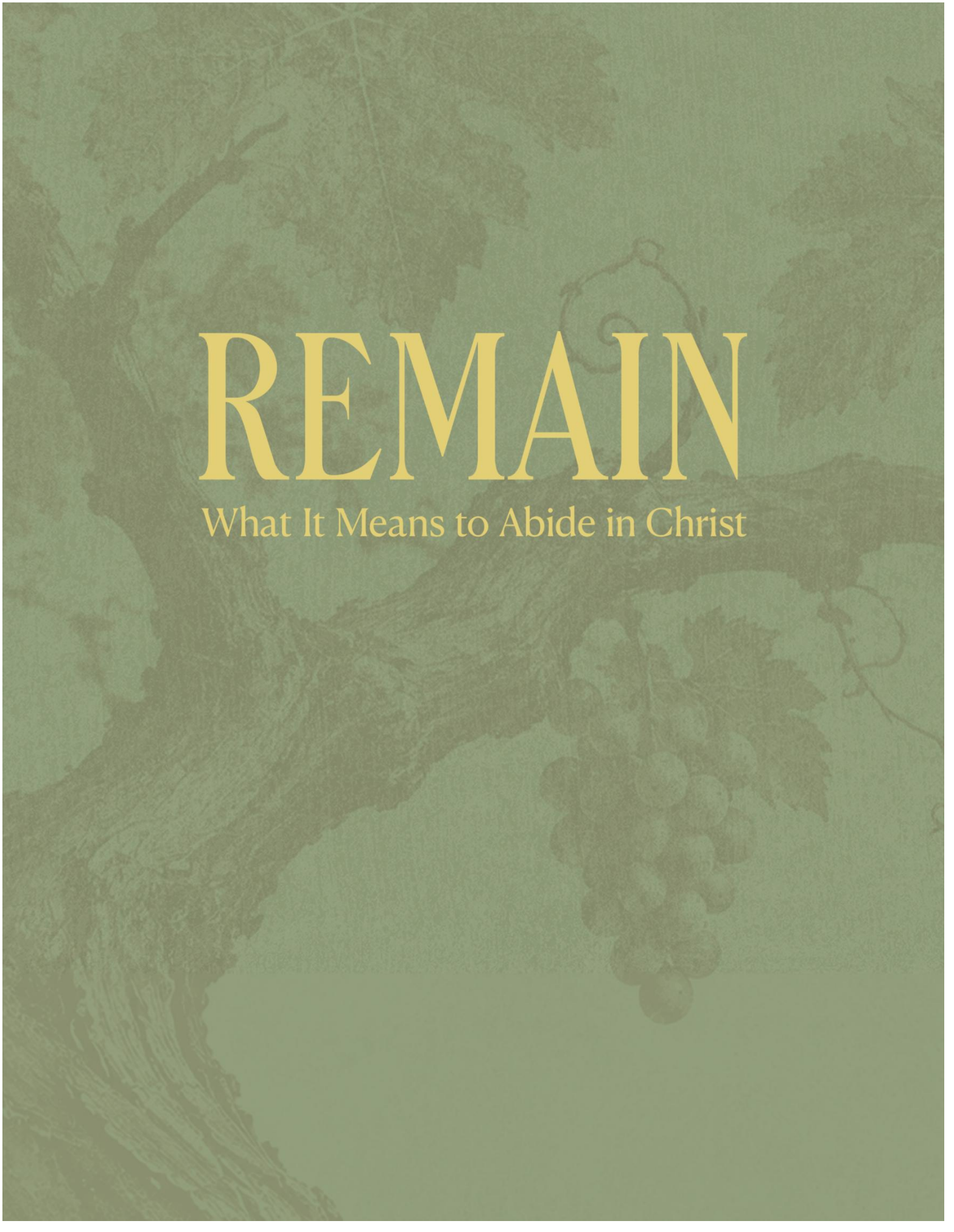

REMAIN
What It Means to Abide in Christ

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Lesson 1 (10-25-26)
Bearing Fruit (John 15:1-8)

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. **2** Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **3** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. **4** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. **5** 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. **6** If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. **7** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

- John 15:1-8 ESV

Summary

The analogy of the vine teaches that a vital relationship exists between Christ and the believer. Jesus claimed to be "the true vine" (v. 1). This is the last of Jesus' seven "I am" statements in this Gospel (see Introduction to John). Vine imagery is used in the Old Testament as a symbol for Israel. Jesus, as the true vine, fulfilled God's intentions for the nation. God the Father is the gardener. He removes dead, fruitless branches and prunes fruitful ones so they can bear more fruit. Believers should not fear that they will be "cut off" since they are clean already. Mutual indwelling is the key to fruitfulness in the believer's life…A living intimacy with Christ is absolutely essential if a believer's life is to bear fruit. Apart from this vital relationship of mutual indwelling, believers can do nothing of eternal significance. Those who refuse to remain in Christ (those who do not have saving faith) will be judged with fire like the fruitless branches. Fire is a common symbol for divine judgment. In view of this warning, believers must understand that Christ's active and indwelling word in a believer is a mark of genuine discipleship. This intimacy of mutual indwelling demonstrates itself in answered prayer.[1]

Observation Questions (What does the book say?)

1. In verse 1, what does Jesus call Himself? What does He call His Father?
2. What does the Father do to the branches that bear fruit? What does He do to branches that do not bear fruit? (v. 2)
3. According to verse 3, how have the disciples already been made clean?
4. What command does Jesus repeat in verses 4–5?
5. What happens to a branch that does not abide in the vine? (v. 6)

[1] William F. Cook III, "John," in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1473.

6. What two things does Jesus say will happen if His disciples abide in Him and His words abide in them? (v. 7)
7. According to verse 8, how is the Father glorified?
8. What word or idea is repeated throughout verses 1–8?

Interpretation Questions (What does the book mean?)

1. What does Jesus mean by calling Himself the "true vine"? (v. 1)
2. What does the imagery of the vine and branches teach about the relationship between Christ and His disciples?
3. What does the Father's pruning of fruitful branches represent? Why might pruning be necessary for greater fruitfulness?
4. What does Jesus mean when He says, "Abide in me, and I in you"? (v. 4)
5. What does verse 5 teach about a Christian's ability to produce spiritual fruit apart from Christ?
6. What does "fruit" appear to represent in this passage? Consider Galatians 5:22–23, Philippians 1:11, and Hebrews 13:15.
7. What does verse 6 teach about the seriousness of failing to abide in Christ?
8. How are abiding in Christ, prayer, obedience, and bearing fruit connected in verses 4–7?
9. What does Jesus mean when He says, "apart from me you can do nothing"? (v. 5)
10. According to verse 8, what is the ultimate purpose of bearing fruit?

Application Questions (How should this change us?)

1. What are some practical ways you can intentionally abide in Christ each day?
2. Are there areas of your life where you are trying to live or serve in your own strength rather than depending on Christ? Explain.
3. How does knowing that God prunes His people encourage you when He brings correction, trials, or difficult circumstances into your life?
4. What role should God's Word play in helping you abide in Christ? (v. 7)
5. How should this passage affect the way you think about prayer?
6. What kind of spiritual fruit do you believe God wants to produce in your life right now?
7. What distractions or priorities can keep you from remaining closely connected to Christ?
8. How does remembering "apart from me you can do nothing" change the way you approach ministry, school, work, or relationships?
9. How can your spiritual fruit point other people toward God rather than toward yourself?
10. What is one specific step you can take this week to grow in your dependence upon Christ?
11. Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *R. Kent Hughes, John: That You May Believe, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 350–358.*]

Our Lord often used things at hand to illustrate or explain spiritual truths. At the Feast of Tabernacles as the priest approached the altar and was pouring out the symbolic water Jesus cried, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." And the next day as he stood in the temple treasury before mammoth, extinguished torches that symbolized the pillar of fire in the wilderness, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He used those dead torches to proclaim that he was the departed *Shekinah* glory.

In John 15:1–8 he used a grapevine as an illustration of spiritual truth. What called this illustration to the Master's mind? Perhaps the closeness of the disciples, or perhaps the moonlit tendrils of a vine at the window. Regardless, the fact that Israel was thought of in terms of a vine reinforced his use of this image. For example, "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the gardens of his delight" (Isaiah 5:7). The grapevine was a symbol of national life. That emblem appeared on coins minted during the Maccabean period, their regard for it resembling our regard for stars and stripes. So precious was the symbol to the Jews that a huge, gold grapevine decorated the gates of the temple…It was a grand symbol of national life.

In John 15:1 Christ gives his seventh and final great "I Am": "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." All the conversation stopped at this powerful pronouncement. The force of his words were, "You all know how Israel is pictured as a vine that is meant to produce refreshing fruit. Well, I am the fulfillment of all that symbol suggests." To Christian believers, this is a wonderfully deep and mystic parable. Christ is the vine (the trunk), we are the branches, and God the Father is the gardener. The picture taken together is that of a vineyard with true believers organically related to Christ (the sap that runs in his veins runs in ours) and of the Father walking among the vines lovingly caring for them so they will bring forth fruit.

The overriding emphasis of the passage is fruit-bearing, as we see from verses 2, 4, 5, and 8:

> *"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."*
>
> *"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."*
>
> *"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."*
>
> *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*

Not only is fruit-bearing the main emphasis, but our Lord makes it the identifying mark of a true believer. "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit" (v. 2). Some claim to be in the vine, but the absence of fruit disqualifies them. If there is no fruit in our life, we had better reconsider the authenticity of our Christianity.

_____ *FOR FRUIT (vv. 1–2)*

We all need to make a careful examination of our own lives as to fruit-bearing. Most of us immediately think about what we have been doing for the Lord—how many people we have won to Christ or whatever. A preacher received a letter from a girl who was in a state of "spiritual distress" because she had never won anyone to Christ—after all, Christ had promised that she would be fruitful. Souls can be fruit. I think that was what Paul was referring to in Romans 1:13: "I planned many times to come to you … in order that I might have a harvest among you." But that is not what Jesus had in mind in John 15.

I will sing to the one I love a song about his vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. (Isaiah 5:1–2)

What was this "bad fruit," these worthless grapes? "And he [God] looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" (v. 7). The fruits he was looking for were the qualities of justice and righteousness, inner qualities.

Similarly, in John 15 the fruit Jesus speaks of is not primarily evangelism but simply the reproduction of the life of the vine in the branch. Jesus is looking for the fruit of his life in us. If the inward graces of the Holy Spirit are not present in our lives ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," Galatians 5:22–23), if these qualities are not present (not perfected but present) in our lives, we must face the fact that we may not be true believers. There must be something of the life of the vine in us if we belong to God! There must be Christlikeness. This is a tougher test than outward fruit such as the number of souls saved, people influenced, or money collected. It is possible to have the outward signs without having the life of Christ within. Furthermore, the inward graces of the Spirit will in time bring the outward fruit. The fruit Christ looks for is his own life in us. The question is, how do we get it?

_____ *FOR FRUIT (vv. 2–3)*

"… every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (v. 2b). *The branches that are doing well, those that best convey the life of the vine, get the knife*. Anyone who has ever driven through the great northern California vineyards understands what the Lord is talking about. In the winter all you see for miles is bare, twisted trunks. But in the summer, what meets the eye are endless rows of lush green grapevines expanding their foliage so fast

you can almost see them grow. Their health is directly proportionate to their pruning. A grapevine will never produce anywhere near its potential without being pruned!

Grape-growers, viticulturists as they call themselves, practice several stages of pruning. There is pinching to remove the growing tip so it will not grow too rapidly, and also topping when a foot or two of new growth is removed to prevent the loss of an entire shoot. Thinning the grape clusters enables the rest of a branch to bear more fruit and better quality fruit. Also, the cutting away of suckers gives more nourishment to the whole plant. The vines are pruned in fall or winter so the main stock will have more advantageous growth and fruit. It may be that Jesus has this whole process in view. Whatever, it is a drastic process. To the uninitiated eye it looks cruel and wasteful, but to the experienced eye it is the only way to grow healthy, delicious fruit. The same is true in the Christian life.

What is involved in pruning? Pain. Pruning always hurts! David said in Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray." Psalm 119:71 says, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." Sometimes the pain of pruning comes because of our sins. Other times it is simply because we are bearing abundant fruit and God wants us to bear more. Whatever the reason for pruning, our natural selves always want to escape it. No one naturally wants the knife. Nevertheless, the results of God's pruning will be beneficial for us and for him.

Often we Christians are subject to what I call the "when syndrome." "When I get spiritually mature, these things won't happen to me." "When I get married, I will not struggle this way anymore." "When I retire, my life will be easier." Afflictions would only stop if they were useless, and that is why they never stop. Without pruning, a vineyard would never be in full bloom. John 15 clearly teaches that pruning is always good for us. Malcolm Muggeridge in his book *Jesus Rediscovered* says: Suppose you eliminated suffering, what a dreadful place the world would be. I would almost rather eliminate happiness. The world would be the most ghastly place because everything that corrects the tendency of this unspeakable little creature, man, to feel over-important and over-pleased with himself would disappear. He's bad enough now, but he would be absolutely intolerable if he never suffered…

A character in C. S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia series is named Eustace Scrub, a selfish, immature boy who thinks only of himself. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, he not only finds himself in a dragon's cave but discovers he has turned into a dragon! He attempts to remove the scales but cannot do so by himself. Finally the Lion, the Christ-figure, comes. Eustace describes what happens next: This is what the Lion said, but I don't know if he spoke. "You will have to let me undress you." I was afraid of his claws I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate, so I just lay flat on my back and let him do it. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right to my heart and when he began pulling the skin off it hurt worse than anything I had ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off.

That is how it is with pruning. We would rather do it ourselves, but we cannot, and even if we could, we would not remove what really has to go. The truth is, what is noble and attractive in

us has come from the cutting we would have avoided. “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word” (Psalm 119:67). “It was good for me to be afflicted, so that I might learn your decrees” (Psalm 119:71). James’s experience taught him this truth as well: *Dear brothers, is your life full of difficulties and temptations? Then be happy, for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don’t try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete. (James 1:2,* The Living Bible*)*

What else do we need to know about pruning? God’s hand is never closer than when he prunes the vine. During those times of severest cutting when, to us, he may seem to have departed, he is the closest. His pruning may pain us, but it will never harm us. When the gardener does his pruning well, he leaves little more than the vine. Similarly, the more we are pruned, the more of Christ there is in our lives! Also, the branch does not bear fruit for itself but for others. The life that has been trimmed by the hand of God sustains others.

_____ *FOR FRUIT (vv. 4–5)*

What does abiding or remaining in Christ mean? To me (although the text doesn’t explicitly say it), the sap that runs between the vine and the branches is suggestive of the Holy Spirit. So remaining or abiding is parallel to being filled with the Holy Spirit. We have already seen that abiding in Christ produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We must set aside everything from which we might derive our own strength and merit and draw all from Christ.

Jesus says that abiding in him involves the belief that “apart from me you can do nothing” (v. 5b). Actually there are many things we can do without Christ. We can earn a living, raise a family, and practice generosity. It is possible to pastor a church without abiding. It is possible to counsel people without abiding. So what does Christ mean? He means that we cannot bear spiritual fruit without him. We can tie fruit onto our lives like ornaments on a Christmas tree, but the real fruit of his *character* comes from the vine itself. *We can do nothing without him!* We cannot be loving or patient or faithful or holy. That is why God does not shield us from the assaults of life but rather exposes us to them, so we will learn to hold him fast. Jesus taught, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Abiding involves a growing sense of weakness.

Along with this realization we are to consciously, deliberately depend upon Christ. I am not gifted with musical ability. But suppose I sneak into my church’s sanctuary on my day off, when nobody is around, and try to play some chords on the piano. Without my knowing it, the great Van Cliburn enters the narthex. The poor man is in pain from my “music,” so he walks to the front and says to me, “I would like to help you. I have a power no one else knows about—I can transmit my ability to another person. All you have to do is to look at me and watch me intently.” I suddenly get a great idea! I make sure that the next Sunday night all of my church’s regular church pianists are away. Van Cliburn is there, but he declines to play. So I humbly sit at the piano, and as long as I look at Van Cliburn, my fingers really fly over those ivories. Nobody has ever played like that at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois! I start feeling pretty good, so I

begin looking at the people, enjoying their admiration for my musical prowess. And my ability is suddenly gone! Often we make the same mistake. We fail to keep our eyes on Jesus and to depend on him, to abide in him.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12–13)

Those who learn to abide stay put for the pruning. We must choose to abide, to get into the Word, to associate with others who are remaining in Christ, to keep growing.

CONCLUSION: _____ THE FRUIT (vv. 6–11)

What fruit specifically did Jesus choose to mention on this occasion? "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you" (v. 7). *An empowered prayer life*. As we pray, we abide. As we abide, we pray more, and more deeply. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (v. 8). *The Father is glorified*.

Verses 9–10 add, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 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." *Love will fill our lives!* "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (v. 11). *The joy of Jesus in us!* Chesterton called this "the gigantic secret of the Christian." Peter called it "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8, KJV). Joy to the max! Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches, the Father is the Gardener. Everything the Father and Son do is geared to enhance our abiding and our fruitfulness. With each trimming, may there be more of Christ in us, for God's glory and the blessing of others!

Lesson 2 (11-1-26)
The Spiritual Fruit of Discipleship (John 15:9-11)

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. **10** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. **11** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

- John 15:9-11 ESV

Summary

Jesus teaches that His love for His disciples is rooted in the Father's love for Him. He calls His followers to remain in His love by keeping His commandments, just as He has remained in His Father's love through obedience. Jesus then explains that His purpose is not to restrict His disciples but to give them true and lasting joy. "Obedience is not all gloom and doom; rather, it's a source of **joy**. The OT prophets envisioned a period of great end-time rejoicing (Is 25:9; 35:10; 51:3; 61:10; 66:10; Zch 9:9)."[1]

Observation Questions (What does the text say?)

1. Whose love does Jesus say He has loved His disciples with? (v. 9)
2. What command does Jesus give His disciples in verse 9?
3. What comparison does Jesus make between His love for the disciples and the Father's love for Him? (v. 9)
4. According to verse 10, how can Jesus' disciples abide in His love?
5. What example does Jesus give for abiding in love? (v. 10)
6. What does Jesus say about His own relationship with the Father? (v. 10)
7. What does Jesus say is the purpose of telling His disciples these things? (v. 11)
8. What words or ideas are repeated throughout verses 9–11?

Interpretation Questions (What does the text mean?)

1. What does Jesus mean by "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you"? (v. 9)
2. What does it mean to "abide in my love"?
3. How does obedience to Jesus demonstrate that we abide in His love? (v. 10)
4. Does verse 10 suggest that obedience earns Christ's love, or that obedience is the response of someone who remains in His love? Explain.
5. What does Jesus' example of obeying the Father teach us about the relationship between love and obedience?

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[1] Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1698.

6. How does this passage connect with Jesus' statement in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments"?
7. What does Jesus mean by "my joy may be in you"? (v. 11)
8. What does Jesus mean by "that your joy may be full"? (v. 11)
9. How are love, obedience, abiding, and joy connected in these verses?
10. How does this passage help correct the idea that Christian obedience is merely about following rules?

Application Questions (How should this change us?)

1. What does it mean for you personally to remain in Christ's love?
2. Are there areas where you struggle to believe or remember Christ's love for you? How can Scripture help you?
3. What is one command of Christ that you need to take more seriously?
4. How can obedience to Christ be an expression of love rather than merely an obligation?
5. What are some things that can distract you from abiding in Christ's love?
6. How should knowing that Christ loves you affect the way you respond when you fail or sin?
7. What is the difference between trying to earn God's love and obeying because you already belong to Christ?
8. How does obedience to Christ contribute to genuine Christian joy?
9. How might abiding in Christ's love affect the way you treat your family, friends, classmates, or coworkers?
10. What is one specific way you can demonstrate love for Christ through obedience this week?
11. Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, Exalting Jesus in John (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 307–310.*]

_____ Prayer

If our connection with Jesus is like a branch's connection to the vine, then prayer is like the nutrients flowing back and forth between the branch and the vine. It's natural, due to the connection. We are united with Christ, and that union produces a relationship. Relationships are maintained and strengthened through communication. Jesus communicates with us primarily through his Word ("my words remain in you"), and we respond in prayer (v. 7).

The life of Jesus flows through his followers, and that life blossoms into a vibrant relationship. We receive the Word and respond in prayer. In our illustration of the vine and branches, the gardener (God) wields his word in order to prune and prepare the branches (v. 3). Clean branches sprout fruit, and one type of fruit is prayer. Where there is prayer, there will be answers. God listens to his people. Think about this circle. We receive the words of God (his

words inform us, instruct us, and command us). In response to the Word, Scripture, we pray to God (our requests are guided and shaped by the truth of the Word and are therefore in line with God's will). God hears our prayers and joyfully responds to our requests because they were offered up in obedience to his Word. As the Word 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 (cf. 14:13–14). 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?

What does the latter look like? It looks like breathing. You breathe without thinking because blood is pulsing through your veins. When the Holy Spirit is pulsing through you, you pray without thinking. You just talk to God. An e-mail chimes, mention it to God. Someone steps into your office, mention it to God. You can't find your keys, mention it to God. Prayer is as important to the soul as breathing is to the body.

_____ Love

God loves Jesus, and Jesus in turn loves us with the same type of love (v. 9). In response we love him and demonstrate our love through obedience (v. 10). The way we abide in Jesus is to remain in his love, and the way we remain in his love is through obedience. Jesus isn't saying, "If you want me to love you, you have to obey." He's saying, "If you love me, you demonstrate it through obedience." Obedience doesn't earn love. Obedience is the evidence of love.

How does this text speak to the person who claims to be a Christian but is living in willful, persistent disobedience to Jesus? It says, "You don't love Jesus. You don't bear the fruit of love. Therefore, the life of Jesus is not in you, and you will be cast into the fire and burned." True Christians obey Jesus. Across our country and around the world are people who claim to follow Jesus but don't. It's spiritual insanity to say, "I'm a follower of Jesus, but I don't follow what Jesus says." "I love Jesus, but I don't listen to him." No, you don't. Faith without works is dead! A disciple who doesn't obey is not a disciple; he's a fraud. If Jesus lives in you, you cannot help but produce the fruit of loving obedience. His life in you will cause you to love what he loves, to treasure his words, and to obey, not out of duty but out of joy. You will delight in doing what Jesus wants you to do because he lives in you and is shaping your heart to be like his.

Jesus is the King, and he has the authority to demand our obedience (vv. 14–15), but he doesn't treat us like slaves. Slaves are given commands but no explanations. Jesus invites us into his inner circle as his friends. He doesn't just give us commands; he shares his friendship with us. His friendship makes obedience a delight.

_____ Joy

Joy is an unmistakable mark of a genuine disciple (v. 11). Christians claim to have the spirit or essence of Jesus taking up residence inside them. Jesus created joy. If you claim the Creator of

joy is inside you and you're miserable, then something is wrong. It makes no sense. It's completely illogical. If someone is finding joy in Jesus, then he or she is a disciple of Jesus. Every step we take to help someone find joy in Jesus is a step of obedience to his words. Joy in Jesus is inseparable from knowing and following him. You can't know him and lack joy. You can't follow him and lack joy. You can't be united with him and lack joy. It's a biblical, logical, and theological impossibility. It does not mean every day is easy and filled with laughter, but it does mean your life is ultimately marked by a confidence that Jesus is greater and more satisfying than anything this world has to offer.

Jesus promises joy will flow through him to us like sap through the branches. He says his joy will be in us (v. 11). Joy is not a transaction. Jesus doesn't send a box of joy to be delivered to your doorstep by FedEx. Joy is a relationship. Jesus invites us to his party where we can feast and make merry with him. His joy becomes our joy. He brings us into his joy, and as a result, our joy is filled up to the brim. Jesus takes his Big Gulp of Joy and places our little Dixie Cup right inside. We are not only full of joy, but we are engulfed by joy. Joy above. Joy below. Joy around. Joy under. Joy over. Joy everywhere. Does Jesus have enough joy to weather your circumstances? His storehouse of joy is infinite. His resources are immeasurable. His joy gauge never reaches empty. So if his joy becomes your joy, then your joy can always be full.

The verse about joy (v. 11) follows the verses about obedience (vv. 9–10). We tend to think joy and obedience are mutually exclusive: we have to choose misery and obedience or freedom and joy. That's a lie told from the beginning. Joy comes through obedience. If the life of Jesus flows through us, then our understanding of this world and our purpose begins to change. Our affections and allegiance change. We start to desire what God made us for. We start to wish and dream for what matters. Our goals start to align with Jesus's calling on our lives. At this point we begin to feel our weakness. Then we cry out for God to help us. As he empowers us to do what he's called us to do, he's empowering us to do what we're beginning to want to do. God's commands and our wants come into line, and for the first time what we want and what we need completely align. Wanting what we need and then accomplishing what we want brings joy. Jesus wants you to live in joy, and if he lives in you, then a steady harvest of joy will appear.

_____ Love

Jesus commands us to love others as he has loved us (v. 12). What an impossible standard for love! I can't do that. How can I possibly obey? The only way I could love like Jesus is if he lived inside me and empowered me to love like that. This is the second time in two chapters Jesus has made love the defining characteristic of his followers. How is this love demonstrated? Through sacrifice (v. 13). Jesus sacrificed for us, and he says the ultimate act of friendship is laying down your life for somebody else. The greatest love is not romantic or erotic; it's sacrificial. Are you laying down your life for others? That's sacrifice—going without something for the good of someone else.

Conclusion

True disciples bear fruit. No fruit, no disciple. If Jesus has taken up residence inside you, you will be different, you will act differently, you will love differently, and you will live differently. The difference is not due to your strength, your effort, or your zeal. The difference is due to the persistent work of Jesus in you. Jesus is alive, powerful, and actively at work in his disciples. An apple tree bears apples, a peach tree bears peaches, and a follower of Jesus Christ loves, prays, and obeys Jesus.

Lesson 3 (11-8-26)
Loving the Branches (John 15:12-17)

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command you. **15** No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. **16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. **17** These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

- John 15:12-17 ESV

Summary

Verses 12–17 begin and end with the command for the disciples to love one another. The standard for love is Christ's love. His love ultimately would be demonstrated in his death, but it was also evident in the intimate friendship and confidentiality Jesus had developed with his disciples. Jesus chose the disciples and appointed them to be his emissaries. As they lived a life of mission for Jesus, they would bear lasting fruit. Fruit bearing, in this context, is connected closely to evangelism and answered prayer. Believers are to hold nothing back when they pray. On the one hand, their prayers shouldn't be for selfish, worldly desires (Jas 4:3). On the other hand, they should take all aspects of their lives to Jesus in prayer. Their prayers are guided by God's Word and Christ's glory. Jesus concluded this section as it began, with the admonition to "love each other."[1]

Observation Questions (What does the text say?)

1. What command does Jesus give His disciples in verse 12?
2. What is the standard Jesus gives for how His disciples should love one another? (v. 12)
3. According to verse 13, what is the greatest expression of love?
4. Who does Jesus identify as His friends? (v. 14)
5. How does Jesus distinguish His disciples from servants? (v. 15)
6. What does Jesus say He has made known to His disciples? (v. 15)
7. Who chose whom according to verse 16?
8. For what purpose did Jesus choose and appoint His disciples? (v. 16)
9. What does Jesus command His disciples to do in verse 17?
10. What words or ideas are repeated throughout verses 12–17?

[1] William F. Cook III, "John," in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1473–1474.

Interpretation Questions (What does the text mean?)

1. What does Jesus mean by "love one another as I have loved you"? (v. 12)
2. How does Jesus' own sacrificial love provide the model for Christian love? (v. 13)
3. What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus according to verse 14?
4. Does being called Jesus' friends mean that Jesus is no longer our Lord and Master? Explain using verse 14 and other Scripture.
5. What does Jesus mean when He says, "the servant does not know what his master is doing"? (v. 15)
6. What does verse 16 teach about Jesus' initiative in choosing and appointing His disciples?
7. What does Jesus mean by "bear fruit" in verse 16? How does this connect with John 15:1–11?
8. What does the phrase "that your fruit should abide" teach about the lasting purpose of Christian discipleship? (v. 16)
9. How are God's sovereignty and human responsibility both seen in verse 16?
10. Why do you think Jesus repeats the command to love one another in verse 17?

Application Questions (How should this change us?)

1. What would it look like for you to love another Christian "as Christ has loved" you?
2. Who is someone you find difficult to love? How could Christ's example change the way you treat that person?
3. What sacrifices might genuine Christian love require from you?
4. How should knowing that Christ calls His disciples His friends affect your relationship with Him?
5. How does knowing that Christ chose and appointed you for a purpose affect the way you view your life and service?
6. What kind of fruit do you want Christ to produce through your life?
7. What are some practical ways you can love other believers this week?
8. How can you avoid confusing biblical love with simply being nice or agreeing with everyone?
9. How should Christ's sacrificial love affect the way you respond when someone has wronged you?
10. What is one specific action you can take this week to obey Jesus' command to "love one another"?
11. Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *R. Kent Hughes, John: That You May Believe, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 359–365.*]

John 15:12–17 focuses on the friendship and love that is to exist among the branches of the vine, among believers. Actually, all of chapter 15 is concerned with the believer's relationships.

Verses 1–11 have to do with the relationship between the vine and the branches, between Christ and believers, verses 12–17 with the relationship of branch to branch, or believer to believer, and verses 18–27 with the relationship of the vine and the branches to the world.

The importance of friendship and love between believers is not confined to outrageous situations. Hundreds in the body of Christ are lonely and anxious for friendship. Craig W. Ellison, in his book *Loneliness, the Search for Intimacy*, says: "Loneliness seems to have flooded the lives of millions of modern Americans. It's an emotional epidemic. A recent survey of over 40,000 respondents of all ages found that 67 percent of them felt lonely some of the time. Projected nationally, that amounts to over 150 million Americans who have personally experienced loneliness. Another survey found that over 64 percent of widows over age 50 in several major urban areas mentioned loneliness as a significant problem in their lives. United Methodist men have established a nationwide 24-hour, toll-free telephone line for people wanting to pray with someone. Loneliness is the most frequently mentioned prayer need that they receive. Contact, a nationwide crisis intervention telephone network, received over 18,000 calls due to intense loneliness in one recent six-month period."

Some Christians would give anything for one good friend. Friendship is important. The principles in John 15:12–17 apply to everyone—to those who have friends and those who feel they do not, to the aggressive, the outgoing, the shy—because these principles govern both the initiation, the reception, and the maintenance of friendship. And as friendship develops, these principles take us into deeper and deeper relationships.

PRINCIPLES THAT PROMOTE FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE AMONG THE BRANCHES (vv. 12–13)

In verses 12–13 we find the principle of *sacrifice* in friendship and love. Sacrifice is essential to genuine friendship and love. Verses 12–13 are a restatement of the "new commandment" given back in John 13:34: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." The idea of sacrifice is found in the phrase, "as I have loved you," for Christ loved us so much that he gave his life for us. The old commandment was to love God with everything in us, and our neighbor as ourselves. The story of the good Samaritan was Christ's great explanation of that kind of love, and it was a wonderful love. But the new commandment requires us to love as Jesus loved. His sacrifice is our model. Jesus calls for sacrificial love in his church.

Our Lord exemplified this even before the cross. Just before he gave this new commandment, he tried in every way to restore Judas, though he knew Judas was bent on betraying him. He seated Judas next to him, the place of honor. He dipped a morsel and offered it to Judas, a custom offering friendship. Christ was offering restoration. In John 15:12–13 our Lord officially made sacrifice an essential characteristic of love between believers, in imitation of his love for us. A story from the life of E. Stanley Jones gives a beautiful example of this principle of sacrifice. It occurred when he was preaching his first evangelistic service among the

mountaineers of Kentucky, a very poor people at that time. The meetings were held in the schoolhouse.

> At the schoolhouse I was invited to stay with a man and wife, and when I arrived I saw there was one bed. The husband said, "You take the far side." Then he got in, and then his wife. In the morning we reversed the process. I turned my face to the wall as they dressed, and they stepped out while I dressed. That was real hospitality! I have slept in palaces, but the hospitality of that one-bed-home is the most memorable and the most appreciated.

Dr. Jones did not say he became lifelong friends with that couple, but he did reveal his affection for that humble couple who demonstrated so poignantly the sacrificial principle. Friendship thrives on sacrifice. There is not enough of this in God's family. We must consciously cultivate a sacrificial spirit and must constantly work at being givers.

THE PRINCIPLE OF MUTUALITY IN _____ AND _____ (vv. 14–15)

Jesus' words in verse 14, "You are my friends if you do what I command," speak primarily of obedience, but they also suggest a *mutuality of heart*, the second principle of friendship. Jesus' friends obey him because they share the same outlook and goals. Close friends agree in heart. They will sometimes disagree, but their hearts' aims are the same. Paul uses a very enlightening phrase in Philippians 2:19–20: *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.* Paul described Timothy as being "of kindred spirit" (NASB), literally "one-souled." We think *soul brothers* is a pop term from the sixties, but actually the concept is 2,000 years old! Paul and Timothy's friendship was a friendship of the soul.

Mutuality of heart was also the basis of David and Jonathan's relationship. First Samuel records its dramatic beginning after David killed Goliath: "After David had finished speaking to Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself" (18:1). Their souls were knit together. Verse 15 tells us that this mutuality of heart is ennobled and promoted by the sharing of personal information: *"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."*

Jesus was saying, "Men, I don't consider you slaves, but I call you friends. Therefore, I am sharing personal information with you. What the Father shows me, I show you." Jesus shared the deepest thoughts of his heart with his disciples, and that fostered their mutuality! In the culture of that day, slaves were considered little more than objects. Even Aristotle put slaves on the same level as inanimate objects—agricultural implements. In Jesus' day, typically masters did not share with their slaves, just as typically today employers do not share their deepest thoughts with employees. But in genuine friendship, there are no spiritual barriers.

We all need close friends who can objectify our thoughts. We need the healing that so often comes when we reveal our feelings to another without fear that our confidence will be broken. There is too often loneliness of soul in the body of Christ. As believers we need to take time to talk about one another's goals, pray about our needs, share, encourage one another.

THE PRINCIPLE OF _____ (v. 16)

We see the principle of *promotion* in friendship and love in verse 16. In this verse we see our Lord's desire to help his friends succeed: "I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit." He was committed to their fulfilling the ultimate in their calling. Friends rejoice in each other's successes.

> *And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. (1 Samuel 18:3–4)*

Jonathan gave David the items that represented his station in life. He was the son of Saul and heir to the throne, but he committed himself to make the Lord's anointed—David—king. In the same way and even more so, Jesus is committed to the fulfillment of our ultimate calling. Likewise, we are to be committed to the ultimate fulfillment of our friends, to help them experience all God intends for them. How wonderful it is to have a friend like Jonathan. It is even better to be such a friend!

We don't always feel like kings or like spiritual successes. Sometimes we feel very much the opposite. As Charles Swindoll has written: "Do you ever feel like a frog? Frogs feel slow and low, ugly and putty, drooped and pooped. I know. One told me. The frog feeling comes when you want to be bright but you are dumb. When you want to share, but you are selfish. When you want to be thankful, but you are filled with resentment. When you want to be great, but you are small. When you want to care, but you are indifferent. Yes, at one time or another each of us has found himself on a lily pad, floating down the great river of life, frightened and disgusted but too frightened to budge."

We all know how the fairy tale goes: Once upon a time there was a frog, except he was not really a frog. He was a prince. He only looked and felt like a frog. The wicked witch had cast a spell on him, and only the kiss of a beautiful maiden could save him. (Since when do cute girls kiss frogs!) So there he sat—an unkissed prince in frog form. But miracles do happen, and one day a beautiful maiden gave him a great big smack! Crash! Boom! Zap! Suddenly he was a handsome prince. And of course they lived happily ever after.

What is the task of the church? Kissing frogs, of course—and allowing ourselves to be kissed! We are to make one another kings and queens! The principle of promotion is beautiful! Many branches in the body of Christ have never reached their potential because no one ever encouraged them. Others would reach unimaginable heights if only someone would say, "You

know, you could really become something." No one has prayed for them, befriended them, or affirmed them. We are called to do just that. That is the principle of promotion.

CONCLUSION

The Lord did not make the principles of sacrifice, mutuality, and promotion optional. These essential principles are framed by verses 12 and 17: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.… This is my command: Love each other." We might react, "Why does he command the impossible? Love is a strong, uncontrollable emotion. You can't command it."

What is the answer? First, we must realize that our concept of love has been influenced by Hollywood. It has been sentimentalized and individualized into an uncontrollable emotion. The love our Lord commands is *agape* love, which begins with the mind and will. The other part of the answer lies in the context of Jesus' words, which is dominated by the concept of abiding or remaining in Christ. In verse 7 we read: "If you *remain* in me and my words *remain* in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." And in verse 9 we hear him say: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now *remain* in my love." And finally, in verse 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." The initial fruit of abiding is the fruit of the Spirit, and the first of the fruits, according to Galatians 5:22, is "love." Jesus was abiding in the Father, and he loved his own! So it should be with us.

As we abide, we will love the unlovely. We will have loving relationships with one another. As we draw upon Christ, realizing that apart from him we can do nothing, we will love the branches. When our relationship with God is what it ought to be, when we are walking, resting, and relying on him, it is remarkable how loving we can be!

Lesson 4 (11-15-26)
Why Does the World Hate Christians? (John 15:18-25)

18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. **19** If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. **20** Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. **21** But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. **22** If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. **23** Whoever hates me hates my Father also. **24** If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. **25** But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

- John 15:18-25 ESV

Summary
The world would hate the disciples because it hated Jesus first. If the disciples were part of the world, the world would love them. But Jesus chose them out of the world. They were no longer in the dominion of darkness but were children of God. Since the world persecuted Jesus and rejected his message, the world would do the same to his followers. The root problem is that the world has rejected God. Jesus came as God's emissary, speaking God's words and performing God's works, yet the world rejected both. Their rejection of divine revelation was the basis of their guilt. The relationship between the Father and the Son is so intimate that their rejection of the Son is a rejection of the Father. God was not caught off guard by the world's rejection of the Son. The Old Testament predicted this hatred (Ps 69:4). The Old Testament reference in John 15:25 depicts a righteous sufferer who was passionate for God but persecuted by God's enemies. Truly, the darkness has always hated the light.[1]

Observation Questions (What does the text say?)
1. What does Jesus say His disciples should remember about the world? (v. 18)
2. What does Jesus say would have happened if His disciples belonged to the world? (v. 19)
3. Why does Jesus say the world hates His disciples? (v. 19)
4. What principle does Jesus give about the relationship between a servant and his master? (v. 20)
5. Why will the world treat Jesus' disciples this way? (v. 21)

[1] William F. Cook III, "John," in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1474.

6. What does Jesus say about those who have heard His teaching and still reject Him? (vv. 22–24)
7. What does Jesus say about those who have seen His works? (v. 24)
8. What does Jesus say the world's hatred fulfills? (v. 25)
9. What Scripture does Jesus quote in verse 25?
10. What words or ideas are repeated throughout verses 18–25?

Interpretation Questions (What does the text mean?)

1. What does Jesus mean by "the world" in this passage? Compare John 15:18–19 with John 3:16–19.
2. Why should Jesus' disciples expect opposition from the world?
3. What does Jesus mean when He says, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own"? (v. 19)
4. How does our identity in Christ distinguish believers from the world?
5. What does "A servant is not greater than his master" teach about following Jesus? (v. 20)
6. Why might people reject or oppose Jesus' followers "on account of my name"? (v. 21)
7. What does Jesus mean when He says that those who reject Him have "no excuse for their sin"? (v. 22)
8. How do Jesus' words and works reveal who He is? (vv. 22–24)
9. What does verse 25 teach about the fulfillment of Scripture?
10. How does this passage show that rejection of Jesus is ultimately a rejection of God the Father? (v. 23)

Application Questions (How should this change us?)

1. How should knowing that Christians may experience opposition because of their faith prepare you to follow Christ faithfully?
2. Have you ever been tempted to hide your Christian beliefs because you wanted others to accept you? What can you learn from this passage?
3. How can you distinguish between suffering because you are faithfully following Christ and suffering because of your own poor choices or behavior?
4. How should Jesus' example help you respond when others reject or criticize your faith?
5. What are some ways that the desire to "belong to the world" can compete with loyalty to Christ?
6. How can you remain loving toward people who disagree with or reject biblical truth?
7. Why is it important to remember that opposition to Christians is ultimately connected to opposition to Christ?
8. How should this passage encourage you when following Jesus makes you feel isolated or unpopular?
9. What biblical truths can you remember when you are tempted to compromise your convictions because of pressure from others?

10. What is one specific way you can remain faithful to Christ this week even if others disagree with you?
11. Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, Exalting Jesus in John (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 311–316.*]

Estimates by Christian research groups put the annual number of Christians killed as a direct result of their faith as high as eight thousand (Heneghan, "Christian Persecution"). Another study found 111 countries who either restrict or are hostile to Christianity (ibid.). It's reported that more than one hundred million Christians are suffering persecution around the globe. In North Korea alone, fifty to seventy thousand Christians are being held in detention camps (Zaimov, "Over 100 Million").

Why are Christians subject to such persecution? In John 15 Jesus answers that question. Starting in chapter 13 and going through chapter 17, John records Jesus's instructions to his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. He's been preparing them to follow him and live for him after he returns to heaven. So far Jesus has focused on how he is forming them into a new community called the church. This new community will be recognizable because of the people's deep love for one another, their commitment to obeying Jesus's instructions, and their experience of joy. Now he turns his attention to how the world will view this new community. Jesus tells his disciples about persecution and suffering. He warns them about coming hatred and animosity. The world will hate the church, and in their hatred they will lash out at those who follow Jesus. In this passage we find the words *hate* and *hatred* eight times. Jesus will explain the reasons for the world's hatred and then arm his disciples to face it.

The World Hates _____ (15:18)

Jesus begins by saying, "*If* the world hates you" (v. 18; emphasis added), but "if" is not expressing uncertainty. Jesus doesn't say, "In the unlikely event the world hates you." The sense is more "If—and trust me they will." The hatred of the world is a certainty. If you're following Christ, this is a guarantee. If Jesus was hated, so will his followers be. Was Jesus hated? Less than twenty-four hours after he made this statement, he was arrested, tried for crimes he didn't commit, mocked, beaten, whipped, then executed as a criminal. Before being hung on the cross, he was dressed up as a mock king, and while hanging on the cross, he was verbally assaulted before being physically impaled by a spear. Yes, the world hated him.

What does Jesus mean when he uses the word *world*? He's not talking about the planet. He's referring to all those who live in open rebellion to the Creator, which means all people. By virtue of our sin, all people have embraced this anti-God world system. Our sin has ushered us

into this rebellious "world" in which we shake our fists at the heavens. Therefore, by definition, the world hates Jesus because it stands opposed to all that God is and is doing.

Jesus Has Called Us _____ (15:19)

Jesus chose us "out of" the world (v. 19). When he called us to himself, he called us *from* something. He called us from the ranks of rebellion to become part of his family. This call isn't because we're special. It's a demonstration of his love, and it's due to his unmerited favor. We do nothing to be called, but when people see us leave the fellowship of rebellion to join this new community of brothers and sisters, some will respond in hatred. D. A. Carson wrote, "Former rebels who have by the grace of the king been won back to loving allegiance to their rightful monarch are not likely to prove popular with those who persist in rebellion" (*John*, 525).

When Jesus called us to him, he made us part of a unique people. In 1 Peter 2:9 the church is described as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession." The King James translated that last phrase, "a peculiar people," but by nature we want to fit in. We want to be loved and respected by the world. The desire for respectability is what has often led to theological liberalism. Christians study with professors and in schools that don't believe the Bible. They're besieged by those who deny the supernatural accounts in Scripture. At some point they've got to make a choice between being accepted by the academics or being shunned for their "simplistic" understanding of Scripture. In other words, deny the Scripture and be accepted, or believe the Scripture and be labeled stupid, silly, and uneducated. Sadly, for many the desire to be accepted by men has caused them to reject Jesus. Beware of wanting to fit in with the world. We don't want to stand out, but Jesus says, "I called you out" (see 1 Pet 2:9). Why? So we could bear fruit so different from what others bear they won't be able to help noticing it (John 15:16). Fitting in with the world is the exact opposite of why Jesus chose us and called us and saved us and sends us. If fitting in with the world were the goal, Jesus wouldn't have to do anything. We fit in with the world perfectly before he called us and rescued us. The purpose of our salvation is wrapped up in living distinctly.

The verse in 1 Peter that calls us "peculiar" (KJV) goes on to say that our uniqueness serves one purpose: "so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9). Jesus says in effect, "They will hate you because you're different, but you're different because I called you to be different. And your difference is what makes the gospel shine brighter." The difference is not merely external. The Amish are different. That's not what Jesus has called us to do and be. Don't feel guilty using electricity. The difference is much greater. We are different in the kind of fruit our lives produce. The way we're peculiar is that we pray, obey, rejoice, and love in ways that are unnatural to the person who doesn't know Jesus.

We _____ the One the World _____ (15:20)

We follow Jesus. Where did Jesus go? To the cross. You can't follow a crucified Savior and not expect a cross. If our Master (who never sinned) died because of the world's hatred, logic alone tells us we should expect something similar, especially since we *have* sinned. In the face of the world's hatred, it's helpful for us to remember the reason we're hated. It's not personal. People's hatred might be directed at us, but we're not the ultimate target. Jesus is (v. 20). Before the nation of Israel had a king, they were led by the prophet Samuel. One day the people came to Samuel and begged him to ask God for a king on their behalf. Their request greatly troubled Samuel. He had given his life to serve them, and they wanted a king. When Samuel brought the request to God, God encouraged him by saying in effect, "Samuel, don't take it personally. Their problem isn't with you; it's with me" (1 Sam 8:7). When the world hurts and imprisons and kills Christians, it's not about us; it's about Jesus. Their intended target was the King, but they can't reach him, so they settle for taking aim at his followers.

Several apostles were arrested in Jerusalem for preaching about Jesus. When they were brought before the ruling council, they continued to talk about Jesus. The religious leaders wanted to kill them but were talked into letting them go: *After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name.* (Acts 5:40–41)

The leaders' problem wasn't the disciples but the disciples' Master. They beat the apostles because they hated Jesus and the disciples served him. The disciples understood what was going on. It's why they rejoiced when they were beaten. They knew the beating wasn't because of them but because of the Name they served, so they felt it was an honor to be beaten for that Name.

Many professing Christians never experience any hatred from the world because they don't serve Jesus. If we wear the uniform with the word "Christian" written on our chests but we go out on the court and help the other team, the other team isn't going to hate us. They'll only hate the ones who actually play for Jesus. In John 15:20 Jesus says all humanity is divided into two camps: those who persecute his disciples and those who listen and obey his word spoken by the disciples. Christians are the point of the spear on which Jesus divides humanity. As we proclaim his words, people will respond one of two ways: they'll receive them or reject them, and with them, the messenger as well.

The World Is _____ from God (15:21)

Sometimes Christians act surprised by the world's behavior. Too often we expect the world to live in obedience to God. We think a bunch of non-Christians should act like Christians. Jesus reminds us the world is estranged from God (v. 21). The world is living in open rebellion against the Creator. Whenever we're shocked by the world's behavior, it's because we've forgotten the world's condition. The world acting like the world is not shocking, and frankly that in itself is not

persecution. But Christians should live differently. Jesus says the world will hate us "on account of [his] name" (v. 21). The hatred of the world comes to those who actually live for Jesus. The world doesn't hate undercover Christians. And we shouldn't make the world's hatred a badge of honor. If we do, it might lead us to act like jerks. Being a jerk doesn't honor God or cause the gospel to shine. We don't actively seek out the world's hatred. We actively seek out Jesus, and the more we do, the more the world will see it and respond negatively.

Jesus Exposed the World's _____ (15:22–25)

Jesus came to earth and did amazing things. He spoke like no man had ever spoken, and he did works no man had ever done. Yet the people hated him. We normally hate people if they speak and act in a way that is mean, untruthful, or arrogant. Jesus was none of these. Why was he so hated? Jesus entered a world made pitch black by sin, and he shone like the sun at high noon. As a result, all the sin and shame and wickedness around him were seen in the truest and most undeniable light. Jesus made hidden sin visible. He exposed all the ugliness in the hearts of the people. All those who thought they were pretty good saw their sin exposed, and they hated Jesus for it (vv. 22–25).

Conclusion

The **things** that the hostile world **will do to** Christ's followers are not aimed solely at them; the persecution they face is ultimately for His **name's sake.** In the Beatitudes Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me" (Matt. 5:11). In the Olivet Discourse He warned, "They will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name" (Matt. 24:9; cf. Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12). Speaking to Ananias about the apostle Paul, Jesus declared, "I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16). "If you are reviled for the name of Christ," Peter wrote, "you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Peter 4:14). Suffering for the name of Jesus Christ is a repeated New Testament theme (see also Matt. 10:18, 22, 39; 19:29; Mark 8:35; 13:9–13; Luke 6:22; 21:12–17; Rom. 8:36; 2 Cor. 4:11; Rev. 2:3).

Ultimately, the world hates Jesus and His followers because it does **not know the One who sent** Him. Because "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God" (Rom. 8:7), "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (v. 8). Unbelievers are "dead in [their] trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), "alienated and hostile in mind" (Col. 1:21), and "darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). All people are sinners by nature, born into a state of rebellion against God. They "suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18), and "even though they [know] God, they [do] not honor Him as God or give thanks, but [are] futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart [is] darkened" (v. 21). Therefore in judgment God "gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity" (v. 24), to "degrading passions" (v. 26), and to "a depraved mind" (v. 28). All people are responsible for their sin, "because that which is known about God is evident

within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (vv. 19–20; cf. John 1:9).

But those who heard Jesus bore an even greater responsibility for rejecting the truth. **If I had not come and spoken to them,** Jesus said, **they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.… If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin.** The Lord was not speaking here of sin in general, but rather of the specific sin of willfully rejecting Him in the face of full revelation. That is the most serious sin of all, because it is the only one that is not forgivable. Having witnessed firsthand Jesus' miracles and heard His teaching—both of which testified unmistakably to His deity (cf. Matt. 7:28–29; John 7:46; 10:25, 37–38; 14:10–11)—the Pharisees' conclusion was, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons" (Matt. 12:24). Because they attributed His miraculous works to Satan instead of the Holy Spirit, Jesus pronounced their sin to be unforgivable (Matt. 12:31–32). While that specific sin can no longer be committed, since Jesus is not physically present on earth, the principle remains the same. Total rejection in the face of total revelation is unforgivable, since there is nothing left for God to show such people (Heb. 6:4–6).

Despite their outward zeal (cf. Rom. 10:2), Jesus' Jewish opponents had **both seen and hated** Him **and** the **Father as well.** The truth is that those who reject Christ do not know God. That applies to the one who is outwardly religious no less than it does to the hardened atheist. All false religions are of demonic origin. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (1 Cor. 10:20; cf. Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37). Jesus said to the most zealous religious people of His day, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father" (John 8:44).

Jesus repeatedly emphasized the truth that the one **who hates** Him **hates** the **Father also.** To those who were outraged because He called God His Father, Jesus replied, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23). John 7:28 records that "Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, 'You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know.' " In John 8:19 He said to His Jewish opponents, "You know neither Me nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also." In verse 42 He added, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me." Later He said, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God'; and you have not come to know Him" (John 8:54–55). After warning the disciples that they would be persecuted, Jesus said of their persecutors, "These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me" (John 16:3). He prayed to the Father, "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You" (John 17:25). Echoing the Lord's words, John wrote in his first epistle, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father" (1 John 2:23). The truth is that if men had understood who Jesus was, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8).

The world's hatred of Jesus, though reprehensible and inexcusable, was not outside of God's sovereign plan. **They have done this,** Jesus declared, **to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, "They hated Me without a cause."** The Lord quoted from two Davidic psalms, 35:19 and 69:4. His point is that if David, a mere man, could be so hated by his enemies, how much more the sinless Son of God? The world hated Jesus because He exposed their sin and confronted them with the reality of who He is.

But in light of Jesus' words and works, there was and is no valid **cause** to hate Him. That the world continues to do so graphically reveals the vileness of sin. But for those who are have been delivered from sin by the power of the cross, and who subsequently encounter opposition for their commitment to the Savior, there is supreme joy in the Lord's promise: *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* (Matt. 5:10–12)[2]

[2] John F. MacArthur Jr., *John 12–21*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 174–176.

Lesson 5 (11-22-26)
Life on Mission (John 15:26-16:15)

26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth,
who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. **27** And you also will bear witness,
because you have been with me from the beginning.

16 "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. **2** They will put you out of
the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering
service to God. **3** And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor
me. **4** But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I
told them to you.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. **5** But now I am
going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' **6** But because I
have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. **7** Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it
is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But
if I go, I will send him to you. **8** And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and
righteousness and judgment: **9** concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; **10** concerning
righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; **11** concerning
judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. **13** When the Spirit of
truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but
whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **14** He
will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. **15** All that the Father has is
mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

- John 15:26 – 16:15 ESV

Summary

Jesus promised the disciples he would send the Holy Spirit to help them. Jesus placed the Spirit's witness and the disciples' witness side by side. The Spirit would testify to Jesus through the disciples. There was to be no doubt the disciples would experience persecution. Jesus told them about it ahead of time so they would not be surprised when it took place. He delineated for them some ways they would be persecuted. The persecutors would not know either the Father or Jesus. Jesus told them these things because he would soon leave them. He had not told them earlier, because he had been there with them to protect them. Jesus then returned to the theme of his departure. He encouraged the disciples by telling them that, despite his leaving, he would send the Spirit to turn their grief into joy and give them peace in time of trouble (vv. 5–33).

After Jesus reminded the disciples that he was returning to the Father, he chastened them for not asking where he was going (v. 5). Earlier Peter had asked this question, but he was less concerned about where Jesus was going than why he couldn't accompany him. Jesus knew the disciples were overwhelmed with sorrow, so he reminded them that they would not be abandoned. He would send the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) to them. The Holy Spirit would convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (v. 8). Verses 9–11 clarify verse 8. The imagery is a courtroom where the Holy Spirit is depicted as a prosecuting attorney, and the world is proven guilty. The Spirit will convict the world concerning sin because it does not believe in Jesus. The world will be convicted of a "sham righteousness" because good deeds apart from commitment to Christ cannot merit salvation (Isa 64:6). The world will be convicted concerning judgment because the world's judgment against Jesus is wrong: at the cross Jesus defeated Satan.

The emphasis shifts from the Spirit's role in the world as a prosecutor to his role among the disciples. The disciples could not take much more instruction now. The Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit) would guide the disciples into the truth. Jesus made this absolutely clear in the next few verses by saying the same thing in different ways. The Spirit would continue Jesus' revelatory work. This promise was directed specifically to Jesus' disciples and found its particular fulfillment in their writing of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit would not speak or act independently but would glorify Jesus by drawing out the implications of his teaching to his disciples.[1]

Observation Questions (What does the text say?)

1. Who does Jesus promise to send from the Father, and what title does He give Him? (15:26)
2. What will the Holy Spirit do concerning Jesus? (15:26)
3. What responsibility do Jesus' disciples have? (15:27)
4. Why does Jesus warn His disciples about the persecution they will face? (16:1–4)
5. What does Jesus say about the advantage of His going away? (16:5–7)
6. What three things will the Holy Spirit convict the world concerning? (16:8–11)
7. Why does Jesus say He has more to tell His disciples but that they cannot bear it yet? (16:12)
8. What will the Spirit of truth do when He comes? (16:13)
9. How will the Holy Spirit glorify Jesus? (16:14–15)
10. What does Jesus say the Holy Spirit will take and declare to the disciples? (16:14–15)

Interpretation Questions (What does the text mean?)

1. What does the title "Helper" or "Advocate" teach us about the Holy Spirit's role? (15:26)

[1] William F. Cook III, "John," in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1474–1475.

2. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by Jesus? (15:26; 16:7)
3. Why is the Holy Spirit's testimony about Jesus important? How does it relate to the disciples' testimony? (15:26–27)
4. Why does Jesus prepare His disciples for persecution before it happens? (16:1–4)
5. Why was it to the disciples' advantage for Jesus to go away and send the Holy Spirit? (16:7)
6. What does it mean for the Holy Spirit to convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment? (16:8–11)
7. Why is the world's unbelief in Jesus central to the Holy Spirit's conviction concerning sin? (16:9)
8. What does Jesus mean when He says the Spirit will guide His disciples into all the truth? (16:13)
9. How does the Holy Spirit glorify Jesus rather than drawing attention to Himself? (16:14–15)
10. What does this passage teach about the Holy Spirit's role in revealing truth, testifying about Christ, and helping believers understand His teaching?

Application Questions (How should this change us?)

1. How does knowing that the Holy Spirit helps believers encourage you to testify about Jesus?
2. Why is it important to depend on the Holy Spirit rather than relying only on your own ability when sharing the gospel?
3. How can you prepare yourself to remain faithful to Christ when facing opposition or rejection?
4. How should the Holy Spirit's work of convicting people of sin affect the way you understand the need for the gospel?
5. What is the difference between feeling guilty about a mistake and recognizing your need to repent and trust in Christ?
6. How can you make sure your understanding of the Holy Spirit's work is grounded in Scripture rather than personal feelings or experiences alone?
7. How should the truth that the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus shape the way Christians evaluate teaching, worship, and claims about spiritual experiences?
8. How can you rely on the Holy Spirit while studying Scripture and seeking to understand God's truth?
9. How does this passage encourage you when you feel inadequate to explain the gospel to someone else?
10. What is one specific way you can depend on the Holy Spirit this week to help you know Christ, live faithfully, or share the gospel with others?
11. Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, Exalting Jesus in John (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 320–326.*]

How Should Christians Respond to the World's Hatred? (JOHN 15:26–16:4)

Don't Stop Witnessing about Jesus (15:26–27)
Jesus promises to send his Spirit to tell people about him; then he says his disciples will tell people about him (vv. 26–27). We understand these two promises as one promise—the promise his Spirit will empower his disciples to witness about him. The Holy Spirit is called the Counselor and the Spirit of truth (v. 26). He will help the disciples speak the truth about Jesus. The disciples aren't left with this monumental task to accomplish on their own. Jesus promises divine reinforcements. The Spirit of God will be sent from the throne of God to empower the people of God to witness about the Son of God.

The Spirit of God empowers us to tell the truth. To tell the truth, we need to be honest about sin. We face the temptation to minimize sin in order to downplay the difference between Christians and the world. Again this stems from our desire to be loved instead of hated. However, if we're not honest about sin, then we cannot impress upon people the need for a Savior. But honesty about sin begins by being honest about our own sins. It's not always difficult to tell the truth about someone else's sin, but it's far more difficult to be truthful about our own. The Holy Spirit can help witness about our own need of salvation. We must not act as if we have it all together and we've got it figured out. Instead, we must be honest about our own brokenness, weakness, and failure. Then we can talk honestly about our desperate need for Christ, bearing witness about his grace at work in us. If we approach people while unwilling to open up about *our* need for salvation, then our words will seem like nothing more than arrogant, hypocritical condemnation.

There's a danger of redefining sin in order to make the good news easier to hear, but love compels us to be honest: whatever God calls sin, we call sin. We have no authority to call clean what God calls unclean. The Holy Spirit helps us share this truth—difficult truth about sin and judgment—with a humble kindness that is compelling to others. We need to ask God to give us honest words wrapped in warm hospitality. One of the reasons we should try so hard to show hospitality is because we know the message of the gospel is offensive. To present the gospel honestly, we must tell a person that he or she is a sinner who stands guilty before God. But the offense of the gospel is part of a greater message of God's plan to welcome sinners into his family because of the sacrifice of his Son. Hospitality demonstrates the gospel and puts the offense of the gospel in the greater context of God's invitation to be reconciled through Jesus.

To testify about Jesus (v. 27) requires honesty about sin and a willingness to be rejected. No one enjoys rejection. We guard our feelings and friendships to prevent rejection. We'll often cut off a relationship if it seems headed for rejection. When it comes to witnessing about Jesus, we must embrace rejection. In rejection we find fellowship with Jesus. Jesus was rejected, and when his people are rejected on his account, we find unique fellowship and identification with him (Heb 13:12–13). When we fear rejection by the world, we refuse to be identified with Jesus. Rejection by the world means we've joined Jesus outside the camp—where the criminals go, where the despised are sent, where the scum go to die. Whom do we want to be accepted by? Those inside the camp will accept us as long as we're willing to stay silent about Jesus. Or

we can speak up, face rejection, and choose to go where Jesus is—outside the wall, outside the circle, outside the city limits. The fear of being hated and rejected by the world often keeps us from speaking about Jesus. Don't stop witnessing. If you've been silent, start speaking now. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to help you share the truth about him.

Don't Fall Away, No Matter How Severe It Gets (16:1–4)
Jesus doesn't minimize the severity of persecution (16:1–4). He tells the truth, and the truth protects his disciples from becoming disillusioned. They won't look back and say, "Jesus never told us it would be difficult. He said it would be easy." No, he was honest about the cost of following him. He said they would be cast out of the synagogue and some would be killed (v. 2). To be cast out of the synagogue was a big deal. It meant more than losing your church. It meant being kicked out of your community. Your identity would be erased. Your future plans all shattered. You could not marry a girl from the community. Any children you had would be outcasts. Your family would consider you dead. They would throw a funeral for you and mourn over you. You would be a man without a family or a country. For a Jew, being kicked out of the synagogue would be a fate worse than death. Many would choose death over this dishonor.

It's a far cry from the false promises of the prosperity gospel preached in so many places today. Following Jesus is worth it, and the benefits far outweigh the cost, but there is a cost. Any preacher who tells you following Jesus is the way to good health, riches, or luxury is not following Jesus; he's selling you something. Following Jesus leads to suffering and persecution. The persecutors will often be driven by religious fervor; they will persecute you as an act of worship to their false God (v. 2). They are misguided but sincere. The reality of persecution should not surprise us. In fact, the lack of persecution we face as American Christians is historically abnormal. The history of Christianity is filled with martyrs. As Tertullian famously said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Our family tree is filled with executions.

There is a price for following Jesus, and Christians through the centuries have been willing to pay the price. Why? The prize is worth the price. Knowing Jesus is worth the cross. In the face of intense persecution, we need to hold on to the truth and cling tightly to Jesus. When living for Jesus and speaking about Jesus brings persecution, don't fall away. Instead, rejoice because God's Spirit will be with you in a unique way as you share in the sufferings of Jesus (cf. 1 Pet 4:12–14).

What's the greatest danger we face in times of persecution? Is it injury? Is it death? No. It's falling away. The greatest danger in persecution is being convinced this temporary life is more valuable than Jesus. Persecution has a way of sifting the true disciples from the false. Persecution exposes spiritual scavengers—those who circle Christianity, hoping only to get something for themselves. Living for Jesus and telling others about Jesus might cause someone to hate you (cf. Luke 6:22). It may mean you're excluded from someone's circle of friends. You might experience mockery and insults. But don't stop witnessing, and don't stop walking after Jesus. Jesus says in effect, "In the face of persecution, don't fall. Keep walking. Keep trusting. Cling to me."

The Disciples' Mission Is _____ (JOHN 16:4B–6)

Though Jesus is leaving, his disciples still have a job to do here on earth. Their job, their mission, is to live together as a new community of faith in such a way that the world will see that the gospel is true and has the power to change lives. They are to serve as witnesses to the gospel. They are to "testify" (15:27) to the unbelieving world about Jesus—who he is and why he came. We must interpret these chapters in light of the mission Jesus gives his disciples. He helps them see that their mission is bigger than themselves (16:4–6) and therefore requires supernatural help (vv. 7–15). What Jesus teaches them on the eve of his crucifixion is something they weren't ready to hear earlier. He's waited to tell them "these things" (v. 4) until now. What are "these things"?

First, he has not fully revealed his departure. Throughout the Gospel Jesus speaks of his death, but the disciples don't understand what he's saying. It isn't until after Judas leaves the room that Jesus, carefully and deliberately, helps the disciples understand his coming death, resurrection, and ascension.

Second, he has not fully revealed their mission. Even in this passage we see him unfolding piece by piece his plan for them. They are learning exactly what it will mean to follow him as his disciples after the cross. The cross changes everything. Everything before points to it, and everything after looks back. The cross will become the focal point of the disciples' mission. They will be sent to the nations as messengers of the cross.

Third, he has not fully revealed the world's reaction to the message. If you remember, Jesus has just warned them about the world's hatred (v. 2).

The reason Jesus hadn't told them all of these things is because he was with them. They didn't need to worry about persecution or focusing on a mission; they simply needed to listen to Jesus, follow him, and trust him. But now their role is changing. Jesus is no longer going to be with them physically. He's leaving and entrusting them with the work of calling new disciples.

What would a normal human response be to all that has happened to the disciples this night? Everything they're counting on seems to be torn out from underneath them. I wonder how the disciples felt when Jesus basically said, "I'm leaving. People are going to hate you, but you need to tell them about me." No wonder he follows that news with "Ever since I began to explain this to you, your hearts have been full of grief" (v. 6; my paraphrase). Their response may be natural, but that doesn't mean it's right. In fact, Jesus gives them a mild rebuke in verse 5. From the moment they hear Jesus is leaving, their thoughts are consumed with themselves. All they think about is how this affects *them*. They never once consider what Jesus is thinking or feeling or what his purpose is in all that's taking place. They don't give his wishes or desire a second thought. His concerns are obscured by theirs. They're like the traveler who visits the pyramids in Egypt, turns his camera around to get a picture of himself in front of this wonder of the world, and when he gets home, he realizes all you can see in the picture is his face. He's completely blocked the focal point. The disciples are so focused on themselves they don't even ask Jesus where he's going. The couple of questions they ask him—Peter's in chapter 13 and

Thomas's in chapter 14—are not so they can understand what he's doing but to find out how it impacts them.

Why does Jesus rebuke them on an evening when they're already grieving? The reason is not because their grief over his departure is wrong. The reason is because their grief is insignificant compared to what's taking place that next day. Jesus is not demeaning their concern for the future. He's lifting their eyes to look beyond their circumstances to something much greater. What happens on the cross the following day is more important than their health and safety. It's bigger than them. Jesus teaches his disciples to live for something bigger. The mission he gives them as his witnesses is far bigger than their hopes and dreams. The mission is worth giving up conveniences and comforts—like safety, security, stability—to invest in something eternally profitable. What a tragedy to find that what you invested your time, energy, money, influence, and abilities in is gone long before you are. Jesus calls us to invest everything in something bigger than ourselves—his service.

Their Mission Requires _____ (JOHN 16:7–15)

Jesus is leaving, which is good for them. He will go to the cross and then ascend to heaven. Only then will the Spirit be able to come to them (v. 7). The Spirit will be sent *by* Jesus to live in the *disciples* of Jesus as they continue the *mission* of Jesus to call other disciples to *follow* Jesus. We need the Spirit for many reasons, but the context of this promise is our mission as disciples. Jesus doesn't send the Holy Spirit so we can have an invisible butler to bring us cold beverages as we lounge around the pool. He sends the Spirit to empower us to accomplish his mission.

Imagine an ancient king deciding to take a trip to visit one of his cities on the far side of the country. He sends his trusted lieutenant ahead of him to get everything ready for the trip. The day of the trip comes, and his caravan starts out. When he arrives at the city, nothing is prepared for him. No lodging, no food, no meetings, nothing. He calls his lieutenant and asks what happened. His lieutenant says, "I came to help them, and they wouldn't listen to me. I told them what you wanted, and I offered to assist them. I assured them I had the authority and resources to accomplish it, but they ignored me. The few times they spoke to me, it was to ask me to do something for them. It wasn't to do what you asked but to do what they wanted." How would the king respond?

The Holy Spirit wasn't sent to assure us lives of comfort and ease. The Spirit doesn't live in us so we can rest comfortably in our easy chairs doing nothing for the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit comes to us, disciples of Jesus, to empower us for a mission that cannot be accomplished apart from his supernatural help. Jesus elaborates on the Holy Spirit's role in verses 8–15. He highlights two ways the Holy Spirit advances his mission.

The Holy Spirit Will Convict the World of Sin (16:8–11)

Jesus, the light of the world, exposes sin (cf. 3:19–20). With Jesus's departure, the Holy Spirit will continue to expose sin, but the Spirit will also convict the world of righteousness. How do you convict a person of righteousness? Isn't righteousness a good thing? Throughout the

Gospel of John we find two types of righteousness. One type is the righteousness of man *apart from God* (self-righteousness), and the other is the righteousness *of God*. These two types of righteousness regularly came into conflict. For instance, in chapter 9 Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders condemned Jesus and characterized themselves as righteous defenders of God's law, but in reality they were more concerned with their own public image than with helping those in need. False righteousness—any attempt to earn God's favor on your own—is always a temptation. When I visited Africa, I was invited to eat at the home of one of the local men. We sat in his backyard and ate a dinner of boiled yams and peanuts. At one point one of his daughters brought out a pitcher of water and began to pour us glasses. He stopped her, took my glass, and poured it out on the ground. She was doing her best to be kind to me, but her best wasn't good enough. He knew if I drank that water, I'd get sick. Her gift of water was a polluted offering. God calls our best efforts to please him "polluted" (Isa 64:6). They're unacceptable. They're tainted by sin and will be poured out as worthless. No one can come to God based on good works.

The Holy Spirit convicts the unbelieving world of sin (v. 9), righteousness (v. 10), and judgment (v. 11). Their judgment about Jesus is wrong. Jesus urged them to "judge according to righteous judgment" (7:24), but they persisted in their unbelief and as a result would face the same condemnation Satan himself faced. The Spirit reveals to the world their sin, self-righteousness, and condemnation in order to call men and women to repentance and faith. The word translated "convict" (v. 8) has the goal of convincing a person to turn from his or her sin. How does the conviction of the Holy Spirit take place? How does he call the unbelieving world to repentance and faith? He speaks through the disciples. The disciples are the agents the Holy Spirit uses to call the world to repentance. Trace the flow of this passage:

- In chapter 15 Jesus calls the disciples to join him in his mission of making more disciples. The chapter ends with the reminder of the Holy Spirit, who will bear witness about Jesus *through the disciples*.
- This chapter reveals their mission will bring suffering and persecution (16:1–4). Then Jesus reminds them of the importance of their mission, which can only be accomplished *by the power of the indwelling Spirit*.

So the Spirit convicts the world by empowering the disciples to bear witness about Jesus. The Spirit brings conviction to the world through the message of the disciples. God blesses this unique combination. His Spirit will take the gospel proclaimed by his disciples and bring conviction to the world. The role of the disciple is to faithfully bear witness to Jesus, and the role of the Holy Spirit is to make that witness spiritually effective…

Jesus gives the disciples an impossible task. When they heard, they must have thought, There's no way we can do that. People won't listen to us. You said yourself they would throw us out of the synagogues. This is crazy! There's no way we can make this work. They were right. There was no way *they* could make this work, but Jesus, through the Spirit's power, would accomplish everything he promised and commanded. Everything good that has happened in Christianity is the result of the Holy Spirit's power.

Maybe you don't realize the Spirit's power in your life because you aren't busy doing things only he can accomplish.

- Without the Spirit's help you can love people who are like you.
- Without the Spirit's help you can give an hour and a half a week to sit in a service.
- Without the Spirit's help you can attend a Sunday seminar or community group.
- Without the Spirit's help you can put money in the offering plate.
- Without the Spirit's help you can talk about the gospel.

But do you know what you can't do without the Spirit's help?

- Without the Spirit's help you can't love someone who is antagonistic to you and your family.
- Without the Spirit's help you can't be on call 24–7 for a person in need.
- Without the Spirit's help you can't meet weekly with a brother or sister to bear each other's burdens.
- Without the Spirit's help you can't give your hard-earned money when little is left.
- Without the Spirit's help you can't plead with your unbelieving friends and neighbors to repent and believe.
- Without the Spirit's help you can't move your family around the world for the sake of the gospel.

For you to be faithful to the mission to which Jesus has called you, you *need* the Spirit's help.

The Holy Spirit Will Guide the Disciples into Truth (16:12–15)
At this moment the disciples must have questions. Jesus describes a mission that will take an entire lifetime and might require them to give their lives. He unfolds a new community unique in the way it lives together. Their minds must have been buzzing with questions: How will this look? What should we do? How will we make decisions? Jesus doesn't answer their questions; he gives them a promise. The Holy Spirit will guide them into all the truth they need to know (vv. 12–15). The answers to their questions will come, but they will come through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God will indwell them and instruct them as they continue on their mission.

Jesus makes a promise overflowing with kindness and grace. He says the Spirit will "guide" them (v. 13). The only other time that word is found in John's writings is in Revelation 7: *For the Lamb who is at the center of the throne will shepherd them; he will* guide *them to springs of the waters of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.* (v. 17; emphasis added) The Holy Spirit will guide the disciples to the refreshing springs of truth like a shepherd leading thirsty sheep to a cool, refreshing spring. The Spirit will reiterate and expand the truth taught by Jesus. The Holy Spirit declares the revelation of Jesus Christ to the disciples.

Conclusion

In the following chapter Jesus will talk about those who believe based on the word of the disciples, the Scriptures. This promise of the Holy Spirit's guidance into truth takes a different form for us than it did for the first disciples. They were reminded of what Jesus had taught them personally. We get the teachings of Jesus *through* them. The Twelve chosen by Jesus were used to inscripturate—to put in written form—the truth of Jesus. Now we are brought to the truth by the Holy Spirit as we open up the Word of God. The Spirit works through the Word. The Word is his means of conveying the gospel and bringing conviction of sin. We should never look for spiritual truth apart from his Word.

We receive personal guidance from the Spirit as we read the Word he wrote. I wonder if the reason we don't read the Bible more often is because we don't want to be guided by the Spirit. Too often we want people to agree with us, to rubber-stamp the decisions we've already made. The Holy Spirit is no rubber stamp. He's a sword-wielding, flame-throwing God. We need to come to him humbly and beg him to tell us what to do. Instead we often open our Bibles and treat the Spirit's words like a buffet table, taking what we like and passing by the rest. He promises to guide us, but we must listen to everything he says. The truth can be hard to hear. Sometimes we'd rather be ignorant, even lied to, but the longer we listen to lies, the more painful the truth will be. The Spirit guides us into truth as we listen to him speak through his Word.

Appendix: Answer Guide

Lesson 1 (10-25-26)
Bearing Fruit (John 15:1-8)
LOOKING *FOR FRUIT (vv. 1–2)*
PRUNING *FOR FRUIT (vv. 2–3)*
ABIDING *FOR FRUIT (vv. 4–5)*
CONCLUSION: ***ENJOYING*** *THE FRUIT (vv. 6–11)*

Lesson 2 (11-1-26)
The Spiritual Fruit of Discipleship (John 15:9-11)
Answered Prayer
Obedient Love
Inexhaustible Joy
Sacrificial Love

Lesson 3 (11-8-26)
Loving the Branches (John 15:12-17)
THE PRINCIPLE OF MUTUALITY IN ***FRIENDSHIP*** *AND* ***LOVE*** *(vv. 14–15)*
THE PRINCIPLE OF ***PROMOTION*** *(v. 16)*

Lesson 4 (11-15-26)
Why Does the World Hate Christians? (John 15:18-25)
The World Hates ***Jesus*** *(15:18)*
Jesus Has Called Us ***Out of the World*** *(15:19)*
We ***Serve*** *the One the World* ***Hates*** *(15:20)*
The World Is ***Estranged*** *from God (15:21)*
Jesus Exposed the World's ***Guilt*** *(15:22–25)*

Lesson 5 (11-22-26)
Life on Mission (John 15:26-16:15)
The Disciples' Mission Is **Bigger Than Themselves** (JOHN 16:4B–6)
Their Mission Requires **Supernatural Help** (JOHN 16:7–15)

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