

REMAIN IN ME

JOHN 15:1-17

(Prepared by Gene Thompson using LifeWay's ETB material.)

1. What generally happens when you plant a flower, bush or tree in your yard and neglect it? (Generally, it will not be a healthy plant or not survive at all.)
2. What happens to relationships in our lives when we neglect them and pay little or no attention to them? (They too, will not be healthy and perhaps even fade away totally.)

The same principle applies to our relationship with God.

(Consider displaying a cluster of good, healthy grapes.)

3. What is necessary for a grapevine to produce a healthy cluster of grapes like these? (Constant attention by the gardener.)
4. Will this cluster continue to produce grapes? Why or why not?

In our Scripture text today, Jesus used the analogy of a grape vine and its branches to teach His disciples a spiritual truth. His arrest is only about three hours away and His crucifixion about six hours away. Jesus had a lot to say to His disciples, much of which they did not understand at the time, but the Holy Spirit would bring these things back to their memory and they would understand more clearly.

Jesus called on His disciples to connect to Him and His purposes. In doing so, they would find their identity. Without Him, we will never be able to accomplish the things He has called us to do.

PRUNED! Read John 15:1-8

This passage contains the last of the seven "I Am" Jesus made as recorded in John's Gospel. Notice there are four categories of fruit bearing in this passage: no fruit; fruit; more fruit; and much fruit.

1. What metaphors did Jesus use here? (The Father is the gardener; Jesus is the True Vine and the disciples are the branches.)
2. Who does the pruning? (The gardener.)
3. Do we find ourselves wanting to do some pruning at times?
4. What happens if you unplug an appliance from the power source? (It will not function. Likewise, we are dependent on a power source. Jesus used the example of the vine and the branches to illustrate this principle. The vine provides the nutrition that the branch must have for growth.)

We enjoy the benefits of being plugged in to God's power by depending on Christ daily, reading God's Word, and praying. Jesus was not saying that a true believer could be cut off from the kingdom. **The emphasis is on God performing the work necessary to produce much fruit!**

5. What happens to the branch that does not bear fruit? (Our translation says it is "removed".) For whatever reason the branch has ceased to produce, and it is no longer useful and in fact may be taking some nourishment from the vine that could be going to healthy branches.
6. What is the fruit produced by healthy branches? (A believer growing toward sanctification; other believers; Gal. 5:22 fruit of the Spirit; etc.)
7. How do you bear fruit? (When you allow God to work through you to bring Him glory. It is the product of obedience.)
8. Is fruit bearing optional for Christians? (No.)
9. How do we "abide" in Christ? (Bible study; prayer; fellowship.)
10. Does verse 7 give us a "blank check" for whatever we want? (No. When we say "in Jesus' name" it is in accordance with His will. That should be what we desire—His will!)

One writer says that "Pruning is a grower's single most important technique for ensuring a plentiful harvest." Are there some things God needs to "prune" from your life so you can produce much fruit? Jesus didn't say we'd be limited if we didn't remain in Him. He said we could do **nothing** without Him. So, we've got to protect that connection. One way to do that is to focus on loving Him and loving others.

JOY! Read John 15:9-11

1. What is the difference between happiness and joy? (Too many people get confused about joy and happiness. Happiness is based on circumstance. Joy is based on relationship to Christ!)
2. Based on these verses, what is the basis for true joy? (Jesus returned to the topic of love. His love for us and our love for Him and others brings all joy.)

The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father and His disciples. The disciples are to love the Son and others as the Son loves them. Remaining in His love nourishes our connection to the vine.

3. What substitutes does the world offer to the joy Jesus offers? (Temporary happiness. “What fools are they who, for a drop of pleasure, drink a sea of wrath.”—Thomas Watson.)
4. How do those substitutes compare to the joy produced by obedience to Jesus? (It makes an eternal difference. We sacrifice momentary happiness for an eternity of joy through obedience to Jesus.)

Remaining in Jesus requires obedience. This obedience is the external evidence of the internal love relationship we have with the Son. We don't obey so He will love us. We obey because we love the One who first loved us—1 John 4:19. The reward is joy—His joy. The joy Jesus offers is unquenchable, even in the face of pain. It is “complete.”

5. What is going through the disciple's minds as they heard Jesus talk about joy when He just told them He was leaving them? (Confusion, at best.)
6. Now, how do we experience His love? (Staying connected and being obedient.)

It all comes back to obedience. Keeping Jesus' commands keeps us in His love, which keeps us connected to Him, which leads to much fruit, which produces joy. Like dominoes, if something is missing along the way, the whole chain stops!

LOVE! Read John 15:12-17

1. Who chose who? (Jesus chose us.)
2. What command did Jesus give that formed “bookends” for this passage? (That we must love one another!)
3. How does true, sacrificial love compare with sentimentality? (Sacrificial love is much more than excessive tenderness or nostalgia. It gives until there is no more to give, if necessary.)

Jesus laid down His life for us. No one took His life from Him; He gave it of His own volition that we might have forgiveness of sin and spend eternity with Him.

3. What does this passage teach us about prayer? (Remain in Jesus and let His truth permeate and shape your life. When that happens, His values, His desires, and His purposes will become yours. That is when we'll pray the kind of prayers He prayed.)

These are the kind of prayers our Father in heaven will answer.

“As we study His Word it shapes our desires and the Spirit forms us from the inside out, we will begin to pray for those things that God cares about. God will hear and answer those prayers. If you aren't seeing answered prayer, are you praying? Is your praying shaped by Scripture, the Word of God? Is your praying a ritual or the overflow of God's life flowing through you?”—Matt Carter

SUMMARY AND CHALLENGE!

The main point for our study today is “Jesus is the source of life and spiritual growth.”

1. Are you growing in your spiritual life?
2. What level of fruit is God producing in your life? (No fruit; fruit; more fruit; or much fruit.)
3. Is your love for Christ evident through your obedience and your obedience expressed by your love for others?
4. Examine your life for evidence of abiding fruit, joy in obedience, and answered prayer. What keeps you from experiencing these things to a greater level?
5. How can you abide with Jesus to a greater degree?