



## **SCRIPTURE + SHARED**

**Week 3 – John 15:1-16:24**

### **Day 1 – John 15:1-11**

#### **Chapter 15**

*<sup>1</sup>I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

*<sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

#### **Understanding the Passage:**

I've tried (and failed) to grow lime trees a handful of times. Sometimes they make it through a full season and produce some mature fruit, but most of the time the trees end up unhealthy or dead before an entire season has even passed. Last spring, my parents happened to be in town the weekend that I went to the nursery and bought two new lime trees. Although they were babies, I picked out trees that already had some buds on them – that seemed like a good sign that the trees would be fruitful. My parents helped me plant them in huge pots, and once we finished, I gave them a once-over, felt proud of myself, and started to go inside. My dad stopped me almost immediately and told me that we needed to remove about 80% of the buds. He said that the reason my trees have been dying is that I haven't pruned them, so all of the little buds were competing for nutrition from the branches and roots. Because there were so many, the nutrition was spread thin and none of them got enough.

In the same way, Jesus describes the pruning process for a grape vine. Without pruning, canes and shoots would grow from the vines, which would take nutrition away from the fruit. Here, Jesus promises his followers that God will prune each of them so they can grow and be fruitful. This should not be scary – this is a promise to take care of us! When we remain in Christ, the Holy Spirit convicts us and helps us to see parts of our lives that are not faithful or contributing to growth in our relationship with Jesus. This allows us to flourish in our faith so that we can be more like Jesus and help contribute to building the Kingdom of God.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. As Christians, what do we have to do in order to bear fruit?
2. What does it mean to remain in Christ? If you're not doing that, what would it look like for you to begin abiding in Christ?
3. How has God pruned you and how did it feel? What was the effect of the pruning?

### Day 2 – John 15:12-17

*<sup>12</sup>“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

### Understanding the Passage:

Parents love each of their children individually, but they also hope that their kids' relationships to one another will be one of high value. It would be highly unusual for a parent to want their child to love them but not love their siblings. In the same way, God seeks a personal relationship with us, but expects us to seek relationships and community with others. So, in Jesus' final words to his disciples about friendship, he emphasizes the need for radical Christian friendships.

After Jesus dies, he knows that the Good News will be spread through his disciples and their followers. If they are living hypocritically – professing abundant love but excluding people or treating some folks poorly – then the power of Jesus' life and message will be extinguished. For this reason, it is important that he conveys to his followers that the basic tenant of Christian community is life-giving, self-sacrificial friendship.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What is the greatest act of love or sacrifice that you've ever experienced in the context of friendship?
2. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus laid down his life for you?
3. What is the difference between a servant and a friend?
4. What are some practical ways in which you can love your friends?

### Day 3 – John 15:18-16:4a

*<sup>18</sup>“If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup>If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup>Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. <sup>21</sup>But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. <sup>22</sup>If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup>Whoever hates me hates my Father also. <sup>24</sup>If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup>It was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’*

*<sup>26</sup>“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. <sup>27</sup>You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.*

## Chapter 16

*<sup>1</sup>I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. <sup>2</sup>They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. <sup>3</sup>And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. <sup>4a</sup>But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.*

### Understanding the Passage:

This passage provides an interesting contrast to what came immediately before (Jesus was talking in 15:12-17 about how radical friendship and love are defining characteristics **within** the Christian community). In this passage, Jesus says that the world (those outside of the Christian community) will define their relationship with the Christians by hatred. Jesus wants the disciples to be aware this will happen, so they are not taken by surprise and then fall prey to being discouraged or abandoning their faith because of it.

By the time that the Gospel of John was written (near the end of the first century CE), Christians were being persecuted and not allowed in synagogues and temples because the Jewish leaders didn't want to jeopardize their standing with the Romans. So, it is important for readers of John's Gospel to be reminded that Jesus told them not only that this would happen, but that he provided a solution that would bring comfort and help them persevere: The Holy Spirit.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. It's tempting to want to live in a way that everyone likes you and no one hates you. What is wrong with doing this?
2. Can you think of some times in the Gospels that Jesus was criticized or persecuted? Did Jesus change his beliefs or convictions to conform to others' expectations of him? What does this mean for your life?
3. Why does the world hate people who have Christian values? Is it avoidable to be hated if you're a Christian? How should you respond to that hatred? (hint: read what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:11-12, 5:38-48)

## Day 4 – John 16:4b-15

*<sup>4b</sup> "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' <sup>6</sup>But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts.*

*<sup>7</sup>Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. <sup>12</sup>"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

### Understanding the Passage:

Have you ever gotten caught up in the thinking that it would have been easier to follow Jesus if you lived while he did? That you could follow an actual living, breathing person who was a charismatic leader instead of an idea? We often think the disciples had an advantage over us because they got to see Jesus perform miracles and hear him speak firsthand. It would be nearly impossible **not** to follow him after being privy to all of that, right?

And yet, Jesus tells the disciples that it is to their advantage that he goes away because they will have the Holy Spirit. They won't be alone, but will continue to have the living God with them – just as we do today. We have immediate and personal access to God through the Holy Spirit, which is the greatest gift that Jesus could leave.

The Greek word that is rendered as “Advocate” in the NRSV translation is *paraklētos*, which you will sometimes see written as Paraclete. There's really no good English word to encompass all of the meanings of Paraclete, so that is why various Bible translations have made the decision to use words such as "Comforter" (KJV), "Counselor" (NIV, RSV), "Advocate" (NRSV, New Living Translation), "Friend" (The Message), and "Helper" (ESV, NASB, Today's English Version). These are all of the functions of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Have you ever longed to see, hear, and experience Jesus as his disciples did?
2. What would Jesus going away accomplish or make possible? Is it better to have the Holy Spirit or to have a living, breathing Jesus as our companion?
3. Have you ever had an experience of the Holy Spirit convicting you (“guiding you into all the truth” as the scripture says)? What was that like? What happened as a result?
4. Describe the ways you have experienced the Holy Spirit as a comforter and friend.

#### **Day 5 – John 16:16-24**

<sup>16</sup>“A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.” <sup>17</sup>Then some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying to us, ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and ‘Because I am going to the Father’?” <sup>18</sup>They said, “What does he mean by this ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” <sup>19</sup>Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Are you discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said, ‘A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’?” <sup>20</sup>Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. <sup>21</sup>When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. <sup>22</sup>So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

<sup>23</sup>On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. <sup>24</sup>Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.

#### **Understanding the Passage:**

We know the end of the story already – Jesus will conquer death and be resurrected on Easter! But the disciples didn't know that. They endured the agony of Judas' betrayal, Jesus's arrest and trial, and then standing at the cross while he is crucified. Imagine what they were going through after Jesus breathed his last. They would have gone home that evening despairing because their Lord, the man they chose to give up their lives for and follow, was dead. Jesus knows this is going to happen, so he begins to prepare them for this moment by telling them, “you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.”

Jesus also tells his disciples that they will receive what they ask for when they ask in Jesus' name. Does this mean that if you end your prayer with “in Jesus' name, I pray” that you will get everything for which you prayed? Nope. Instead, Jesus is teaching them in this short statement how to pray. Proverbs 22:1 says, “a good name is better than riches.” That is because in Biblical times, if a person had “a good name” that meant they had good character or a good reputation. So, when you pray in Jesus' name, you're praying in the character of Christ. Would it be in the character of Jesus to pray for riches? No.

That is why just ending your prayer with “in Jesus’ name” doesn’t guarantee an answer to prayer – you are only guaranteed an answer to prayer when you pray in the character of Christ.

**Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Have there been times in your life when someone tries to prepare you for something, but you don’t really take their advice to heart and you are later hurt? What have you learned from those situations?
2. Write about an experience in which your pain turned to joy. How was God present in that experience? Read Romans 8:28.
3. Does Jesus’ promise about joy that cannot be taken away give you comfort? Or does it seem too farfetched?
4. What are you praying about in Jesus’ name currently? What could you add to your prayer list?

**Video Discussion Questions:**

1. What does it mean for us to bear fruit? What does that look like in our everyday life? How does this relate to the Fruit of the Spirit?
2. Have you been able to bear good fruit on your own? Or do you feel like it has been important in your life to be in community with other Christians?
3. Have you ever considered the idea that being pruned by God is a good thing or an invitation to live a life closer to God? After watching this week’s video, what do you now think about being pruned through a refining fire?
4. It’s interesting that unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there is only one commandment given in the whole Gospel of John: to LOVE one another! How does this inform our understanding of what Jesus wants from us?
5. What does it truly mean to love how God loves? Be specific in your answer. Are you currently practicing that on the people closest to you?