



NG Study Guide: John 15:1-11 “How to Grow (pt. 1)” [5.8.22]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: When we live, abide, or are attached to the *true vine*, we are able to experience what all people deeply long for: the fullness of life, the fullness of contentment, and the fullness of joy. Discover how we can grow and bear fruit simply because we abide in Christ.

Subject: Abide in Christ

Object: Experience the fullness of life.

The “I am” statements of Jesus (in John):

1. “I am the bread of life.” ([John 6:35, 41, 48, 51](#))
2. “I am the light of the world.” ([John 8:12](#))
3. “I am the door of the sheep.” ([John 10:7,9](#))
4. “I am the resurrection and the life.” ([John 11:25](#))
5. “I am the good shepherd.” ([John 10:11, 14](#))
6. “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” ([John 14:6](#))
7. “I am the true vine.” ([John 15:1, 5](#))

1. **Those who abide find true life [1-6]**

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

a. **The true vine is Christ [1]**

This is an agrarian culture, therefore agrarian imagery would be easily understood amongst nearly everyone. Throughout the Old Testament God’s chosen people, Israel, is commonly linked with the symbol of the vine [Ps. 80:9-16; Is. 5:1-7; 27:2; Je. 2:21; 12:10; Ezk. 15:1-8; 17:1-21; 19:10-14; Ho. 10:1-2]. Because this symbol is often used in connection with Israel, it’s important to note that Jesus refers to himself as the *true vine* [1]. This doesn’t negate the fact that Israel is linked with the term, Jesus is simply claiming the fulfillment of the all OT prophesy that points to the coming messiah and the new covenant. Placing your faith in Christ, receiving the

forgiveness of Christ, and receiving the inheritance of Christ is essential to what Jesus is claiming here. **This is no longer a covenant strictly for Israel, but the fact that Jesus is the true vine demonstrates the ability for all people, Jew or gentile, to receive true everlasting life, that is only found in the true vine.**

“And My Father is the vinedresser” [1]. Jesus has just claimed his deity with the “I am” statement, so this is not a claim that Jesus and the Father are not one, but it simply an acknowledgment that Jesus is living his earthly life in obedience and subjugation to the Father’s will. It’s an acknowledgment that Jesus and the Father possess different roles.

b. True life is evidenced by fruit [2-6].

This is the work of the vinedresser. The Father [1] takes away the branches that do not bear fruit (which we will address in more detail later), and he prunes those branches that do bear fruit [2]. In agrarian culture this is perfectly logical. In order to establish flourishing in the vineyard the vinedresser must tend and care for the branches. This promotes life and is for the betterment of the entire vineyard. The pruning is necessary for the growth of more fruit.

We are already clean because of the word of Jesus [3]. He has taught that He has all authority to grant forgiveness of sins, and this cleaning is only through placing our faith in the *way, the truth, and the life*. At this moment we are able to begin bearing fruit because we are attached to the vine.

ABIDE [4] – connectedness, dwelling in, living in. This term is vital to understanding what Jesus is offering. “Abide” is used 10 times in these 11 verses. Abiding is what causes life, if we do not abide we cannot bear fruit or have life [4].

So far there has been a lot of language of fruit, but what is fruit? What are the things that demonstrate growth in the life of a believer? “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [Gal. 5:22-23].”

There is a lot of language of bearing fruit in this passage [2,5]. And the fruit is important, but it is not the central idea of what Jesus is talking about. The fruit is a byproduct of abiding. No fruit is possible if we aren’t attached to the vine [4]. And the entire focus here is on the vine itself, it’s not on the branch. **Jesus is essentially saying the fruit that is evident in your life, is not because you are a branch, but it is because you are connected to the vine.** The only way that we grow and bear more and more fruit this is through abiding in the *true vine*, staying connected.

Verses 5-6 is essentially a mirror of verses 1-4. Again Jesus states that He is the vine [5,1]. He then affirms again that we as His followers are the branches [5,2]. And then reaffirms that the desire for us to abide in Him [5,4]. And then again discusses the concept of branches with and without fruit [6,2].

So what are the branches without fruit [6,2]? We are told that they will be taken away, gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned [2,6]. The language used can appear quite stark. And at first glance it appears that Jesus is stating that the branches that do not bear fruit are cut off from the *true vine* and thrown into the fire. Again, this is an agrarian culture, there was a very basic understanding that the dead branches are removed from the tree, placed on the ground, then gathered to be thrown into the fire to keep the vineyard productive and functional. This is a farming method that is common, not necessarily a threat to Christians who does not produce good fruit. Though some may hold to a view that these “branches” would be individuals like Judas, scholars mostly agree that this fire isn’t a reference to hell. We know from Scripture that believers cannot lose their salvation [Rom. 8:35-38, John 10:27-30]. Meaning, any branch connected to the *true vine*, would not be cut off because He will never leave us or forsake us.

A better understanding: to recognize that the Vinedresser is simply creating health within the vine. Therefore, works in the life of a believer that are fruitless or come from self-seeking motivation will be cut off. It’s a picture of sanctification, or becoming less like the world, and more like Jesus. *Simply stated, our lives are designed to be connected to the true vine, produce good fruit that glorifies Him because of that connection, and selfish or sinful actions (that do not glorify Him and are not from Him) will be cut out from us so that we can continue to grow in health and godliness.* This process allows us to bear fruit.

2. Those who abide find true contentment. [7-8]

⁷ *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.* ⁸ *By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*

We are told that if we abide in Christ, He will abide in us in verses 4 and 5, and here in verse 7, we are told to abide in Christ, and *His words* will abide in us [7]. This is an important distinction. First, we receive the promise that if we abide in Christ, we will abide in us; the picture of healthy completely connected relationship [4,5]. And here we see the idea that if we abide in Him, there is the built-in assumption that His words and teachings will abide in us. And this is so significant because of the connection to the follow phrase: “you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” [7]. We are given this promise that if abiding in Christ and his words abiding in us, will produce an environment where our desires will be completed.

Now there is a danger here, with a faulty understanding of what Christ is saying, that we can promote a prosperity gospel where we follow Jesus and He then grants our wishes because we live for Him. This is not at all what Jesus is teaching. He’s saying that if we abide in Him, and His words and teachings abide in us [7], our desires will be calibrated to His desires.

This is exactly what Jesus is talking about! Our hearts and desires, as we abide in Christ, are calibrated to His, the truth. Therefore, when we are praying, and asking God for something, it is not out of selfish desire, but rather out of a proper understanding of what truly is best. This is exactly why we receive the attached promise that “it shall be done for you” [7].

And as our desires are aligned with His, we begin understand what is truly best, and He answers our prayers, we begin to experience the fullness of contentment. When our desires are mis-calibrated or misaligned we are left feeling disappointed and discontent. We feel like God isn’t doing enough or responding how we want Him to. There is a deep human desire that all people possess to live lives that are filled with contentment. As we abide, we are calibrated to the proper desires and will of God, and are able to experience complete and full contentment because our desires (ultimately His desires) are being met.

Verse 8 says “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you will be My disciples.” Without proper digging into the grammatical connection of this verse it could appear to be a stand alone idea. However, “by this” can better be interpreted “herein,” or referring back to the previous phrase. Therefore, we understand that God the Father is glorified by our desires becoming aligned with His desires. He is glorified by the process of us find full contentment in Him. And in this process continue to “bear much fruit” and we are recognized as His disciples [8].

3. Those who abide find true joy. [9-11]

⁹ *As the Father loved Me, I also have 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 remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*

We see evidently and clearly throughout Scripture of the love that the Father has for Jesus. That is without question. And the Greek term here that is used is ‘agape.’ This is the deepest expression of love that is on a soul level, a true ‘depths of the heart,’ unconditional love. Jesus continues on to state that it is with this same, deep rooted agape love that he loves his disciples [9], and by extension all of those who follow Him. His love here is not contingent on the behavior of his disciples. The love itself is never-failing, and unconditional. The command is to abide in the love [9]. The love is present, and available. God’s love for you is on a soul level, with the depths of the heart, unchanging, never failing, unconditional, complete love for exactly who you are. That concept is challenging for some of us to grasp because we feel like that cannot be the case. But it’s true. It is completely unchanging and available for us, all we’re asked to do is abide in it [9]; live in it, dwell in it, experience it to it’s fullness.

In verse 10 again we see this concept of calibration or alignment. As we abide in the love of God, we become aligned and calibrated to living our lives as He desires. We abide and demonstrate our obedience to His commandments. We abide, as we do that it becomes easier and easier to keep his commandments [10].

The disciples at this point, don't even know how sincere Jesus is being when he states that He has "kept my Father's commandments" [10]. He is getting ready to be arrested, beaten, and crucified out of obedience to the Father's commandments. This is a demonstration of what it means to abide in the love of the Father. Jesus is completely aligned and calibrated to the Father's will and love, and therefore he keeps His commandments. He understands that what is best for mankind is for Him to do what the Father has asked Him to do. And as we abide *we too begin to understand that keeping the commandments of Christ (to love God fully and love our neighbors) is what is best for us, those around us, and mankind.*

And the promise that follows is truly amazing. "My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" [11]. We have the opportunity to abide, dwell, live in relationship with a God that will never fail us and always love us. We have the opportunity to experience the fullness of life connected to the true vine. We have the opportunity to be aligned with Him and experience the fullness of contentment. And as we abide in His perfect love, we will experience the fullness of joy.

We grow as followers of Jesus by abiding in the incredible love and relationship of Jesus and experience the fullness of life.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. How can believers practice abiding in Christ?

Q2. What are some obstacles to abiding in Christ? And how might one resolve them?

Q3. Share a time where you experienced true contentment in Christ.

Q4. What are some practical or actionable ways that believers can bear fruit and grow (from this passage or elsewhere in Scripture)?

"Digging Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Here are is more information on the "I am" statements of Jesus:

<https://www.gotquestions.org/seven-I-AM-statements.html>

2. An alternate resource on Jn. 15:1-11

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Jhn/Jhn_15.cfm

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationships with their neighbors inside or outside the group?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?

2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Pray for those in your life who do not know Jesus, and pray for opportunities to share.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.