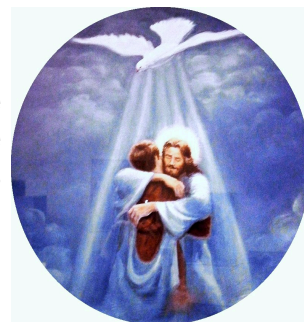




"I AM where two or three are gathered in My Name."

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Something for you to take to heart (an expression that's often repeated in the Older Testament!): **If** your prior religious instruction has taken place within the context of nominal Christianity, then you may be unaware of the wholehearted experience with your heavenly Father and Lord Jesus that's offered to the *genuinely* born again. The Great News that's found within the New Covenant which our Lord made possible isn't limited to getting you "saved." Rather, this amazing work of sacrificial love represents an offer of **divine belonging** that you readily experience in your life. This is a relationship of spiritual intimacy. Through your ongoing interaction with the indwelling Spirit of our Lord, you are empowered to keep pressing on in His grace to fulfill Father's purposes.



This may be new ground for you. The life of **divine belonging** we'll be discussing here has nothing in common with the theological bamboozling that's so prevalent in nominal Christianity: people whose sense of belonging has more to do with their loyalty to a specific denomination or a specific congregation or a specific pastor. You can recognize many of these misguided Christians by their conversations. They're devoid of any sense of **divine belonging** which would arise if there were any active rule of our Lord Jesus in their life, or if they were fulfilling any of Father's purposes for them to His glory.

In this Abide we want to share with you the biblical characteristics of the *genuinely* born again in experiencing **divine belonging**. We'll also clarify how **divine belonging** impacts your depth of belonging to one another as extended spiritual family in a fellowship of homes. We're talking "heart and soul" relationship here, something that's repeated time and again in the Hebrew Scriptures. Biblically speaking, your *heart* represents your deepest innermost feelings in all their multifaceted array. This means that it's likely that *your heart and your mind* need to be renewed if you're to fully experience **divine belonging** to your Father and Lord Jesus as well as the *communal belonging* of your home fellowship as family. *Divine belonging* is a heartfelt experience that's unconfined by creedal persuasions and religious form.

We've discovered a particular characteristic over the years which helps distinguish the heartfelt quality of *divine belonging* in the *genuinely* born again. In conversations you often hear their references to and testimonies of the divine **WHO** coming first or most often out of their mouth. As our Lord Jesus says, "For the mouth speaks what overflows from the heart" (Luke 6:45).

❖ We want to reiterate that the Hebraic foundations require you to prioritize your heartfelt commitment to: (1) your Father and Lord Jesus; (2) your Home; (3) your Fellowship of Homes. Your divine belonging to your Father and Lord Jesus stems from your *obedient child-like trust* and *ongoing repentance*.



Please reflect on these questions:

- Does the overflow from my heart reveal divine belonging to my Father and my Lord Jesus?
- Do my Father and my Lord Jesus hold a dearer place of love in me than my own biological family?

The Heartfelt Attributes Of Divine Belonging

Experiencing divine belonging begins with the day you were *genuinely* born from above and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. *If* at that time you experienced heartfelt godly sorrow concerning your own sinful depravity and determined by His grace to put away all evil from your life, then what we'll be discussing will be that much easier for you to experience "*heart and soul*". You'll also discover that true fellowship among followers of Jesus is a cooperative endeavor of the humble in helping each other live out these attributes.

1. Divine belonging requires that your Father and Lord Jesus be *exclusively loved and honored in your life.*

When you hear the word "jealous", you probably wince that it's a negative character trait like envy. But the Bible is clear in reference to the jealousy of our Father. His righteous jealousy arises from His demand for an **exclusive position** in your life in the covenant relationship to which He has called you: "*Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose Name is Jealous, is a jealous God*" (Exodus 34:14; see also Deuteronomy 4:24). God is called the Husband of Israel in Isaiah 54:5 even as Jesus is the Heavenly Bridegroom awaiting His Bride, the collective called-out ones (Revelation 19:7). This covenant of love (see Nehemiah 1:5; Daniel 9:4) is between you and your spiritual "marriage partner", and leaves no room for honoring or venerating any other spiritual entity! This *unique exclusivity* is emphasized as God's chief heartfelt command to both Israel in Deuteronomy 6:5 and to all the *genuinely* born again in Mark 12:30: "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**" This wholehearted response can happen only through the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Our heavenly Father and Lord Jesus must be the preeminent recipients of your deepest affections if you're *genuinely* born again. In Matthew 10:37 our Lord spells out the relational cost of this depth of divine belonging: "*Anyone who loves their father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*". These words are our Lord's personal warning to all the *genuine* to examine their hearts closely!



In our own lives we can strongly affirm that loving our Father and Lord Jesus with the exclusiveness that's demanded of us adds significantly to the depth and quality of our loving each other and all others He puts in our path!

2. Divine belonging requires that your life pleases your Father and your Lord.

First off, we're *not* talking about trying to earn acceptance from God by what you do. In our first two Abides we presented the heartfelt requirement by our heavenly Father and Lord Jesus that the *genuinely* born again possess these: **obedient child-like trust** and **ongoing repentance**. These two attributes are distinctive and emanate from your gratefully loving relationship with our Father and Lord Jesus. Each of these reveals that you have a deep and abiding appreciation for **Who** you are trusting and **Who** you offend by your sin. This awareness is love-driven and is necessary for you to live a life that's pleasing your Father and your Lord.

God's Word is clear in this command to those who love and serve Jesus as their Lord and Savior: "*find out what pleases the Lord!*" (Ephesians 5:10; see also Romans 12:2; Colossians

1:10). In other words, you must discern from the Scriptures what is required of you in pleasing our Lord, and then follow through out of grateful and obedient love for Him. Study the Bible with this purposeful intent to please our Lord because of your appreciation for the amazing grace that's extended to you. This motive intensifies you experiencing divine belonging through His Spirit within you. Your desire to please your Father and Lord Jesus is made manifest as you continue in these biblical requirements:

- you apply our Lord's commands to your life out of grateful love (John 14:15).
- you fulfill Father's will as His beloved son or daughter (Matthew 7:21).

👉 Your love-based resolve to uphold the exclusive place of your Father and Lord Jesus in your life and your unwavering commitment to do what pleases your Father and Lord Jesus is the degree to which you will experience divine belonging. (And keep in mind that in *any* relationship in which you desire a deeper sense of belonging, having a heart that wants to please the other person reveals the character of your inner person.)

3. Divine exclusiveness and seeking to please God underscores communal belonging.

When you humbly embrace the exclusive love which your Father and Lord require, and when you live to please your Father and your Lord Jesus, then you are all the more motivated to fulfill your biblical responsibilities to other people. Walking in divine belonging is vital because being part of a fellowship of homes, the extended spiritual family which our heavenly Father is restoring, requires ***interpersonal responsibilities*** that are far greater than anything that nominal Christianity calls for.

If your heart is longing to be part of the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship that Father is restoring, then you'll need godly humility to prepare yourself for commitment to other *genuinely* born again followers of Jesus. (As with everything that our Lord commands you, call on the Holy Spirit within you to help you grow this essential character quality. And don't be surprised if some unpleasant situations arise to test whether you actually are growing in humility!)

Evaluate your own growth in the character quality of humility using these verses:

•“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3,4). •“The humble He guides in justice, And the humble He teaches His way” (Psalms 25:9). •“These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at My word” (Isaiah 66:2). •“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). •“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time” (1Peter 5:6).

The vast majority who are part of nominal Christianity avoid humbling themselves no matter what the circumstances. But if you're *genuinely* born again, you won't resist our Lord's will this way! He commands His own, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:10). If you're intent on pursuing the humility that places others above yourself, then it's imperative that you seek first to be like your Lord: “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29).

A certain mission in Rwanda used the Hebraic *communal-based context* when they first made cross-cultural contact with a particular village. They first sat *humbly* with the village elders for three days to discuss their motivation and purpose. When the elders saw the heart of the Hebraic-oriented missionaries being expressed, they told the whole tribe, “Listen to these people! They are here for our good.”

You might say that humility is refinement into Christ's likeness when you get yourself out of the way. *"Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me"* (Matthew 16:24). No matter how mature or immature you are in Christ, you are called to live with the all-important character quality of humility. And in a home fellowship family, it's imperative that you help each other grow in humility. It's when you keep choosing the humble path that you place your Father and Lord Jesus and all others ahead of your own pursuits or gain. In so doing, you're encompassed by a divine peace that all can see!

4. Divine belonging instills a strong sense of "we" in your fellowship family.

Before anti-Semitic theology, Hellenism, and Humanism had gained a foothold in Christianity, those who first followed our Lord Jesus had a strong sense of **communal self-awareness**. As sons of Abraham they saw themselves collectively as a people set apart by our heavenly Father, called out from the goals and values of the world so they might please Him by fulfilling His purposes to His glory. Their strong sense of **we** can be grown and matured as you mutually apply our Lord's commands as a family or home fellowship family.

Our previous writings disclosed a vital truth: Most of the commands in the Newer Testament are written in the plural sense, not a singular one. In other words, they're written for a group of people to put into practice together, such as a family or the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship. Our heavenly Father wants His children to cooperate in making His Word their way of life. That's how we're transformed together into the love-based motivations of His Son Jesus.

Most English translations of the Bible miss the plural collective sense of the 1,050 commands in the Newer Testament. For example, the admonition to *"continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling"* (Philippians 2:12) is communal: *"YOU (plural) work out your salvation together."* Father intends that we mutually apply His Word to our lives—especially within our marriages, families, and home fellowship families. Certainly the Bible's metaphor of spiritual gifts as various parts of the human body depicts them cooperating together.

❖ Far more than any academically-based Bible instruction can accomplish, mutually applying our Lord's commands greatly enhances the sense of belonging that pleases Him in a home fellowship/house church. When our Lord directs the *genuinely* born again, *"If you (plural) love Me, keep My commands"* (John 14:15), He is calling for mutual experience of divine belonging.

👍 Please download *Discerning Levels of Friendship*, to clarify the depth of heartfelt commitment to belonging that's required of the *genuinely* born again. You'll recognize that "Intimate Friendship & Fellowship" is the deepest relationship that followers of Jesus can have with each other. The extent of experiencing **divine belonging** to each other is developed in your mutual support in Christ-like character development. You have the freedom and mutual responsibility to correct each other and help each other keep pressing on in service to Him as Lord and King.

For a more extensive understanding of *belonging*, please read: *"Put On Love, Which Binds Them All Together In Perfect Unity"*.

Depersonalizing divine belonging through liturgy: Both Roman Catholics and then Protestants adopted **impersonal liturgy** in their services, eliminating Spirit-led participation (1Corinthians 14:26). Liturgy in its variety of expressions is the pre-established religious ritual by which public worship is conducted. In the sixth century Pope Gregory invented a liturgical order for service for Catholics that has remained basically unchanged. Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin developed a liturgical order that has remained standard for most of Protestantism: a welcoming prayer, hymns, announcements, prayer, offertory, sermon, hymn, benediction.

But be warned. Established liturgy impedes our Lord's own from mutually expressing their **divine belonging** when they're gathered together. Father intends that when the *genuinely* born again gather, 'Spirit-orchestrated participation' occurs in which the genuine come prepared to participate.