

LEADER OVERVIEW - DECEMBER WEEK 1

Text: John 15:1-13

Objective: For Home Group members to develop relational dependence on God through abiding. Practically, this looks like prayer, reading the Bible, obedience, and fellowship with others.

Text Overview: In John 15:1-13, Jesus describes total relational dependence on God through the allegory of the vine and the branches. Jesus is speaking with 11 of his disciples during the last supper, since Judas has already left (see John 13:30). Jesus tells his disciples they must be in total unity with him in order to bear fruit (v. 1-8). He also guides them to find unity with one another (v. 9-13). This process comes from the gardener trimming the dead limbs (*pruning/cleaning*) from the branches in order for them to bear fruit. Later in the text, he clarifies that the way to bear fruit is to follow his commandment of loving one another the way Jesus has loved us.

Text Explanation: There are three main roles in this text. The vinedresser (gardener), the vine, and the branches. These symbols break down this way: the vinedresser is God, the vine is Jesus and the branches are Christ's disciples (or, your Home Group). We have to abide in Jesus in order for the gardener to prune us so that we can bear fruit. This pruning is where God refines believers so that we look more like Jesus over time. He cuts out areas of our life that damage our relationship with Him and prevent us from bearing fruit.

Jesus tells his disciples that when they obey his commandments they will remain in his love (v. 10). Then he explicitly states his commandment to love each other as he has loved them (v. 13). Jesus loved his disciples and us by sacrificing himself so humanity could have relational dependence on God. That is the kind of love we are being pruned to producing: to love as Jesus loved.

Discussion Tips: Two of the tensions your group members may experience come in verses 6 and 10. The questions might look like, 1. "If I do not abide in Jesus, will God send me to hell?" and 2. "Is Jesus saying that our works earn us God's approval?" This semester we have covered that eternal life is more than "going to heaven when you die." Eternal life means abiding in Jesus every day, and the natural result of separation from Jesus is death (Romans 6:23). Scripture is extremely clear that faith alone saves us (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 4:2-5; 13-15, etc.). However, our faith must be genuine faith that overflows in good works. If we say we believe but have no works, we only deceive ourselves and do not truly believe (1 John 1). Abiding will not determine if we are saved, but only believing and trusting in Jesus (which is part of abiding). This takes us to question 2. As we abide in Christ, he will change us to want to do good works. Abiding and our personal heart-change go hand-in-hand. Out of joy for what Christ has done for us, we respond with good works.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - DECEMBER WEEK 1

Read John 15:1-13.

1. **What sticks out to you from this passage?**
 - Because this passage has so much to it, we would love to start the conversation off with what people notice, what does or does not make sense, what resonates with them etc. You may start with this question every week already, but we wanted an extra emphasis here.
2. **What is our role in this metaphor? What ways do we confuse our roles?**
 - We are the branches, attached to Jesus the vine. Often times, we as people may try to play the role of the vine (the savior, the rock for others) or the gardner/vinedresser (clinging to control, trying to play God in the lives of others, etc), but we need to remember we are branches and we need Jesus.
 - Our role is to produce fruit. Fruit is anything that gives God glory (v. 8). Some examples of fruit are: Love for people, patience, joy, peace, good works, praising God, people accepting Christ, etc.
3. **What does it look like to abide?**
 - Abiding means remaining close to Jesus. Two specific and essential ways to do this are in v. 7 where Jesus tells us that abiding means reading the word and prayer. The word “abiding” communicates more than just reading, but dwelling on God’s word and keeping it on our minds (cf. Colossians 3:16).
 - *Abide: To remain; to make a dwelling place, to continue to be present, to remain as one; to never become another or different*
 - There can be a lot of answers to this question. Part of the discussion is learning more and more how each individual person can abide in their daily life, moment by moment.
4. **How can we have joy, while “laying down our lives” for others? (See v. 11 and v. 13)**
 - We want group members to discuss and feel the tension in living as a Christian. Jesus says we will have joy when we lay down our lives for love.
 - Additionally, he does not call us to a joy that he did not have, or a command that he did not follow. He went to the cross to die for us and his motivation was the joy of honoring his Father and saving us (Hebrews 12:1-2).
5. **What areas are you scared God might want to prune?**
 - This question provides a space for your group to share what they are wrestling with. If you feel comfortable as a leader, share first to set the tone.
 - *Optional: If you would like, give your members a chance to journal independently for 3-5 minutes before sharing as a group.*