

STUDY GUIDE

NEW VISION
THE MIDDLE
JESUS THE
TRUE VINE
JOHN 15:1-17
11/26/2017



NEW VISION

MAIN POINT

A disciple walks with Christ by abiding in Him.

INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When did your relationship with Jesus begin? What are some of the highlights of that relationship?

What image comes to mind when you think of the word “abide”?

How would you define the word “abide” in the context of your relationship with Jesus?

Today we will look at Jesus’ teaching about walking with Him and bearing fruit as a result. If we are to be His disciples, we must be intentional about pursuing Christ and prepared to be pruned by Christ. True disciples walk with Christ by abiding in Him.

READ AND REFLECT

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 15:1-4.

What did Jesus mean by trimming or pruning the branches, and how does that relate to God’s actions to believers? In what specific ways do you think God prunes His disciples?

Describe a time in your life when God pruned you so you would grow closer to Him. Was it a good process? Why or why not? What was the result of the pruning?

What role does the Holy Spirit play in our pruning and fruit-bearing process?

Verse 2 continues the vine metaphor and describes the process of pruning, when dead branches are removed and the decaying parts are trimmed away. As Christians, we’re represented in the branch that produces fruit but still

requires pruning. This process of removing the dead parts occurs as God challenges us and disciplines us so we can continue to grow in Him. Pruning is a good process, and it promotes spiritual health and strong faith.

What does it mean for Jesus to abide in us?

Why are both remaining in Jesus and Jesus abiding in us necessary to produce fruit?

Verses 4-5 state the critical importance of staying connected to the Vine (living in obedience to Jesus and allowing Him to work through you). Jesus encouraged the disciples to abide in Him and to allow Him to abide in them. When people are saved, they are in Christ and Christ is in them. We can do nothing without Christ. Only with Him living and working in us can we produce fruit and make a difference in the world.

Do you really believe you can do nothing without Christ? How do your thoughts and actions affirm this mentality? How fruitful have you been without Him?

Jesus desires to live in us. We act in obedience when we allow Him to not only live in us, but also help us break free from the bondage of sin. With those chains broken, Jesus is now able to work through us. Through our obedience we display Him and His character to the world. Only by allowing Christ to live in us can we truly have an impact for the kingdom of God.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 15:5-8.

What is the meaning of Jesus' statement in verse 6? How does that statement relate to believers?

What is the link between obedience and prayer (v. 7; see also John 14:13-14)?

Genuine believers who maintain an essential relationship with Christ can ask whatever they wish and their requests will be granted. This promise is not a blank check but rather is conditioned by Christ. The petitioners must remain in Christ and His words must remain in them. Their petitions are tied closely to bearing much fruit and glorifying God.

How can believers bring glory to God, according to this passage?

If you were abiding in Christ completely and without a doubt, what do you think you would pray for our church?

HAVE A THIRD VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 15:9-11.

With what kind of love did Jesus love His disciples?

What was the motivation behind Jesus' words in these verses?

Producing spiritual fruit is joyful, but it comes as the result of sacrifice—of pruning and abiding and seeking the heart of God. In this way, it should lead us to follow the example of Christ, who “for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame,” as Hebrews 12:2 tells us, “and has sat down at the right hand of God’s throne.”

What would Jesus' disciples have learned from Him about joy?

How has Christ made your joy complete?

APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What can you do to more closely and consistently abide in Christ? How can we as a group intentionally help one another with this effort?

What are some specific things we can ask God to accomplish through us? What step might He want us to take to accomplish this?

How does knowing you were chosen by God to be a part of this body of believers affect the way you view the church and your involvement in it?

PRAY

Close by praying over your group. Thank God for putting this specific group of people together at this moment. Ask Him to reveal to each person the fruit that He wants him or her to produce, and ask for the willingness to make the sacrifices necessary to accomplish it.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 15:1-11

15:1. "I am the true vine" is the last of Jesus' seven "I am" sayings in John's Gospel. "True" contrasts Jesus with OT Israel. Joseph was called a "fruitful vine" in Gen 49:22. The reference to the Father as the vineyard keeper harks back to Isaiah's first vineyard song, where God is depicted as tending His vineyard, only to be rewarded with sour grapes (Isa 5:1-7; cp. Ps 80:8-9).

15:2. Three types of believers are named or inferred in this first part of the chapter: those who bear no fruit, those who bear some fruit and, later in verse 5, those who bear much fruit. The fruit-bearing branches, it would appear from the text of this verse, represent true believers. But to whom does the text refer when it says, he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit?

This passage is capable of dangerous interpretation, especially when the idea of fruit-bearing centers in evangelism. Some people teach that those who do not win others to Christ will themselves be snatched out of the vine. Such an idea is alien to the teaching of the New Testament. Perhaps Galatians 5:22-23 helps us here: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

15:3. The disciples, however, needed neither cutting off nor trimming clean because they had already been cleansed by the Lord's word. One thing is clear at the outset of the chapter: this is not a passage on salvation, a topic John covered in earlier chapters. Here he dealt with requirements for a fruitful life on the part of believers.

15:4-6. Another key here is the word remain (abide) which appears no fewer than eleven times in the passage. It seems to suggest an effortless resting in the Lord, confident in the promised union between the vine and the true branches.

Furthermore, John used the word remain forty times in his Gospel and twenty-seven more times in his epistles. In the context of this passage, it seems to emphasize an ongoing faith and loving obedience to the Father and the Son that results in fruit. The fruit in this passage seems to focus on spirit-generated behavior of Christians, though again this is not the only interpretation. Many sermons have been preached on emphasizing fruit as other people who have been influenced by the gospel.

15:7. Jesus added a specific dimension to the mutual abiding of the Christian life (v. 7). He set forth the condition that His words abide in believers. On the basis of this condition, He made the promise of fruitful praying. An abiding

life is an obedient life. My words abide in you points to a willing acceptance of Jesus' authority as expressed through His teachings and commands. Words that remain ultimately become words that are obeyed. Whatever you wish defines the possible agenda of a believer's praying. The agenda is unlimited. Any concern is a proper subject for prayer. We can pray for anything that Jesus desires and for which He would ask the Father.

15:8. When followers of Jesus bear much fruit, God receives glory. Since believers cannot bear fruit of themselves but only by means of Christ's indwelling life, their fruitfulness is a manifestation of divine life. It thus glorifies God and serves as evidence of genuine, vital discipleship.

15:9. Next Jesus turned to a declaration of His love for His disciples. On the basis of His declared love, Jesus urged the disciples to abide in my love. He wanted them to live in the consciousness of being loved— rejoicing in its fact, depending on its undergirding, being careful not to betray it, and being faithful to all that delights it. That Jesus gave such a command suggests some can live without being mindful of Christ's love for them. Thereby they miss out on the close fellowship between Jesus and His followers and on the obedience and joy that flow from it (vv. 8-9).

15:10-11. Jesus moved from the need to live in awareness of His love to the need to obey His commands (vv. 10-11). Remaining is dependent on obeying. Abide in carries the connotation of living in the awareness and enjoyment of divine love. Jesus then moved to teaching about joy. Wholehearted obedience leads to full-hearted joy. "I have told you this" refers to Jesus' promise in verse 10 that obedience to His commands would lead to an awareness of living in His love. Jesus then explained further the desired outcome: "that my joy may be in you." Jesus probably meant He would impart to them the kind of joy He had found through His obedience to the Father (15:10). The disciples would be the recipients of joy that Jesus gave them through His indwelling presence. The disciples gained a measure of joy through obedience to Jesus' commands, and to that would be added the joy that came from Jesus.

The "commands" to be obeyed (15:10) are reduced in this verse to a single command. We are to love each other and to do it in the way and to the degree that Jesus loves, namely, as I have loved you. Jesus' love for His followers sets the standard for His followers' love for one another and furnishes the motivation for practicing mutual love. Having set His love as the standard for the disciples' mutual love, Jesus described the highest manifestation of love. Willingness to lay down one's life for others is the supreme test of love. Jesus' saying no doubt referred primarily to His death as proof of His love for the disciples ("as I have loved you," v. 12). Having mentioned "friends" as the ones for whom love prompts the giving of oneself, Jesus gave the qualification for people being His friends. The "if" clause in verse 14—you are my friends if—identifies the singular requirement for being His friend: doing "what I command."