



Abide

THE SECRET TO A LASTING
RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

AN 8-LESSON STUDY



Our Mission Is Clear

As Christ followers our mission is clear. We are commanded to make disciples of all nations. The last words that Jesus spoke to His disciples before He returned to heaven after His crucifixion and resurrection from the dead are recorded in Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus commands His followers to, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Interestingly, we are not commanded to make converts, or Christians, but disciples. In fact, the word “Christian” is found only three times in the Bible, but the word “disciple” is found 269 times. The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus knew that the need for disciples to become disciple-makers and carry on His ministry of reconciliation on earth was imperative; and 2,000 years later, the need for disciples carry on Christ’s ministry is just as important as it was then.

Most Christ-followers are familiar with “The Great Commission” found in Matthew 28:19-20. However, many of us leave out an important phrase after this command. It is found at the end of Matthew 28:20 where Jesus says, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” In this passage, Jesus has just laid out the challenging task of making disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching others all that He has spent three teaching His disciples.

He is saying, “Take everything I have taught you and modeled for you and then reproduce it in others all over the world.” He is reminding His disciples that what He has taught them is not only for the but for the whole world. And the very last words that Christ says to these disciples that He so dearly loves, that He even dies for, is this: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

For Group and Individuals

These lessons are written to be done in a small group, so you’ll find illustrations, activities and ice breakers that might be helpful with 6-15 people. However, you can certainly do this study on-your-own by just skipping those parts and getting directly to the Word. Whatever your context—small group or individual—we hope you enjoy learning how to Abide.

LESSON 1

KNOW YOUR POSITION

Matthew 28:20... Never Alone

What a paradoxical statement, just before the disciples watch Jesus ascend into heaven, physically leaving earth. He is reminding them that they are not and will not be alone. Even though He is leaving them physically, His power and presence will be with them always through the coming Holy Spirit. And His power and presence in their lives will be the only way they can accomplish the command to make disciples of all nations.

The same is true of us today. The only way we can accomplish Christ's command to make disciples of all nations is through His power and presence at work in us and through us. The questions and problems we face, with respect to Jesus' command, are usually not theological in nature, but are of a "practical" nature. These practical issues are what this study series is going to address.

The Key Question

"How?" is the key question that we struggle with the most. "Now that I'm a Christ-follower, how do I live out my faith? At work? At home? All the time?" "How do I obey Christ's command to make disciples of all nations?" "How does this look in my life on a day to day basis?" "How do I begin?" "How do I grow up and become an effective disciple?" These are practical questions. The good news is we serve a practical God! His Word does address and apply to everyday living.

Throughout this study, we are going to uncover the truths in God's Word about that last phrase in the Great Commission ("...and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age") and how developing an intimate relationship with Christ is the key to our day to day lives as disciples and disciple-makers. If we can grasp and understand practically that Christ is always with us, and learn to abide in that relationship, we will discover God transforming our lives. And as He transforms our lives to look more like Christ, our lives will bear the fruit that Christ's life bore—disciples. We will find ourselves free from trying to "do" what makes us feel "Christ-like" and instead of "being" who God created us to be. This is the abundant life that Christ died in order to give us.

Additional Background for This Series

Our study will focus on John 15:1-17. This passage is a great parallel to that key statement in Matthew 28:20

because in John 15, Jesus paints a word picture (a parable) of the truth that He will be with His disciples and bear fruit through them always. Jesus' work on earth was almost complete and He was heading to the cross. He had spent three years teaching, modeling and training the future leaders of the church. He was entrusting to these imperfect leaders the future of the ministry He began on earth. He had spoken to them clearly at the Last Supper about what was about to happen. He was on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray for them and for all of us who would believe as a result of their faithfulness to the mission He laid out for them.

Christ wanted to be sure they understood the importance of total dependence upon Him to complete their mission even though He would no longer be physically present with them. He wanted them to know that everything hinged on a deep, intimate relationship with Him, where they gave up trying to please God in their own human strength, and relied on His power at work in them. So Jesus stopped on the way to the Garden to give them a parable, a story picture, so they would not forget about intimacy and dependence upon Him. He told them the "Parable of the Vine" in John 15:1-17. The theme of this parable is best summarized in one statement in John 15:5. It says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains (abides) in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." In this parable is the secret of abundant living and fulfilling the Great Commission. According to this verse above, it is not by concentrating on bearing fruit, or trying really hard to bear fruit, but by remaining, or abiding, in Christ.

This study will concentrate on the absolute necessity of continuously abiding in the Vine, and how to do that all day everyday so we can bear much fruit for the glory of God. It is our hope that everyone who participates in this study will re-teach it to others as they seek to make disciples of all nations.

Abide—Know Your Position

Key Passage: John 15:1-8; cross-references

Lesson Goal: That we might be sure we are "in Christ" and that He is "in us." To understand that our new position "in Christ" gives us a new identity that is eternally secure. Therefore, we do not have to live in guilt, fear, and shame anymore.

Opening Activity Choices

Option One: Man's Best Friend. Bring a photo of a dog (your own dog if you'd like) and display

it so the group can see it. Lead your group in a discussion of some reasons why dogs are considered “man’s best friend.” You may discuss things such as companionship, loyalty, obedience, fun to play with, protection, etc. Ask the group to discuss what makes a dog a good pet. How does a “good dog” relate to its owner?

Use this discussion to illustrate how well-trained dogs are constantly watching and responding to their master. Well-trained dogs know and understand the commands of their master and respond to his leadership. Explain that this is a simple illustration of what it means to remain [abide] in Christ.

Option Two: For Newer Groups. If your group is new, divide your group into 3 or 4 couples, or 3 or 4 single adults, and have them share something about their family or self, and what they hope to get out of the study. Remind everyone of the importance of mutual acceptance, respect, trust, confidentiality, and engagement with the study as you grow together.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time in study of God’s Word by praying for your group. Pray that God will open the hearts of every person and reveal Himself to you all in a new way as you study and discuss His Word together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth and show you all how to apply what you learn to your lives in a practical way. And pray that God will be glorified through your discussion today.

This Week’s Study

Using the series introduction at the beginning of the lesson, explain to your group the background and foundation for the “Abide” series you are beginning today. Have your group open their Bibles to John 15:1-17. Explain that this passage is the basis for our study for the next 8 weeks. Have a volunteer read this passage aloud. Using the Lesson One Background at the beginning of the lesson, explain the context of this parable to the group. Now, explain that today’s lesson will focus on verses 1-8. Have a volunteer read verses 1-8 aloud again as the group follows along.

The Key Characters

The first thing we need to do in order to properly interpret and apply this passage is to identify and define the key “characters” in this parable. It is important to remember that Jesus is telling this story to His disciples so it is written in first person. So every time a personal pronoun such as “I” or “Me” is used, Christ is referring to Himself. In verse 1

Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener.” Then in verse 2, Jesus begins to discuss “branches” that are “in Me.” The branches are intended to “bear fruit,” and the passage explains how the Father [the gardener] prunes and cuts off [which literally means “to lift up”] these branches to cultivate fruit bearing through them.

In verse 4, Jesus makes clear that His followers are these branches when He says, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.” You is always plural in this study. So in this parable we see that Christ is the vine, God the Father is the gardener, Christ’s disciples are the branches, and the purpose of the branches is to bear fruit so that God’s name will be glorified among the nations.

Throughout this study, it will be important to remember who the “characters” are in this parable. Jesus outlines specifically for us who the vine, gardener and branches are for a reason. Each “character” has a purpose, role and position in fruit bearing. If the vine begins to act as the branch, or the branch tries to act as the gardener or the vine, no fruit will result. And according to verse 16 in this passage, the purpose of our lives [the branches], is to bear fruit that will last so God will receive glory.

Lead your group in a discussion of the key “characters” in this passage using the information provided above and the following questions. Make a list on the board as your group identifies each “character.”

1. How does Jesus identify and describe Himself and His Father in verse 1?
2. In verse 2, Jesus identifies branches. Where are these branches according to verse 2?
3. Who do the branches represent in this parable?
4. Do the branches hold themselves in place, or does the vine hold the branches in place?
5. What is the comparison Jesus makes in verse 4 between the branches and His disciples? How are they alike?
6. According to verse 4, what is the purpose of a branch?
7. According to verse 16, what is God’s purpose for His followers?

Our New Position

In John 15, Jesus supplies the answer to an unstated question that every believer is likely to ask himself at some time in his life, “how is my life going to be different now?” “What do I have now that I have

placed my faith in Christ that I did not before?” When someone comes to faith in Christ, many times the focus is on how his behavior should change instead of how his position has changed. The inner changes that take place when we surrender our lives to Christ leads to our outer changes in behavior; but many times we think it is the other way around. We place too much emphasis on “doing or not doing” certain things.

In this illustration from nature, Jesus tells us that the Christian life is based on a relationship, not religious rules, regulations, or things we do. It is simply a relationship between Christ and the individual disciple. In this parable, there is little focus on the disciples “doing” anything except abiding in Christ at all times. He illustrates this truth by using the example of a vine and its branches. Just as the vine and its branches have an inner relationship in which the sap of the vine flows through the branch and gives it life; the disciple of Christ should have a life-receiving intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship should be the absolute focus of every disciple’s life.

As Christ followers, we have a new position in life. The phrase “in Me” or “in the vine” is used seven times in the parable to describe our position in Christ if we have confessed Him as our Lord and Savior and received His grace and forgiveness. The phrase “in you” or “in him” is used twice to describe the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in us after we trust in Christ for salvation. According to Ephesians 1:13-14, the moment we put our faith in Christ for our salvation the Holy Spirit seals us in Christ and enters our bodies as a deposit guaranteeing our new position “in Christ.”

Continually Reminded

Notice what Christ says in verse 3. He says, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” Then He says in verse 4, “Remain [abide] in Me and I will remain [abide] in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain [abide] in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain [abide] in Me.” Throughout the rest of the passage, Jesus states over and over, “I am the vine and you are the branches.” He continually reminds them of their position “in Him.” Verse 3 helps to explain that position.

Notice that Jesus says, “You are already clean.” The word “already” indicates a past, completed action by Christ and the current position of the new believer in relation to Christ. If we place our faith in Christ

and confess Him as our Lord and Savior He forgives our sins and makes us clean [see 1 John 1:9]. Christ is reminding His disciples that it is not their job to make themselves clean with a list of rules and regulations. Christ has already made them clean.

Then, in verse 4, He tells them to abide in Him just like a branch abides in the vine so they can bear fruit. At this point, it will be helpful to understand how a vine and a branch relate to one another in nature since this is the example Christ gives us of how we are to be in relationship with Him. In his book, *The True Vine*, Andrew Murray discusses the branch and its relationship to the vine. Murray points out that a branch is simply a piece of wood, produced by the vine for one purpose—to bear fruit.

Without the branch, the vine would bear no fruit. The branch has only one purpose for existence—to bear the fruit that the vine produces. The branch gives itself wholly to this purpose. In the same way, the Christ follower has one reason for being a branch—one reason for existing on this earth—that the True Vine may bear fruit through his life.

That is why Christ continues to remind His followers of their position “in Him.” In Christ’s example in nature, the branch is in the image of the vine. They are alike. The only difference is that the vine is great and strong, and the branches are small and feeble, constantly needing and receiving strength from the vine. The vine has stored up sap and strength, not for itself, but for the branches.

The branches have nothing except what they receive from the vine. They are kept in place by the vine and are totally dependent upon the vine for strength and nourishment. So we see in Christ’s example a picture of total dependence upon Him to provide all we need for life. This is what it means to be “in Christ.” This is the position of every believer. Here are a few cross-references that teach us about our new position in the True Vine.

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Ephesians 4:22-24

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

John 10:27-29

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can ever snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”

So if someone is not “in Christ,” where is he? In order to truly grasp our new position in Christ, we must understand our position outside of Christ. The following cross-references explain our former position, and why being “in Christ” is so vital for every believer.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

“For since death came through a man [Adam], the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man [Christ]. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”

Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Ephesians 2:4-5

“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

In these six references, we see a stark contrast between life outside of Christ, and life “in Christ” after salvation.

Using the commentary above on the vine and the branch, explain the relationship of the vine and branch in nature. Then, using the following questions, lead your group in a discussion about what it means that as believers we gain a new position “in Christ.”

1. According to this parable in John 15, what is the believer’s new position in life?
2. Using Jesus’ example of the vine and the branch, what does this mean practically that a believer is “in Christ?”
3. How does this truth of being “in Christ” affect our lives in the same way that the vine affects the life of the branch? Be specific in your discussion in order to help your group begin to see the practical application of being “in Christ.”
4. How does Jesus describe His disciples in John 15:3?
5. Why do you think Jesus says that they are “already” clean? What might this indicate about

their relationship with Him?

6. Do you think Christians today could use a good reminder that they are “already” clean? In other words, do you think many believers live their lives in an attempt to “clean” themselves, not understanding their position as “already clean” in Christ?
7. After reminding them that they are “already clean,” what instructions does Jesus give His disciples in verse 4?

Share with your group that Jesus uses the term “in Me” or “in the vine” seven times in this parable to describe our relationship with Christ. Explain that they are going to spend a few minutes in smaller groups taking a deeper look at Scripture on what it means to be “in Christ,” and outside of Christ. Divide your group according to size and assign the cross-references to different groups. Give them a few minutes to discuss these verses together and then bring the group back together to share and discuss what they learned. List the characteristics of life “in Christ” in one column on the board, and the characteristics of life outside of Christ in another column.

Cross-Reference Verses:

2 Corinthians 5:17 Romans 6:23
Ephesians 4:22-24 Ephesians 2:4-5
John 10:27-29 Ephesians 1:4-8
1 Corinthians 15: 21-22

1. In nature, which produces fruit, the vine or the branch?
2. What is the difference between producing and bearing fruit?
3. Why then, is it so important that as believers we “abide in the Vine” in order to bear fruit?
4. If we don’t “abide in the Vine” will there be any fruit for us to bear? How do you know based on Jesus’ example in this parable?
5. Do you think that most Christians understand and live to bear fruit, or are they striving to produce it?
6. Discuss how living to produce fruit as a “branch” leads to weariness, frustration, etc.

“Abide In Me”

It is important that Jesus’ command to “abide in Me” in John 15:4 not be misinterpreted. The instruction to remain [abide] in Christ and He will abide in you, does not refer to our position regarding salvation. We have seen that when we place our faith in Christ, He forgives us, cleanses us, and the result is that our position is no longer “in Adam,” but “in Christ” for all eternity! This is a secure position that will never

change. Jesus is not teaching His disciples how to become “in the Vine.” He is reminding them that they are already “in the Vine.”

The command in verse 4 to “abide in Me” is not referring to losing salvation. It is reminding us how to bear fruit in our salvation because this is the purpose for which Christ saves us—so that He can produce His fruit through our lives. Christ is encouraging complete dependence upon Him. Only then will we bear fruit that will last.

The True Vine

Jesus describes Himself in John 15:1 as the “true vine,” not one of many vines. This reference presupposes that there must be untrue, or false vines. The following cross-references take a closer look at the importance of Christ being the true vine and how this assures every believer that he is eternally secure in his relationship with Christ.

John 10:8-9

“All who ever came before Me [Christ] were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”

Acts 4:12

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

John 14:6

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

Using these cross-references and the following questions, lead your group in a discussion of why Christ is the true vine and what this means for everyone who places his faith in Christ.

1. Why do you think Jesus used the word “true” to describe Himself in John 15:1? What might this tell you about other religious leaders in the disciples’ time?
2. Do we today face “false” vines? Explain your answer.
3. According to Acts 4:12, where is salvation found? Is this the only place it is found? Has anyone else ever conquered sin and death then rose to life?
4. According to John 14:6, what is the only way to come to the Father for eternal life?
5. How does Jesus describe other religious leaders in John 10:7-10?

6. How do these verses assure a person that he is eternally secure in his relationship with Christ?
7. Do you think many Christians struggle with assurance of salvation? Why is that the case?
8. Why can we have confidence in our new position in Christ? Is this confidence found in anything we ourselves do? If not, in what is it found?

Depending On God

We have established the key “characters” in John 15. We have examined God’s Word to understand what Christ meant when He taught His followers that they were “in Him,” and commanded them to remain [abide] there.

We have seen that Jesus is the true vine; therefore, our salvation and position as His child are eternally secure. The role of the vine is to hold the branch in place. The branch simply abides [remains] where the gardener put it. The vine bears the branch, strengthens the branch, supports the branch, gives life to the branch, and lives through the branch making it fruitful.

Branches are made secure in the vine by the gardener as he grafts them into the vine. The process of grafting is when a gardener takes the bud or shoot of a plant or tree and inserts this new bud into the stem or trunk of another where it continues to grow, becoming a permanent part. Notice in this parable that before Christ ever tells His followers to remain [abide] in Him, He directs their attention to God, the gardener, in John 15:1. The vine is dependent on the gardener, and the branches are dependent on the vine. Christ is teaching us that ultimately, it is God the Father who is working in and through our lives.

At the root of this parable is the truth that the Christian life comes down to one simple truth. We are to leave our lives in God’s hands, living in total dependence on Him, trusting that He will give us all that we need. Remember, Christ came to bring us to God. Christ the vine points to God the gardener. Scripture describes how God has grafted us in to the Vine in several different ways.

Let’s look at some cross-references that will help us to further understand the work of God the Gardener in our lives as “branches” in Christ the Vine.

Ephesians 1:4-5

“For God chose us in Him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will.”

Ephesians 1:13

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard

the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."

Romans 3:22-24

"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Look for the key words in these verses that describe the "grafting" work of God the Father. Words such as "chose," "adopted," "included," "marked," "sealed," and "justified." These words show us the work of God as the gardener who grafts us in to Christ, the only True Vine.

Using the information above and the following questions, lead your group in a discussion about how God is the gardener who grafts us in to our new position in the Vine.

1. In Christ's example in nature, what is the role of the gardener in relationship to the vine and the branches? What does he do? How does his work affect the vine and the branches?
2. How does this illustrate the work of God in the lives of Christ's disciples?

Have your group turn to the cross-references listed above and ask three volunteers to read the verses aloud. Then, lead a discussion of these verses and how they illustrate the work of God as the one who grafts us in to Christ. Remember to point out the key words that describe this work that are listed in the commentary above. You may even want to list these key words on the board to help focus their attention on the work of God in our lives.

1. When you look at these key words, what does it make you think about your salvation? Are you secure in Christ?
2. In Jesus' example in nature, discuss the roles of the gardener, the vine and the branches. Who does the work in fruit being produced by the vine and borne by the branches? Ultimately, whose work determines the outcome of fruit? Where does the responsibility ultimately lie?
3. Following Jesus' word picture and example in this parable, who does the work of salvation, the branches or the gardener? How do the cross-reference verses we just read teach this truth?
4. How does this simple truth from nature apply

to our lives "in Christ" once we have received God's grace and forgiveness? Who does the work of making us fruitful? What is our role in the process?

5. In daily life, what does it mean to "remain in the Vine?"
6. How will this truth change the way we understand and live our lives as Christ followers? Be specific in your answer.

Conclusion

Christ is the true vine. God is the gardener. All disciples of Christ are the branches, and their sole purpose is to bear the fruit of the vine. As believers, our position is "in Christ." God put us there, and He keeps us there. We must surrender our old identity "in Adam" in order to be grafted into the Vine and given new life, a new identity, and a new purpose. Only as we willingly give control over to the Gardener and submit to the Vine can we experience this new life the way it is intended to be lived. Since we now are secure in the Vine, there is no need to live in guilt, shame or fear in relation to God. We have been chosen, adopted, included, marked, sealed and justified freely by God's grace. We are in Christ, a new creation, re-created by the Gardener in the likeness of the Vine. Now we are free. We are free to remain [abide] where God has placed us, to surrender, to bear fruit for the glory of God. And remember Christ's last words on earth, "And surely I am with you, even to the end of the age."

Additional Application

- 1) This week, daily thank God for your new and secure position in Christ.
- 2) Seek to read Ephesians 1 and John 15 a couple of times this week. Ask God to continue to teach you more things about what it means to be "in Christ" and "abiding in Him."

LESSON 2

EMBRACE CHRIST'S VISION

Key Passages: John 15:4-5; Philippians 3:7-11

Review and Introduction

Last week, we began a study on the Parable of the Vine in John 15:1-17. In this parable, Jesus gave His disciples an example from nature that illustrated how their relationship with Him should be. Jesus taught that God is the gardener, Jesus is the true vine, and His followers are the branches. Last week's lesson focused on a believer's position "in Christ," and how John 15 illustrates this position because God has "grafted" all believers into the Vine. We also learned that Christ commanded His followers in John 15:4 to abide in Him so that they would bear fruit. As we remain [abide] in Christ the vine, He produces fruit that we, the branches, will bear [demonstrate] in every area of our lives.

Understand and Obey

Our study this week will focus on God's vision for our lives—to know and become like Jesus. We will see that in order to embrace and live out this vision, we must understand and obey this command in John 15:4-5 to abide in Christ. As we saw last week, Scripture teaches that this command does not pertain to gaining or losing salvation. A believer's position in Christ is eternally secure. So how do we "abide" in Christ if our position in Him is secure? What does Jesus mean? What is abiding in Christ? That is what we will begin to uncover in Scripture throughout this lesson.

Before you begin today's study, lead your group in a quick review (5 minutes) of last week's lesson to refresh their memory and lay a foundation for those who did not study Lesson One. Below are some questions to help you review.

1. Who are the key "characters" in John 15:1-17?
2. Who produces fruit?
3. Who bears fruit?
4. What is the difference in producing and bearing fruit?
5. What does it mean for someone to be "in Christ?"
6. What is God's (the gardener) role in fruit being produced in the Vine and borne through the branches? How does He "graft" the branches into the Vine?

Opening Activity

Explain to your group that this week we are going to uncover God's vision for every believer's life as we dive deeper into Christ's command in John 15:4-5 to "remain [abide] in Me and I will remain [abide] in you." As we learned last week, "abide" does not refer to our position, because we are secure in Christ if we have placed our faith in Him and surrendered our lives to His lordship. "Abide" refers to the intimacy of our relationship and fellowship with Christ. It is a word that calls believers to stay connected in deep intimacy with Christ.

A practical way to illustrate this point is the marriage relationship. Lead your group in a discussion of marriage (or a close friendship if marriage doesn't apply to your group) using the following questions. Be sure to focus on how a marriage (or friendship) is strengthened and deepened.

1. How would you describe a healthy marriage?
2. Does going through the wedding ceremony guarantee a close, intimate marriage? Why or why not?
3. Once two people are united in marriage, what would happen if they just stopped spending quality time together? Would they cease to be married? How would their relationship be affected?
4. What are some specific ways that people deepen a relationship?
5. Do you think it is important that couples "remain" or "abide" with one another in order to grow in their love for one another? If so, how do people do this practically?
7. Which do you think is more important in a marriage, the things you do for one another, or the intimacy and deep community that you build together?
8. Do you think it is possible to follow all of the "rules" of marriage but still not build a deep and intimate connection?
9. Do you think building a foundation of intimacy and relational oneness will likely lead to behavior that strengthens the marriage?

Explain to your group that just as spending time together strengthens a marriage or friendship, it also strengthens your relationship with Christ. Healthy marriages grow over time as two people communicate regularly and do life together, becoming one in every part of life. There is no "checklist" of things to do in order to have a great marriage. It is the same with your relationship with Christ. There is no list of

things to do for Jesus that will automatically bring someone closer to God. It is a relationship that grows as we “abide” in Christ—daily living life with Him.

Spiritual disciplines like Bible study, prayer, and biblical community are ways to help us abide in Christ—but these things in and of themselves do not automatically produce fruit in our lives. They are only tools to help us grow in our intimacy with Christ. Remember, Christ (the vine) produces the fruit. And the only way we will bear that fruit is if we remain [abide] in Him.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time in study of God’s Word by praying for your group. Pray that God will open the heart of every person and reveal Himself to you all in a new way as you study and discuss His Word together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth and show you all how to apply what you learn to your lives in a practical way. And pray that God will be glorified through your discussion today.

Key Study

God’s vision for all believers is that we know Christ intimately and experience life-transformation by His Spirit to become like Him. This is why Christ commanded His disciples in John 15:4-5 to “remain [abide] in Him”—so that they could know Him more every day and become like Him. Romans 8:29 says that it is God’s will that everyone He saves be conformed to the image of His Son.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 says that Christ followers reflect the Lord’s glory as we are being transformed [changed from the inside out] into Christ’s likeness. And Romans 12:1-2 commands believers to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God so that we will no longer be conformed to the image of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. God’s will is clear in these verses. He wants those He saves to look like His Son.

Notice how all of these verses teach that being changed into the image of Christ is an ongoing process, not an overnight change that happens when you place your faith in Christ. Also notice that being transformed is something that God is doing in us, not something that we can do ourselves. Romans 12:1 makes clear again that the believer’s job is not to produce this change, but merely to relinquish control and offer ourselves to the One who can change us. Doesn’t this truth fit exactly with Jesus’ parable in John 15? We don’t produce the “fruit” of change, we

abide in the Vine and the Gardener will produce the change, which will be borne through our lives as we continually offer ourselves to Him.

First Learn to Abide

God’s vision that we know Christ and become like Him cannot happen unless we learn first to remain [abide] in the vine [Christ]. Jesus gave His disciples this parable in John 15 as a picture not only of their position “in Him,” but to show them how He would produce His character in and through them. God receives great glory as we bear [demonstrate] His character in our lives, because only He can produce the life-change in us that shows His character to the world. His power and presence is revealed as He transforms us.

“Abide,” or “remain,” is used 11 times in this parable. Most of the time it refers to our need to “remain” in a close relationship with Christ. The word means, “to stay connected” in a relational sense. We cannot know Christ in an intimate way without abiding with Him. Just as we saw in the opening activity that our relationships with others grow and deepen when we spend time together, so it is with Christ.

We can know about Christ from a distance, but we can only know His heart, passions, desires, and purposes by spending time with Him. And we cannot live out God’s vision to become like Christ if we do not know His heart, passions, desires, and purposes. So we see that abiding in Christ is the only way to embrace God’s vision for our lives, and the purpose for which we have been saved—to bear fruit through us for His glory.

Paul understood the importance of knowing Christ above everything else. His life is an excellent example of what it means to remain [abide] in Christ. Toward the end of his life Paul wrote in Philippians 3:7-11, “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

In this passage, we see a perfect picture of abiding because Paul's focus is not on "doing" certain religious things, but simply on knowing Christ and becoming like Him. And here we see that Paul wants to know ALL of Christ, not just the "easy" parts. He wants to know Christ's suffering, becoming like Him in His death. We see Paul's desire to "die" to his way of life, and to spend his life in a pursuit to know Christ and become like Him in every way. This is abiding.

Using the commentary above, explain to your group God's vision for every believer's life. Have your group turn in their Bible to the following verses as someone reads each one aloud. Using the following questions, lead your group in a discussion of how these verses show us God's vision—that we know and become like Christ.

Romans 8:29
2 Corinthians 3:17-18
Romans 12:1-2

- According to Romans 8:29, what is God's will for every believer?

Leader Note: The word "predestined" in this verse is the Greek word *proorizo*. It is a verb that means, "To ordain; to pre-determine; to decide beforehand." The word "conformed" is the Greek word *symmorphos*. It is an adjective that means, "Having the same form as another; fashioned like unto." Sharing these definitions with your group may help them to understand what the verse means.

- How does 2 Corinthians 3:18 describe the process of becoming like Christ in a believer's life?

Leader Note: The word "transformed" in verse 18 is the Greek word *metamorphoo*. It is a verb that means, "To change into another form; to transfigure." This is where we get the word "metamorphosis," which describes the change that occurs in the cocoon for a butterfly. Sharing this definition with your class may help them to understand the change that is God's vision for our lives. Just as a caterpillar is changed into another form in the cocoon, God wants us to abide with Christ to experience a spiritual transformation.

1. What does Paul urge his brothers in Christ to do in Romans 12:1?
2. What is his command to them in Romans 12:2?
3. Describe the "pattern" of the world that we live in today.

4. What are some ways that we can conform to this pattern?
5. According to Romans 12:2, how are we transformed?
6. The word "renewing" in the Greek means, "To renovate; a complete change for the better." Based on this definition, how does someone "renew" his mind?
7. According to all three of these verses, what is God's pre-determined vision for the life of every Christ follower?

Have your group turn in their Bible to Philippians 3:7-11 and have someone read the passage aloud to the group. Using the commentary and the following questions, lead a discussion of these verses.

1. How does Paul describe his life in Christ in verses 7-8?
2. Paul mentions two different kinds of "righteousness" in verse 9. What are they and how does he describe each?
3. Which "righteousness" does Paul desire to have?
4. Who is this righteousness from and how does a person get it according to the end of verse 9?
5. How deeply does Paul desire to know Christ according to verse 10?
6. Is Paul more focused on "deeds" for God or on "intimacy" in his relationship with Christ? How do you know?
7. How do these verses demonstrate "abiding" in Christ?
8. Based on what you know of Paul's life, what "fruit" was borne through his life as a result of his focus on knowing Christ?
9. What does this tell you about the importance of intimacy and constant connection with Christ?

Grafted In

In our first lesson, we discussed how a branch is grafted into a vine by the gardener. This is the example given to us by Christ in John 15:1-17. When a branch is grafted into a vine, there are two things that must happen in order for the new graft to survive. The first takes place in the wood. The new graft [branch] must shoot its little roots into the vine, so the vine can grow up into the new graft.

The branch must give up its individual identity and independence and be willing to take on the identity of the vine as one organism. As the branch abides there, it becomes one with the vine. There is also a second process that must occur. The sap of the vine must enter the new branch. The vine can then use

the branch as a passage through which sap can flow in order to produce fruit.

When Christ says in John 15:4, “Remain (abide) in Me, and I will remain (abide) in you,” it is the same two-fold process that we see in a vine and branch. “Remain in Me” refers to our part in the process. We have to surrender control and independence, trust and obey Christ, detach ourselves from everything else and “shoot our roots” deep into Him. As we do this, our heart and character are prepared for the next part of Jesus’ command, “...and I will abide in you.”

Intimately Connected

Notice in John 15:4 that the “abide in Me” comes before the “I will abide in you.” Remember, this does not refer to salvation, but to the intimacy and community in your relationship with Christ. The “I will abide in you” will not come if the “abide in Me” is not maintained. Ephesians 4:4 says, “There is one body, and one Spirit.” Before the Spirit will fill us and bear fruit through us, the body must be prepared. The new graft must have grown into the vine and be abiding in it before the sap will flow through it to yield fruit. As we deny ourselves, offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1) and abide in Him, we will be able to receive the “I will abide in you” promise of Christ.

Sap of the Spirit

The “sap” that flows from the Vine to us, the branches, is the power of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 28:19-20 when Jesus commanded His disciples to “make disciples of all nations,” He made them a promise in verse 20. He promised them that He would be with them always, “Even to the end of the age.” The Holy Spirit is how Jesus would be with them always. Acts 1:4 tells us that Christ had commanded His disciples to go to Jerusalem after His ascension to heaven and “wait for the gift My Father has promised, which you have heard Me speak about.” In John 14:16-17 Jesus says to His disciples, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to 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.” The Holy Spirit is the “sap” of the vine that transforms us into the image of the vine (Jesus). As we abide in Christ, we become the passageway through which the Holy Spirit flows to produce fruit that is demonstrated through our lives.

Using the commentary above and the following questions, lead your group in a discussion of the

presence of Christ in our lives through the Holy Spirit. Begin by explaining the two-fold process of a new graft surviving in the vine and how this process relates to John 15:4.

1. According to what you learned about the grafting process in nature, why does “abide in Me” come before “...and I will abide in you” in John 15:4? What is the significance of this order?
2. What are some practical ways that believers “shoot roots” deep into Christ the vine every day?

Read Matthew 28:19-20.

- What is Christ’s promise to His disciples in verse 20 of this passage?

Read John 14:16-17.

1. According to these verses, what did Jesus ask His Father to do for His disciples?
2. How long would the Holy Spirit be with them?
3. According to verse 17, what would their relationship be like with the Spirit?
4. Where would the Spirit dwell?
5. So, how did Christ keep His promise in Matthew 28:20 to be with His disciples always?

Read Acts 1:4 and Acts 1:8

1. According to Acts 1:4, what did Jesus command His disciples to do?
2. Based on Acts 1:8, what would the disciples receive when the Holy Spirit came on them? Why?

The “sap” of the Holy Spirit brings the power of God into our lives. But if we are not “abiding” deeply rooted in the Vine, then we will not experience the “...and I will remain in you” promise of John 15:4. In order for the Holy Spirit to freely flow through our lives, we must abide in Christ. As we abide in Him, He abides in us as the Spirit of Christ flows freely in and through us, producing fruit in our lives. Only as we spend time in His presence can we receive the strength to bear fruit—the fruit of Christ-like character and the fruit of more Christ-followers.

How Do I Abide in Christ on a Day-to-Day Basis?

This brings us to the practical question, “How do I abide in Christ on a day-to-day basis?” As we ask ourselves this question, it is important that we remember the example that we studied earlier in this lesson of Paul’s life in Philippians 3:7-11. The question is not “what to do” for God, but “how to abide.” It is not a question of position, but of relationship. The

gardener [God] has grafted us into Christ. Our position is secure. The practical question for us is how to remain deeply rooted in the True Vine, cultivating a surrendered heart and mind that is daily being changed to look more like Jesus. Remember, that is God's vision for our lives—that we know and become like Jesus.

Answering the Question

In the remainder of this lesson we will look at several Scriptures to help us answer this question. As you lead your group through a discussion of these verses, remember to continue to focus not on “doing,” but on “abiding,” developing an intimate connection with Christ. The practical things we “do” are a means to an end, not the end itself. The goal is to abide in Christ, not “do a quiet time” or “Bible study” or even “do church.” The spiritual disciplines of the Christian life do not produce fruit, but they help us to learn to abide in the Vine. As you guide the discussion, help your group members to begin to change their mindset from “doing” to “abiding.”

Each cross-reference will be listed along with a brief commentary on the verse, followed by some discussion questions for your group. You do not have to use all of the verses if you do not have time. This would also be a great opportunity to divide into smaller groups for deeper community building and discussion. If you choose to do this, assign each group one verse to read and discuss. Print the verse and applicable discussion questions on a card for each group. After a few minutes, bring everyone back together and allow each group to share what they learned.

Romans 6:11-14

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

In this passage we see Paul reminding the Roman believers of their position “in Christ.” That position is “dead to sin, but alive in Christ Jesus.” Throughout the passage, Paul is urging them to live in this truth. We must choose to live in a way that reflects our position. We are dead to sin. Notice that verse 12 begins with the word, “therefore.” Whenever the word

“therefore” is used at the beginning of a sentence, it tells us that the words that follow are based on the previous thought or verse. In this case, the instructions in verses 12-13 are based on the truth [that we are “dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus”] that is presented in verse 11.

Paul says we must not let sin reign in our mortal bodies. This means that we can choose what controls us. Will we let sin control us, or will we abide in Christ and let His Spirit control us? We cannot serve two masters. Either our sinful nature [the flesh] or the Holy Spirit will control us. Notice again in this passage [like in Romans 12:1-2] how Paul is telling us to offer our bodies to God. Here again we see the choice to surrender control [“die to self”] of our lives to God in Christ Jesus. Just like in John 15:4-5, this passage is not telling us how to gain the position of “alive to God in Christ Jesus,” but how to live in the reality of that position. It is by continually offering ourselves to Christ and abiding in Him.

1. How are believers to “count” [or consider] themselves according to verse 11?
2. What does it mean to be “dead to sin?”
3. According to verses 12-13, what is the practical way that we “count” ourselves “dead to sin but alive in Christ?”
4. According to verse 12, what happens if we let sin reign in our bodies?
5. What are some ways that we can let sin reign in our bodies?
6. What choice does Paul lay out for us in verse 13?
7. What do you think he means by “offer?” How do we “offer” ourselves either to sin or to God?
8. According to verse 13, what is the result of offering your body to sin versus offering your body to God? What is the “fruit” of each choice?
9. How does verse 14 confirm our position as “dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus?”
10. Discuss some ways that we are used as “instruments of righteousness.” How does this phrase compare with the parable in John 15:1-17? [Hint: Do instruments produce the music, or are they vessels through which music is played?]

Galatians 5:16-25

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual

immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 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. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

In verse 16, we see again the choice that every believer faces each day... "Who or what will control me today?" In verse 16, Paul states the natural result of abiding in Christ and living by the Spirit—you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Many times our focus is not on "living by the Spirit" (abiding), but rather on "not gratifying the flesh." We concentrate and try so hard "not to sin." But where does this place the focus of our attention, on Christ or on ourselves? In this verse lies a wonderfully practical and life-changing truth. The key is not in what we do, but Who is controlling what we do. Once again we see how abiding in Christ, by surrendering to His control daily, will produce fruit in our lives.

Notice Paul's language in verse 19 as he begins to list the acts of the sinful nature. He writes, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious..." It's almost as if he is saying, "Don't focus on this. This is obvious." In these verses we see two different "fruits." Paul isn't giving a "list of do's and don'ts." In verses 19-21, he is simply listing the results of gratifying the desires of the sinful nature (which occurs if we aren't living by the Spirit according to verse 16). Then in verses 22-23, he is simply listing the fruit of living by the Spirit. The "fruit" our lives bear will be the result not of what we "do," but of where we are "abiding."

The Conflict

In this passage we see a great conflict, and a great choice. In verses 24-25, Paul reminds us that if we have placed our faith in Christ, then we have "crucified" the sinful nature. Notice how this lines up with what we just saw in Romans 6:11—that we are "dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." It is wonderful and practical advice that he gives in verse 25. If we have crucified the sinful nature (also called the "old self"), then we can live by the Spirit (the "sap" that brings life to the branch). Paul is saying, "You are alive in Christ through His Spirit, so live like it!" How do we live like we are "alive in Christ?" By daily abiding in the vine and receiving the life-

sustaining sap of the Spirit. This is where we will receive the power to choose to be controlled by Him instead of by sin.

1. What are we commanded to do in verse 16?
2. What is the result of "living by the Spirit" according to verse 16?
3. What conflict does Paul lay out for us in verse 17?
4. How does this conflict play out in daily life?
5. According to verses 19-21, what is the "fruit" of NOT living by the Spirit?
6. According to verses 22-23, what is the "fruit" of living by the Spirit?
7. Look carefully at verses 19-23. Is there a command to "do" or "not do" any of these things?
8. What is the command associated with this list, according to verse 16?
9. Based on what we have studied in John 15, how do you "live by the Spirit?"
10. According to verse 24, what has every believer done to the sinful nature and its desires?
11. Based on this truth, what is the command in verse 25?
12. What are some ways that we can "keep in step" with the Spirit of Christ in our lives?

Ephesians 4:22-24

"You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Notice the parallels in this passage to what we have already seen in Scripture throughout our study. We see here a contrast between the "old self" and the "new self." The "old self" is life outside of Christ, when we were "in Adam," dead in our sins. The "new self" is life grafted into the True Vine, living by the Holy Spirit through our new position in Christ. Sin reigned in our bodies in the "old self," but in the "new self," sin is not our master. Again in this passage we are presented with a daily choice. We must choose to "put off" the old and "put on" the new.

Again, this is not in reference to our position in Christ because our salvation is secure. It is the choice to abide or not to abide in Christ. According to verse 23, if we choose to abide, the "fruit" is a change in the attitude of our minds. Remember what we saw in Romans 12:1-2? As we offer ourselves to God by abiding in Christ, choosing not to be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world (putting off the old self), we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds, trusting the Vine, not self. And verse 24 of this passage describes again God's vision for

this “new self.” It is “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

1. According to this passage, what are believers to “put off” and “put on?”
2. What is happening to the old self according to verse 22?
3. What happens when we choose to “put off” the old and “put on” the new according to verse 23?
4. How important is the attitude of a person’s mind in how he lives?
5. According to verse 24, what is God’s purpose for the “new self?”
6. What are some ways that we “put off” the old self?
7. What are some ways that we “put on” the new self?
8. Do you think this “putting off” and “putting on” is a one-time act, or a daily choice? Explain your answer.

Conclusion

The only person who can produce the character of Christ in us is Christ Himself. It is God’s vision for each of our lives that we be transformed into the image of His Son Jesus so that others can see God’s

glory. But we must “abide” in Him for that vision to become a reality. As we surrender our lives to the will of God, He grafts us into Christ. And as we abide there, the Holy Spirit flows through us producing the fruit of the Vine. We are all “abiding” in something. Where we choose to “abide” determines the fruit that our lives will bear. The question isn’t “if” we’re abiding, but rather, “Where are you abiding?”

Application

If your attendees have not yet developed the discipline of time alone with God every morning as they prepare themselves for the day, now would be a great time to begin “abiding” in Christ each morning so they can continue “abiding in Him” throughout the day. A suggested beginning time might be 15 minutes each morning alone with God. A suggested plan for the 15 minutes is provided on the attached handout.

Leader’s Note: You can distribute the available handout to help everyone begin the discipline of time alone with God in the morning, so they can learn to “abide with Him” throughout the day.

Time Alone with God

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed. Mark 1:35 NIV

Many prominent biblical personalities including Jesus developed the habit of solitude—spending time alone with God (like Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Paul and others). Sometimes we need extended time alone with God, especially for new direction in life, but all of us need *daily* time alone with God in order to experience consistent spiritual transformation and to fulfill God's mission for our lives each day.

What should happen in our daily time alone with God?

We should spend some time *talking* to God in prayer, and some time *listening* to God from His Word, gaining strength and direction for life.

*"Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths."
Psalm 25:4 NIV*

Your daily time alone with God is a time to:

- **Consider your way:** *"Consider well the path of your feet." Proverbs 4:26 AMP*
- **Commit your day:** *"Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust Him and He will help you." Psalm 27:5 (NLT)*

How do you have a meaningful time alone with God?

(1) Select a specific time each day. Schedule it, like a date on your calendar. Choose a time when you can:

- Be at your best.
- Be alone.
- Be consistent.

There are many good reasons to choose a time at the beginning of the day:

- The example of many in the Bible, including Jesus
- It helps you get spiritually prepared for the day.
- It demonstrates that meeting with God is your highest and first priority.
- It gives you the opportunity to "meditate" all day on what God is showing you.

(2) Choose a specific place. Find a place where you can relax, be quiet and be free from distractions to meet with God.

(3) Gather the resources you will need. In addition to your Bible, you might want to get a pen and notebook or "spiritual journal" where you can write down things God is saying to you each day.

(4) Begin with the right attitudes:

- **Humility.** *"...humble yourselves before God..." James 4:7 NLT*
- **Expectancy.** *"In the morning You will hear my voice, O Lord; in the morning I will prepare [a prayer, a sacrifice] for You and watch and wait [for You to speak to my heart]." Psalm 5:3 AMP*
- **Sincerity.** *"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13 NAS*
- **A Willingness to Obey.** *"If any man's will is to do His will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God..." John 7:17 RSV*

(5) Follow a simple plan. Plan your time alone with God by spending time in prayer and reading your Bible. A simple 15 minute format might look like this:

- **Approach God.** Spend your first moments focusing on God. Worship and praise Him for this new day and the opportunity, through Christ, to fellowship with Him. Ask Him to speak to you through His Word.
- **Bible Reading.** Read through a book of the Bible in a systematic way. (Start with the Gospel of John.) Read a chapter or a few verses twice—first for information, then for inspiration. Ask God to speak to you about the issues of life for that day.

After reading John, go back and read through the other Gospels and then through the rest of the New Testament. The Psalms are also great reading for your time alone with God.

- **Journal.** Write down what you think God is saying to you through the verses you've just read.
- **Pray.** Ask for God's strength to accomplish the things He has shown you to do. Confess any sin He has shown you that you need to turn away from and ask for the conviction not to fall into those temptations again. Thank Him for His forgiveness, guidance and direction. Yield your heart and mind to Him to accomplish His will through you today. Pray for others' needs as well.

LESSON 3

EMBRACE CHRIST'S MISSION

Key Text: John 15:1-17

Introduction

Over the last two lessons, we have been studying the Parable of the Vine in John 15:1-17. In this passage, we find an illustration that Christ gave His disciples of how their relationship with Him should be. We have seen that everyone who places his faith in Jesus Christ and confesses Christ as their Lord receives a new position in life. Each new believer goes from being dead in his sins “in Adam” to being alive to God “in Christ.”

In Jesus' illustration in John 15, God is the gardener, Christ is the true vine, His disciples are the branches held in place by the vine, and the Holy Spirit is the sap that flows from the vine to the branches, giving them the vine's life and power. We have seen that the branches cannot bear fruit unless they remain [abide] in the vine at all times. The gardener “grafts” the branches into the vine, and as the branches remain [abide] in this new position, they become “one wood” with the vine.

Christ used this example from nature to help His disciples understand how important daily intimacy and connection with Him would be in their lives in order for them to bear fruit for God's glory—which is the purpose for which He saves us. God's vision for every Christ follower is that we know and become like Jesus. The only way to know and become like Christ is to abide in Him. We abide by surrendering our lives to Him and allowing the Holy Spirit to control us instead of being controlled by our sinful desires.

As we continue to study John 15:1-17, we will begin to understand that the reason we have been given this new position “in Christ,” and the reason He commands us to abide in Him, is so that we can bear fruit for the glory of God. As we study this passage, it will become evident that the focus of the passage is not on abiding, but on bearing fruit. The point of this series is not just to teach us how to abide—it is to help us understand that abiding is the only way that our lives will glorify God because when we abide, we bear the fruit that the vine produces. God's will for us is not just that we have an intimate relationship with Christ through abiding. His will is that we have an intimate relationship with Christ so that we will bear fruit for His glory. In this lesson, we will see what kind of fruit

God intends for us to bear as we abide in Christ.

Opening Activity

Before you begin today's lesson, lead your group in a quick review of what they've studied so far [5 minutes]. The following questions will help as you review.

- 1) What is God's vision for every believer's life?
- 2) What does it mean to “remain” or “abide” in Christ?
- 3) What did Jesus promise in John 15:4 to His disciples?
- 4) What is the role of the Holy Spirit in producing and bearing fruit?
- 5) What is the difference in trying to produce fruit in our lives, and abiding in Christ to bear fruit?

Opening Prayer

Begin your time in study of God's Word by praying for your group. Pray that God will open the heart of every person and reveal Himself to you all in a new way as you study and discuss His Word together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth and show you all how to apply what you learn to your lives in a practical way. And pray that God will be glorified through your discussion today.

Key Study

It is important as we begin our study today that we take a moment to remember and reflect on the context of John 15:1-17. Jesus had just finished the Last Supper with His disciples, one of whom was about to betray Him. He had explained His fast-approaching crucifixion using a loaf of bread and a glass of wine. He had humbled Himself before them as He washed their dirty feet, telling them to do the same for others. This was a somber, emotional night for Jesus and the 12 men He had poured the past three years of His life into. This was, in many ways, a farewell—even if only for a short time. Jesus knew He would be raised back to life after three days, but things would never be the same again. His time on earth was almost over, and He loved these men.

As they exited the home where they had eaten dinner they began to walk towards the Garden where Jesus would pray the amazing prayer for His disciples found in John 17. Somewhere along the way, maybe even in a vineyard, Jesus begins to teach His disciples this parable in John 15. He begins, “I am the true vine and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off [lifts up] every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” This is one of the last chances Jesus will have to teach and encourage His disciples in person, and He chooses to explain to them in simple

terms how they can be fruitful and fulfill His mission for their lives.

Got Fruit?

On the surface it may seem strange, but think about it. How many truly “fruitful” Christians do you know? Have you ever wondered why that is? Why are so many believers no more “fruitful” now than before they began following Christ? What are we missing? We can be fairly certain that following Christ did not turn out how those 12 disciples had expected. They were run out of town, hated, persecuted, and even killed. They sacrificed comfort, wealth and even relationships to follow Christ. And think how they felt when He died. This is not what they expected. It was hard—and Jesus knew it would be hard. Don’t you think it’s the same for many of us today? We place our faith in Christ expecting life to be easier, better, to be happier. We think, “Christ will save my marriage, my children will follow Christ, my financial needs will be met.” And then... life happens. And it brings hardship, pain and disappointment. We feel confused and disillusioned, and sometimes even betrayed by God. Most of us surely wouldn’t characterize our lives as “fruitful.”

Let’s be honest. It’s not easy to admit, but many people who follow Christ experience these feelings, we just don’t talk about it—especially to other “seemingly happy” Christians. We expect the love we feel for Christ on the day He saves us to make it easy to sacrifice for Him... but it’s not any easier now than it was 2,000 years ago.

Pursuing Us

In John 15, Christ is about to hand over His ministry to eleven men who have little knowledge of what they are in for. In just a few days He will send them out to make disciples of all nations for His glory. Now, 2000 years later, His ministry has been handed over to us. Like the first disciples, we didn’t know what we were “in for” when we decided to follow Christ either. The good news is that God never expected us to accomplish His mission in our own power or in our own ways. God has given us everything we need to have an abundant, fruitful life by grafting us into the Vine. Christ does not want us to settle for a relationship with Him that is fruitless. In this passage, Christ shows us the life He wants for us, and it is a fruitful life that bears an abundant harvest for His glory.

He also tells us how to have this fruitful life—we must abide in Him. Branches are meant to bear fruit—it is

the only reason for their existence. If our lives are not fruitful, something is missing. God will never allow us to be satisfied if we aren’t bearing fruit. To do so would be allowing us to miss out on the purpose for which we exist. Could it be that the feelings of disappointment or emptiness that many believers sometimes face are a result of a life without fruit? What if this is His way of pursuing us, of showing us that there is something more, something better that we are missing?

His Desire for Us

As we study today, let’s take to heart these life-giving words of Christ in John 15. God created and saved us to bear fruit. This is His desire for us. Every circumstance He allows into our lives is for the purpose of making us fruitful. Once we begin to understand this truth, we will be able to view our lives from His eternal perspective, facing each challenge and sacrifice as an opportunity to bring Him glory by bearing fruit. God has an amazing plan to keep His branches flourishing and fruitful. This is the life we are intended to live, and this is the life that will satisfy us—bearing fruit for God’s glory.

How do we know that it is God’s purpose for our lives to be fruitful? Notice that before Jesus even tells His disciples to abide in Him, He begins explaining God’s process of making the branches fruitful. In verse 2 He addresses how God makes an unfruitful branch fruitful, and how He makes fruitful branches even more fruitful. Nowhere do we see the Gardener ignoring a fruitless branch. Even the ones bearing fruit receive nurturing from God so that they will bear more fruit.

Then in verse 4, Jesus tells His disciples to remain in Him. But why? Because, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me.” The purpose of Christ’s command to abide in Him is to bear fruit. The end goal is not abiding for the sake of being “close to God.” The end goal is to remain close to Christ so we will be fruitful branches.

Jesus begins this parable talking about bearing fruit in verse 2, and He ends the parable talking about bearing fruit in verse 16. It is here that we see how bearing fruit is God’s purpose for our lives. Jesus says, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” Jesus sort of “pulls rank” in this verse. He reminds His disciples that He chose them, and He did so for a purpose – so they would bear lasting fruit.’

Why Is This God's Purpose for Us?

Why is bearing fruit God's purpose for our lives? John 15:8 says, "This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples." Bearing lasting fruit brings great glory to God. The Father is not looking to see if we are abiding, He is looking to see if we are bearing fruit. This is what brings Him glory. If He sees we aren't bearing fruit, then He knows we aren't abiding—because abiding is the only way to bear fruit. A fruitless branch is of no use to a vine or to a gardener.

In the same way, a believer who is not demonstrating Christ's fruit is of no use to the Father. This explains the care He [the gardener] takes in John 15:2 to make us fruitful. God wants to demonstrate His glory through our lives. Look at God's words in Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." God's mission is that His name be glorified to the ends of the earth (Psalm 96:1-3). How has He chosen to accomplish this mission? He has chosen to glorify His name by placing us "in His Son" so that we can bear fruit.

Using the commentary above, explain the context of John 15 to your group. Open your Bibles and have someone read John 15:1-17 aloud.

Explain that bearing fruit is the main point of this parable. Jesus' command to "remain in Me" is so that our lives will be fruitful. Use the following questions and the commentary above to lead your group in a discussion of God's purpose that we bear fruit.

- According to verse 2, what does God do to branches that don't bear fruit?

Leader Note: The phrase "cut off" in verse 2 actually means, "to lift up." We will be studying what this means in a couple of weeks. Just make sure your group does not misinterpret the meaning of the phrase in light of our study. This "cutting off" or "lifting up" is the process of making a fruitless branch fruitful.

1. What does verse 2 say that God does to branches that are bearing fruit?
2. What does Jesus say about a branch in verse 4?
3. According to verse 4, how are we (Christ's disciples), like these branches?
4. According to verse 5, how are we guaranteed to bear fruit?
5. Based on verse 8, why is it so important to Christ that His disciples be fruitful?

6. According to verse 16, why has Christ saved us and what has He appointed us to do?
7. How does verse 6 describe a disciple who does not bear fruit through abiding in Christ?
8. According to verse 16, what kind of fruit does Christ want His disciples to bear?
9. How does our lives bearing fruit bring God glory?

Lasting Fruit

We have seen in John 15 that it is God's will for every follower of Christ to bear lasting fruit. We have also seen that the only way to do that is by abiding in Christ. As we surrender daily to Him and allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives, we will bear fruit. Christ promises us that in John 15:5. In verse 16, Christ is specific about the kind of fruit He wants His disciples to bear—fruit that will last. So now we want to answer the question, "What does God consider lasting fruit?"

In order to answer this question, let's go back to Jesus' parable and an example from nature. What kind of fruit do branches bear in nature? They bear fruit "after their kind." In other words, apple tree branches bear apples, orange tree branches bear oranges, plum tree branches bear plums, etc. So what kind of fruit does Christ intend for His branches to bear? Christlike fruit! Not fruit of this world, but fruit that shows the world the character of the Vine. Remember, as the branch abides in the vine, the vine produces the fruit - so the fruit should look like the vine. If the "fruit" our life is bearing doesn't look like Christ, then He didn't produce the fruit, which means we're abiding in something other than Him. Abiding and fruitfulness go hand-in-hand. You can always tell where you're abiding by examining the fruit your life is bearing.

Inner and Outer

The fruit from your life is how God receives His due honor on earth. At its simplest level, the "lasting fruit" Jesus mentions in John 15:16 can be understood in two "categories," so to speak. There is inner fruit, which is borne when we abide, allowing Christ to develop His character in us. Secondly, there is outer fruit, which is borne when we abide, allowing Christ to reproduce Himself through our lives as we multiply ourselves by making disciples. God desires to use both our inner fruit and our outer fruit to fulfill His mission for us—to make disciples of all nations.

The Fruit of Christlike Character

As we abide in Christ, we will bear the fruit of a changed life. As the sap of the Holy Spirit flows

from the Vine through our lives, we are transformed [changed from the inside out] into the likeness of the Vine. We will begin to think like Christ, love like Christ, pray like Christ and act like Christ. Our character is always growing and changing as we abide, bearing the fruit of attitudes, motives and thoughts that please God and bring Him glory. Let's look at some cross-references that will help us understand this "inner fruit."

Ephesians 5:1

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

In this verse we see the command to imitate how Christ lived on earth. The command in this verse is not to perform the deeds of Christ, but to imitate His character. As His character is produced in us, we will begin to imitate His behavior as well. This life will bear the lasting fruit of sacrificial love that is a pleasing sacrifice to God. Notice the words "just as" in this verse. Christ is our ultimate example of a fruitful life. As we bear the fruit of love and compassion, Christ is revealed through us in a way that others know He loves them, so that they will want to know Him too.

Ephesians 5:8-10

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth] and find out what pleases the Lord."

In this verse we see the comparison of life outside of Christ before salvation, to life "in Christ." The command is to live as children of light. Notice that the "fruit of the light" given in verse 9 is not a list of deeds, but a list of inner qualities. Here again in this passage we see the fruit of a Christlike character that lives in goodness, righteousness and truth. As we bear the "fruit of light", we demonstrate the changing power of God to those who are still in darkness.

1 Peter 1:15-16

"Just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

In this verse we see the command to be like Christ. Christ was holy, so we are to be holy. The only way for us to be holy is by abiding in Christ and allowing Him to produce His character in us.

Philippians 2:5-8

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross."

Again in this passage we see that our lives should bear the fruit of Christlike character. Our attitudes should be like Christ's, who humbled Himself and put the needs of others before His own. His heart was surrendered and His will was submitted to the Father. This resulted in His whole life being committed to reconciling others to the Father. We, too, are given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-19).

The Fruit of More Disciples

As we abide in Christ, He produces His character in us so that others see Him through our lives. As we become more like Him, we are motivated to serve others. As we demonstrate His love, mercy, goodness, and grace our lives become tools that the Holy Spirit uses to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-8). As the Holy Spirit convicts, and we abide in Christ, we will be given the opportunity to make disciples by pouring our lives into others, just as Christ has poured Himself into us.

God is always at work, drawing men to Himself. As we abide in the Vine we will see Him at work and have the opportunity to join in His work by Sharing the Word, Showing the Word, Teaching the Word, and Serving the World—this is disciple-making. Let's look at some cross-references to help us better understand our mission.

Romans 10:13-15

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"

This passage makes clear God's plan for reaching the world. Christ's followers must go and proclaim the message of the Gospel. We proclaim with our words and we proclaim with our lives. The only hope for a lost world is to call on the name of the Lord, but they will never know this if we, Christ's branches, are not

abiding in the Vine, bearing His fruit of the Gospel, demonstrating and proclaiming His message to all.

John 17:20-21

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.”

This passage is from Jesus’ prayer for His disciples right before He goes to the cross. It is obvious from verse 20 that Jesus expects His 11 disciples to bear the fruit of more disciples who will believe in Him through their message. The same is true of us today. God expects us to bear the fruit of more disciples by intentionally reproducing ourselves in others as we abide in Christ.

In nature, each piece of fruit has a seed that contains the potential of bearing hundreds more pieces of fruit. Each time we bear the fruit of a new Christ-follower, that new Christ-follower has the potential of reaching others who will reach others who will reach others. The whole world and future generations depend on us being faithful to our mission.

Matthew 28:18-20

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

The Ultimate Fruit-Bearing Passage

This is the ultimate “fruit-bearing” passage. Jesus makes it clear in verse 18 that God has given Him all authority to issue this command. His command is to bear the lasting fruit of disciples in all nations. This fruit will include baptizing, teaching, demonstrating and proclaiming. In verse 20, He assures us that He will be with us always. The One who has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” will be with us always as His Spirit lives in us. As we abide, Christ’s power and authority flow through our lives and the result is the lasting fruit of more Christ followers.

Using the commentary above, explain the two “categories” of lasting fruit that God has purposed for us to bear. Using the cross-references and the questions on the following pages, lead your group in a discussion of lasting fruit. This would be a good

opportunity to break into smaller groups as well. If you choose to do so, assign each group either the “Fruit of Christlike Character” verses or the “Fruit of More Disciples” verses. Allow them time to read the verses and discuss them before bringing the groups back together to share what they learned.

The Fruit of Christlike Character Cross-References

Ephesians 5:1

1. What is the command in this verse?
2. What kind of life are we to live?
3. Who is our example of this type of life?
4. How is Christ’s love described in this verse?
5. How will God be glorified if we imitate Christ according to this verse?
6. What are some ways that Christ demonstrated love?
7. What are some ways that we can imitate Christ by living a life of love?
8. How is living a life of love an “inner fruit?” In other words, what must happen in our character in order for us to love as Christ did?
9. How does obedience to this command help us to fulfill our mission?

Ephesians 5:8-10

1. How does verse 8 describe a life without Christ, and a new life in Christ?
2. How does verse 8 tell us to live?
3. How does verse 9 describe the fruit of a life in the light?
4. Is this fruit “works” or qualities of one’s character?
5. What are some practical ways that this fruit can be produced in your character as you abide?
6. What is the command in verse 10?
7. According to what we have learned in John 15, how can you “find out what pleases the Lord?”
8. Why is “bearing the fruit of light” important to our mission?

1 Peter 1:15-16

1. What is the command in this passage?
2. Why are we to be holy according to this verse?
3. How does this passage demonstrate the fact that trees bear fruit “after their own kind” [the fruit will be like the tree]?
4. What does it mean to be holy in all you do?
5. What does being holy have to do with our mission?

Philippians 2:5-8

1. According to verse 5, how should we be like Christ?
2. Based on verses 6-8, describe Christ’s attitude?

3. What are some Christlike qualities that would have to be produced in someone's character for him to have this type of attitude?
4. How would your life be different if you had this type of character?
5. How does God receive glory from a Christlike attitude?
6. Why are these qualities foundational to our mission?

The Fruit of More Disciples Cross-References

Romans 10:13-15

- 1) According to verse 13, how is someone saved?
- 2) Based on verses 14-15, what role do Christ followers have in someone believing in Christ?
- 3) How does this passage show us that it is God's purpose that we bear the fruit of more disciples?
- 4) Looking at these verses in reverse order, what is the result if we as branches do not answer the call to go and preach?
- 5) What happens if the lost never hear?
- 6) What happens if they never believe?
- 7) So according to this passage, what is God's plan to reach the world with the Gospel?

John 17:20-21

1. According to verse 20, who else besides His 12 disciples is Christ praying for in this passage?
2. What does Christ expect from His disciples' lives?
3. What does Jesus pray for us in verse 21?
4. Where does Christ pray that we will "be" in verse 21?
5. How does this prayer relate to what Christ taught in the parable of the vine in John 15?
6. Why does Jesus want us united "in Him" according to verse 21? (Hint: Look for the "so that" phrase)
7. What does this teach us about the purpose of abiding? Is it for our own sake only, or for the sake of the world?

Matthew 28:18-20

1. What authority has been given to Christ according to verse 18?
2. Based on this authority, what command does Christ issue in verse 19?
3. Which commands were the disciples to teach others, according to verse 20?
4. What is Christ's promise in verse 20?
5. Based on what we have learned in John 15, how is Christ "with us always"?
6. Based on this passage, what is the purpose of knowing Christ and being like Him? What does He expect us to do with what He teaches us?

7. How does this change your purpose in life?
8. How does God receive glory when we pour into other people what the Holy Spirit pours into us?

Conclusion

In John 15:4-5, Jesus tells His disciples exactly how to bear fruit – by abiding in Him. By explaining to them how to be fruitful, He is showing them how to bring glory to God. Jesus spent three years with these men, showing them first-hand what "lasting fruit" looks like. They are His lasting fruit, and so are we, because we have believed through their obedience to His command to make disciples of all nations. Christ modeled for His disciples what abiding looked like on a day-to-day basis. See this truth in the following Scriptures.

"I [Jesus] tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." John 5:19

"For I [Jesus] have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent Me." John 6:38

"If you obey My [Jesus] commands, you will remain [abide] in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain [abide] in His love." John 15:10

"I [Jesus] have brought You [God] glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do." John 17:4

These four verses show us that Christ abided in God, surrendering His will to the will of His Father. The result was the fruit of a sinless life that demonstrated the glory of God and more disciples. Christ came to earth to not only tell us God's mission for our lives, but to show us how to accomplish it. As we abide in Him, He will continue to produce the lasting fruit that brings glory to His Father.

As you close your study time together, have someone read each of these verses aloud. Help your group to understand that Christ abided, and the result was lasting fruit. If the Son of God had to abide in order to bear fruit during His life on earth, how much more must we abide in Him?

Application

As a Christ follower, you will never be satisfied if your life is not bearing lasting fruit because you are not fulfilling the purpose for which you were "grafted" into the Vine. Let's examine the "fruit" of our lives. Is

it the kind of fruit that reveals the character of Christ? Is it the fruit of more disciples? Let's not settle for fruitless Christianity. God will do the work of making us fruitful – we must only abide, surrendering our lives to His mission of making disciples of all nations through us.

For additional application of today's lesson, a handout is provided for members of your group to develop their personal testimony so they can be prepared to share the Word as God opens doors. Encourage them to take some time this week preparing to tell their story and practice sharing with a friend.

LESSON 4

ABIDE THROUGH HIS WORD

Key Passage: John 15:1-10; cross-references

Introduction

Over the past few lessons, we have been focusing on Christ's words to His disciples in John 15:4-5, "Remain [abide] in Me, and I will remain [abide] in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain [abide] in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain [abide] in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains [abides] in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." As we have studied the Parable of the Vine in John 15:1-17, we have learned that God has placed all believers "in Christ." This position is eternally secure.

If we abide in Christ, the Holy Spirit flows from the Vine through us, the branches, bringing to us the life and the power of the Vine. As we have learned, abiding means daily surrendering our lives to God, allowing Him to work in us and through us. The result of abiding is that the branches will bear fruit. It is God's will that every believer have a fruitful life on earth. This is our purpose for existing and the reason for which God saves us—so that we will bear fruit for His glory.

Bearing Fruit

Last week, we studied Christ's words in John 15:16, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name." We examined Scripture in order to find out what Jesus meant by "fruit that will last." We discovered through the Word that a Christlike character and making disciples is the lasting fruit of our lives that brings God glory.

As we abide in the Vine, the Holy Spirit works in our lives to develop Christ's character in us. As His character is produced in us, we bear fruit that the world can see; and the fruit we bear looks like Christ. When others see this fruit in our lives, the Holy Spirit uses us to show those outside of Christ their need for a Savior. This gives us the opportunity to share the Gospel and make disciples, fulfilling Christ's command to all believers in Matthew 28:18-20. The purpose of abiding is so that we will bear fruit and glorify God.

Needing Christ

The more we study John 15:1-17, the more we understand how much we need Christ in order to

fulfill God's purpose for our lives. There is no way we will ever develop a Christlike character and reproduce that character in others by making disciples without the power and presence of Christ at work in our lives. He must do it through us. And we must make the daily choice to allow Him to do it through us. We must learn to "get out of our own way" (die to self) and just abide in Him. As we remain relationally connected to Him, He will abide in us and God's mission will be accomplished through our lives. Remember to continue to direct the group's focus on intimacy and connection with Christ. This will naturally lead to a fruitful life.

Review

Before you begin today's study, lead your group in a quick review of last week's lesson using the questions below.

1. Why is it so important to Christ that His disciples bear fruit?
2. What does God (the gardener) do to ensure that His branches bear fruit?
3. What kind of fruit should our lives bear?
4. How did Christ abide and bear fruit?

Not a To-Do List

This week we will begin to look at some practical ways to help us abide in Christ. It is important to study in light of what we have seen in God's Word about abiding. Remember, there is no "list of things to do" that ensures we are abiding. The spiritual disciplines of the Christian life (Bible study, prayer, community, etc.) are a way through which we abide. The goal is not "performing" these spiritual disciplines—the goal is an intimate relationship with Christ. Think about it in practical terms. The strength of any intimate relationship (friendship, family relationships, dating, marriage) is in how well you know one another. The more deeply you know each other, the healthier and more fulfilling the relationship becomes. You begin to know each other's needs and desires. You know how to encourage and serve one another better. You communicate better. You understand and relate better. This is true of all relationships.

There are many "things" you do to get to know one another better. You may talk on the phone, write letters, e-mail, go places together, etc. These "things" are ways that you grow in your relationship. The focus isn't so much on what you're doing, but on whom you're doing it with, right? If you begin to focus on the things you are doing instead of the person you are doing them with, you miss the whole point. You may be "doing"

all of the right things, but you won't necessarily be growing together in your relationship. Abiding in Christ is the same way. The spiritual disciplines that we "do" are how we get to know Him better. It is how we spend time with Him since He isn't physically here with us. They are how we abide. We abide "through" these things, but not "in" these things.

Abiding Through the Word

The most important means by which we abide is the Word of God. In John 15:3, Jesus told His disciples that it was His Words of Truth that had made them clean. In Verse 7, Jesus tells His disciples how important it is to know His Word to have an effective prayer life. Today we will see why the Bible is so vital if we are going to abide in the Vine and bear fruit that glorifies God. In order to abide in Christ, we must communicate with Him. Like any relationship, this includes both talking to Him, and listening to Him. The Word of God is His voice in our lives. His Spirit helps us to understand what He is saying through His Word. As we spend time abiding through His Word, we get to know Christ better and we begin to understand His heart, His plans, and His purposes. As we know Him more, we will trust Him more. As we trust Him more, we will surrender to Him more. As we surrender to Him more, we will bear more fruit.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time in study of God's Word by praying for your group. Pray that God will open the heart of every person and reveal Himself to you all in a new way as you study and discuss His Word together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth and show you all how to apply what you learn to your lives in a practical way. And pray that God will be glorified through your discussion today.

Key Study

We will begin our study today by looking at why it is so important that we abide through the Word of God. We will allow Scripture to show us the answer. Through the following cross-references we will discover the importance of the Word in our lives. We will see how abiding in Christ through His Word will deepen our intimacy with Him and our dependence upon Him. In order to help you communicate these truths with your group during your discussion, the lesson commentary is organized to enable you to make a list of "Reasons to Abide Through the Word" on the board as you study together.

Leader's Note: Because there are so many verses in this portion of the lesson, making a simple list on the board

will help your group to understand and remember why we must abide through God's Word. You may choose to divide into smaller groups and assign the verses to different groups. Each cross-reference is followed by a brief commentary and discussion questions.

As you begin your study together, have everyone open their Bible to John 15:1-10. Have someone read these verses aloud. Using the lesson introduction, explain to the group that we are going to begin to look at practical ways to abide in Christ. Remind the group that these spiritual disciplines are ways that we abide in Christ. "Doing" these things should not be our focus. Christ should be our focus. After you have finished laying the foundation for today's study, begin your study of the cross-references.

REASONS TO ABIDE THROUGH THE WORD

Because It Is God-breathed Because It Is Useful

2 Timothy 3:16-17

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

In this passage are two important truths related to abiding in Christ. First, we see that all Scripture is God-breathed (inspired by God). This means that the Bible is not man's ideas, or man's words (2 Peter 1:20-21). It doesn't "contain" the Word of God—it is the literal Word of God. Every single word is God-breathed. This is such an important truth in today's culture. Many people, even some professing Christians and even some pastors, do not believe that "all Scripture is God-breathed." The second truth we see in this verse is that Scripture is useful in our daily lives. This verse lists four ways that Scripture is useful in abiding. It is useful for teaching (giving us God's commands). It is useful for rebuking (showing us our sin). It is useful for correcting (showing us how we need to change). And it is useful for training in righteousness (maturing us).

A great way to help us understand these four uses of Scripture is to think of ourselves as being on a journey. We don't know where we're going, but God does. His Word is one of the ways He guides us through the journey. The teaching of the Word shows us the road to take, rebuking alerts us when we get on the wrong road, correcting shows us how to get back on the right road, and training in righteousness keeps us on the right road. The purpose of abiding through

the Word is also given in this verse—so that we will be “thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Abiding through the Word equips us to bear fruit for God’s glory.

1. According to verse 16, Whose words and thoughts is the Bible?
2. How much of it is His words and thoughts?
3. Read 2 Peter 1:20-21. How does this passage confirm this truth?
4. How important is this truth in our culture today?
5. What four ways is Scripture useful in our lives according to verse 16? Discuss what each one means.
6. What is the result of Scripture’s work in our lives according verse 17?
7. How does this relate back to John 15:4-5 and abiding in Christ?

Because It Is Our Guide

Psalm 119:105

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

In this short verse, we see that God’s Word is our source of direction and light in a dark world. Notice the words God uses in this verse. The Word is a lamp to our feet. Think about the imagery. How much light does a lamp shine in darkness? Just enough light for the next few steps. This illustrates how we must constantly be abiding through His Word, shining it in front of us so we can see where to step next. We face so many choices and temptations each day, and God’s Word lights our path, guiding our every step.

1. How does this verse describe God’s Word?
2. What is the purpose of a lamp?
3. Describe the darkness of the world in which we live.
4. Why do we need a “lamp for our feet” in our lives?
5. How does the Word of God “light our path?” Give practical examples from your daily life.
6. What will happen to our “steps” and our “path” if we don’t use the light of the Word to guide us?

Because It Keeps Us Pure

Psalm 119:9-11

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word. I seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands. I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”

This passage fits beautifully with what we have been studying over the past few weeks about abiding. Notice that verse 9 doesn’t ask how a young man

can “become” pure, but how he can stay pure. This confirms what we studied in John 15:3 when Jesus said, “You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you.” How do we live a life that reflects this purity Christ has given us? By living according to His Word. Verse 10 illustrates abiding through the Word as the psalmist seeks God with all of his heart, asking God not to let him stray from His Word.

The psalmist is seeking God through His Word, and trusting that the result will be the fruit of a pure life that reflects God’s character. Notice in verse 11 that knowing God’s Word is for the purpose of not sinning against Him. His Word keeps us pure.

1. What is the question this passage answers based on verse 9?
2. According to verse 9, how do we keep our ways pure?
3. How do we “live according to His Word” according to verse 10?
4. According to verse 11, where must God’s Word be in order for us not to sin?
5. What do you think the word “hide” means in verse 11? Does it mean to keep it to ourselves like a secret?
6. How do we practically “hide” God’s Word in our hearts?

Because It Makes Us Holy (Sanctifies) Because It Is Truth

John 17:17

“Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.”

What a power-packed verse! It is from Christ’s prayer for His disciples and everyone who would believe in Him through their message. In the Greek, the word “sanctify” is a verb that means, “To separate from profane things and dedicate to God; a people dedicated to God; to purify internally by the renewing of the soul; to cleanse externally.” Jesus is praying that God would separate His followers from the world and make them holy. How does God do this? Through His Word, which is truth. As we abide in Christ through His Word, God develops Christ’s character in us, which sets us apart from the world. Then others will begin to see Christ through our lives.

1. What is Christ’s prayer for us in this verse?
2. What does “sanctify” mean?
3. How are we sanctified according to this verse?
4. How does Jesus describe God’s Word in this verse?
5. What are some ways God’s Word sanctifies us on a day-to-day basis?

Because It is Eternal

1 Peter 1:23-25

"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed; but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God. For, 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord stands forever.' And this is the Word that was preached to you."

This passage shows us that God's Word is eternal. It will never perish. The "living and enduring" Word of God is how we have been born again [John 1:14]. In this passage a comparison is made between the perishable and the imperishable. Man and his glory are perishable, which withers up and falls; but God and His Word stand forever. It is the Word that was preached to us.

1. According to verse 23, how have we been born again?
2. How are man and his glory described in verse 24?
3. How is God's Word described in verse 25?
4. Discuss how man and his glory wither and fall based on what you see in the world around you. Give specific examples.
5. Discuss how God and His Word stand in our culture today, even though it was written centuries ago. Give specific examples.
6. Based on this passage, how would you respond to those who say that God's Word is not "relevant" in today's culture?
7. Based on this passage, why is it important that you abide through the Word?

Because It Is Alive and Active

Hebrews 4:12

"The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

This verse teaches us that God's Word is not idle. It is alive and active in every believer's life. Here it is described as a double-edged sword, penetrating and dividing, exposing our deepest thoughts and attitudes. Looking at some of the Greek meanings of the key words in this verse will help us understand how deeply the Word of God works in our lives if we abide through it. The word "active" is the Greek word *energes*, which is where we get the English word "energy." The meaning of the word "sword" is, "A large knife used for killing animals and cutting up flesh." So we see that the Word of God is energetically slicing

through our lives, exposing us to God and ourselves.

The word "judges" here actually means "discerning." God's Word doesn't just judge our heart from a right and wrong viewpoint; it also discerns and exposes the hidden thoughts and attitudes of our heart. The meaning of the word "attitudes" in this verse includes, "The mind, understanding, will, manner of feeling and thinking." Finally, "heart" means, "The center of physical and spiritual life; the inmost part of anything."

Share these definitions with your group prior to discussing the questions.

1. How is the Word of God described in this verse?
2. What is it able to do?

Answer the following questions using the Greek definitions.

1. What does it mean that God's Word is living and active in our lives?
2. How much of our lives is it active in?
3. Based on this verse, how well are you known by God?
4. What might the Word of God reveal to us that we don't know about ourselves apart from it?
5. Why is this important as we abide in Christ?

Because It is How We Know What is True

1 John 4:1

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

This verse is so important in our world today. There is so much false teaching about Christ and it is easy to believe these lies if we are not continually abiding in Christ through His Word. This verse warns us not to believe everything we hear, but to test all things to see whether they are from God.

1. What is the warning given in this verse?
2. How are we to judge what is true?
3. The word "test" in this verse means, "To scrutinize to see if something is genuine." Based on that definition, how should we listen to what we hear about God?
4. Are there still "many false prophets" in the world today?
5. How does this verse show us that the Word of God is crucial in order to abide in Christ?
6. If we don't "test the spirits" against the truth of God's Word, what might be the result in our lives? What might we end up abiding in?

Because It Is Our Offensive Weapon

Ephesians 6:13-17

"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. In addition to all of this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

These verses teach us how to fight the enemy. Notice that we aren't to run in fear from our enemy, but to stand firm and fight. The passage lists the armor that every believer should daily "wear." Notice that most of the pieces of armor are defensive, in order to protect us from the "flaming arrows" Satan hurls at us. But the sword is an offensive weapon. Satan can throw darts at us, but he cannot stand against God's Word. The Word of God is an offensive weapon. As we abide in Christ through His Word, we are prepared and equipped for battle.

1. What are we told to do in verse 13?
2. Why are we commanded to put on God's armor?
3. Does verse 13 say "if" the day of evil comes or "when" the day of evil comes?
4. Look at verse 13 carefully. When are we to put on the armor, before the "day of evil" arrives or when it arrives?
5. What are we to do when this day comes, according to verse 13-14?
6. What are the pieces of God's armor?
7. How is the sword different from the other pieces?
8. What does verse 17 tell us the sword represents?
9. What are some practical ways that we can put on God's armor?
10. What are some ways that you can "wield" the Word of God in your everyday life to fight the enemy?
11. What does this passage teach you about the importance of God's Word in being prepared for the trials, temptations, and battles that following Christ brings?

Conclusion

The cross-references we have studied today clearly show us the importance of God's Word in abiding in Christ. As we conclude today's lesson, we are going to see once again that the purpose of abiding through the Word is so that we will bear the fruit

of more disciples of Christ. Last week we saw that Jesus abided in God during His life on earth. As He "remained" in the Father, His life bore fruit that glorified the Father.

His disciples, and all of us who have believed in Christ through their message, are the lasting fruit of Christ's life on earth. As we end this lesson, we are going to see that one of the ways Jesus abided was through God's Word. As He abided through the Word, He also gave others God's Word. The same should be true of us today. Let's look at this truth in God's Word:

John 17:6-8

"I [Jesus] have revealed You [God] to those whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me and they have obeyed Your Word. Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You. For I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent Me."

John 16:13

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come."

1 Corinthians 2:12-14

"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

These verses show us how Jesus abided in God through His Word. This is one of the ways that Christ "stayed connected" to God while on earth. John 17:6-8 says that Jesus gave His disciples the words that God gave Him. The result was that they accepted these words and believed. God also sent His Spirit to guide them into the truth after Christ returned to heaven. In John 16:13, Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would not speak on His own, but would speak what He heard from God, which is what Jesus had been doing while on earth. The Spirit was how God would continue to give the disciples His Word. Then in 1 Corinthians 2:12-14, we see how Christ's ministry was continued through His followers.

As they received the Word of God through the Holy Spirit, they spoke and taught the words they received. Notice that verse 14 says that people without God's Spirit (unbelievers) cannot understand God's words. We who believe in Christ and have received His Spirit are the only ones on this earth who can understand "what God has freely given us" because the Holy Spirit guides us and teaches us the truth. It is our responsibility and privilege to abide in Christ through His Word so that we can, like the early Christians, "speak not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words." How else will a lost world know what God has freely done for them, if we who can understand don't tell them?

As you conclude your study time together, have your group turn to these three verses in their Bible and

read each one aloud. Challenge and encourage your group that just as Christ abided through the Word, we must do so also. We have a responsibility to share His Word with others who do not have His Spirit. As we choose to abide daily through the Word, our lives will bear the fruit of a Christlike character and more disciples for Christ.

Application

Encourage your group to start spending some extra time each week studying and reading God's Word. Remind them that we don't read God's Word just for information, but for application. The following handout can help them read and study God's Word more accurately and effectively.

LESSON 5

TIMES OF ADVERSITY

Key Text: John 15:1-5

Introduction

As we have spent the last four lessons studying John 15:1-17, our focus has been on developing an intimate relationship with Christ by abiding in Him. We have seen through His Word that abiding [remaining] in Him is not about “doing” things for Him, but about being with Him. We abide in Christ when we choose daily to surrender our lives to His purposes and ways, focusing our lives on Him instead of on ourselves.

Abiding is developing a deeper connection and intimacy with Christ by spending time with Him, getting to know Him better. Last week we saw that one of the best ways to spend time with Christ is through His Word.

Not Only for Our Own Good

The purpose for having an intimate relationship with Christ is not only for our own good, but also for the good of those around us. It is God’s will that all of His “branches” in Christ be fruitful. As we receive abundant life in Christ, it is God’s will that we bring forth an abundant harvest for the world to see. Abundance isn’t only something we receive into our lives from Christ as we abide in Him, but it is also something that our lives pour forth into other people.

This is the beauty of abiding in Christ. We receive so that we can give. As we bear fruit, God is glorified through our lives and we experience unspeakable joy and satisfaction because we are fulfilling the purpose for which we have been saved.

Before we begin this study, take a few minutes to review the key points of last week’s lesson with your group. Use the following questions as you review:

1. What are some of the reasons that we should abide in Christ through His Word?
2. How is the Bible useful in our lives?
3. How is the Bible alive and active in our lives?
4. What does the Bible have to do with purity in our lives?
5. How is it a weapon for us?

Becoming Fruitful

This week, we are going to focus our study on how the Father makes His branches fruitful. John 15:1-5

has a lot to say not only about abiding, but also about the branches bearing fruit. We have established in earlier lessons why fruitfulness is so important to Christ—because it brings His Father glory on earth. We have learned what the “lasting fruit” is that Christ mentions in John 15:16. It is a Christlike character and pouring our lives into other people by making disciples.

Since we have seen that it is God’s will for us to be fruitful, and that the only way to bear fruit is by abiding in the Vine, it is time for us to examine John 15 to understand how God [the gardener] makes us fruitful. We know we cannot make ourselves fruitful, so how does God deal with His branches? That is what we will discover this week.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time in study of God’s Word by praying for your group. Pray that God will open the heart of every person and reveal Himself to you all in a new way as you study and discuss His Word together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth and show you how to apply what you learn to your lives in a practical way. And pray that God will be glorified through your discussion today.

Key Study

This week we are going to focus our study on one important, and sometimes troubling, verse in the Parable of the Vine. John 15:2 says, “He [God] cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” As we study this verse, it is important to put it in context with the rest of the passage so that we do not misinterpret its meaning.

Remember, Jesus is teaching this parable to help His disciples understand how to have the fruitful life that God intends for every believer. The focus of the parable is abiding in Christ for the purpose of bearing fruit that will last. Whatever God does or allows in our lives is for the purpose of making us fruitful.

...Not What You Might Be Thinking...

Many would look at verse two and derive that if someone isn’t bearing fruit, he must not be a Christian because of the phrase “cuts off.” But that is not what this passage is teaching at all. First, notice that the verse says the gardener cuts off every branch “in Me” that does not bear fruit. Remember our first lesson on every believer’s new position “in Christ”? Non-Christians are not “in Christ.” They are “in Adam” [1 Corinthians 15:22]. So Jesus cannot be talking about

non-believers in this verse. The Parable of the Vine in John 15 refers to branches (disciples) that have been placed “in Me,” according to verse two.

Others might say that verse two is teaching that believers who do not bear fruit lose their salvation—that God literally “cuts” them out of the Vine. This view does not stand up theologically, as it contradicts other Scripture. Salvation is God’s work in our lives through His Son. We do not “do” anything to earn salvation, therefore it makes no sense that we could “do or not do” anything to lose it. Ephesians 2:8-10 clearly communicates this truth:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Grace for a Purpose

This passage teaches that we have done nothing to earn or gain salvation. Even the faith we exercise to accept His grace and forgiveness is a gift from God, so that no one can boast. We also see in this passage that we have been recipients of God’s grace for a purpose—in order to do the good works He has planned for us in advance. Or, as we have seen in John 15, in order to bear fruit that glorifies God.

Have your group open their Bible and turn to John 15:1-5. Have someone read the passage aloud. Using the commentary above and the following questions, lead your group in a discussion in order to put John 15:2 in context.

1. Who is the gardener for the vine and branches according to verse 1?
2. In nature, what is the purpose of a gardener? Does he only tend healthy plants, or both healthy and unhealthy plants?
3. According to verse 2, what are the two types of branches that the gardener tends in this parable?
4. What is the position of both of these types of branches according to verse 2? In other words, who are they “in”?
5. What does He do for the branches that bear “no fruit”?
6. What does He do for the branches that do bear fruit?

Using the commentary, explain to your group that verse two is telling us how the Father tends to believers who aren’t bearing fruit, and to those who are bearing fruit. This verse does not refer to losing

one’s salvation since both types of branches are “in Christ.”

Have the group turn to Ephesians 2:8-10. Have someone read this verse aloud and discuss it using the following questions.

7. According to verse 8, how is someone saved—“by” what and “through” what?
8. How does verse 8 describe this faith?
9. According to verse 9, what doesn’t save someone? Why not?
10. Based on verse 10, what is the purpose of salvation?
11. Based on this passage in Ephesians, how do we know that the branches that aren’t bearing fruit in John 15:2 cannot be “cut off” from their position “in the Vine”?

Different Branches

There are two groups of branches “in Christ” that God [the gardener] is dealing with in this passage. One group bears no fruit, and the other bears fruit. Just as any good gardener does, God lovingly and carefully nurtures both His healthy and His unhealthy plants. We will look at both types of branches and how the Father nurtures each differently in order to bring forth fruit.

First, let’s look at what God does to believers who are not bearing fruit. Many people would say that if someone isn’t bearing fruit, he must not truly be saved. But John 15:2 tells another story. Here we see a branch “in Christ” that is not bearing fruit. What is important to understand is that God doesn’t allow the barren branch to remain fruitless. Verse two shows God actively intervening in order to bring forth fruit from the branch. It is possible for a believer to not bear fruit for a time? But it is not Biblical that someone would be a Christian and never bear fruit. Why? Because the Gardener will not allow it. He will intervene to make us fruitful in seasons of barrenness in our lives. What causes a believer not to bear fruit? Things such as unknown or unconfessed sin, wrong attitudes, selfishness, pride, self-reliance, independence from the Vine and even apathy. Many different kinds of sin can cause a fruitless branch.

A Fruitless Season?

How does the Father deal with such a branch in a fruitless season? Verse two says, “He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit.” It is in verses like this that a concordance is necessary to really understand what this verse means. The original Greek word that is translated “cut off” is the word *airo*; and it means “To raise up; elevate; lift up, or to raise up from

the ground.” Unfortunately, the phrase “cut off” is a poor translation of this word. Based on the definition of *airo*, God lifts fruitless branches up off of the ground. He elevates them. He lifts them up.

This won't mean much to us if we aren't familiar with grape farming. So let's dig a little deeper into how grapes are grown to understand what Jesus is teaching in John 15:2. Grape gardeners spend countless hours walking through the vineyards tending to the grapes. New branches that have been grafted into the vine have a natural tendency to trail down and grow along the ground. But a branch growing along the ground will never bear fruit because it does not get the light it needs, the leaves get coated in dust, and when it rains they get mildewed. Remaining on the ground or in darkness will cause a branch to become sick and barren.

Lifting Up the Branches

So what does the gardener do? He walks throughout the vineyard with a bucket of water looking for those branches growing on the ground. When he finds them, he lifts them up off of the ground and washes them off with the water, and then wraps them around a trellis or ties them up to keep them from trailing back down to the ground and to help them get the light they need. Soon, these branches that were once sick and useless are bearing fruit. When a gardener finds fruitless branches he doesn't “cut them off” and throw them away—they are too valuable for that. He lifts them up, cleans them off, and helps them to become fruitful again.

This is the picture of God's work in the life of a believer who is not bearing fruit that Jesus is painting in John 15:2. It is the picture of a loving Father carefully tending to barren branches, helping them to thrive again. So how does God “lift up and wash off” fruitless believers? Scripture teaches us that He does this through discipline.

Discipline Is Not Punishment

Most of us in North America do not have a Biblical view of God's discipline. We mistake God's discipline for His judgment or His punishment. In order to understand God's work in our lives, we must have a Biblical view of His discipline. Let's look at a passage in Hebrews that shows us how God views discipline.

Hebrews 12:5-11

“You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes

you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined [and everyone undergoes discipline], then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

In this passage, we see that God's discipline is how He proves to us that we are His legitimate children. Have you ever thought of discipline that way? It is the proof that God cares enough about us to intervene for our ultimate good, even though it isn't pleasant at the time. Notice that verse five calls this passage a “word of encouragement.” It should encourage us that God loves us enough to discipline us when we aren't bearing fruit. If He didn't, we would continue to “grow along the ground” and live in darkness, never experiencing the joy and satisfaction of thriving in the Vine. So what is God's discipline?

Godly Discipline

First, let's look at the Greek definition of the word “discipline” to help us understand the Gardener's work in our lives. Because so many people don't receive godly discipline from their parents, the comparison in this passage between God's discipline and our earthly father's discipline can be upsetting and confusing. God is the perfect Father, and any shortcomings or mistakes of an earthly father should not be attributed to our Heavenly Father.

The Greek meaning of “discipline” in this passage is, “The whole training and education of children, which relates to the cultivation of mind and morals, and employs for this purpose commands, admonitions, reproof and punishment.”

Notice in this definition that discipline isn't punishment by God. Discipline employs punishment in order to train and educate. When God disciplines a barren branch, He isn't punishing it. He is “lifting it up” to the position it needs to be in to become fruitful again. Verse five of this passage encourages believers not to “lose heart” when we are disciplined by God. Why? Verse six says because He “disciplines those He loves.”

Enduring Education

Verse seven says to “endure hardship as discipline.” The word “hardship” here is the same Greek word as “discipline.” So God is telling us to endure His education and training, even though it may “employ” uncomfortable measures such as commands, admonitions, reproof, and punishment [which literally means scourging]. But guess what the word “endure” means in verse seven? It is the Greek verb *hypomeno*, and it means, “Remain; abide; bear bravely and calmly.” Hebrews 12 is telling us to abide through discipline! Isn’t this just what Jesus is teaching us in John 15? He says in John 15:4 that no branch can bear fruit if it doesn’t abide in the vine. And in John 15:2 Jesus says that His Father “cuts off,” or disciplines every branch that bears no fruit in order to make it fruitful.

Discipline Enables Us to Flourish

Do you see how God’s discipline goes hand-in-hand with John 15:2? We must not view God’s discipline in our lives as a negative thing. His discipline is lovingly administered in order to lift us up and wash us off, cleansing us from the sin in our lives that leaves us barren, thus enabling us to flourish in our position in the Vine. Just like those grape branches in nature, it will always be our natural tendency to fall back into patterns of sin, living in darkness even after we place our faith in Christ. But John 15:2 is good news for every believer! God will never allow us to remain in a sinful, fruitless season for too long. Eventually, He will intervene. Notice what Hebrews 12:11 says. This discipline will not be “pleasant” at the time. In fact, it may even seem “painful.” However, verse 11 promises that it will eventually produce “a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Discipline Brings a Harvest

Remember God’s goal in discipline, or in “cutting off” (lifting up) the fruitless branches is not to be mean or punish anyone, but to produce fruit where there is none. Discipline brings a harvest for God’s glory through the lives of those who abide through it and allow themselves to be trained by Him. What good news! God will never allow a branch to remain fruitless forever. He will lift it up, wash it off, and cause it to flourish again.

Explain to your group that we are going to begin our study of John 15:2 by looking at the branches that “bear no fruit.” Have a volunteer read John 15:2 aloud once again. Then, using the commentary and the following questions, lead your group through a discussion of what it means for God to “cut off”

fruitless branches. Make sure to keep the focus on how God brings about fruitfulness.

Before you begin the discussion, share the Greek definition of “cuts off” in John 15:2 with the group. Also share the information from the commentary about how grape farmers deal with fruitless branches.

1. Based on the Greek definition of “cuts off” (lift up) and the information about grape farming, how does God deal with believers who are not bearing fruit [John 15:2]?
2. So is it possible for a believer that bears no fruit to stay that way forever? Why or why not?
3. What does that mean for you as a Christ follower? Are you comforted by this truth that God will not allow you to remain in a season of not bearing fruit?

Explain that we are going to see in Scripture that God’s discipline is His way of “lifting up and washing off” a fruitless believer.

Have the group turn to Hebrews 12:5-11 and have someone read the passage aloud to the group. Then, using the commentary, share the Greek definitions of “discipline” and “endure” with the group. Using the commentary and the following questions, lead them through a discussion of God’s discipline.

4. How does verse 5 tell believers to receive God’s discipline?
5. Why should we have this attitude towards His discipline according to verse 6?
6. What does verse 7 say about hardship?
7. Based on the Greek definition of “endure,” what are we to do throughout God’s discipline in our lives?
8. According to verse 8, what would be true about you if God did not discipline you?
9. What is the comparison made in verses 9-10?
10. Based on verse 10, what is God’s ultimate goal in disciplining any believer?
11. What is the reality of discipline during the time we are receiving it based on verse 11?
12. What does discipline produce in those who are trained by it according to verse 11?
13. How does verse 11 relate to John 15:2 in dealing with a branch that isn’t bearing fruit?
14. What are some ways that we, like new grape branches, might “grow along the ground,” allowing ourselves to become dirty and sick branches that don’t bear fruit?
15. Why is God’s discipline necessary in such situations?
16. What does this passage in Hebrews teach you

about God's love for you?

17. Should you be more concerned if you are being disciplined, or aren't being disciplined by God? Why?

The Other Branches

Next, we are going to look at the other group of branches Jesus mentions in John 15:2. He says, "... while every branch that does bear fruit He [God] prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." We have seen how God disciplines believers who aren't bearing fruit in order to make them fruitful again. Now, we will see how God "prunes" fruitful branches in order to bring forth even more fruit through them.

Once again, it will be useful for us to examine how a grape farmer deals with fruit-bearing branches. Does he leave them alone since they are already yielding fruit? No, he prunes them to make room for more fruit. Because grape vines grow so quickly the branches become so dense that light cannot reach the area where fruit grows. If left alone by the gardener, the branches will always favor new growth over fruit. Therefore, pruning is the most important function of a gardener to keep a branch healthy and bearing fruit.

Similarities

Don't you see some similarities in believers who are bearing fruit? "Rampant growth" can also occur in our lives, choking out the light of Christ in us. This unhealthy growth could be characterized as those things in our lives that aren't necessarily bad, but keep us from bearing more fruit. They are the things that take up our attention and time, keeping us busy and preoccupied so that we aren't reaching our full "fruit-bearing" potential. So what does the Gardener do with such a branch? He prunes it so that more fruit can be produced through the branch.

The Greek word for "prune" in John 15:2 is *kathairo*; and it means, "To purge; to cleanse of impurity; to prune trees and vines from useless shoots." What Jesus is saying in this verse is that when the Father sees that a believer is bearing fruit, He will purge [remove] useless things from his life so that he can become even more fruitful. If left alone, the branch would "overgrow" and choke out the light necessary to continue to bear fruit.

So how does God "prune" a believer? How does He remove unnecessary things from our lives that we might be holding onto? He does so by speaking truth to us from His Word and by the testing of our faith.

Pruning

The Greek word translated "prune" or "purge" in John 15:2 is the same Greek word that is translated "clean" or "cleansed" in the very next verse. There we read, "You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you." Here we see the two-fold work of the Holy Spirit using the Word of God that we've already studied.

First, God uses His Word to open our eyes to the need for a Savior. God exposes our sinfulness to us through His Word and then uses His Word to help us understand that Jesus is the only solution, the only Savior, for our sinful condition. He draws us to Jesus by using God's Word so that we will be saved as we confess Christ as our Lord. Then, we are eternally cleansed [justified] of our sin before God as He places us "in Christ." Once in Christ the Holy Spirit uses God's Word to expose our wrong motives, selfishness, pride, fascinations and distractions, etc. so that we can let go of those things and experience the spiritual transformation needed to abide more in Him. The result is that we will bear even more fruit for God's glory.

In addition to His Word, God uses adversity within the life of a believer to help us experience transformation in order to bear fruit. The Bible calls these adversities "testing of our faith" and "trials". Let's look at this truth in Scripture:

James 1:2-4

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

James 1:12

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

Romans 5:3-5

"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."

Tested

In all of these passages we see that the testing of our faith through trials and even suffering is how God

develops our character. Have you ever thought about a trial or suffering as a good sign? It is evidence that you are a fruit-bearing branch! God is pruning your life, removing needless things in order to bring forth more fruit. This is why James 1:2 says to consider it “pure joy” when we face trials. It is evidence that we are abiding in Christ and bearing fruit. We can know that when God tests our faith, it is for the purpose of bringing forth the fruit of perseverance, character, and hope in our lives. And we are promised in James 1:12 that there is a crown of life for all who abide through God’s pruning process in their lives.

Explain to your group that now we are going to look at God’s work in the lives of believers who are bearing fruit. Review John 15:2 and what it says about God pruning fruitful branches to make them more fruitful.

Using the commentary above, share the purpose and process of pruning in grape farming. Share the Greek definition of “prunes” in John 15:2 as well. Point out that it is the same word that is translated “clean” in verse 3. Explain that the way God “prunes” fruitful branches is by using His Word and the testing of their faith through trials and suffering. Explain the two-fold work of the Spirit—to expose our sinfulness and to transform our lives.

Have the group turn to James 1:2-4 and read it aloud. Then have someone skip down and read James 1:12. Using the commentary and the following questions, lead the group in a discussion of these verses.

1. According to verse 2, what should be a believer’s attitude towards trials in his life?
2. Why should this be his attitude, according to verse 3?
3. Why is perseverance so important in a Christian’s life according to verse 4?
4. How do trials test our faith?
5. How does God use trials to “prune,” or rid our lives of useless things that hinder “new fruit” in our lives?
6. How can seemingly “good growth” in our lives actually end up keeping us from bearing more fruit, just like a grape branch?
7. According to James 1:12, what is the reward for fruitful Christians who abide and persevere through God’s pruning in their lives?

Have the group turn in their Bible to Romans 5:3-5 and read it aloud. Using the commentary and the

following questions, continue your discussion of God’s pruning in our lives.

8. According to verse 3, what should be our attitude amidst suffering? Why?
9. What does perseverance lead to based on verse 4?
10. What does character bring?
11. What does verse 5 promise about hope?
12. How does suffering produce perseverance, character, and hope in our lives?

Conclusion

In light of what we have learned about discipline, God’s Word and trials, John 15:2 is a reminder of how much the Father cares for every branch that He has graciously placed “in” the Vine. Every branch in Him will benefit from the Gardener’s careful care. The challenge is for us to receive His nurturing with a joyful heart, learning to be thankful for His loving intervention in our lives. It may be painful at the time, but it ensures a harvest for His glory if we abide through it.

As you close your time together, break into smaller groups for deeper discussion. Have the groups discuss the following questions and pray together before you dismiss.

1. Based on today’s lesson, what do you think is the difference in God’s discipline and His testing in our lives?
2. How might we know whether we are being disciplined, or tested?
3. How can unconfessed sin in our lives lead to God’s discipline? If this is the case, how should we respond to Him?
4. Based on all you have seen in God’s Word today, how are we as believers able to rejoice in discipline, trials, suffering and the conviction of the Holy Spirit through God’s Word?
5. What does rejoicing and abiding through such times show the world around us about our God?
6. Are you in the midst of a test of faith right now that you would like to share? How can your brothers and sisters pray for and encourage you during this “pruning” season?

Application

Ask God to reveal to you this week anything in your life that you need to let go of in order to bear more fruit for His glory.

LESSON 6

ABIDE THROUGH PRAYER

KeyText: John 15:7-8; Matthew 6:9-13; cross-references

Introduction

As we begin the sixth lesson of our study of the Parable of the Vine, we have learned from God's Word that apart from Christ we can do nothing. Just as a branch must remain in the vine in order to bear fruit, we must abide in Christ in order to bear fruit for God's glory. As believers, we cannot produce fruit and we are not expected to do so. Producing fruit is what the Vine does; and the branches bear it, as they remain connected to the Vine. When God redeems us, He places us "in Christ." As we abide in that position through developing an intimate relationship with Christ, our lives will become fruitful.

Through the Word and Trials

In the last two lessons we have studied how to abide in Christ through His Word, and how to abide through times of adversity in our lives. Last week we studied John 15:2 and learned that the "cutting off" and "pruning" of the branches by God is actually good news for the branches. This is the Gardener's way of ensuring that His branches are fulfilling their purpose of bearing fruit that will last. It is how He keeps us healthy. God "lifts up" branches that are not bearing fruit through loving discipline. He "prunes" those branches that are bearing fruit through testing their faith (trials and suffering) to make sure that they don't "overgrow" and become so dense they cannot bear more fruit. These seasons of discipline, trials and suffering are the acts of a loving Father, and they prove that we are legitimate children.

Before you begin this lesson, lead your group in a quick review of the main points of last week's lesson on abiding through times of adversity. Use the following questions to help guide your review.

1. How does God [gardener] tend to the branches in Christ that aren't bearing fruit? Explain what "cuts off" means in John 15:2 when you answer.
2. Describe God's discipline according to the passage we studied in Hebrews 12.
3. How does God [gardener] tend to the branches in Christ that are bearing fruit? Explain what "pruning" means in John 15:2 when you answer.
4. What does the testing of faith and suffering produce in a believer's life?

Intimacy Through Prayer

This week we are going to study another practical way to develop intimacy with Christ in our daily lives—abiding through prayer. Our focus will be on John 15:7-8 which says:

"If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

This is a wonderful promise by Christ to His followers; but it is also one that can easily be taken out of context—especially the phrase "whatever you wish." We are going to see how to pray in a way that lines up with this passage. Jesus never lies, so this promise is true. It is possible to abide in Christ through prayer in such a way that "whatever we ask" will be given to us.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time in study of God's Word by praying for your group. Pray that God will open the heart of every person and reveal Himself to you all in a new way as you study and discuss His Word together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth and show you all how to apply what you learn to your lives in a practical way. And pray that God will be glorified through your discussion today.

Key Study

As we begin our study today, it is important to remember that prayer isn't a religious ritual that we perform. Prayer is a way that we abide in Christ. The purpose of this study is developing intimacy with Christ. There is no way to stay "connected" with Christ on a daily basis without prayer. Therefore, there is no way to bear fruit without a Biblical prayer life. Just like any relationship in our lives, communication is essential. Not all prayer connects us relationally with God. If we come to God in prayer with a list of what we want Him to do for us, and never seek His heart and His desires for our lives, we aren't connecting with Him, and our prayers will not be "fruitful." In this kind of prayer, He becomes like a "Santa Claus" in our lives—someone we go to when we want or need something.

This type of prayer relationship is not what Jesus meant in John 15:7. So what does He mean? Throughout Scripture, God promises to answer our prayers. Here are some of these Scriptures:

John 15:7-8

"If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to

My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples."

1 John 5:14-15

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him."

Mark 11:24

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

John 14:13-14

"I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it."

These verses contain the promise of answered prayers, but they also contain conditions. These conditions are:

- Remaining in Christ and His words remaining in you—John 15:7
- Asking according to God's will—1 John 5:14
- Believing that you have received it—Mark 11:24
- Asking in Christ's name—John 14:14

The question of whether God will answer our prayers is not one about God, but about us. Are we praying in such a way that we are abiding in Him and His words are abiding in us? Are we asking according to God's will and not our own? Do we pray in full faith that we have received what we ask? Are we asking in Christ's name? These are the questions we must ask ourselves if we are going to pray in a way that develops a deeper intimacy and connection with Christ.

Seeking God's Heart

If we are praying in the ways described in these verses, then we are no longer bringing God a list of demands, nor are we "tossing up" our requests, hoping He might answer. Our prayer life will become a time of seeking God's heart, and praying prayers that He wants to answer because they reflect His desires and will for our lives. This is how Jesus wants us to pray.

These Biblical "conditions" to the promise of answered prayer are the key to understanding why Christ made such a bold promise. Another way to say this promise based on these verses is, "If you are abiding in Me through My Word and asking in complete faith, you can ask anything you want, as long as it is according to God's will and reflects My character, and I promise God will answer your prayer."

Receiving Anything We Ask

We will receive anything we ask for in prayer if we are asking for that which God already wants to do. How do we pray this way? How do we know what God already wants to do? By abiding in Christ through His Word. The deeper and more intimate our relationship and connection with Christ, the more we will know Him and His will.

Have your group turn in their Bible to John 15:7-8. Have someone read it aloud. Using the commentary and the following questions, lead your group in a discussion of these verses.

1. What is the promise Jesus makes regarding prayer in verse 7?
2. What is the condition of this promise?
3. Based on what we have studied so far in this series, what does Jesus mean by, "If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you?"
4. How will abiding be reflected in prayer?
5. In verse 8, Jesus gives a reason that "whatever you ask" will be granted. What reason does He give?

Explain that you are going to lead the group in a brief "tour" of other places in Scripture where promises regarding prayer are made. Have the group turn in their Bible and ask volunteers to read the verses. After each verse, use the commentary and following questions to discuss them.

1 John 5:14-15

6. What is our confidence in approaching God, according to verse 14?
7. How do we know that He hears us, according to verse 14?
8. The word "hears" in this passage is the Greek word *akouo*, and it means, "To attend to; to consider what has been said." Based on this definition, what does it mean that God "hears" our prayers if we pray according to His will?
9. And if He hears us, according to verse 15, what do we know?

Mark 11:24

10. What is the condition for answered prayer in this verse?

John 14:13-14

11. In Whose name should we make our requests in prayer, according to this passage?
12. Asking "in Christ's name" means to ask in accordance with His character. How does this affect the meaning of this passage?

13. Why will Christ grant our requests based on verse 13?

Our Desires Aligned to God's Will

Explain to your group that based on all of these cross-references, Jesus isn't saying in John 15:7 that we can ask God for anything that we want and receive it. Christ is saying that when we abide in Him, God will change our desires to align with God's will. And when we pray according to His will, we can have confidence that God will answer our prayers. Why does praying according to God's will assure that He gives us whatever we ask? Have a volunteer read the following passage in order to answer that question.

Isaiah 46:9-11

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill My purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do."

God will fulfill His purposes and His will with or without us according to this passage in Isaiah. Prayer is His way of involving us in the process. It is a way that we abide in Christ (connect with Him intimately). When we pray according to God's will, He will answer our prayers because He will accomplish His plan on the earth. Now we must answer the question, "How do I pray according to God's will?"

Practical Prayer

The rest of today's lesson is going to be practical in nature. Christ's disciples asked Him the same question we are asking today. In Luke 11:1, Jesus' disciples saw Him praying and when He finished, they asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." Christ's lesson in prayer that day was what is now known as "The Lord's Prayer" or the Model Prayer.

This prayer was not meant to be a religious ritual that is mindlessly repeated as it has become today. It was an intimate conversation between Jesus and His twelve disciples as He answered their request to teach them how to pray. How did He teach them to pray? He prayed in front of them. He was giving them a model to follow, not a prayer to be repeated word for word. It is still a model for us to follow that can help us pray according to God's will. Let's examine the prayer line by line in order to understand why Jesus told His followers to "pray in this way."

Matthew 6:9-13

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'"

Our Father In Heaven, Hallowed (Holy) Be Your Name

All answered prayer begins with God. In the model Jesus gave us, He is teaching us to begin our prayers with acknowledging God's position and character. He is "in heaven," which means He rules and reigns over all; and He is hallowed. This means He is holy, and we are to be in reverent awe of Him. He is above all, and His ways are higher than our own.

When we begin prayer in worship of God, we humble ourselves before Him. The strength of our prayers is in knowing God through His Son Jesus Christ. How can we acknowledge and worship Him if we do not know Him? Notice that Jesus says to call Him "Father." In this model, Jesus teaches us not to come before God with a list of demands, but to begin our prayers in humble adoration for who God is and in respect of His authority over all the earth (Isaiah 6:3).

Your Kingdom Come

In this part of Christ's prayer we see complete and total allegiance to God's kingdom. We align ourselves with God's will on earth. Many times we are double-minded, forgetting that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). By praying, "Your kingdom come," Christ is showing us that our prayers should focus on God's priorities and not our own. This is our way of saying to God, "You are in control, not me."

Your Will Be Done On Earth As It Is In Heaven

Once we have acknowledged God's character and position, and pledged our allegiance to His kingdom, we must submit our will to the Father's will. Remember from our earlier cross-references, this is how we know God will answer our prayers—if we pray according to His will. This is the part of our prayers when we seek God's viewpoint, praying for what He wants to do. Our prayers must reflect divine purposes. There is no way we will ever be able to pray this way if God's Word does not fill our minds. This is why Jesus said in John 15:7, "If My words remain in you..." In order to know God's will, we must abide in Christ. We must surrender to Him, allowing Him to change our hearts and minds.

Give Us Today Our Daily Bread

This is when we present our needs to God and confess our dependence upon Him. Notice Christ asks for “daily bread.” Not enough bread for a week, or a month, or a year. Just enough for “today.” This models for us daily intimacy with Christ through prayer. It presupposes that tomorrow, we will be talking to Him again. And also note that Jesus prays for “bread.” He doesn’t teach us to ask for filet mignon. We are to ask God to meet our needs, not our earthly desires, and trust Him that He will come through.

Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Also Forgive Our Debtors

The “debts” Jesus is referring to are moral debts, not financial ones. This is the part of our prayers that involves confession and forgiveness of sins. Notice the order in which Jesus prayed as He taught His disciples. He begins with worship and adoration of the Father, followed by allegiance to His kingdom and submission to His will. Then Jesus humbly asks that God will meet His basic needs for this day. It is natural that confession would come in such a prayer. As we meditate on God’s holiness and His provision, the Holy Spirit will convict us of our sin so that we can confess it to the Father, which builds greater intimacy with Him.

And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From The Evil One

Finally, we ask for God’s guidance and protection from the evil one (Satan). Christ knew that His disciples could not handle Satan alone. Christ Himself prayed for His disciples’ protection in John 17:11,15. This is the part of our prayers where we cry out to God in poverty of Spirit, acknowledging that we need Him every moment of every day in order not to fall short of His righteous standards. This is when we express our desire to please Him by obeying Him, and yet also acknowledging that we cannot do this apart from Him.

Prayer That Models Abiding

As you can see, Christ gave His disciples quite a lesson in how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13. This model falls right in line with Jesus’ promise in John 15:7-8. This is a prayer model that shows us how to pray in a way that fulfills Christ’s “conditions” of abiding in Him, His words abiding in us, praying according to God’s will, and praying based on the character of Christ (in His name).

You may be thinking, “When do we pray for the needs of others in this model?” The answer is

simple, but easy to miss. Notice that throughout the passage, Christ prays using the pronoun “our,” instead of “my.” Throughout the prayer, He is praying for Himself and for others. This teaches us that our prayers should not only be for ourselves, but also for others.

Taking Your Group Through The Model Prayer

Have your group turn in their Bible to Matthew 6:9-13. Explain that today we are going to see how Jesus taught His disciples to pray. Explain that this prayer was never meant to be repeated word for word, but it is a model for how to pray. Have someone read the passage aloud.

Using the commentary, write each line of the Lord’s Prayer on the board (you may want to write it before class begins). Go back through the passage line by line with the group, writing a brief explanation next to each line explaining Christ’s model. As you go through each line, give a brief description of Christ’s model using the commentary above. You may write something like the following:

- Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name – Worship
- Your kingdom come—Allegiance
- Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven—Submission to God’s will
- Give us today our daily bread—Needs/Faith
- Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors—Confession/forgiveness
- And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one—Guidance/Protection

The remainder of the lesson is going to be taking a deeper look into each “line” of Christ’s model prayer. Break everyone into smaller groups and give each group one of the handouts for deeper discussion. If you don’t have enough groups for each to receive one handout, you may give more than one handout to the groups. In a very small setting (6-8 people), you can assign each “group” reading to one person, and ask them to complete the questions on their own—let the exercise “scale” to your group size. Give them 20-25 minutes to complete their work and then let each group share with the rest of the class what they learned.

It will be helpful for you as a leader to complete each group assignment yourself prior to class so that you can facilitate discussion and help answer any questions they have. The group assignments are listed to follow for your use.

GROUP IN-CLASS BREAKOUT WORK

Group One

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name."
Worship

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow.

Daniel 2:19-23

Jeremiah 32:16-25

1. How do these prayers compare to how Jesus teaches us to pray?
2. How does Daniel worship and adore God in these prayers?
3. How does Daniel acknowledge God's character in these prayers?
4. List some of the characteristics of God that Daniel acknowledges in these prayers.
5. How does Daniel acknowledge God's position and authority in these prayers?
6. Do you think these are examples of prayers that please the Father? Why or why not?
7. What can you learn from these examples that will help you as you approach God in prayer?

Spend a few moments together in prayer, not asking God "for" anything, but just worshiping and adoring Him for who He is and His authority over all.

Group Two

"Your kingdom come"
Allegiance

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow.

Matthew 6:33

1. Based on Matthew 6:33, what are we to "seek first"?
2. The Greek definition of the word "kingdom" in Matthew 6:33 actually means, "Royal power, kingship, dominion, rule; not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right or authority to rule over a kingdom." Based on this definition, what is Jesus teaching in this verse?

Mark 8:34

3. What must we do in order to follow Christ (be His disciple)?
4. What does it mean to deny yourself?
5. How does this verse show that Jesus expects allegiance to God's kingdom from His followers?
6. How does denying yourself relate to what we have studied about abiding in Christ?

Luke 9:59-62

7. What did the man want to do "before" he followed Christ in verse 59?
8. How did Jesus respond to his request in verse 60?
9. What did Jesus tell the man to "proclaim"?
10. What did another man want to do before he followed Christ in verse 61?
11. How did Christ respond to his request?
12. How does this passage illustrate how important allegiance to the Father's kingdom is to Christ?
13. How do all of these passages relate to Jesus telling His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come" in Matthew 6:10 (the Lord's Prayer)?

Spend a few moments together in prayer, aligning yourselves with His will by expressing your allegiance to His kingdom (authority, rule, right to reign).

Group 3

"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
Submission to His Will

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow.

Romans 12:1-2

1. According to this passage, how can you "test and approve" what God's will is? Note: The phrase "test and approve" in verse 2 literally means, "To recognize as genuine after examination."
2. Based on this passage, is it God's will that you be able to recognize His will?
3. How do we renew our minds in order to recognize His will?

James 4:1-3

4. According to verse 1, what causes fights and quarrels among believers?
5. What are the 2 reasons given in verses 2-3 for why we sometimes don't receive what we ask for from God?
6. What are some "wrong motives" we have when we pray?
7. How does this passage relate to submission to God's will?

Luke 22:39-44

8. What did Jesus request from God in verse 42?
9. How did Jesus submit to the Father's will in verse 42?
10. In this passage, was Jesus' will (desires) ever in conflict with the Father's?
11. How did Jesus handle this conflict of wills?
12. How does verse 44 describe Jesus' anguish as He prayed in submission to God's will?

13. What encouragement do you get from this passage for when your feelings and will conflict with what God wants to do in your life?
14. What if Jesus had not submitted to God's will?
15. What are the consequences if we, Christ's Body, do not submit ourselves to God's will?

Spend a few moments praying together, submitting yourselves to God's will.

Group 4

"Give us today our daily bread"

Needs

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow.

Philippians 4:19

1. What is God's promise to us in this verse?
2. How many of our needs will He supply?
3. What is the difference in a "need" and a "want"?
4. According to Whose riches will He meet our needs?
5. How are Christ's riches different from earthly riches?

Jeremiah 17:5-6

6. Who is "cursed" according to verse 5?
7. What are some ways that we tend to "trust in man" instead of trusting in God for our needs to be met?

Job 12:7-10

8. According to verses 7-8, who can teach us of God's provision?
9. What do these "know" based on verse 9?
10. How is God described in verse 10?
11. What does this teach you about His ability to meet all of your needs?

Matthew 6:25-34

12. What are we "not" to worry about according to verse 25?
13. Who is our example in such faith, based on verse 26-30?
14. How are we to pray for our needs, according to verses 31-34?
15. What does verse 32 teach us about God's knowledge of our needs?
16. Why is it so hard not to worry about tomorrow?
17. What does worrying show about our faith in God?

Spend a few moments in prayer together, thanking God for His provision in your life and His ability to

meet all of your needs.

Group 5

"Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors"
Confession and Forgiveness

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow.

Hebrews 10:10

1. What has God already done for us according to this verse? In other words, what have we "been made"?
2. Through what have we been made holy?
3. For how long, according to this verse?

1 John 1:9

4. According to this verse, what are we to do in prayer?
5. What is God's promise if we do so?
6. If we have already been forgiven and made holy according to Hebrews 10:10, why should we confess our sins like 1 John 1:9 says to? What does sin do to our fellowship with God, even though our relationship with Him is secure? [Look up Isaiah 59:2 to help you answer]

James 5:16

7. What are believers commanded to do in this verse?
8. Why?
9. How are the prayers of a righteous man described?

Matthew 6:14

10. According to this verse, what must we do in order to be forgiven of our own sins and enjoy intimacy with Christ?
11. How can bitterness and unforgiveness towards others result in a lack of intimacy with Christ?

Spend a few moments praying together as a group for any sins you are struggling with.

Group 6

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"

Guidance and Protection

Read the following passages and answer the questions that follow.

Luke 22:31-32

1. What request did Satan make regarding Peter?
2. What did Christ do for Peter according to verse 32?
3. What did Jesus pray for Peter?

1 Peter 5:8

4. How is Satan described in this verse?
5. How, then, should we “be”?
6. Based on this verse, why should we pray for God’s guidance and protection?

1 Corinthians 10:13

7. What is God’s promise to believers regarding the temptations we will face in life?
8. What is the difference in “getting out of it” and in “standing up under it?”

2 Corinthians 2:14

9. How does Christ always “lead us” based on this verse?
10. What does it mean to triumph?
11. What does this verse teach you about how God will answer if you pray, “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one?” Should we fear Satan?

John 17:15

12. How did Jesus pray for His followers in this verse?
13. Why doesn’t He want us “taken out of the world?”

Spend a few moments praying together, asking God to protect and guide you.

Conclusion

Give each group a few minutes to share some of the key points of their discussion. You will not have time for them to share all they studied and learned. You might want to give them all a copy of the different “group studies” from this lesson for their personal study time this week. As you close your time together, remind the group that the purpose of prayer is not to get what we want from God, but to develop our intimacy with Him by abiding in Christ through prayer.

Prayer is how God involves us in His work on earth. He wants to reveal His will to us through His Word and His Spirit—but He will not if we are not abiding in Christ. As we remain closely connected in the Vine, God will show us how to pray, and what to pray for. These are the prayers that He promises to answer. Prayers based on His agenda, and not our own.

Let’s be a people connected to God through prayer. If we remain in Christ, and His words remain in us, we will receive whatever we ask for in prayer. Why? Because it is to God’s glory that we bear fruit (John 15:7-8).

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Date _____

What I'm praying for today _____

Prayers God has answered _____

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Prayers God has answered _____

LESSON 7

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

Key Text: John 15:9-17; cross-references

Introduction

The purpose of the “Abide” series has been to learn through Scripture that intimacy with Jesus Christ is the only way that we can live out God’s purpose for our lives. Throughout the Parable of the Vine in John 15, Christ reminded His disciples that apart from Him, they could do nothing. We have seen how important it is to abide in Christ through His Word and prayer—not because we “have to,” but because it is a way to spend time with Christ, getting to know His heart and aligning ourselves with His purposes and plans.

We have also learned that God is the loving gardener who “lifts us up” during seasons of barrenness in order to make us fruitful, and “prunes” us during fruitful seasons to bring forth more fruit from our lives. Because of this truth we can rejoice, even in hardships, because we know that whatever tests or trials God allows into our lives is for the purpose of making us fruitful.

In John 15:16, Jesus told His disciples that He appointed them for the purpose of bearing fruit that will last. Doing so brings glory to God. When others see in us the fruit of a Christlike character, God is glorified through our lives. As we abide, we receive the power and the life of the Vine. This is not only for our own good, but also for the good of those around us who need Christ. As we remain in Him, Christ empowers us through His Spirit to bear lasting fruit by making disciples as we choose to pour our lives into others.

Before you begin this week’s lesson, lead your group in a quick review of last week’s lesson on abiding in Christ through prayer. Use the following questions as you review.

1. What is Christ’s promise to us regarding prayer found in John 15:7?
2. What conditions did we find in Scripture for receiving whatever we ask for in prayer?
3. How did Jesus teach His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:9-13?
4. Briefly explain this model Jesus taught them.

Christ’s words to His disciples in John 15:5 were absolute: “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” Think

about the context in which Jesus said these words. He was days away from dying on the cross, and weeks away from returning to His position at God’s right hand in heaven. And yet He says, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.”

Jesus Was Departing...

The disciples were appointed to bear fruit. And yet they are branches that must remain in the Vine in order to do so. But their Vine was about to leave the earth. So how were they going to be able to remain [abide] in Christ and bear fruit? Jesus isn’t only teaching them about their need for intimacy with Him in these last days before His death. He also is using these last precious moments with His disciples to pave the way for the One who was coming from the Father to be with His disciples after He returned to heaven. The Father was sending someone to be with them who would keep them connected to God and to Christ. This is how they would “remain” in Christ—through the promised Holy Spirit.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time in study of God’s Word by praying for your group. Pray that God will open the heart of every person and reveal Himself to you all in a new way as you study and discuss His Word together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth and show you all how to apply what you learn to your lives in a practical way. And pray that God will be glorified through your discussion today.

Key Study

We were never intended to live the Christian life on our own. We cannot earn salvation. We cannot will to become like Christ. And we cannot make disciples of all nations through human effort. We simply cannot live a life that honors God in our own strength. God has been trying to tell us this truth since the beginning of time. When sin separated us from God, He already had a plan to redeem [buy back] us to Himself. When the time was perfect, He sent us a Savior and His name is Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life as a man, took our sins upon Himself when He willingly gave up His life on the cross, and made a way for us to once again have a relationship with God through faith in Him. This is something we could never have done on our own.

Because of Christ’s sacrifice, when a sinner repents of his sin and surrenders his life to God, confessing Jesus as his Savior and Lord, God forgives him and places him “in Christ” forever. God knew we needed a Savior, so He sent His Son. But what happens after

we place our faith in Christ? Are we all of a sudden able to live the Christian life on our own since we've been forgiven and declared righteous? Not according to Jesus. He said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing."

Disconnected From God's Power?

Jesus knew that once He left the earth, His disciples would be helpless to bear fruit, no matter how much they wanted and tried to do so. Why? Because Christ was their connection on earth to God's power. When they were with Christ, they had access to the power of God to glorify Him on earth. They had Christ physically with them, pouring His life into theirs and teaching them what the Father wanted them to know. He was their teacher and their guide, leading them into the great mysteries of God. All authority had been given to Christ on earth, and He gave authority to the disciples during His time with them so that they could join in His ministry (Matthew 10:1). With Christ leading them and helping them, they could participate in God's work on earth.

So how would they "remain in Christ" after He was gone? How would they stay connected to the power and presence of God so that they could continue to bear fruit? They would no longer be in need of a Savior, since Christ would finish that work before He returned to heaven. They had placed their faith in Him, leaving everything to follow Him. What they would need, however, was a helper. They would need someone to connect them to Christ and to the Father, so they could continue to have access to His power, presence, and authority in order to glorify Him on earth.

Christ knew what they needed. Acts 1:4-5 says, "On one occasion, while He [Jesus] was eating with them, He gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" Christ told His disciples before He was crucified that He would not leave them alone. He told them that God was sending help for them, to be with them forever.

Apart from Christ...

Christ's disciples knew that they could do nothing apart from Christ's presence in their lives. They had been living life with Him for three years, witnessing first-hand His power and authority. They also saw His connection with the Father. The disciples knew that without Christ's help, guidance, and power, they would be useless to God's kingdom.

Do we know that today? Do we understand as believers that apart from Christ we can do nothing? Nothing. Christ said that word. We are a completely useless branch that will never bear fruit in our own power, but when we abide in Him, we will bear lasting fruit for His kingdom. We will never fully understand and appreciate the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives if we do not first believe Christ's words in John 15—apart from Him we can do nothing. Look at the following passage.

John 15:9-17

"As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name. This is My command: Love each other."

If this passage doesn't show us our need for help in living the Christian life, what else will? Look at Christ's commands to His disciples: Remain in My love, obey My commands, love each other as I have loved you, bear fruit that will last, and love one another. This passage reminds us again of our desperate need for the power and presence of Christ in our lives. Not only do we need Him for salvation; but we continue to need Him every minute of every day. Intimacy with Christ through the Holy Spirit is our only hope of fulfilling Christ's command to remain in His love.

Leading Your Group Through John 15

Have your group open their Bible and turn to John 15:9-17. Have someone read it aloud. Using the commentary above, introduce the foundation for today's lesson—the disciples' need for a helper as well as our need today for a helper. Using the following questions, lead your group in a discussion of John 15:9-17.

1. What are all of the commands that Christ gives His disciples in this passage?
2. According to verse 10, how do we remain in His love?
3. According to verse 14, what is the proof that we are Christ's friends?

4. Based on verses 10 and 14, how important is obedience in the life of a believer?
5. What reason does Jesus give for calling His disciples friends in verse 15?
6. According to this passage, who made the Father known to the disciples? Could they know God on their own?
7. Why did Christ choose and appoint His disciples according to verse 16?
8. Do you think it is possible for someone to fulfill Christ's commands in this passage apart from God's power? Why or why not?
9. Review what Christ told His disciples in John 15:4-5.
10. What was about to happen to Jesus when He told this parable?
11. What problem did this create for the disciples based on what Jesus said in verses 4-5?

“The Helper”

We are going to spend the next part of the lesson digging into Scripture to see what Jesus told His disciples about the helper that the Father was sending them. What would be His purpose in their lives? What would He do for them? These are important questions because the same applies to us today. God sends the Holy Spirit to every believer. Just as the Holy Spirit would be the disciples' connection to Christ and to God after Jesus left the earth, He is also our connection to Christ and to God. The Holy Spirit is how we are able to abide in Christ's love.

John 14:15-21

“If you love Me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to 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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see Me anymore, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show Myself to him.”

John 14:25-26

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, 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.”

A Counselor

Again in this passage we see Jesus saying that those who love Him will obey His commands. This is not a way to earn salvation, it is the result of salvation. When we place our faith in Christ, God sends the Holy Spirit to live in us. The Spirit brings the power of God that we need in order to be able to obey Christ's commands, bearing fruit for His glory. Obedience is evidence that we are truly Christ-followers. Notice that Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “another Counselor” in verse 16, and calls Him “Counselor” again in verse 26. In order to understand the significance of this, we need to see what the definition of “Counselor” is in this passage. It is the Greek word *parakletos*, and it means: “Summoned, called to one's side, one who pleads another's cause, an intercessor, helper, aider, assistant, defense, legal assistant, advocate.” Doesn't this definition describe exactly what Jesus had been for His disciples while He lived on the earth? He had been their advocate before God, their defender, intercessor, and helper. Christ is the one that God “summoned to our side” to “plead our case” before Him.

Now Christ tells His disciples in verse 16 that He is going to ask the Father to send “another Counselor.” Christ has been our Counselor in coming to salvation, and the Holy Spirit is our Counselor in living out our salvation. He is our helper, advocate, and our assistant in bearing fruit. Notice in verse 17 that Christ tells His disciples that they know this Spirit because He “lives with you.” How had God's Spirit lived “with” the disciples? Through Christ living with them because God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all one. So by living “with” Christ, they had been living “with” the Holy Spirit. Soon, however, the Spirit will be “in you” [verse 17].

Teacher and Reminder

Verse 20 shows us that the Holy Spirit is how we are united [connected] to God and to Christ. Verse 26 also says that the Holy Spirit is our teacher and our reminder. Christ had taught them while He was with them, and the Holy Spirit would continue that work in their lives:

Romans 8:26-27

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”

Intercessor

Do you remember what we studied about prayer last week? If we pray according to God's will, He will give us whatever we ask. This passage teaches us that the Holy Spirit is our intercessor, and He prays according to God's will. When we do not know what to pray, He intercedes for us:

John 16:5-15

"Now I am going to Him who sent Me, yet none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is Mine and make it known to you."

In this passage, Christ makes a shocking statement to His disciples. In verse 7 He says, "I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." The disciples were probably thinking, "What!? What do You mean it's for our good that You go away? How could anything be better for us than You here with us?" Think about Christ's statement. In the previous passage (John 14:15-20), Christ told the disciples that they had been living with the Holy Spirit, but soon the Spirit would live in them. Unless Christ went away, the Holy Spirit would not be sent to live in them.

Empowered to Continue Christ's Ministry

God's presence had been with them through Christ's presence on earth, but what they needed now was for God's presence to be in them, empowering them to continue Christ's ministry. Christ was God's ambassador on earth, sent not only to die on the cross for our sins, but to pour His life into a few men, showing them the way to God. His plan was one of multiplication. When Christ returned to heaven, it became these men's responsibility, and ours, to continue Christ's ministry on God's behalf. We are

now His ambassadors, and God makes His appeal through our lives to the world, "Be reconciled to God" [2 Corinthians 5:20].

Notice also in verses 8-11 that another reason the Holy Spirit was coming was to convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment. In verse 13 Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will not speak on His own, but will give the disciples the words of the Father. Notice again the similarity between what Christ had done for the disciples as their Counselor, and what the Holy Spirit would do as their Counselor. In John 17:8 Jesus prayed: "For I gave them the words You [God] gave Me and they accepted them." Christ has been their teacher and guide, making known to them the words of God. Now, the Holy Spirit would continue that work. This will bring glory to Jesus [verse 14].

Acts 1:8

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

This passage teaches us where our power comes from to live out Christ's mission to make disciples of all nations. The Holy Spirit not only brings the presence of God, but also puts the power of God into our lives.

Understanding More About the Holy Spirit

Break your class into 3 groups for the following assignment. Remember, the exercise can "scale" to your group—for 6-12 people, it's fine to have groups of 2 or 3 folks, or even "groups" of one. Give each group one strip of paper with the following passages:

Group One: John 14: 15-21; John 14:25-26

Group Two: Romans 8:26-27; Acts 1:8

Group Three: John 16:5-15

Tell each group to look up their assigned passage[s] and read them together. Their assignment is to discuss the verses and make a list of all of the ways that the passage shows how the Holy Spirit helps believers to abide [remain connected to] Christ.

Give them about 10 minutes to complete the assignment and then allow each group to read their passage[s] aloud to the class and share what they learned. As each group shares their list, make a list on the board that shows how the Holy Spirit is our connection to Christ. Use the commentary above to clarify or add to the discussion.

“Living In the Spirit”

Now that we have seen how the Holy Spirit is the One who makes it possible for us to abide, let’s look at some Scripture to help us understand how to live in the power of the Holy Spirit instead of trying to bear fruit in our own power. Just because the Holy Spirit is living in someone doesn’t mean that the Holy Spirit is controlling him. We as believers must choose daily, moment by moment, to “walk in the Spirit.” In other words, we must choose to give control to the Spirit and not to our flesh. When the Holy Spirit doesn’t control us, we will not bear fruit because the Spirit is our connection to the Vine. He is the “sap” that flows from the Vine to the branches.

Ephesians 5:18

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

Acts 6:3

“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them...”

Both of these passages were written to believers, and yet they say to be “filled” with the Spirit, and to find men who are “full” of the Spirit. Believers already have the Holy Spirit because God sends Him to live in us the moment we place our faith in Christ. So what do these verses mean? The meaning of the word “full” here is, “Hollow vessels; covered in every part; thoroughly permeated with.” In this context to believers, being “filled” means to be controlled by the Spirit.

A Contrast

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul is contrasting being drunk with wine to being “filled” with the Spirit. Being “controlled” by wine leads to debauchery. These verses show us that it is possible to be inhabited by the Holy Spirit, meaning that He lives in you, and yet not be controlled by the Spirit. This is evident in Acts 6:3 as they are looking for men “among the brothers” who are “full of the Spirit.” We have already learned in earlier lessons that it is possible to be “in Christ” through salvation, and yet not be abiding in Him. This is the same principle. We must choose to yield control of our lives to the Holy Spirit every day. Just because the Spirit is alive in us doesn’t mean we are bearing fruit through His power. We must surrender to His leadership, and then we will abide and bear fruit.

Have your group turn in their Bibles to Ephesians 5:18 and Acts 6:3 as someone reads them aloud. After you have read the verses, use the commentary to explain

to the group how these verses show us that we can be inhabited by the Holy Spirit, and yet not “filled” [controlled] by Him. Be sure to share the Greek definition of “full.”

Now, break into two smaller groups. Assign each group one of the following passages:

Romans 8:5-17
Galatians 5:16-25

Their assignment is to read the passages and discuss what they learn from them about the sinful nature and the Spirit. Give them a few minutes to discuss the passages and then bring them back together to discuss what they learned. Feel free to give the groups the Greek definitions that pertain to their passage that are listed in the commentary that follows if you’d like.

Use the commentary below, especially the Greek definitions, to guide the discussion and further clarify what the verses mean as the groups share what they learned.

Romans 8:5-17

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.”

Sinful Mind Versus The Spirit

Verses 5-8 of this passage contrast living according to the sinful nature with living according to the Spirit. We see that the sinful nature brings death, but the Spirit brings life and peace. The sinful mind is hostile to God and cannot please Him [cannot bear fruit]. Those without the Spirit do not belong to Christ. In verse 10 we see the conflict within believers because of the Spirit and the flesh. Paul writes, "Your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness." The dead body and the living spirit are in opposition to one another. Christ said, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

In verse 12, Paul says that we have an obligation—not to the sinful nature, but to the Spirit. Verse 13 shows us that it is the Spirit of Christ in us that enables us not to act according to sinful desires. It says, "...if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live." We have a choice to exercise the power of the Holy Spirit in us and choose not to gratify the sinful desires of our flesh.

Verses 14-17 remind us that we are God's children. The Spirit we have received is not one of fear, but one of adoption. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are able to call God Father. Verse 16 says the Holy Spirit living in us testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. And if we are God's children, then we are co-heirs with Christ.

Galatians 5:16-25

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 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. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

This passage also shows us the conflict between the Spirit of Christ living in us and the desires of our sinful nature. Verse 16 says to "live by the Spirit" and the

result will be that you won't gratify the desires of the sinful nature. The word "live" in verse 16 is translated "walk by the Spirit" in the King James Bible. It is the Greek word *peripateo*, and it means, "Make one's way; conduct one's self." Verse 16 is saying, "Conduct yourself by the Spirit, and you will not give in to the desires of the sinful nature."

A Choice

We have a choice how we conduct ourselves. Will we walk through life according to the sinful nature, or according to the Spirit of Christ. Verse 17 says that the Spirit and the flesh will always be in conflict with one another. The acts of the sinful nature are listed in verses 19-21, followed by a warning that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. The fruit of the Spirit is listed in verses 22-23.

Notice that it doesn't say "fruits" of the Spirit [plural] but "fruit" of the Spirit [singular]. There is one fruit, and it is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Anyone who has the Holy Spirit living in him can bear this fruit. You don't get "part" of the fruit. The Spirit brings the power to bear all of these. These aren't "spiritual gifts." It is fruit that is borne through our lives if we choose to "walk" by the Spirit.

Conclusion

Galatians 5:25 says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." This is such a wonderful verse when you understand the Greek meanings of the words "live" and "keep in step." When it says, "Since we live by the Spirit," it isn't the same word for "live" that was used in verse 16, which meant, "to conduct one's life." This is the Greek word *zao*, and it means, "To enjoy real life; breathe; be among the living; active; blessed." So Paul is saying, "Since we have been given real life by the Spirit." The phrase, "keep in step" is the Greek word *stoicheo*, and it means, "To proceed in a row as the march of a soldier; to direct one's life."

What verse 25 is saying is since we have been made alive [given real life] by the Spirit of Christ who lives in us, let's fall in line and follow His direction as soldiers of God. Can you see the imagery of this verse? What would happen if as an army of believers we "fell in line" behind the Holy Spirit, surrendering our lives to His leadership. What would the lost world around us see? They

would see a Church bearing the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They would see an army of Christ followers fulfilling Christ's command in John 15:9 to remain in His love. They would see Christ in us, the hope of glory!

Application

This week in your time alone with God at the beginning of each day, seek to be conscious of choosing to "live by the Spirit" instead of by the flesh. Surrender control and ask God to fill you with His Spirit each day so you can bear His fruit for His glory!

LESSON 8

ABIDE THROUGH COMMUNITY

Key Text: John 15:1-17; cross-references

Introduction

“Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.”

For the last seven weeks, we have been meditating on the meaning and implications of these words that Christ spoke in John 15:4-5. We have learned that these words are an invitation to all Christ-followers to pursue and grow in a deep, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. He is calling us to abide in Him—to remain connected to Him through His Spirit each and every day of our lives. He is reminding us that we need Him desperately not only for salvation, but also to live out our salvation and to fulfill the purpose of being placed “in Him,” which is to bear fruit for the glory of God.

Not Motions or Activity

The command to abide is not calling us to go through the motions of religious ritual or activity. Christ is encouraging us to surrender control and depend on Him daily, spending time with Him through His Word and prayer. This is how we connect with Him, hear from Him, know His will, and align ourselves with His plans and purposes each day.

The Holy Spirit

Last week we learned that the Holy Spirit is our helper, our teacher, and our guide. He is the Counselor sent to us by Christ to be in us, forever sealing us in the Vine. He is our advocate, interceding for us in accordance with God’s will, and giving us the words of God— just as Christ did when He was on the earth, and continues to do at the right hand of the Father.

God has “set us up” to succeed in glorifying Him with our lives. He sent His Son to save us when we were dead in our sins. Christ is now at the right hand of the Father, living to make intercession (pray) for us (Romans 8:34). And He has given us the Holy Spirit to be our helper and our guide.

The key to abiding is not activity—it is intimacy. God has given us everything we need in order to abide in

Christ. We cannot do it on our own. We must remain in Him.

Before you begin this lesson, spend a few minutes reviewing the key points of this series with your group. Use the following questions to help guide your review.

1. What does it mean to abide in Christ?
2. What is the purpose of the branches?
3. How does God tend to branches that aren’t bearing fruit?
4. How does God tend to branches that are bearing fruit?
5. Why should we abide in Christ through His Word? How is the Bible useful in our lives?
6. How did Christ teach us to pray?
7. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life?

This week, we are going to finish our study of the Parable of the Vine in John 15:1-17. We will see that it is God’s plan that we abide in Christ as a community of believers. We were never meant to live our lives in Christ alone. We need one another. Throughout John 15:1-17, the pronoun “you” is always plural. Notice that Christ says “branches” and not “branch.” In verse 14 He uses the word “friends,” not “friend.” He is addressing His disciples not as individuals, but as a group united in Him.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time in study of God’s Word by praying for your group. Pray that God will open the heart of every person and reveal Himself to you all in a new way as you study and discuss His Word together. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you into the truth and show you all how to apply what you learn to your lives in a practical way. And pray that God will be glorified through your discussion today.

Key Study

We are going to begin today by looking at three different passages that teach us about abiding in Christ through community. As these passages show us, the goal is not just to attend “church.” In fact, nowhere in Scripture do we see “church” as a place. Scripture describes “church” as a people united in Christ. Yes, we may gather in different locations around the globe, but “church” is not a location, a denomination, or a building.

The first part of the key study today will be observing and discussing passages that teach us how God defines the Church theologically. The second part will

focus on passages that teach us how we should abide together practically through community.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

A Comparison

In this passage, Paul makes a logical comparison between the physical body, and the Church. This passage is where we get the term, "Body of Christ" to describe the community of believers all around the world. In verse 12, Paul says that even though a physical body is made up of different parts, it is still one body. It is the same with all of the "branches" in Christ. We are all different, but we are still "in" the same Vine and we bear the same fruit of that Vine. We may live in different places, speak different languages, have different strengths, and worship together in different ways, but if we are worshipping the same God through Christ, then we are one Body.

United

Notice in verse 13 that it is the Spirit living in us that unites us. Paul encourages us in verses 14-16

not to compare ourselves to one another. A foot is different from a hand, but both are important parts of the body. Just because one isn't like the other doesn't mean it isn't a part of the body. It is the same with Christ's Body. In fact, verses 17-24 show us that the differences and diversity within the Body strengthen it.

Lastly, we see complete unity in verses 25-26. There is to be no division in the Body. When one part suffers, we all suffer. When one part is honored, we all rejoice. This is an important truth for the North American church today. Many times there seems to be an attitude of competitiveness and criticism between different church "locations." We allow superficial things like music style and how formally or casually we dress for worship gatherings to divide us or unite us. According to this passage, if we tear one another down, we are tearing ourselves down and injuring the Body of Christ because we are one in Him.

Ephesians 2:19-22

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit."

Family

In this passage, Paul describes believers as "fellow citizens" and "members of God's household." We are a family united in our allegiance to God and His kingdom. God's household was built on the foundation of the apostles, and Christ Himself is the cornerstone. A cornerstone is the most important part of a building. Notice that the Apostles are the foundation on which God's house is built. They were the first generation of Christ-followers. Because of their obedience to Christ's mission of making disciples of all nations, we are now "bricks" in His house also. Verse 21 says it is "in Christ" that the whole Church is united and built. He is what keeps the house from crumbling and falling down.

Ephesians 4:11-16

"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be

built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole Body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

This passage says that it is Christ who gifts some within the Body to be leaders. Why? In order to prepare God's people to serve. Notice that this passage does not say the Church leaders are to be the only ones serving. Their gifts have been entrusted to them so that they can prepare each part of the Body to do its work. What happens when we serve? Verses 12-13 say the Body will become mature and unified in the faith.

No Longer Infants

The result of this unity and maturity is that believers will no longer be "infants" in our faith. We will no longer be "tossed back and forth" by the waves of false teaching and popular opinion. Instead, verse 15 says, we will speak the truth in love and grow up into Christ, who is the "head" of the Body. He, so to speak, is the "brains" behind the whole operation. Notice in verse 16 that our growth comes from Christ, but "every supporting ligament" holds us together. God has united us in Christ (the head) through His Holy Spirit. But it is our responsibility to hold ourselves together in this unity by each doing our work as one part of the Body.

Christ and Each Other

Notice in all three of these passages that we need Christ, and we need one another. He is our chief cornerstone and our head. But we are His Body. In a physical body, the body parts are how the thoughts, ideas, and plans of the "brain" are accomplished. Just like the branches bear the fruit of the vine. If each part of the Body is not doing its part, the mission will not be accomplished in the way the Head intends for it to. We do not function independently of one another, but instead are interdependent on each other. We have been united by God's Spirit for our good and for God's glory.

Using the lesson introduction, explain to your group that the word "you" in John 15:1-17 is always plural.

Also point out that Jesus uses the words "branches" and "friends" when He teaches this Parable.

Share with them that today we are going to finish our study of abiding in Christ by seeing that Christ never intended for us to abide in Him apart from one another. We have been placed "in Him" as a community of faith.

A Group Exercise

Break into three groups, and give each group one passage to study together. As before, you can "scale" the exercise to your group—even a breakout "group" of one is just fine. The group assignments are included below so you can work through them before class if you'd like. Give the groups about 15 minutes to complete their work. Then, have a representative from each group read the passage aloud and share what the group learned. Use the commentary above to help guide discussion.

Group One **1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

Read the passage and answer the following questions.

1. How does verse 12 describe believers as a whole?
2. How are we united according to verse 13?
3. What logical comparison does Paul make in verses 14-20?
4. How does this affect the way we relate to one another and function based on verses 21-25?
5. Why has God combined the parts of the Body and given greater honor to the parts that lacked it according to verse 25?
6. Do you think there is division in the Body of Christ today? Explain your answer.
7. How can division be avoided, according to verse 25? [Hint: Look for the contrast word "but."]
8. According to verse 26, how should unity cause one part of the Body to treat other parts?
9. Does the Body of Christ suffer together like this?
10. Does the Body of Christ rejoice for one another like this?
11. How would the Body of Christ be different if we suffered and rejoiced together?
12. What are some ways we could suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who are honored?

Group 2 **Ephesians 2:19-22**

Read the passage and answer the following questions.

1. According to verse 19, how is the community of believers described?
2. What were we outside of Christ according to verse 19?

3. What is God's household built on according to verse 20?
4. What is a cornerstone?
5. How are we joined together according to verses 21-22?
6. How does this relate to what we have learned in John 15:1-17 about our position in the Vine?
7. How is a foreigner different from a family member?
8. What is the difference in how you would treat and relate to a family member?
9. What does this teach you about how the Body of Christ should relate to one another?

Group 3 **Ephesians 4:11-16**

Read the passage and answer the following questions.

1. What gifts has Christ given some members of the Body, according to verse 11?
2. For what purpose, according to verse 12?
3. Based on this passage, are the Church leaders supposed to do all of the work? Explain your answer.
4. Do you think most believers understand that the role of Church leaders is to prepare them to go and serve? Why or why not?
5. How would the Body of Christ be different if all of its members were serving?
6. What is the end goal for the Body of Christ according to verse 13? What are we living for?
7. What will be the result of such unity and faith, according to verse 14?
8. What are some ways that we can be "tossed back and forth" as Christians in our culture?

Examine verse 16 carefully as you answer these questions.

9. From Whom does the growth of the Body of Christ come?
10. How is the Body held together and supported?
11. How is the Body built up? Who builds it up?
12. What is the result, then, if each part doesn't "do its work"?
13. What does this teach you about your personal responsibility to the other people in this room?

Abiding Through Community

Now let's look at some cross-references that will show us some practical ways that believers are to abide with one another through community.

1 Peter 4:10-11

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its

various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."

God has gifted us all in different ways. According to this passage, the purpose of these gifts is to "faithfully administer God's grace in its various forms." Have you ever thought of yourself as an administrator of God's grace? Everything God has given us is for the purpose of showing others His grace. Not just those who don't know Christ, but also to our fellow brothers and sisters. We should speak the words of God and serve with the strength of God so that our lives glorify Him and not ourselves. However, we cannot speak His words or serve with His strength if we are not abiding in the Vine and walking in the Spirit.

Hebrews 10:24-25

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Provoke Toward Loving God

The word "spur" in this passage means, "to provoke or to incite." We should consider how to provoke one another toward loving God and loving others through good deeds (bearing fruit). This truth paves the way for the next statement about continuing to meet together.

How can we provoke one another toward love if we don't build relationships with one another? The "Day" is approaching when Christ will return. The closer this Day gets, the more hardships believers face. This is why we must continue to love and encourage one another so that we do not give up.

Ephesians 4:29-32

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Words That Build Up

This passage is a "punch in the gut" for most of us. Our words should build one another up in Christ, not

tear each other down. We should speak not based on what we want to say, but based on the needs of the listener. Our words should be beneficial. Gossip and negative words grieve the Holy Spirit, which tears down our unity. The Spirit is what unites us, so if we grieve Him, it affects unity within the Body. Instead of grieving the Spirit, the Spirit wants to extend compassion, kindness and forgiveness through us to others.

John 13:34-35

“A new command I [Jesus] give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

Love As Christ Loved Us

Jesus commands us to love one another as He has loved us. His love for us is faithful, patient, unconditional and sacrificial—and this is how we should love one another. Notice that Jesus says that our Christlike love for one another [other believers] is how all men will know we are His disciples. Our love will set us apart from the world because only Christ can enable us to love this way. When others see this kind of love in our lives, they will see Christ.

Ephesians 4:1-5

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Worthy of the Calling

Paul is writing this letter from prison, urging his brothers to live a life “worthy of the calling” they have received. He goes on to describe how such a life should be lived. What kind of fruit will this branch bear? It will bear the fruit of humility, gentleness and patience towards one another. Here, again, we see how we should treat other believers. Paul says to make “every effort” to remain unified. Notice that verse 3 doesn’t say to “become” unified. God has already united all believers by sealing us with His Spirit.

Not “Create” But “Keep”

Our job isn’t to create unity by superficial means,

but to “keep” the bond of unity and peace that God’s Spirit has established among all Christ followers. The Greek verb translated “keep” in verse 3 is *tereo*, and it means: “To attend carefully, take care of, guard.” We are to carefully protect the unity and peace that God has given us. Paul uses the word “one” seven times in verses 4-5 to describe this unity. We have “one” Body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and Father in all.

Recording the Key Points

Have your group turn in their Bibles as you read each of the cross-references above aloud. As you read each verse, discuss it using the commentary above. You may want to make a list on the board of the key points of each verse. Once you have the list, lead the group in a discussion using the following application questions.

1. What are some ways that our group can “faithfully administer” God’s grace to one another?
2. How can we “spur” one another on towards love and good deeds?
3. How can we “keep” [carefully guard] the bond of unity that God has given us?
4. Discuss the balance of loving one another the way Christ has called you to, but still being open and inviting to new members. How can you be careful and intentional in both areas?

Conclusion

“Small Groups” provide the best opportunity to participate in the biblical community that we have seen described in God’s Word today. In the North American “church” culture of multi-million dollar buildings and services with thousands of people, we have the responsibility to carefully protect the unity we have in Jesus Christ. We have a responsibility to one another, and to the lost world that is watching how we treat one another.

A Small Group provides the opportunity to encourage and love one another in a deep, meaningful way. Jesus modeled this type of community for us with His twelve disciples. Their unity of heart and purpose became the foundation of the Body of Christ throughout the world. In His last night with the disciples, Jesus emphasized the importance of loving and serving one another. Not only for each other, but for the sake of a lost world that needed to see what God’s love looks like in action.

Will you make an ongoing commitment as a Small Group to abide in Christ together so that you, too, can make disciples of all nations?

Afterword

As you conclude this spiritual journey, consider where God may lead you next. Spending time in His Word, studying, learning and applying what you have read, and doing it in community with others, is the best way to grow in your faith and grow in your likeness to Jesus. Invite everyone in your group to continue the journey of making disciples of all nations with your group. However, let your attendees know that

if this group hasn't worked for them, there are other groups they can try to find the best fit. It is far more important to be engaged in the community of faith that is the church, than necessarily being in one specific group.

End by praying for one another that each of you will be faithful to "abide in Christ" for the rest of your lives.

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Date _____

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