

Matthew 22:34-40

Loving Our Neighbor

Image Church // Abide and Abound Week 3

Introduction

Image family, I hope you're doing well this morning...

If you're new with us, we're so glad that you're here... CONNECTION CENTER to join in/ask questions!

Well, we've been a series based out of **John 15:4-5** called **Abide and Abound** that's setting the framework for where we're headed over the next year...

I told you that we have **two primary goals** that we're going to be orienting around...

1. Abide: We want to abide in the riches of the gospel in order to take us deeper in our knowledge and love of God.

2. Abound: We want to abound in the gospel by bearing fruit that expands our impact locally, nationally, and internationally.

So, those **two goals** are going to be our two focuses over the next year that we're going to be orienting ourselves around and mobilizing to as a church over the next year...

And one of the other things that I have put in front of you and challenged you on is giving toward these goals through what we're calling **The Abide and Abound Initiative**...

The Abide and Abound initiative is what will help give us the *financial means* to fuel our efforts as we peruse these goals together over the next year...

- If you want to see what that looks like you can go to **page 6** in your guide...

Every dollar that you give toward this **Abide and Abound initiative** will go toward, and enhance, our missional efforts locally, nationally, and internationally...

So, here's what we want to see happen specifically through this **Abide and Abound Initiative**...

Together, we want to give above and beyond to see **at least \$15 thousand dollars** come over the months of **November and December** to fuel our missional efforts locally, nationally, and internationally.

For those of you giving, the challenge I'm putting in front of you is to give above and beyond what you're currently giving toward this initiative...

For others of you, you're not giving- I want to challenge you to start! This is a great opportunity to have an incredible impact through these different needs and opportunities...

You got a Commitment Card when you came in this morning- I want you to take that card and put it in your house in a place where you can see it and use it as a marker to pray and seek the Lord on what He's calling you to give...

And then on **November 7th** we're going to be having a **Commitment Weekend** on where we will come together and commit our **above and beyond gifts!**

- And then you'll have the opportunity to give toward your above and beyond gift over the months of **November and December**... this is not a yearlong initiative- this **Initiative** will end in **December**...

Alright, **if you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn to Matthew 22**... Remember we're building on the foundation of **John 15:4-5**...

The flow is this- *the gospel works in us, and then through us...* And it's what happens *through us* that reveals whether or not we're resting in Jesus...

This morning we're going to continue to expound on how we should be abounding *locally...*

Let me give you a quick context snapshot of what's happening here in **Matthew 22...**

What we have is 2 groups of religious people, the **Pharisees** and the **Sadducees**, who have been at it trying to trap Jesus, through a little *spontaneous Q&A...* *Not the guy you want to play this game with...*

And we're going to be jumping in at **verse 34** which is right after Jesus had just handled business on a question from the Sadducees... *Who are sad you see, because they don't believe in the resurrection or any afterlife...*

And now the ball goes to the Pharisees and their about to take their shot... *And it's how Jesus answers them that we're going to camp on, because its going to continue to flesh out this concept of **abiding and abounding**...*

Matthew 22:34-40

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. **35** And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: **36** "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?"

Now here seems to be the play... They were probably either trying to get Jesus to deny certain laws, or they were trying to get Him to answer in a way that would lead to an open debate so they could try to go toe to toe with Him...

Classic Jesus, He's going to allow neither...

Verse 37 He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. **38** This is the greatest and

most important command. **39** The second is like it: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** **40** All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

Now here's what Jesus does, He quotes both **Deut. 6:5 (Shema)**, and **Lev. 19:18** here in His answer... Following up by the fact that all the Law and the Prophets all *depend on these 2 elements...*

That word **depend** there in the original language literally means **to hang...**

Think about it like this, the way that **a door** is held up is solely based on the hinges that it hangs on... That's the picture Jesus is painting for us here... This **twofold love command** is the hinges that everything else hangs on and works off of...

This double command states the true purpose of all the law and the prophets in the **OT**, that everything that God did and established in the **OT** is revealed in, and points to the **love of God and love of neighbor...**¹

And not only is this the basic foundation of the **OT**, but it's also at the core of the **NT**... In fact, it's at the center of God's redemptive plan for humanity!!

Which means this is a **big deal!!** And if we miss what Jesus says here, or we don't know how to apply it, then we're missing what Christianity is all about!

Jesus has given a massive reorienting for the Pharisees, but He's also giving us an incredible framework that we need to unpack... And it's going to take us deeper in what it means to **abide and abound...**

So, let's dive into these **2 love commands** that Jesus gives so that we can wrap our minds around them, and ultimately so that we can embody them as a church family...

¹ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004). *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Vol. 3, pp. 245–246).

Here's how we can summarize the first command:

1. Fully commit to loving God as a way of life

This is not just lip service through a declaration, this is not a cognizant understanding... This is an **active engagement** that impacts your life...

- This is why Jesus says heart, soul, and mind...

Let's unpack this... one of the first things that we have to understand is that **love is not just a feeling, it is an action**...

- *Side note: That may help some of you with your marriage*

One of our biggest problems to understanding this is that the word love is so all encompassing... We use it so generally that we get confused...

- **Example:** We love BBQ, we love our Alma Mater (*even when they lose because they can't make free throws*)... We love our pets, and we love our spouse and our kids...
 - *Hopefully, there is a difference in those for you...*

See, we use the word **love** in so many ways to mainly describe a feeling... **But here's the problem**, if love is **only** a feeling then when the feeling is gone, so is love...

But that's not how love works according to the Bible...

Love is not defined by warm bubbly and emotional sensations... Now, you may have those as a result of love, but it's not the essence of love... Love isn't primarily an affection or an attitude, it's an action toward someone else, it's participating in something...

You could say it like this: **Love is when you actively orient to take pleasure in something or someone**...

Example: I love to fish (*you thought I was going to say hunt*), but the way I'm able to love fishing is by actually go fishing... It's the act of fishing that allows me to take pleasure in it... I can't know the love of fishing if I never participate in the activity...

You can't know love and you can't experience the impacts of love unless you **actively orient yourself to take pleasure in something or someone**... Love demands active engagement...

Tertullian wrote *that love is visible*... It's visible because it's active engagement and not just an emotion that you feel...

John Calvin says: *It's the free service of our wills*... Again, an active engagement...

Dr. West says: *Justice is what love looks like in public*. Again, an active engagement...

Here's why this is so important, for many of us **our emotions lead the way in our faith**...

- We don't **feel** like we love Him...
- **OR** we don't feel like God loves us...
- We don't **feel** the love of God emotionally...

How we feel controls our activity... And it never really works for us... Because feelings fade... And we're always left feeling confused...

Listen to me, your emotions and your feelings **do not** dictate or determine the foundation of your faith, and it can't drive your activity long term, and they're **not** the basis of your standing before God, **Jesus is!**

Who by the way gives us the greatest example of love as an action... **John 3:16: For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.**

We **experience** the love of God through His **intentional** and **active** love that He put on display through **Jesus**...

Gospel...

And when you understand His love for you, ***we respond to the love of God by taking pleasure in Him, and actively surrendering*** to Him for who He is and what He's done...

This is a holistic lifestyle that's characterized by our love for God that happens as we take pleasure in Him by remembering what he's done for us through the ***finished work of Jesus!***

- We were sinners but we're now sons and daughters...
- You once were a rebel, but now you've been made righteous...
- You once were condemned in you sin, and now you are co-heirs with Christ...

IOW: The way you love God is by taking pleasure in Him, by delighting in Him because of what he's extended to you through the gospel...

*In its simplest form, here is what it means to be in a relationship with God, what it means to love God: **loving God is to be in active awe of the gospel**...*

And listen, it's through the gospel that you experience God over and over again, and the more you experience God through the incredible extension of the gospel, the more you begin to desire the God who extended the gospel to you, the more you want to know Him...

You begin to realize that the deeper you go, the more you want... You begin to see the vastness of who God is and all that he has to offer you...

And it's then that you begin to **feel** the emotions that are a result of the love of God!

For some of you the reason why you don't understand Christianity, or why your life doesn't **emit** love for Jesus, or **display** your love for God is because *you've never seen His love for you through the gospel!*

You haven't surrendered to it- you haven't taken pleasure in it, you aren't delighting in it...

For some of you, Christianity's been more of an ***emotional experience*** where you prayed a prayer one-time...

- ***Started with one and has continued in that vein...***

The gospel isn't a one-time prayer that you pray, it's a continual trust and surrender to the person of Jesus... It's an active surrender to the gospel daily...

For others of you, you're looking for an ***emotion to drive your faith***, and you can't find it and so you're stagnant... Listen, ***emotions don't drive your faith, your active faith will drive your emotions...***

Ok, real quick... How do we cultivate active awe in our life?

To be actively in awe it means that you have to believe and behold who God is and what He's done over and over again... You have to ***ABIDE...*** *We don't naturally feel that...*

God's given us tools...

- **Word-** *here's what God's word does...* He lift's our eyes **from** our weaknesses, inabilities, failures and shortcomings to who he is, building our confidence in Him for who He is, that He is big, that He is mighty, that He is beautiful and that He cannot fail, and will not fail, that He's all powerful, and that His love is incredible and it's been extended to us through the blood of Jesus!

Prayer- The ability to communicate with God, a way to get to know God... A way to ask God to reveal His glory to you- and tell Him when you're not in active awe...

Community: Comes through relationships with other believers in the local church... Image Bearers with different gifts and attributes, help us see more of who God is, remind us of the love of God...

All ways that you're leaning into the power of the **Holy Spirit!**

- ***Don't point your finger at God and not participate in these...***

And watch this, watch what the **Spirit** does... as you orient your heart around who God is, through Word, Prayer, and Community, you will begin to cultivate active **awe** of God, he will begin to transform who you are from the inside out...

- **Example:** when you buy a house...

Active awe in the gospel leads to action...

- If we don't have **awe** in the gospel, if we're not **abiding** in the gospel, then we will never be able to live out the second part of this twofold command that Jesus gives...

Let's look at the second part of this two-fold commands Jesus says:

2. Love your neighbor in the same way that you love yourself

Jesus says: "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38** This is the greatest and most important command... **Then He says: 39** The second is like it: **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

Now I want you to notice how Jesus says this... He says **the second is like the first...**

- Which means that this **second element** of this twofold command is in no way less important than the first part... It is *like* the first, which means that it's of equal importance...

*The first commandment is the basis for the second, the second is a visible expression of the first.*²

Which means that if you're not loving your neighbor, if you're not loving others then it's an **indicator** that the first part of this two-fold command Jesus gives isn't being lived out...

- *Flesh this out...*

Our vertical relationship with God should flow horizontally to others... If it doesn't, then that's a problem... *It's like the check engine light on your life...*

And when we're talking about loving your neighbor, we're not talking about being nice to them... *Yeah, you should be nice to them, but that's not what it means to love your neighbor...*

Jesus doesn't just say to love your neighbor, **love them as you love yourself!**

What does this mean, and what does it look like?

Best definition: John Piper: Make your *self-seeking* the measure of your *self-giving*...

- Now how do we keep this in check because we tend to seek unhealthy and sinful things... *is this promoting self-centered thinking???*

Piper continues: Before you make your own self-seeking the measure of your self-giving, make God the focus of your self-seeking. This is the point of the first commandment.

IOW: The first commandment changes the way that we view ourselves, it reorients our hearts around who God is... And it changes the way that you view yourself... The gospel reprograms us, it changes the things that we desire... **The gospel takes us from self-centered to Christ-centered...** Which means that we have the ability to love ourselves in the right way and not in a self-indulgent way...

Your identity in Christ leads to loving like Christ...

Loving your neighbor is: living in light of your active awe, it's loving others in response to the way God has loved you...

1 john 4:10-11 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. **11** Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

² John Piper, *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself Part 2.*

And it's through this **paradigm shift** that happens through our love of God, that we're able to love our neighbor through that same vein...

Let me give you a **framework** for how this should play out in light of what we now know...

- To the same degree that you seek wellbeing for yourself, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree that you pursue protection for yourself, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree you seek provision, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree that you seek care, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree that you pursue love, seek it for your neighbor...
- To the same degree you seek stability, seek it for your neighbor...

It is a mindset that we adopt...

Now let's get more **practical**...

Who I my neighbor: Luke 10- reframes this question- Jesus' challenge is: **am I being neighborly?**

- **What does it look like to be neighborly-** Showing compassion and intentionality to anyone in need...

I want you to think through this in two ways:

- Physical Neighbor...
- Non-physical neighbor...

My physical neighbor...

- God has put you where you are to be a neighbor...
- Some of you are looking past this...
- Can't do this well- will struggle beyond this...

LYN Movement...

Non-physical neighbor:

- As we cultivate intentionality with our physical neighbors and as we go deeper into the love of God and what that means then it continues to lift our eyes past just our immediate neighbors to those who are in need...
- Widow
- Elderly
- Immigrants...
- Racial injustice...
- People who don't have access to food, shelter, medical care...
- Standing up for anyone being discriminated against...

Here's the thing... If we really understand the nature of the Kingdom, then we have to understand our call as citizens of that Kingdom...

To live out now the elements that are true of the Kingdom we're a part of!

To cultivate a type of shalom in a broken world...

In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight--a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.

- Cornelius Plantinga, *It's Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*

This happens through neighbor love...

My question: what does it look like for my neighbors to flourish and how can I work towards their flourishing?

This is most certainly a call to a radical way of life... Here's the thing this feels overwhelming...

2 Things I will leave you with to help you think through this:

1. We have to be at a place where we don't just embrace Jesus, but we also embrace the cross...

- A call to come and die, a call to sacrifice...
- Combats complacency

2. We have to embrace the gift of limits (Pete Scazzero)

Few of you are here...

These are not limits that you set for your confidence and comfort they are limits that keep you centered on God and faithful to who He has called you to be...

If this was a way of life for a community it would totally change the way that we view this...

Identify how you're going to pursue the love of neighbor... Step into it sacrificially...

Conclusion [VAMP]

Jesus said: *Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul and mind... And love your neighbor as yourself...*

Are you actively in awe of who God is and what He's done for you??

Active awe in the gospel leads to activity loving your neighbor.

Pray...

OUTTAKES

If we really take what Jesus says here **seriously** then inevitably what will happen is that we won't be loving others *as we love ourselves...* We will be loving others *instead of loving ourselves...*

And this feels threatening, to us, it feels invasive of our own self-love... It feels like our neighbors have more of a stake in our time and resources than we do...³

We don't like that, it's hard, it's uncomfortable...

But I think that's exactly the tension that Jesus wants us to walk in... I think that's the heart of what He's getting at...

That we would step back and go wait a min... this love that Jesus is talking about for my neighbor is radical, *how could we do this...*

³ Thoughts here from John Piper, *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself Part 2*.

Gospel... Oh wait, think about the love that God had for me, how radical it was how crazy it was, that God would love me when I was unlovable...

I was stained I was tarnished, I was trash...

God sent His Son to die for that, he died for me and He died for you...

THAT'S RADICAL! That means that it changes the way that we view, God, ourselves, and our neighbor...

We are to love our neighbor in the same way we love ourselves but the only way we can do that is by remembering the love God had for us...

I know this is weighty this morning... I know this isn't a feel good... But it is what the bible teaches...

A. The Word of God

In order to really love someone, in order to commit to someone, in order to desire to be loyal to them, you have get to know them...

It's like when meet a girl or a guy for the first time, you don't just immediately fall in love with them... *unless of course you're a college student... That when "love at first sight happens"*

You get to know someone first, you go on a few dates, you learn more about their personality and characteristics, and **the more you learn about them the more you love them**, the more you're amazed...

It's the same way with God. The more that you learn about him and the more you understand more about him, the more you are going to be in **awe** of Him... The more it's going to orient your heart and mind around who he is...

And here's the thing, **here's what God's word does**: every time we get in it, God is constantly showing us our weaknesses, our inability, our failures and shortcoming...

But then He lift's our eyes **from** our weaknesses, inability, failures and shortcomings to who he is, building our confidence in Him for who He is, that He is big, that He is mighty, that He is beautiful and that He cannot fail, and will not fail, that He's all powerful, and that His love is incredible and it's been extended to us through the blood of Jesus!

The word of God helps keep our emotions in check, it runs like a filter for us, it serves as a reminder for us, it breathes life into us, it renews us and it instructs us in what it means to actively run after Jesus.

- **Hebrews 4:12**: Word of God is living and active...
- **2 Timothy 3:16**: All Scripture is inspired by God...
- **Matthew 13:23**: But the one sown on the good ground—this is one who hears and understands the word

The more you infuse the Word of God in your life- **the more you abide**- the more you will actively begin to be in Awe of God!

The second way you can cultivate a love for God is through

B. Community

Hebrews 3:12-14

12 Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

13 But encourage each other daily, while it is still called **today**, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. **14** For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start.

Hebrews 10:24

23 Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, **25** not neglecting to gather

together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

We have to have people around us that are going to point us to God. We are sinners and we constantly need someone holding us accountable and walking with us through life. When our eyes are no longer focused on God we need someone to tap us on the shoulder and say *look, look at who God is, look at what he is saying to you in his word...*

Comes through relationships with other believers in the local church... We need this... I know this feels like a lot, but think ***intersection not addition***... Do what you already do with other people...

Another important part of community is this: Check this out... So, God reveals himself to us through displaying different attributes of himself through the gifts and traits he has given to us, so when a Community Group comes together they get to see many of the different attributes that God has given each person and so in turn each person is able to learn a little bit more about who God is!

In order to cultivate ***an active awe*** for God, you have to constantly be pointed to God. Developing a love for God is a group project.

The third way that we can cultivate a love for God is through

C. Prayer

God is a person; how can you ever learn to know and love him if you never commune with him.

Can you genuinely love someone and never talk with them?? Can you love someone and never tell them you love them??

Can you love someone yet never take the time to listen to them???

Prayer is dialogue with God, it's a time where you listen...

Prayer is an active declaration that ***I can't but that God can***... That we are needy and God is able... That we are finite, but He is infinite

Prayer is something that reorients our hearts around who God is in light of who we are...

To be in ***active awe*** of God we have to spend time communing with God in prayer.....