



YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2017-18 Leader Commentary

Unit 2: Spiritual Checkup
Session 1: Stay Connected (see pp. 124-127)

The Question: What are some evidences I am connected to God?

The Point: Healthy spiritual connections require daily spiritual exercise.

Background Passage: John 15

Focal Passage: John 15:1-10

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, “What are some evidences I am connected to God?” and drive home this one truth: Healthy connections require daily spiritual exercise.

Focus on These Points

Keep Bearing Fruit
(John 15:1-4)

Jesus had important words for the disciples about living a productive life—a life connected with Him. Jesus promised that He would enable those who abide in Him to bear much fruit. He connected fruit bearing to a life of mutual abiding (He in the believer and the believer in Him), effectual prayer, and obedience.

As Jesus continued to instruct His disciples the night before His crucifixion, He made use of vivid and familiar imagery—a vineyard. In the analogy Jesus identified His Father as the vine grower, Himself as the vine, and His disciples as the branches that are pruned to enable them to bear more fruit. Jesus made use of the visual image to emphasize that because of their ongoing close relationship with Him, Jesus expects His followers to be productive for Him and enables them to do so. In John 15, Jesus presented Himself as the true vine. The adjective “true” placed Jesus and His mission in contrast to Israel and its mission. The nation had become a faithless and fruitless vine. God had intended for Israel to become “a light for the nations” to declare God’s “salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). Rather than influencing the nations, all too often Israel was influenced by the other nations’ religion and lifestyle. Israel was unfaithful but Jesus was perfectly faithful; Jesus fulfilled the original plan for all people on earth to be blessed (Gen. 12:2).

Jesus identified God as the gardener, which was also God’s role in relation to Israel. Jesus did not identify the branches of the vine as disciples until His words in verse 5, but early in His analogy He related the branches to Himself. “Every branch in me” points to the abiding relationship of branches to the Vine. Jesus referred immediately to the Father’s role in His

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vineyard. Producing fruit is the vineyard's whole purpose, and God's purpose in tending it is to increase fruitfulness. Fruitless branches create clutter, sap nutrients from the vine, and produce no grapes. A vineyard from which they are not cut away will have much unproductive growth.

Jesus also spoke of cutting back healthy branches. The verb translated *prunes* means "to cleanse" or "to purify," maybe with the sense in this context of "trims clean." Because Jesus is concerned with people, not vines, He used a general term for pruning. He was saying the pruning of a life is more like a cleansing than a cutting. Pruning of believers is with a view to enabling them to become even more fruitful. As an analogy of the believer's life, fruit is used in various ways in the New Testament. In passages like Galatians 5:22-23, the emphasis is on the fruit of Christ-like character. In Romans 1:13, fruit describes the possibility of Christian converts among Gentiles. In Romans 6:22, fruit has to do with holiness of life on the part of believers. The essential key to every form of Christian fruitfulness is a life that is being pruned of un-Christ-like qualities, delivered from indifference to winning others to Christ, set apart from unholy conduct, and laying aside evil deeds.

Pruning a vine requires pruning shears, but pruning a life requires God's Word. Jesus encouraged His disciples with the reminder that because of His word they had been made "clean" (v. 3). The Bible points out sin and condemns it, and at the same time it teaches holiness of life and inspires spiritual growth. Failure to hear and heed the Word of God will soon result in a life cluttered with unfruitful activities, interests, and commitments.

Jesus made explicit the negative side of His analogy. That a branch detached from the vine is unable to bear fruit illustrates the impossibility of a person's bearing fruit while living in detachment from Jesus.

Keep Praying Expectantly ***(John 15:7-8)***

Jesus set forth the condition that His words abide in believers. "My words remain in you," points to a willing acceptance of Jesus' authority as expressed through His teachings and commands. "Whatever you want" defines the possible agenda of a believer's praying. Effectual praying occurs in an obedient life. Thus whatever you wish is limited by the mutually shared life of a believer and Christ.

"This" (v. 8) looks forward to the last part of the verse and the explanation of what glorifies God. When followers of Jesus bear much fruit, God receives glory. Since believers cannot bear fruit of themselves but only by means of Christ's indwelling life, their fruitfulness is a manifestation of divine life. It thus glorifies God and serves as evidence of genuine, vital discipleship. Just as God was glorified in His Son's work (John 13:31-32), God is also glorified in the lives of believers who abide in the Son. "Prove to be my disciples" speaks about how they demonstrate they already are disciples, not how they qualify to become disciples. Jesus established this principle in the Sermon on the Mount: "So you'll recognize them by their fruit" (Matt. 7:20).

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Keep Obeying
(John 15:9-10)

Jesus identified love as the key to relating to Him, relating to one another, keeping God's commandments, and bearing fruit. The relationship of Jesus the Son to believers finds its pattern in the relationship of God the Father to Jesus. He compared His love for them with the Father's love for Him. On the basis of His declared love, Jesus urged the disciples to "remain in my love." He wanted them to live in the consciousness of being loved—rejoicing in its fact, depending on its undergirding, being careful not to betray it, and being faithful to all that delights it.

Jesus moved from the need to live in awareness of His love to the need to obey His commands. He described remaining in His love as a matter of simple obedience. Remaining is dependent on obeying. Obedience is the way Christians abide in Christ's love.

In John 15:16-17, Jesus revealed the intended result of believers abiding in, and producing fruit through, a personal relationship with Christ—fruit that would last for eternity.