

Abiding In Christ

Lesson 1

The Vine and the Branches

Leader Guide

Leader Guide Bible Studies

David R. Steele

This lesson is a free download from Leader Guide Bible Studies and is not for resale.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®

Copyright © 1973 1978 1984 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™

Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Lesson 1

John 15:1-17

The Vine and the Branches

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. *John 15:5 ESV*

Prayers

Introduction

Jesus' words of "Abide in me and I in you," found in John 15 in the parable of the vine and branches, are some of the most intimate words of comfort in the Bible, offering assurance of unity with Christ, abundant joy, and blessings to Christians throughout the centuries. A quick Google search found over 30 million commentaries, publications, and videos on what it means to abide in Christ. One of my favorites is "Abide in Christ," written by South African pastor Andrew Murray. Andrew Murray wrote "Abide in Christ" in 1895 as a daily devotional for his parish. Its 31 chapters reveal his love for Christ and have inspired the faith of believers ever since.

As much as the thought of abiding with Christ brings hope and joy, it can also bring a sense of disappointment and failure because, far too often, we feel distracted by life's demands and burdened by our sin and unfaithfulness. We feel we are *not* abiding with Christ. This study is for new and mature Christians who may have complete security in their assurance of salvation, the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life but still feel the promise of abundant joy, God's peace, and true intimacy with Christ has yet to be entered. Through this study and devotional reading, I pray you will discover the depth of God's love for you and the complete security you have in his love.

Setting

The lesson of the vine is found only in John and is part of Jesus' final words of comfort to his disciples while in the upper room during the Last Supper. Judas left the room to betray Jesus, and Jesus told Peter that he would betray him three times before morning. Jesus told his disciples he was going away, but they could not follow, at least not yet. The disciples were confused, worried, and probably fearful of what awaited them in Jerusalem. In this setting of confusion and fear, Jesus offers the parable of the vine to console his friends with his love for them.

Through the lesson of the Vine, Jesus makes the last of his "I Am" statements, "I am the vine," continuing to reveal His identity and helping his disciples understand what it means to be united in him. They had been united with him in his presence, but they would soon abandon him, and Peter would deny him three times. Jesus' lesson of the vine goes hand in hand with his teaching about the Holy Spirit because it is through the Spirit his disciples abide in him.

The vine's lesson is the subject of many devotionals. Several are "The Secrets of the Vine" by Bruce Wilkerson and "Abide in Christ," a 31-day devotional by Andrew Murray.

Read John 15:1-17

Jn 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

Jn 15:2 He 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. Jn 15:3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Jn 15:4 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. Jn 15:5 "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. Jn 15:6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. Jn 15:7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. Jn 15:8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. Jn 15:9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. Jn 15:10 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. Jn 15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Jn 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Jn 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. Jn 15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command. Jn 15:15 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. Jn 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. Jn 15:17 This is my command: Love each other.

Discuss

1. In the parable of the vine of the branches, Jesus portrays God as the gardener, "Jn 15:1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." What activities of a gardener illustrate God's watchful care of the vine and branches in his garden?
 - a. He cares for the branch and the vine
 - b. He wants the garden to flourish
 - c. He watches over every hindrance and danger
 - d. He supplies every need
2. Are you more alarmed by the thought of pruning or comforted by the Father's care for his garden?

Personal responses, allow time for discussion.

3. In the imagery of the vine's allegory, God the Father is the gardener who actively cuts off branches without fruit and prunes branches that bear fruit so they will be even more fruitful. What does it mean to be pruned by God, and how have you experienced pruning in your life?

The grapevine is probably the most heavily pruned of all plants because it bears more fruit with careful pruning. Pruning is through trials, challenges and failures, sickness, and loss. Remember that Jesus tested his disciples by putting them in the center of the storm so that they would learn to pray and learn that he was sufficient to protect them in their peril. During these times, we learn just how dependent we are on God. We try to go through life with our own self-sufficiency, but it fails in the end. The scriptures are clear; we should not lean on our understanding (Proverbs 3:5) and learn to

rejoice in suffering because suffering ultimately produces a Christ-like character (Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4).

4. Jesus told his disciples that they were clean in verse 3. He had just washed their feet during the Passover meal; is that what he was talking about?

Clean! The disciples were clean through Jesus' spoken word, and their faith in him. We are forgiven of our sins through the blood of Christ, redeemed from the power of Satan, and sanctified by God's Spirit that he puts in our hearts so that we might know him and pursue his holiness. But isn't the pursuit of God's holiness precisely where the problem comes in, and we see that we are still sinners at our very core? You are not alone if you continue to do the same sins after repenting time after time. You may say, "Jesus healed others; why doesn't he heal me?" The promise and the power in Christ are still present despite past failures. Despite our assurance that the bondage of sin is broken, we return to the same sins repeatedly, like addicts addicted to sin. Some of our addictions need professional help from medicine or counseling. The Holy Spirit heals some of our sins when our love for Christ is finally greater than our love for sin. Some of our sinful desires are not removed until we die, but all of our sins are forgiven at the foot of the cross when we come with broken, contrite hearts. Ultimately, Christ will destroy our sinful nature forever. His promise gives us comfort and courage to look past this dark hour of life to the peace of heaven when these sinful desires will no longer distress us.

5. In verses 4 – 10, Jesus told his disciples to "remain" or "abide" with him eleven times. What purpose does Jesus have for his disciples that they should abide with him?

To know and glorify God in our lives and to abide in Christ is the desire of every Christian. Yes, there is pardon and forgiveness, but there is more – there is bearing fruit. Bearing fruit is evidenced by a transformed character of love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness (Galatians 5:22). Abiding means that we seek to follow Christ's example to be a blessing to others. Worship, partaking in the sacraments, and studying the scriptures become integral to life. Jesus wants his disciples to be fruitful. Jesus called them to be his disciples and eyewitnesses so that they would continue to spread the kingdom of God by telling the world that Jesus was the Messiah, Son of God and that redemption and salvation are found through him alone.

6. In verse 8, how did Jesus say the disciples bring God glory?

Disciples bring glory to God by being fruitful.

7. Our first impulse is to equate being fruitful with evangelism, an important aspect of fruit-bearing – but not the only aspect. What are some other aspects of bearing fruit? Refer to Jesus' parable on the sheep and goats, Matthew 25:31-46 and Galatians 5:22-23.

Mt 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.

We learn from these scriptures that God's disciples show his love to the world by their character as they seek to meet the needs of others in a broken and afflicted world.

8. Jesus makes a bold promise to his disciples in verses 7 and 16 that the Father will give them whatever they ask for in his name. Judging by the context, to what do you think this promise refers?

The context of this promise is bearing fruit. Christ called his disciples and us to bear fruit, so God is pleased to answer our prayers to be fruitful in Jesus' name. We glorify the Father and the Son by being fruitful. These works might be great or small, but God has prepared them for us in advance (Ephesians 2:10). Prayer is a right God gives to his children so that we can bring any aspect of our life to him and ask for his guidance.

7. Jesus mentions love three times in verse 9 and then repeats himself for emphasis in the following verses. Jn 15:9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." Jesus told his disciples he loved them the same way the Father loved him. Refer to the following verses on how the Father loved the Son and complete the sentence of how the Son loved the disciples.

a. Jn 10:30 **I and the Father are one."**

God loved the Son by being in union with him. Jesus loved the disciples by being in union or abiding in them.

b. **The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.**

The Father loved the Son by giving him his words to reveal him. Jesus loved the disciples by **giving them his words and power to be his witnesses.**

c. Jn 6:38 **For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.**

The Father loved the Son by sending him to do his will. Jesus showed his love for his disciples by **sending them to do his will, the will of the Father.**

d. Jn 15:10 **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**

God loved the Son for obeying his commands. Jesus loves the disciples for **obeying his commands.**

e. Jn 17:5 **And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began**

God showed his love for the Son by raising him from the dead to glory. Jesus shows his love for his disciples by **raising them to eternal life.**

9. Sometimes, we are frustrated that our faith in Christ is weak. We have not obeyed Christ's commands to be loving and gracious to others, and our lives are in disarray. When we read a passage like John 15:2 and wonder if our Lord's warning applies to us, are we a branch to be cut off? Reflect on the promises in John 15:13-16 and the assurance of God's love for you.

In 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 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. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.

- a. How does the branch come to be in the vine, and likewise, how did you come to know Christ's love for you in the first place?

The branch is an outgrowth of the vine. It cannot choose to be a part of the vine. Nor can a branch exist without the vine.

Christ chose us, you and me. We did not choose him or earn his choice by our merit. We cannot be called a Child of God without Christ.

- b. How did Jesus demonstrate his love for us?

Jesus died for us.

He calls us to be his disciples/ friends

He reveals the mind of God to us. Christ invites us to live a deeper and richer relationship than when we first come to him in faith.

Sometimes we feel that we are not fruitful, and our lives are full of disarray. We are certainly not enjoying the peace and blessings promised in the scripture. Nonetheless, the promises are true. The scriptures remind us that our joy does not depend on our present circumstances but on our hope in Christ. We must trust Jesus, repent, and seek him with our whole heart.

10. What does it mean to you to abide in Christ as the branch in the vine?

Abiding in Christ means letting his life-giving Word flow into and through us. We are intimately connected with him through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The branch doesn't work to bear fruit of itself. It is only through its connection with the vine that the branch bears fruit.

The allegory of the vine and the branch is rich in illustrating our relationship with Christ. The branch is part of the vine because of the act of God, the Creator. Likewise, we are in Christ because God has revealed him to us through the work of his Spirit. God made His plan for us to be with him before he created the world (Ephesians 1:4). As the branch's purpose is to bear fruit, our purpose as Christians

is to be fruitful, to share Christ's example of sacrificial love, grace, and forgiveness in all our relationships in our family, neighborhood, and workplace.

Closing Prayer and Blessing