

Living in God

1 John 2:1=6

John Breon

We're devoting a series of messages to *being who we're meant to be*, being the people, being the church God wants us to be. For several years I've prayed, and encouraged others to pray, "God bless this church and help us be all that you want us to be."

Way back in the early 90s, many churches used a program called *Vision 2000*. It was a way to get us thinking forward, imagining where God was leading, and making plans for the future. The church I was serving at the time went through the program and I expect this church did as well. One component of *Vision 2000* was a worship attendance crusade. The material for that included the prayer, "God, help us to be all that you want us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen." So that's where I first started using this type of prayer.

Some time later, one of my mentors suggested this prayer: "Lord, this is your church to do with as you will." I combined that with the "God help us be" prayer to form something like, "Lord, this is your church to do with as you will. Help us be all you want us to be." At some time, I started saying, "We are your church, to do with as you will. Help us be all you want us to be." Then, at some point, I started saying, "God bless this church and help us be all you want us to be." That's where we are now.

As I mentioned last week, I started praying what the Bible says about being the church, being God's people, being disciples of Jesus as a way of filling in the meaning of "all God wants us to be." We saw that being established in the truth, being true disciples who abide in Jesus' word and are set free by the truth, are part of who God intends us to be.

One day, 1 John 2:6 stood out as another description of all that God wants us to be: "Whoever claims to live in him must live just as Jesus did." So I started praying, "Help us be all you want us to be: people who live in you, living as Jesus did."

When I started digging into that verse and its context as I prepared for this message, I saw how it connects with the verses around it and with

themes all through 1 John, as well as the Gospel of John and other passages. Studying the Bible shows how verses connect. One leads to another and then to another. Scripture is kind of like a web—touching one thought or idea makes another vibrate. One calls attention to another. That's one reason reading and studying the Bible and Christian thought are exciting.

Digging into a passage of Scripture also shows you more than you see at first glance. For example, I discovered, or was reminded, that when 1 John 2:6 says "live in him," the word for live is "abide" or "remain." When it says to "live as Jesus did," the word there is "walk," with *walk* as a metaphor for a way of life.

Now let's see what it means to live in God, abide in God, remain in God and to show that that's what we're doing by walking as Jesus walked.

I heard a preacher say, "It's not just devotions fifteen minutes a day; we *live in God!*" God calls us to a relationship where we know God as our life. God is the source of our life and all people live in him in some way. The apostle Paul, speaking to philosophers in Athens, pointed them to the Creator God. Paul quoted some of their own poetry as he made his case: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). There's a sense in which every person lives in God because God is the source of all life.

To be all that God wants us to be, to be in this relationship with God, starts with acknowledging God as the source of life. But it goes farther and deeper. We become intentional about living in God. We respond to God's call and we commit ourselves to knowing God, abiding in God, remaining in God, continuing in relationship with God.

First John has a lot to say about knowing God. Verses three and four of chapter two tell us that we can know that we know God if we keep his commandments. If we say we know God but don't do what he says, we're lying. But if we obey God's word, the love of God is perfected in us.

Do you know God? Not just by reputation, not just by description, but do you know him by acquaintance? Are you acquainted with God (see Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today* 139)? Tim Ford's doing a series of messages on "Not a Fan." He talks about the difference between being a fan of Jesus or a follower of Jesus. You may be a fan of a sports hero or an

actor or a musician or a business leader. You can know a lot about that person. You may even feel like you do know them. But you're not personally acquainted with them. You don't really know them. The kind of knowing God wants for us is intimacy, closeness, like we know each other in marriage and family. Dallas Willard writes about knowing Jesus:

To know Christ in the modern world is to know him in *your world now*. To know him in your world now is *to live interactively with him right where you are* in your daily activities. This is the *spiritual life* in Christ. He is, in fact, your contemporary, and he is now about *his* business of moving humanity along toward its destiny in this amazing universe. You don't want to miss out on being a part—*your part*—of that great project. You want to be sure to take your life into his life, and in that way to find your life to be "eternal," as God intended it. (*Knowing Christ Today* 139)

To live in God is to know God. To know God is to obey God. To obey God is to love God. To love God is to know God loves us and to love God back. This letter says a little later, "We love because he first loved us" (4:19). To love God is to be in relationship with God, abiding in God, remaining in God, staying in relationship with God. To abide in God means to walk as Jesus walked.

We don't know God in some mystical experience that's removed from the life we live every day. There is a mystical or mysterious element to knowing God, but we know God in our everyday reality. Knowing God is down to earth. God comes to us in this life. Jesus is God with us as a real human being, living real life. That's why he's the one we need to follow, to walk as he walked.

In the first verse of this chapter, Jesus is our *advocate* with the Father. The word there is the same word Jesus used when he talked about the Holy Spirit being our Advocate or Helper or Counselor. In the ancient world, it meant someone who stood by your side and spoke on your behalf. That's who Jesus is for us. And, because the Holy Spirit is our Advocate, he's not

only by our side but also within us. We can't walk as he walked without him helping us.

What does it mean to walk as Jesus walked, to live as Jesus lived? What does it mean that God wants us to be like Jesus, to live like Jesus? What do we mean when we say we want to be like Jesus? What are some steps we take toward walking like Jesus walked?

Used to be, when I would think about balance in Christian life, I had the idea that balance meant barely standing, like balancing on a tightrope or a balance beam. With one misstep I could fall. But then it occurred to me, or God gave me this insight, that balance can refer to being able to stand and walk. You have to have balance to walk normally. Being a balanced follower of Jesus isn't like doing a high wire act. It's standing in the Lord and walking with him.

Remember, "walk" here is a figure of speech for a way of life. What's the Jesus way of life and how do we walk in it?

I'm going to suggest a couple of thoughts about Jesus that came to mind as I considered this. There's a lot more to who Jesus is. One step we can take to live Jesus' way is to get familiar with the four Gospels in the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They're our primary and best source for knowing about Jesus and getting to know him. I hope you're reading and re-reading the Gospels regularly. Doing that leads us to getting acquainted with what other New Testament writers say about Jesus, how they reflect on who he is and what he does. And that leads us to look at their source material, the Old Testament. So again, working in one part of Scripture takes us to the whole thing.

All right. Here are a couple of ways to think about how Jesus lived, how he walked during his special time on earth. Considering them helps us see how we're to walk, how we can live, how we can be all that God wants us to be.

First, *humility*. Jesus is always moving downward. Here's that down-to-earthness of God in Jesus Christ. Paul talks about this in a great passage where he probably quotes a hymn the early Christians sang about Jesus.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus [we think like Jesus and have his kind of attitude as we walk with him], who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself [or, made himself of no reputation], taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

Think of how God the Son humbled himself to become human. Then he lived a life of humility. Humility really has to do with being down-to-earth. The word humility is related to *humus*, dirt. Jesus got down into life with us. He associated with all kinds of people, including those who were on the margins of society, who were downtrodden. The way of the cross, the way of self-giving, of humility was the way Jesus walked all through his life and death on the cross.

In 1 John 2:2 we see that Jesus is the *atoning sacrifice* for our sins—and not just for ours, but for the sins of the whole world. Jesus died for everyone. If we'll accept that gift, he forgives and cleanses us from sin and reunites us with God.

We can't repeat the atoning death of Jesus. His sacrifice was once and for all. But we can echo it, we can share what he did so others can know about it.

Are we willing to walk that way? Will we go with Jesus and become like him in getting close to people who hurt, who are left out, who are needy?

That downward mobility of Jesus led to an uplifting.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9-11)

As Jesus was raised from the dead, exalted, and lifted up, he brings us with him if we are in him, walking with him.

Another way that Jesus walked—and it's related to humility—is in obscurity or *hiddenness*. As you read the Gospels, you're struck by the fact that two of them tell about Jesus' birth (Matt and Luke). One of them tells about when Jesus was twelve years old (Luke). And that's all we have about his life until he was around thirty years old. There are a few hints here and there about his family and possibly his occupation during those years. But most of his life on earth is hidden. That's frustrating in a way, but it's also encouraging. I like how one writer connects the hiddenness of Jesus to us:

Though you and I may be known in our circle of family and friends, we live for the most part a spirituality that participates in the hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth. He chose to witness to this ordinary way for the first thirty years of his life, only then entering into public ministry. In the hiddenness of family life, he blessed the daily existence in and through which we too find our sanctification. (Susan Muto, *Pathways of Spiritual Living* 29-30)

Jesus not only saves and redeems us through his death, but also through his life. By becoming human, he affirms the value of human life. He lived life as God intended. He shows us how to be all that God wants us to be. Ancient Christian writers said that Jesus "assumed" humanity, that is, he took it on and took it into himself. What he assumed, he healed. By living a truly human life, Jesus blesses and redeems and heals and sanctifies all of life.

What if in the hiddenness of our lives we're becoming like Jesus? We're walking with him in ways that may never be well known, but he's using us to transform life, to bring glimpses of new creation where we are. And we don't have to do dramatic things to walk as Jesus walked in the hidden places of life.

Someone posted this quotation the other day. I read it as I was thinking about this idea of following Jesus in hiddenness.

The majority of us lead quiet, unheralded lives as we pass through this world. There will most likely be no ticker-tape parades for us, no monuments created in our honor. But that does not lessen our possible impact, for there are scores of people waiting for someone just like us to come along; people who will appreciate our compassion, our unique talents. Someone who will live a happier life merely because we took the time to share what we had to give. Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have a potential to turn a life around. It's overwhelming to consider the continuous opportunities there are to make our love felt. (Leo Buscaglia, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/41610-the-majority-of-us-lead-quiet-unheralded-lives-as-we>)

First John talks a lot about love. This little letter refers to the word *agape* fifty-two times (C. Clifton Black, "The First, Second, and Third Letters of John," *The New Interpreter's Bible*). *Agape* is the word for self-giving love, the love that wills the good of another. It's the love God has. In fact, John says, "God is love" (4:16). It's the love God shows us in Jesus Christ, who was fully and truly human, who suffered and died for us, who was raised, and who now lives to give us life. It's the love we're called to show to each other. To know God, to abide in God, and to walk as Jesus walked is to let God love us, to love God, and to love one another. We will the good, and seek the good, and work for the good of each other.

As we're becoming all that God wants us to be, we get next to people, strengthen them with Christ's strength, pray for them, share his forgiveness and make it real as we accept them, and we relate to them as forgiven people. That's all involved in walking and living as Jesus did (Lloyd John Ogilvie, *When God First Thought of You* 30). And that's all involved in knowing God and remaining in him. It's part of being all that God wants us to be.