

BIBLE STUDY HELPS

TITLE: Remain in Me

TEXT: John 15:1-17

TARGET: SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Believer's lives will give evidence that they remain in Christ.

LOOK UP: FOCUSING THE GROUP

Option: Bring a pair of pruning scissors or pruning shears to display.

Option: Bring a variety of grapes for the group to eat while gathering.

Guide: Who knows what must take place every year for grapes or other berry-producing vines to remain healthy and to produce good fruit?

Most berry bushes bear only once on 2-year-old canes. After that, these canes must be cut away because they will no longer produce fruit. Additionally, some pruning should be done every spring to keep the plants from becoming tangled and to improve their ability to bear fruit. When it comes to pruning grapes, the most common mistake people make is not pruning heavily enough. Light pruning doesn't promote adequate fruiting, whereas heavy pruning provides the greatest quality of grapes.

As Jesus continues His conversations, in John 15, during the Passover Meal with His followers, He provides a lesson on what it means to remain or abide in Him. Using the portrait of a grapevine and a vineyard, Jesus explains how one who remains in Christ will provide evidence of this in the way that they live.

LOOK IN: UPACKING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Remaining in Christ produces fruit – John 15:1-8

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit." ³ "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." ⁴ "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." 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. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned." ⁷ "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples."

During this part of the conversation, Jesus described Himself as the true vine.

Ask: Why do you suppose Jesus said, "I am the true vine," instead of THE vine? Was there another vine that had been referenced somewhere else?

Direct: Someone read Isaiah 5:7 and Hosea 10:1. As these are read, consider what is different between Jesus saying He was the TRUE vine versus Israel being the vine. Why couldn't Israel be the true vine? How do the two words, "I Am" describe why Jesus can be the true vine?

This refers to the Old Testament passage where the vine came to symbolize Israel. Sadly, Israel could never be the TRUE vine because they were corrupt. Jeremiah 2:21 states this about Israel, "I planted you, a choice vine from the very best seed. How then could you turn into a degenerate, foreign vine?"

Jesus addresses his listeners in this context. He was explaining to them that He was not like Israel but was the True Vine and God, the Father, was the Vine Dresser or Gardener. The disciples would have recognized this reference.

Jesus also contrasted two types of branches – branches that bear fruit and branches that don't bear fruit.

Guide Options: Draw two columns. Label one "Bear Fruit" and the other "Don't Bear Fruit." List items under each column as you guide the discussion.

Notice how the branches that bear fruit are described in verses 2, 5, and 8.

Guide: What actions and results did Jesus describe regarding the branches that bear fruit?

Jesus describes the fruit-bearing branches as remaining in Him. Those who remain in Christ are like these branches. They are trimmed and pruned so that they will produce more fruit. When the branches that are grafted into the vine are pruned by the Gardener (God), they will produce more and better-quality fruit.

As much as the Father does through the Son to bring about fruitfulness in those who abide in the vine, it's hard to comprehend that some have no desire to produce fruit. Look what the Gardener (the Father) does for those who are fruitless.

Guide: What actions and results did Jesus describe regarding the branches that don't bear fruit?

The term "does not remain in me" in verse 6 is not a reference to someone who loses his salvation. It is about someone who never truly received Christ. They may have even made a profession of faith at some point but have no evidence of fruit.

Keep in mind the events of that night. Judas was one who appeared to be a part of the vine. He walked with Jesus, followed Jesus, listened to Jesus, but in the end, he rejected and betrayed Jesus. Earlier Jesus also taught Peter that most in the room were already clean, but there was one who was not, Judas. He repeats this reminder in this passage,³ *"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."*⁴ *"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."* As Jesus discussed the importance of abiding or remaining in Him, He declared the disciples *clean*.

Jesus states that the branches that don't bear fruit are taken away, allowed to wither, picked up, thrown in fire, and are burned. He is referring to those who reject the message of Christ; thus they don't remain in Him. They are the ones who have only known superficially the ways of Christ or who have dabbled with God but have never been grafted into the vine.

While the fruitless branches are set aside and destroyed, the gardener *prunes* the ones that are fruitful. The act of pruning was not intended to punish these branches. Rather, pruning stimulates growth and leads to *more fruit*.

Discuss: How would you define the fruit to which Jesus is referring? What type of fruit do you desire for your life as a believer to produce? How do you think the Father prunes you so that you can produce this kind of fruit?

Jesus did not go into specifics about what the fruit would be, but it could include some of the following:

- Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
- The fruit of evangelism.
- The fruit of thanksgiving.
- The fruit of generosity.
- The "fruit of righteousness" (Hebrew 12:11).

In any case, we can surmise it relates to following Christ and obeying Him. Jesus knew that if His disciples would keep that strong connection to Him, they would naturally produce fruit that pleases Him. Finally, Jesus didn't only say we'd be limited if we didn't remain in Him. He said we could do nothing without Him.

Truly remaining or abiding in Christ not only produces fruit; it brings joy.

Remaining in Christ Brings Joy – John 15:9-11

⁹ *"As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love."*¹⁰ *"If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."*¹¹ *I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."*

Respond: When you read the phrase, "As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you," what are your thoughts about the way God loves?

Jesus focuses on the topic of love—both His love for us and our love for others—and how that love produces joy. That joy is only made complete through the joy we have by remaining (abiding) in Christ. His joy in us, makes our joy complete!

Respond: How would you define complete joy? Why is it important to define what joy really is? What kind of approaches might we be tempted to take to pursue what we believe is complete joy? What did Jesus say was the criteria for experiencing His joy? (Love and obedience)

Here is the progression. 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.

Consider: Considering the dominoes described, is there something missing along the way that is robbing you of the joy that Christ desires for you to have?

The joy we have in Christ, while centered in remaining in Christ's love, produces love for others.

Remaining in Christ Means We Can Love as Christ Loved – John 15:12-17

¹² "This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends." ¹⁴ "You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father." ¹⁶ "You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. ¹⁷ This is what I command you: Love one another."

Discuss: Why did Jesus say He called them His friends? Do you have this kind of friendship with other believers? Is it difficult for us to have this kind of friendship today? If so, why? How difficult is it for us to obey the command to "love one another"?

God's love flows like an irresistible current through the lives of believers who abide in Christ. As the Father loved the Son and the Son loved the disciples, Jesus told them to *love one another*. The disciples were not just Jesus' project, they were His friends, and He was going to lay down His life for them and for all humanity. Is there any greater way to demonstrate one's love for friends?

The only way we can have this kind of friendship with others, especially believers, is to remain or abide in Christ. This is something we will work on our entire lives as we continue to learn how to remain in Christ.

LOOK OUT: LIVING OUT THE TARGET

Remaining in Christ for one who claims to follow Christ is not something we do because we seek justification before God. As believers we are justified because of salvation that only comes through Christ. What we are doing as believers when we are striving to remain in Christ is something called sanctification. We are daily striving to become more like Christ. If this isn't taking place, then one must ask oneself if there is any evidence that they are truly a fruit-bearing branch or rather a branch that isn't truly connected to the vine.

Consider your walk with Christ. Are you:

- Producing good fruit?
- Experiencing joy that is only complete in Christ?
- Loving others as Christ loved you?