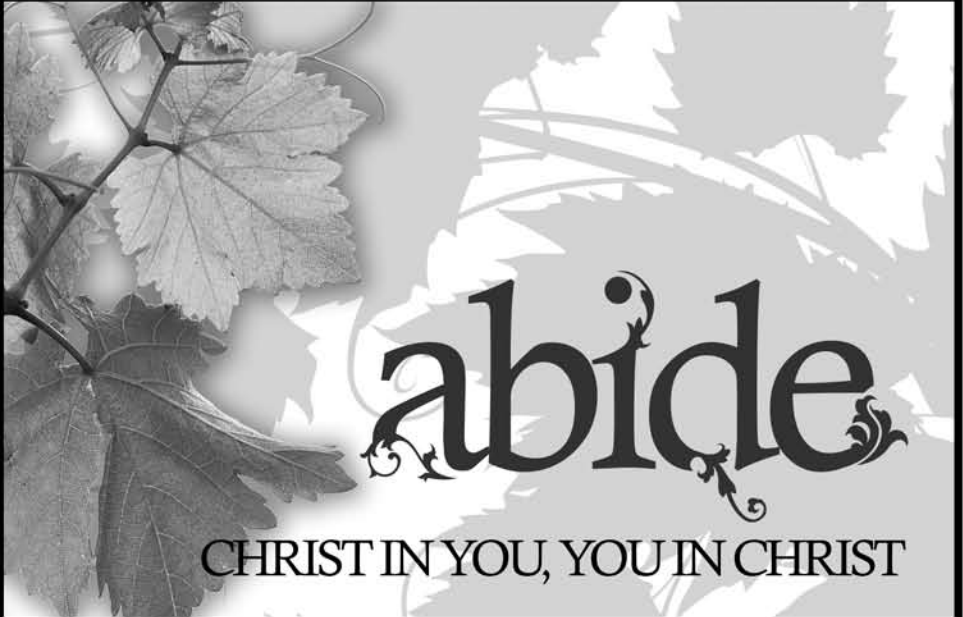


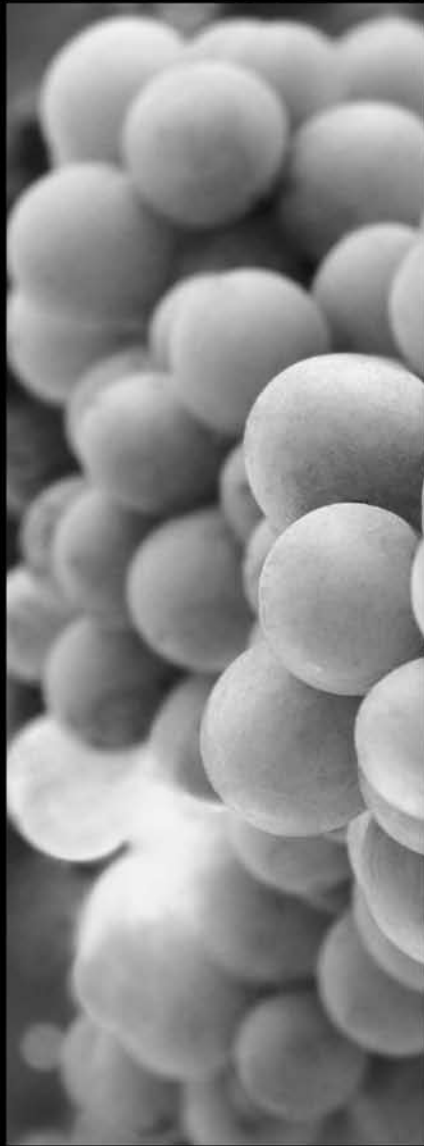


## SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY



# abide

## CHRIST IN YOU, YOU IN CHRIST



### LESSON 3

#### Embrace Christ's Mission

**Key Text:** John 15:1-17

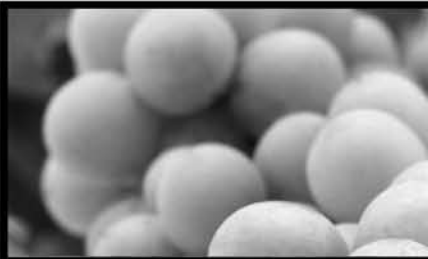
#### Introduction

Over the last two weeks, 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



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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 them. 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.

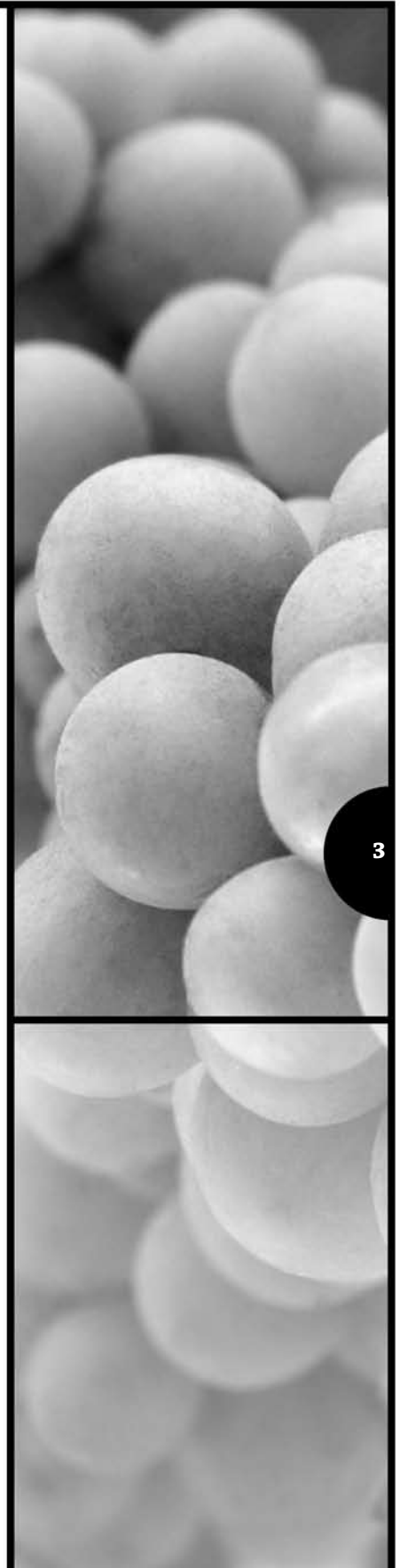
He also tells us how to have this fruitful life—we must abide in Him. Branches are meant to bear fruit—it is the only reason for their existence. If our lives are not fruitful, something is missing. God will never allow us to be satisfied if we aren't bearing fruit. To do so would be allowing us to miss 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?

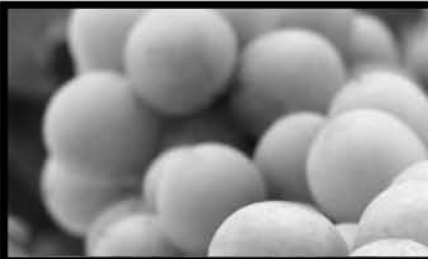
### **His Desire for Us**

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.

- 1) 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.**

- 2) What does verse 2 say that God does to branches that are bearing fruit?
- 3) What does Jesus say about a branch in verse 4?
- 4) According to verse 4, how are we (Christ’s disciples), like these branches?
- 5) According to verse 5, how are we guaranteed to bear fruit?
- 6) Based on verse 8, why is it so important to Christ that His disciples be fruitful?
- 7) According to verse 16, why has Christ saved us and what has He appointed us to do?
- 8) How does verse 6 describe a disciple who does not bear fruit through abiding in Christ?

- 9) According to verse 16, what kind of fruit does Christ want His disciples to bear?
- 10) 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**

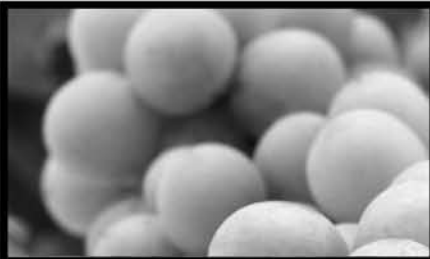
As we abide in Christ, we will bear the fruit of a changed life. As the sap of the Holy Spirit flows from the Vine through our lives, we are transformed (changed from the inside out) into the likeness of the Vine. We will begin to think like Christ, love like Christ, pray like Christ and act like Christ. 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.





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*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.

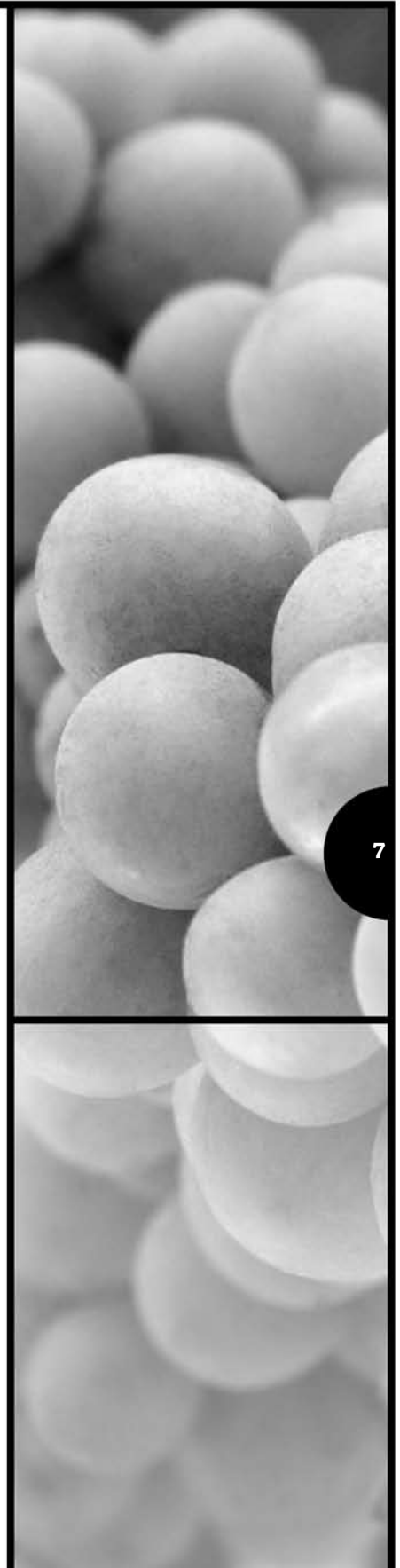
*Matthew 28:18-20*

*"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.





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**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.

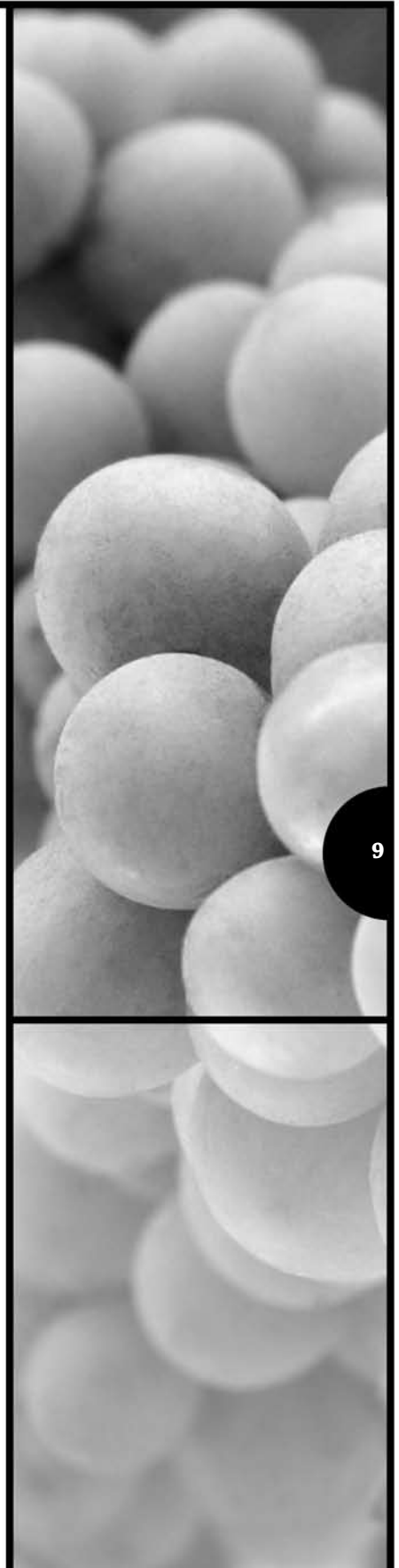
*"I (Jesus) tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*  
John 5:19

*"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.





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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.

