

STUDY GUIDE

Monday, October 12 – Read John 15:5 Most of the world's religions offer the same formula for success: do the right things in the right way and you'll be rewarded. But as each devout follower soon learns, the burden of carrying that pressure on our own is just too heavy. Because on our own, we're never good enough. We can't produce the right things or be the right person. So if success in our religion is resting on our ability to accomplish it, we're all going to fail. But then there's Jesus. And He offers the opposite solution. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." Every measure of success in our whole faith rests in this promise. Jesus is the source. He produces the fruit. Everything good comes through Him. Our only job is to stay connected so His life-giving Spirit can work through us. If you've been running yourself ragged trying to be the ideal Christian, using your own strength and energy to be good enough, find comfort in Jesus' instructions. Remain in Him, and let Him produce the fruit in your life! What are you trying to accomplish in your own strength? Is the fruit of that effort authentic and lasting? What fruit have you seen Christ produce through you? Is it different? Do you resist the idea that apart from Jesus you can do nothing? What might happen if you accepted that idea as truth? Do you feel set free, or do you panic at the loss of control? Consider why that might be. How can you connect to the true vine, Jesus Christ? Whether it's through journaling, worship, meditating on His Word, or other methods, find a way to genuinely connect with your Lord today!

Tuesday, October 13 – Read John 15:1-4 There's a hard reality to being a branch: Either you're being pruned to be even more fruitful, or you're being cut off. Pruning does not feel nice. It isn't pleasant to have all the old, dead parts scraped out and removed, or to have perfectly good and healthy parts of us removed to make room for other parts to grow better. It might even feel unnecessary or unfair. But God is a good gardener. He knows exactly what we need to thrive in Him. And He loves us too much to leave us overrun with the weeds and thorns of sin. As painful as the pruning process can be, it's far better to be pruned while in the true Vine, Jesus, than it is to be cast away from Him. And there's hope in the process, too. Just like we cannot bear fruit on our own, we cannot remove the unhealthy pieces alone either. It is not your responsibility to become less angry, less prideful, less doubting, or less selfish on your own. It's your job to remain connected to the Vine. It might be difficult to trust that God the Gardener cares about your growth while you're in a season of pruning. But afterward, when you can see the fruit being produced through you, you'll be able to recognize the sin and hindrances that were strangling your progress. When you trust God, who knows just what He's doing, and remain connected to Christ, you'll grow the fruit of His Spirit that He created you to bear. Are you in a season of pruning? What sins do you see God cleaning out from you? Why do you think it hurts to lose those things? Have you attempted to purge yourself of the sin and worries that so easily entangle you? How do you think it's different when you try to do that on your own strength and when you rely on God to accomplish His work in you? Have people in your life been too critical or unfair? Does that shape how you view God's role in your growth? How can you remain in the Vine even when you're in a season of painful changes?

Wednesday, October 14 – Read John 15:6-8 Sticks cannot be trees. If a branch decides it is tired of existing as an extension of the vine and sets off on its own, it does not become another vine. It becomes firewood. Jesus' warning in these verses is not harsh or dramatic; it's the truth. Jesus loved His disciples too much to let them believe that there was any kind of sustainable future apart from Him. God did not create us to be gods. He created us to reflect that He is God. Any other purpose is as empty as dry kindling. But these verses don't just come with a warning; they contain a promise. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that when they're connected to Him, their prayers will be different. If a stick on the ground asks the vine above to give it fruit, the effort is empty and futile. If a healthy branch connected to the vine asks to be given fruit, it's to the glory of the vine to produce fruit abundantly. Jesus wasn't promising the disciples that He'd be their magic genie, granting whatever wish popped into their mind. He was reminding them—and us—that transformation happens through connection. The more ingrained in His presence we become, the more our desire to bring Him glory will increase, and the more fruit He will produce through us. The message is clear: apart from Jesus, we're nothing. With Him, we experience the life we were created to live—as bearers of His fruit! Are you disconnected from the source of all life, growth, and hope? Repent and turn to God, who eagerly waits to give you abundant life. How have your prayers changed as you've grown closer to Christ? Are you boldly and confidently asking Him to produce fruit in your life for His glory? Spend some time today reflecting on the

fruit the Holy Spirit produces in the lives of those connected to Him. Do you see evidence of this fruit in your life? Consider why or why not that might be, and ask God to transform you through connection with Him.

Thursday, October 15 – Read John 15:9-13 *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.* This should be our definition of love. Not “what makes me feel good.” Not “what makes me feel valued or special.” But “Can I lay down my life for this person?” Since Jesus willingly gave up His life on the cross, it's easy to read this passage and only think love means dying for someone. It sure can mean that. But there are many ways we can die for someone without giving up our lives. Greater love can be listening to another person share a story over coffee without constantly interrupting with your own thoughts. Greater love can be adopting a child who will not know true love without a Christ-like family. Greater love can be living on a small percentage of your income and giving away most of it to missionaries and those in need. This kind of love requires something bigger than ourselves. It requires us to know God's love and let it flow through us to others. Left to ourselves, we drift back to love focused on us. Love becomes about how everyone else should serve us. Jesus gives us the kind of love that says, “How can I serve you?” How loved by Jesus do you feel? Take a few moments and reflect on what Jesus has done for you. Allow yourself to recognize His love. What holds you back from serving someone else? Pick one person this week and let Jesus' love flow through you to them. Deny something you want and do something meaningful for them.

Friday, October 16 – Read John 15:14-17 Being chosen or recognized for a special task makes us feel fulfilled and gives us confidence. We may say to ourselves, “Finally, someone sees what I'm capable of! My boss believes in me and he trusts me to get this done.” The disciples heard Jesus affirm them as His friends in these verses. Out of that relationship, there was new life and purpose. They didn't need to live out of guilt, fear, or shame because Jesus was their friend. They didn't need to fight for positions of power or accomplishments because they were secure in their friendship with Jesus! Jesus recognizes us for more than what we can accomplish. He recognizes us for who we are. We are his friends. Jesus chose us to have a close relationship with. He saw you across the playground and said, “I want to be your friend.” A friendship with Jesus gives the fulfillment and confidence we are looking for. Being chosen by Jesus means He believes in you wherever you go. Jesus believes you can make a difference in your neighborhood. Jesus believes you can make a difference at your job. Jesus believes you can make a difference with your friends and family. How's your friendship with Jesus? Take a few minutes to write how you would describe that relationship. Enjoy your relationship with Jesus. Ask Him how He wants to spend time with you. Maybe it's reading more scripture, telling Him about your day, or going on a walk. Pray to Jesus that His presence would be noticeable everywhere you go. Ask for Jesus to deepen your friendship with Him so that the world can see Jesus in you.

Saturday, October 17 – Read John 15:18-27 In one moment, Jesus had thousands of followers. Crowds overwhelmed towns and occupied fields to hear Him teach. Then the next moment, Jesus was left deserted with only His twelve disciples left. Some shouted, “Hosanna” and wanted to make Jesus king, while another crowd cried, “Crucify Him!” Jesus knew what was coming and warned the disciples of the harsh reality that the world wouldn't give them a pass. The world hated Jesus and the world would hate His disciples just as much. Hate has a way of making us act in ways we regret. We might explode in anger. We might stuff the feelings and ignore it. We might fall into sadness. Jesus calls the disciples and all of us to not be surprised by hate in the world. Don't take hate personally, because they hated Jesus without reason. Jesus prepares us so we won't react differently from how Jesus reacted. Jesus' message has always been about reacting with love and grace. Jesus wants all of us to know the landscape of the world will be full of hate but our strategy is still love. Instead of meeting hate with more hate or anger or bitterness we meet hate with love. Think about your typical reaction to something you don't like. Consider how Jesus reacted to His accusers. How can you change your reaction to align with Jesus? Repent of times you've acted out of hate toward others. Ask Jesus to help you not be a wall that divides others from knowing His love. Every time someone upsets you, write them an encouraging note. React with love instead of hate.

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