

The Way

April 3, 2022

PURSUE

BUILDING FOR PEOPLE. BELIEVING FOR MORE.

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 15:1-8

Session Outline

1. Our Deepest Need (John 15:1-4)
2. Fruit Producers (John 15:5-7)
3. Glory to the Father (John 15:8)

Theological Theme

The one true and living God is both transcendent and immanent. He is both separated from His creation because of His greatness and goodness and in and with His creation. He calls His people to abide in Him each moment and depend on Him for everything.



Leader Guide

The Way

Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever been in a place for so long that you started to smell like that place?
- ❓ Have you ever spent so much time with a person or group of people that you began to mimic some of their actions or characteristics?

Smelling like a certain place could be good or bad. It may be a welcome result of spending some time in a coffee shop or a repulsive consequence of being exposed to too much car exhaust.

Either way, this only happens when you remain in a place for an extended period. The longer you stay in a place, the more the smell of that place will seep into your clothes. The longer you stay in a place or with a person, the longer it will affect you after you leave.

Christians are commanded to remain in Christ. When they do, they have the fragrance of Christ on them and walk in obedience to Him. They tell others about Christ and bring much glory to God. In our lesson today, we will consider how Christians ought to remain in Christ and that remaining in Christ should result in telling others about Christ.

Session Summary

Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5). The Christian life is intimately and exclusively connected to Christ. Jesus is the hope and focus of all who have been born again. Furthermore, all who have experienced new life by connecting with Christ will be moved with compassion to lead others to know Him also.

1. Our Deepest Need (John 15:1-4)

Christianity is built upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus Christ is God in flesh, eternal, immortal, almighty. They also believe Christ’s work on the cross is the only hope that poor sinners have for pardon and life.



What was the main point of Jesus's words recorded in John 15:1-4?

Jesus's point was summed up in verse four when He said, "Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me." Christians are desperately dependent upon Christ for all things and will seek to abide with Him more and more as they grow in their understanding and knowledge of the Scriptures. It may seem counterintuitive, but the more a Christian matures, the more they will depend upon Christ. The Christian who is self-reliant and gives little thought to their need for a connection to Christ reveals their immaturity.

When Jesus commanded His disciples to abide in Him, He wasn't making a suggestion. Jesus Christ is God, in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Every breath of air we take, every meal we receive, every friendship we enjoy, and our hope of salvation and eternal life all rest in Him. Christ begins by calling us to abide with Him, but it isn't long before we are pleading with Him to abide with us, for apart from Him we can do nothing. This was what was on Henry F. Lyte's heart when he wrote the wonderful hymn "Abide with Me." The first verse reads:

*Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*



Why do Christians need to stay connected to Christ and walk close to Him?


Jesus Christ is the Christian's Savior and Sustainer. It may be helpful to think of His goodness toward Christians in terms of His three offices in the life of the believer. Jesus is the believer's Prophet because He reveals God to them. He is their Priest because He continues to intercede on their behalf and keep them secure in salvation. And He is their King because He directs them and preserves them for His heavenly kingdom. Christians need a prophet because they are ignorant. They need a priest because they are sinful. And they need a king because they are needy. Christ is all of that as He shepherds His little lambs to still waters and green pastures; and leads them on paths of righteousness. A person's deepest need before they are saved is to come to Christ for forgiveness and life. A person's deepest need after they are saved is to abide in Christ because He is the author *and* finisher of their faith (Hebrews 12:2, NKJV).

Fruitfulness

The repeated reference to fruit underscores that fruitfulness is God's primary creative (Gn 1:11-12, 22, 28) and redemptive purpose (Jn 15:8, 16). The OT prophets envisioned a time when God's people would "blossom and bloom and fill the whole world with fruit" (Is 27:6; cp. Hs 14:4-8).


Those who are truly in Christ desire to keep close to their Lord and Savior. They long to be at His side, hearing His voice, singing His praises, and being fed from His hand. They choose the lot of Mary over Martha's (Luke 10:38-42). Christians can do this by keeping two things in mind. The first is doing what they ought. Christians can stay close to the Lord by approaching Him through the precious means of grace that has been provided for them. These include taking up His Word to read, bowing their heads in prayer, fellowshiping with the saints, partaking in the Lord's supper and baptism, and singing songs of praise.

Doing the right thing must also be complemented by being in the right way. Their hearts must take on the appropriate posture. John Newton is helpful to us here, "To be humble, and like a little child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and danger around us, as to cry to him continually to hold us up that we may be safe, is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with him."¹

-  Application: How much do you seek to remain in Christ? What are some things you do to keep your heart situated at the throne of grace?


2. Fruit Producers (John 15:5-7)

Jesus told His disciples that they were to "remain" in Him. In other words, their minds were to contemplate thoughts about Him, their hearts were to be filled with right affections toward Him, and their hands were to be busy doing that which pleased Him.

-  What did Jesus say about those who remain in Him? What do they do?

Remaining in Christ is a great blessing and joy for Christians. However, the end of remaining in Christ isn't the self-satisfaction of the believer. Abiding works itself into obedience to the One in whom we are abiding. The one who most abides in Christ is the one who best loves his neighbor as himself as Christ has commanded (Mark 12:31).

John 20:21 tells us that our connection with Jesus was never meant to stay to be hoarded and hidden. Our clinging to Christ includes calling to others to connect with Christ.

-  Why should abiding in Jesus also cause us to share about Him with others?

Christ was sent by the Father so that sin-dead people might be given life and abide in Him. Christians are sent to proclaim the gospel so that sin-dead people might be given life and abide in Christ. Consider all the

benefits and comforts given to Christians. Why would they not desire and labor so that others may experience those as well? They have received hope for the life and security for the next. They are made to be children of God and enjoy the fellowship of His family and the nourishment of His grace. These good gifts are for all those who come to Christ, and the Father calls sinners to Christ through the proclamation of the gospel by Christians.

The command to make disciples of all nations originated with God. It doesn't originate with any person, and, therefore, can't be controlled or modified by any person. If the command to go and make disciples were a human scheme then it could be nullified by another human scheme, but it is the commission of the King and Christians must obey.

This may feel constrictive to some, but it should actually be a comfort. There is no guesswork as to what Christians are supposed to be about as they sojourn on this earth. Those who are connected to Christ and submitted to Him as Lord are to readily see His will as superior to any personal ambition.

Christians should work to let this be a comfort and joy. If they feel too hemmed in by the calling that has been placed on their lives, then it may be an indication of a heart that is not fully submitted to God's will as it is revealed by the Scriptures.

Matthew 28:18-20 clearly explains the way Christians are to help others connect to Christ. Christians are sent to make disciples of all nations. Jesus gave two directives in Matthew's commission that help us understand what it means to make disciples. First, we are to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those around us (baptizing them). Second, we are to help them grow up into their salvation (teaching them). Acts 1:8 puts it this way, "you will be my witnesses."



Application: What sorts of fruit are you producing? Does this fruit match what the Scriptures say about the kinds of fruit believers ought to produce?

3. Glory to the Father (John 15:8)

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Christians bear the name of God, and they were created for God's glory (Isaiah 43:7). In John 15, Jesus commanded His followers to remain in Him and to produce fruit. The ultimate purpose of this is that the Father would be glorified.

God the Father is glorified by all faith-filled acts of obedience of Christians. The Father is especially glorified when Christians proclaim the

gospel for three reasons: The simple act of obedience of sharing the gospel with a lost person gives glory to the Father. The Father is greatly glorified when He uses the proclamation of the gospel to awaken a person who is dead in their sin. And evangelism results in more people who love and obey the Father who will also glorify God.

- ❓ What biblical accounts do you know where God was glorified through the proclamation of the gospel?
- ❓ How are these a model for our lives today following Jesus?

There are many examples of God receiving glory through the proclamation of His gospel. Two examples are found in Acts 16. In Acts 16:11-15, Luke described the story of Lydia's conversion. Then, in verses 16-34, we learn of the Philippian jailer.

When Paul arrived in Philippi, he immediately began looking for a place to share the gospel. This is a sure sign of someone walking humbly with their Savior. Luke reported about Lydia that "The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying" (Acts 16:14). This episode is a simple and instructive example of a Christ-follower walking in humble obedience to his Lord laboring to be a witness, and the Lord using that simple obedience to save another soul. It's important to note that Paul spoke to Lydia directly about Christ and the gospel. He didn't wait and hope that she would ask him. Furthermore, he didn't buy into the idea that he could preach the gospel without using words. Paul knew the commission meant a clear verbalization of the gospel.

Paul and Silas ended up in a Philippian jail cell after their encounter with Lydia. This wasn't Paul's first jail cell, and it wouldn't be his last. Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25). This is another example of their abiding in Christ. They loved Him and sought to exalt Him and glorify Him in every place and situation. What could be more glorifying than songs of thanksgiving echoing from a prison cell?

Next, God miraculously intervened by causing an earthquake that gave opportunity for all the prisoners to go free. They did not flee, though. The jailer had been moments away from suicide because he thought his prisoners had escaped. When he realized they had willfully stayed, the jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Paul responded with the gospel message and the jailer believed. But it didn't stop with the jailer. His whole household believed and was baptized. These two case studies illustrate how God the Father is greatly glorified when Christians remain in Christ, proclaim the gospel, and see sinners come to faith.

- ❓ Application: Have you shared the gospel with anyone recently? How did they respond?

Conclusion

Christians abide in Christ and produce fruit. One of the primary ways we are to produce fruit is through the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. While our mission is non-negotiable, the way Christians carry it out will differ from context to context. It is necessary for Christians to complete this mission no matter their situation. Some are called to full-time work of disciple-making in new cultures and lands, but all are called to a daily lifestyle of being Christ's witnesses, sharing the gospel, and teaching fellow believers all that Jesus commanded.

- ❓ What would it look like to abide with Jesus in your daily life?
- ❓ How does our connection through the church help us to abide in Jesus together? How is our ability to abide in Jesus hindered by being isolated from the church?
- ❓ Who do you who needs to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ? How will you seek to have a gospel conversation with them this week?

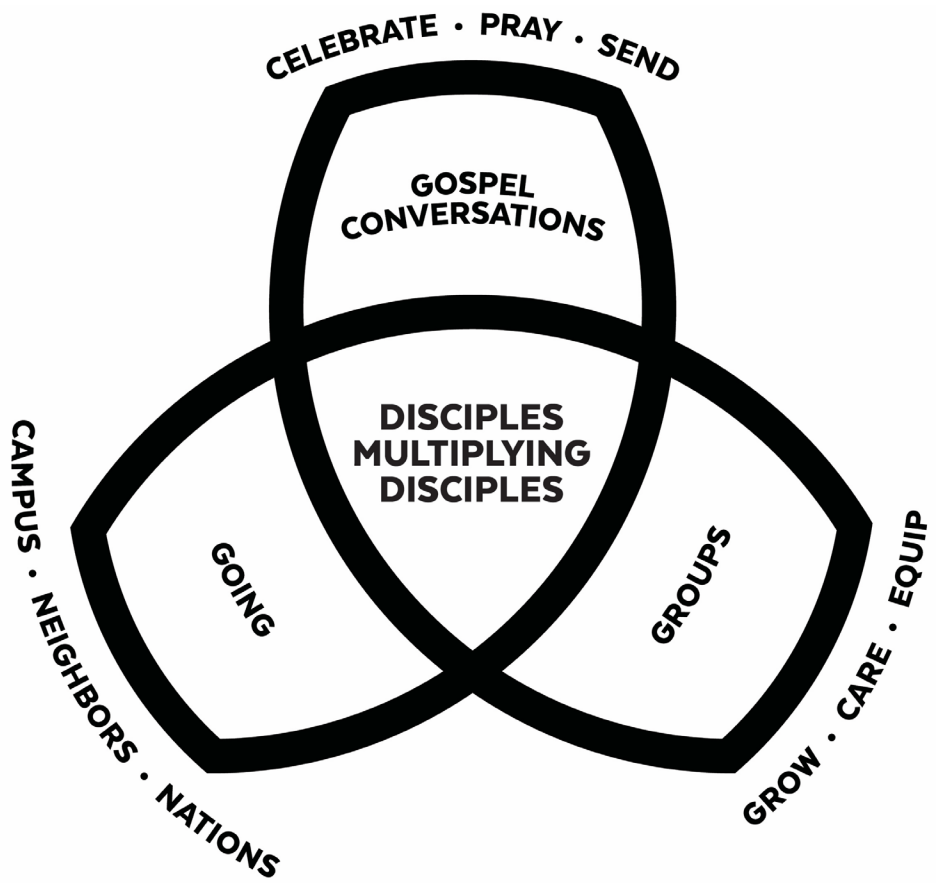
Prayer of Response

Ask the Lord to help you to abide in Him daily. Pray that your affection for Christ would spill over into your everyday life and that you and your fellow church members would be bold witnesses about Christ to those with whom you live, work, and play.

Additional Resources

- *The Gospel According to John* by D.A. Carson
- *John Chapters 11-21* by J. Vernon McGee
- *John 12-21* by Gerald Borchert

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Session Title

- The Truth

Main Passages

- John 18:33-40

Memorize

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.

- John 15:5

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

John 15:1-8

15:1. Though this section of our study is only two paragraphs, it is impossible to separate the components of the analogy that our Lord put forth. They appear as contrasting couplets throughout the passage. First we have the vine and the branches. This was imagery that every Jew would understand. In the Old Testament the vine appeared regularly as a symbol of Israel (Ps. 80:8–10; Isa. 5:1–2, 7; Jer. 2:21). The Father owns the garden, Jesus is the vine, and his followers are the branches.

Christ and not the church is the true vine. Branches placed anywhere else are false branches. The word for gardener is *georgos*, the common word for farmer, a role retained by the Father himself. The vine with which these disciples would have been familiar was Israel, described in some detail in Psalm 80. There the psalmist prayed, “Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself” (Ps. 80:14–15).

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

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

Viewing the removed branches as unregenerate professing Christians is not the only possible way of handling the text. Westcott says, “Even the unfruitful branches are true branches,” but then he chokes on the later reference to being thrown away and notes, “It is not perhaps necessary to attempt to determine the mode of this removal” (Westcott, B. F. *The Revelation of the Father*. London: Macmillan, 1884.). Perhaps it is best not to force every reference in this parable any more than any other but to focus on the pruning.

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

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

Furthermore, John used the word remain forty times in his Gospel and twenty-seven more times in his epistles. In the context of this passage, it seems to emphasize an ongoing faith and loving

obedience to the Father and the Son that results in fruit. The fruit in this passage seems to focus on spirit-generated behavior of Christians, though again this is not the only interpretation. Many sermons have been preached on emphasizing fruit as other people who have been influenced by the gospel.

This is new covenant thinking. The disciples and all believers since them must give up the idea that true Christianity emphasizes memberships and associations rather than life in Christ through the Spirit. True believers, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit because the Spirit of God lives in them, are pruned so their fruit will increase.

15:5. Here we have the key verse of the passage, although it only expands what we have already learned on the first paragraph. Gromacki writes, “Christ identified Himself as the true Vine, the believers as the branches, and God the Father as the vine dresser (John 15:1, 5). The fruit of the vine is Christlikeness. Although the Holy Spirit is not called a vine, He is a producer of fruit. The analogy could refer to a grapevine or to a fruit-bearing tree” (Gromacki, Robert. *The Holy Spirit*. Nashville: Word, 1999).

Let us go back to the Galatians passage and see how this teaching of John 15 links closely to what Jesus has already said in John 14 about the Holy Spirit: “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. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other” (Gal. 5:24–26). In my view, John 15 is not a passage on evangelism and the fruit does not describe new believers. This passage probably deals with discipleship and fruit describes godly behavior.

15:6. Verse 6 narrows other possible interpretations of verse 2. We struggle a bit with the words, “he cuts off.” But thrown away and withers takes it further than we want to go in any reference to people who may have been true believers at one time. Certainly the words thrown into the fire and burned could never refer to those who were at one time true believers.

15:7–8. The focus of this passage is on the positive side (the branches remaining) and the Lord put aside all reference to branches that are removed. He also indicated that fruit-bearing is to the Father’s glory and that those who bear much fruit demonstrate their relationship to Christ.

The distinctive factor here links an effective prayer life with fruit-bearing. Carson sums it up: “In short, Christians must remember that the fruit that issues out of their obedient faith-union with Christ lies at the heart of how Jesus brings glory to his Father. Those who are contemplating the claims of the gospel, like John’s readers, must reckon with the fact that failure to honour the Son is failure to honour God (5:23)” (Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991).

But John also talked here about complications in the application. Even when we understand the metaphor and grasp the analogy, we struggle with how best to make this work in our own lives. Let us understand Jesus’ words: You are already clean; you must remain in me; your fruit glorifies God. Even in this temporary life, some things remain. The abiding realities of this passage include answered prayer, the Father’s glory, and Jesus’ affirmation of discipleship.²

References

1. John Newton and Josiah Bull, *Letters by the Rev. John Newton: Of Olney and St. Mary Woolnoth* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1869), 328.
2. Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, ed. Max E. Anders (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000).

Author Bio

John Newton (Letters by the Rev. John Newton)

John Newton, (born July 24, 1725, London, England—died December 21, 1807, London), English slave trader who became an Anglican minister, a hymn writer, and later a noted abolitionist, best known for his hymn “Amazing Grace.” His transformation from a faithless seaman to a man of deep faith is echoed in his work.

Kenneth Gangel (John)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He’s written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

D.A. Carson (The Gospel According to John)

D. A. Carson (PhD, University of Cambridge) is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and is the author or editor of more than fifty books, including *The God Who Is There and How Long, O Lord?* He is one of the founders of The Gospel Coalition and an active guest lecturer in academic and church settings around the world.

J. Vernon McGee (John Chapters 11-21)

Dr. J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988) spent more than 50 years teaching the Bible on his “Thru the Bible” radio broadcast. He pastored for more than 40 years and has authored many best-selling books, including *Doctrine for Difficult Days*.

Gerald Borchert (John 12-21)

Professor Emeritus. Dr. Borchert has served as a Canadian Lawyer, an Ordained Baptist Minister, a Professor, and a Dean and Vice President of two Baptist theological seminaries in the United States in addition to having taught in many places. He is one of the translators of the New Living Translation and has written more than 150 articles and a score of books including commentaries on John, Galatians, Revelation, Thessalonians, two works on Jesus, one on *Worship in the New Testament: Divine Mystery and Human Response* which surveys the entire New Testament, two handbooks on visiting The Lands of the Bible, and most recently *Christ and Chaos: Biblical Keys to Ethical Questions*, a Webber Institute publication.