God?"

● **FATHER – Do you know God as a Father, and are you His child?**

● **GOD – Do you know God as Creator, and are you a faithful steward?**

- **KING – Do you know God as King, and are you a citizen of His kingdom?**

- **JUDGE – Do you know God as Judge, and do you present your cases to Him for justice?**

- **FRIEND – Are you a friend of God, and can He trust and entrust His secrets to you?**

PERSONAL REFLECTION

What is your understanding of the term “Fear of the Lord”?

“The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He makes known to them His covenant.” Psalm 25:14 ESV

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK EIGHT - DAY TWO

OBEDIENCE IS A QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 15:14

READING: Isaiah 1:19; John 14:21; John 14:23; Luke 5:4; John 14:23

INTRODUCTION

“You are My friends if you do what I command you.” John 15:14 ESV

Obedience is one of God’s love languages. Scripture tells us: *“If you [really] love Me, you will keep and obey My commandments.”* John 14:15 AMP

There are two parts to obedience — the first is our willingness, and the second is our actions. There are great benefits to living a life of obedience to God.

“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the best of the land.” Isaiah 1:19 NLV

An obedient life makes you a candidate for divine visions and revelations of God:

“Whoever has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me. The one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him.” John 14:21 CEB

An obedient life makes you a habitation for God: *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him,”* Jesus replied. (John 14:23 ESV) You become God’s dwelling place!

Obedience leads to walking in the power of the Holy Spirit: *“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”* (John 14:15-17) The more you obey, the more power you have to obey. The less you obey, the less power you have to obey.

Obedience leads to intimacy with God. *Jesus replied, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”* (John 14:23 ESV) God making His home with you reflects closeness, hence intimacy.

Obedience leads to peace. *“Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* (John 14:24-27 NIV) God is the author of Peace, and He is drawn to an obedient life; hence, His peace

Obedience leads to fruitfulness. *“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my command, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”* (John 15:8-10 NIV) ABIDING life is a fruitful life.

RESPOND

A PRAYER TO PURSUE A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE

“When you obey My commandments, you remain in My love, just as I obey My Father’s commandments and remain in His love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with My joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.” John 15:10–12 NLT

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your great love and Your compassion that never fails. Forgive me for all acts of disobedience. I want to live a life of obedience because I love You. I know that delayed obedience is still disobedience. Just as You command children to obey their parents, You command Your children to obey You. I want to make wise decisions that honor and please You above all. I need Your grace and Spirit to empower me to obey, so I rest in You and trust You are working in my regenerated heart.

Father, I need Your grace to walk in total obedience. I pray that Your strength and wisdom would be with me as I make decisions that follow Your path. Help me to put Your Word to the test in my life so that my obedience will be a blessing to everyone who sees You working in me. Lord, help me to stay focused on You so the obstacles that come up won’t seem impossible to overcome. I know all things are possible through You, and I thank You for the privilege of doing any small task that brings You glory. May I decrease so You will increase.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK EIGHT - DAY THREE

LAY DOWN YOUR LIFE – A QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 15:13

READING: John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10; John 13:35; Romans 12:10

INTRODUCTION

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13 ESV

This statement upholds sacrificial love as the ultimate expression of love. In saying this, Jesus prepares His disciples for His crucifixion and shows them what He meant when He told them to *“love each other as I have loved you”* (verse 12). All true love involves some kind of sacrifice, as the lover seeks to benefit the loved one. It stands to reason, then, that the greatest love of all would involve a total laying down of one’s life for the loved one. God, Who is love, revealed His love for mankind through sacrifice (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Sacrifice is paramount in 1 John: *“This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* 1 John 4:10 ESV

The sacrificial love of God, also known as *agape love*, stands as the “greater love” and is how the Source of Love saved us.

Another reason why laying down one’s life is considered the greatest love is that it’s counterintuitive to human nature. Humans tend to prefer taking rather than giving, so instances of selflessness leave us amazed, even shocked. When a father dives into raging water to rescue his child, when a laboring mother asks the doctor to prioritize her child, or when a soldier falls on a grenade to save his brothers-in-arms, we’re humbled and awed. In the modern concept of love, the focus often gravitates toward self-satisfaction, and in many circles, the idea of sacrifice is considered unnecessary or even repugnant. In contrast to our diluted version of love, *agape* shines brightly. David, who was called a man after God’s own heart, said, *“... I will not offer to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”* 2 Samuel 24:24 CSB

For Christians, the expression of this “greater love” isn’t limited to literally laying down our lives. We don’t have to wait for a grandiose moment of sacrifice to love others as Jesus loves us. Our daily lives should be characterized by selflessness, a denial of ourselves for the good of others. Such displays of love should be common in the body of Christ. We are called to follow Christ, which includes showing love in the ways He demonstrated to us. Laying down your life for another is the heart of servitude. In that, you will have to make God your reason, motive, and motivation, rather than pleasing yourself.

Other portions of scripture also reflect the truth of John 15:13. For instance, Philippians 2:3-4 NIV instructs us to “...do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

And Romans 12:10 NIV urges Christians to “be devoted to one another in love” and to “honor one another above [themselves].” The Christian lifestyle does not nurture self-aggrandizement but centers on humility and self-denial.

Does the word “friend” in John 15:13 only mean to love our friends? Wouldn’t this contradict other passages like Matthew 5:46-47, “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”

In the context of John 15:13, the “friendship” Jesus refers to is the relationship He had with the disciples. Yet we know that Jesus did not just die for His “friends” alone. Romans 5:6 NIV says, “Christ died for the ungodly.” So, the principle of laying down one’s life extends farther than just benefiting friends. We are to show love even to enemies. There is no greater love than laying down one’s life for others. Jesus exemplified this love for us, and we are called to walk in the same selfless love. I love how Jesus makes it plain:

“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.” John 15:12-13 ESV

My prayer for you today is that you would recognize the depth of this love God has for you and that this love will be a reminder of how we should love one another. May we be willing to serve and care for the needs of others, knowing that our God has done the same. There is no greater love than this! May we always be mindful of the great love that He has had for us and that He would give His life for us. May this love compel us into action and intentional service to the world around us.

A PRAYER TO PRAY

Lord, I thank you for loving me. Your death and resurrection on the cross were the ultimate sacrifice for me. God, help me to never take Your love for granted. Help me to see Your love as a motivator to lay down my life for You, those around me, and my enemies. Teach me how to have eyes to see the needs of others and to be willing to share my resources and support in a way that would bring you honor. Show me, Lord, how to love and give the way that You would call me to. I thank You for Your heart for humanity. You, Lord, are my hero. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK EIGHT - DAY FOUR

THE FEAR OF THE LORD – A QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

KEY SCRIPTURE: Psalm 25:14

READING: John 15:15; Hebrews 10:31; Isaiah 11:3; Proverbs 1:7

INTRODUCTION

“The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He makes known to them His covenant.” Psalm 25:14 ESV

In John 15:15 ESV, Jesus said, *“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,”* and that has to do with the secrets of God. The only way to be a steward of God’s secrets is to walk in the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus *“will delight in the fear of the LORD, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, and He will not decide by what His ears hear.”* (Isaiah 11:3) NIV

The fear of the Lord, for the believer, is the reverence of God. Hebrews 12 offers a good description of this: *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”* Hebrews 12:28-29 NIV

This reverence and awe are exactly what the fear of God means for Christians. This is the motivating factor for us to surrender to the Creator of the Universe. Proverbs 1:7 NIV declares, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”* Until we understand Who God is and develop a reverential fear of Him, we cannot have true wisdom. True wisdom comes only from understanding who God is and that He is holy, just, and righteous. Deuteronomy 10:12, 20-21 NCB records, *“And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Fear the LORD your God and serve Him. Hold fast to Him and take your oaths in His name. He is your praise; He is your God, Who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes.”*

The fear of God is the basis for our walking in His ways, serving Him, and, yes, loving Him. Some liken the fear of God for believers to “respecting” Him. While respect is included in the concept of fearing God, there is more to it than that. A biblical fear of God, for the believer, includes understanding how much God hates sin and fearing His judgment on sin — even in the life of a believer. Hebrews 12:5-11 describes God’s discipline of the believer. There are amazing benefits to walking in the fear of the Lord: The following details some of the benefits of the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord: The following verses from the New International Version of the Bible detail some of the benefits of the fear of the Lord:

- Adds length to life. (Proverbs 10:27 NIV)
- Teaches a person wisdom. (Proverbs 1:7 NIV; 9:10 NIV; 15:33 NIV)
- Enables a person to avoid evil. (Proverbs 3:7; 8:13; 14:16; 16:6 NIV)
- Leads to life. (Proverbs 14:27 NIV; 19:23 NIV)
- Brings wealth and honor, and life. (Proverbs 22:4 NIV)

Those who fear the Lord are:

- A secure fortress and a refuge for their children. (Proverbs 14:26 NIV)
- Blessed. (Proverbs 28:14 NIV; Psalm 112:1 NIV; Psalm 128:1 NIV; Psalm 128:4 NIV)
- Are to be praised. (Proverbs 31:30 NIV)
- Lack nothing. (Psalm 34:9 NIV)

To those who fear the Lord, God:

- Confides in them. (Psalm 25:14 NIV)
- Makes His covenant known to them. (Psalm 25:14 NIV)
- Has His eyes on them. (Psalm 33:18 NIV)
- Has compassion for them. (Psalm 103:13 NIV)
- Loves them. (Psalm 103:17 NIV)
- Sends His righteousness to them. (Psalm 103:17 NIV)
- Delights in them. (Psalm 147:11 NIV)

Believers are not to be scared of God. We have no reason to be scared of Him. Fearing God means having a reverence for Him that greatly impacts the way we live. The fear of God is respecting Him, obeying Him, submitting to His discipline, and worshipping Him in awe.

A PRAYER TO PRAY

Heavenly Father,

You who are clothed in majesty and righteousness, I come before You, seeking the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. Forgive me for not walking in the fear of the Lord. Just as Jesus delighted in the fear of the Lord and did not judge by what His eyes saw, or what His ears heard, but by You, so do I choose to delight in the fear of the Lord. Lord, teach me, O God, to hold a reverential awe for Your holy name. Let my heart be struck with the beauty of Your purity, the depth of Your love, and the gravity of Your justice. Instill in me a profound respect and a holy tremor that recognizes Your omnipotence and Your sovereignty over all creation. Guide me in understanding that fearing You is not to be terrified but to be filled with awe, to honor You as God Almighty, and to acknowledge Your dominion in my life. May this lead me not into hiding but into a closer embrace with Your Spirit. Teach me Your ways that it may become the compass of my soul, directing my every thought, word, and deed.

I ask this in Jesus' Mighty Name.

Amen.

THE ABIDING CHALLENGE

WEEK EIGHT - DAY FIVE

GOD'S SECRET BEARER – A QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

KEY SCRIPTURE: John 15:15

READING: 1 Corinthians 2:10; Deuteronomy 29:29; Daniel 2:22; Jeremiah 6:16

INTRODUCTION

“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.” John 15:15

Jesus, in the above scripture, indicated that one of the qualities and benefits of being a friend of God is to disclose to you the secrets of God. “What He heard from His Father.” Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:10 NLT, *“But it was to us that God revealed these things by His Spirit. For His Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets.”* And in Deuteronomy 29:29 ESV we read, *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*

In yesterday's devotional, we looked at the Spirit of the fear of the Lord and how that qualifies us to be God's secret bearers. *“The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.”* (Psalm 25:14 NKJV) The Fear of the Lord means to:

- Obey God instantly.
- Obey God even if it doesn't make sense.
- Obey God even if it hurts.
- Obey God, even if you get nothing out of it.
- Obey God to completion.

Daniel 2:22 says God reveals the deep and secret things. The English Standard Version puts it that way, *“He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.”* God has a secret to tell us. And it's the best secret imaginable. If we lean close to Him as a friend and walk in the reverential fear of the Lord, we will hear Him whispering the confidential mystery into our hearts. The secret of the Lord is knowing the ways of God. Moses in Exodus 33:13 AMP said, *“Now therefore, I pray you, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways so that I may know You [becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with You, recognizing and understanding Your ways more clearly] and that I may find grace and favor in Your sight.”*

The secrets of God are the ancient paths where we find rest for our souls. Jeremiah 6:16 ESV puts it plainly: *“Thus says the LORD: 'Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it and find rest for your souls.'”* God called Amos to be a prophet and revealed secrets to him. Amos prophesied about the scattering of Israel, a famine of hearing the word of the Lord, and Israel's prosperity in the last days.

God revealed a mystery that had been hidden for ages to His saints. (Colossians 1:26-29) Paul revealed the mystery of God's will in Christ, which would bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth. (Ephesians 1:7-10) The king recognized Daniel's God as the revealer of secrets. (Daniel 2:47) Some were given insight into God's kingdom, while others were told the story in parables. (Luke 8:10)

The Holy Spirit is the revealer of the secrets of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 NIV, however, as it is written: *"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love Him, these are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God."*

RESPOND
PRAY DANIEL'S PRAYER

Daniel 2:17-23 ESV

God Reveals Nebuchadnezzar's Dream To Daniel

Nebuchadnezzar's dream, recorded in the biblical book of Daniel, describes a giant statue composed of different metals (gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay) that is eventually shattered by a stone, signifying the rise and fall of worldly empires and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. The wise men couldn't interpret the dream, but Daniel, through divine revelation, revealed its meaning, declaring that the statue represented successive human empires, with the stone symbolizing God's everlasting kingdom that will grow to fill the entire Earth.

"In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled, and he could not sleep. So, the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me, and I want to know what it means." Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So, tell me the dream and interpret it for me" Daniel 2:1-6 NIV

Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said:

Lord, I bless Your holy name! Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.

Lord, You change times and seasons; You remove kings and raise kings;

Lord, You give wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; give me wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, I pray!

Lord, You are the revealer of deep and hidden things; You know what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with You. Give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You. Enlighten the eyes of my understanding to know the hope to which You have called me and hidden riches in secret places reserved for me [Saints].

*To You, O God, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of You, for You have made known to me what is on Your heart." In Jesus' Name,
Amen!*

FRIEND OF GOD PRAYER

God saw Abraham as His friend: In Genesis 18:17 Amplified Bible: "The LORD said, 'Shall I keep secret from Abraham [My friend and servant] what I am going to do?'"

"Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. He was even called the friend of God." James 2:23 NLT

- **LORD GIVE ME THE FAITH OF FRIENDSHIP**

Jesus says, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." John 15:14 E S V

- **LORD, GIVE ME A HEART OF OBEDIENCE AS YOUR FRIEND**

"Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other." 1 John 4:11 NLT

- **LORD MANIFEST YOUR LOVE IN ME**

"God has made you His friends, in order to bring you, holy, pure, and faultless, into His presence." Colossians 1:22b GNT

- **LORD, MAKE ME YOUR FRIEND AND MAY I LIVE IN YOUR PRESENCE**

Dear Heavenly Father,

I come to you in the name of Jesus. I accept your invitation to friendship. You saw in Abraham, Moses, David, and the Apostles a heart of friendship. You said in 2 Chronicles 16:9 that Your Eyes move to and fro throughout the earth looking for those whose hearts are completely Yours so that You might show Yourself strong. Please cultivate in me a heart of friendship so I can walk with You intimately and please You in every way.

Teach me Your ways, O LORD; make them known to me. Teach me to live according to Your truth, for You are my God, Who saves me. I always trust in You. Remember, O LORD, Your kindness and constant love, which You have shown from long ago.

Forgive the sins and errors of my youth. In Your constant love and goodness, remember me, LORD! I ask this in Jesus' mighty name!

Amen.