

RINGTONES

"ON HOLD" JOHN 15:1-17

This Week's Core Competency

Personal God – I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life. Psalm 121:1, 2

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills-

where does my help come from?

*2 My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

In John 15:1-8 Jesus repeatedly told his disciples "remain in me." In verse 4 he specifically said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you." Too bad, some Christians take his words as a threat rather than a promise. Jesus said, "Remain in me and I will remain in you," but they hear, "Continue to believe in me otherwise, I will abandon you." These are hardly the encouraging words one would expect him to deliver to his disciples on the very night he was delivered to his enemies. A closer reading, however, makes it clear that he was talking to them about their *fellowship* with him, not their *relationship* to him. "Remain close to me," better captures the nuance of his words, and "I will remain close to you." Disciples who do that are promised fruitful lives filled with the joy of their Lord.

The question is, how do disciples do that? What do they have to do to remain in him? Certainly, *his words* play a crucial part. In verse 7 Jesus told them, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you .

***You do not want me to be thinking
about what I am, but about what
You are.***

– Thomas Merton

.. " Disciples remain close to Jesus by living according to his words. Nevertheless, there's more to it than that. Remaining close to Jesus involves more than just obedience. It has an often neglected in our day mystical side. Disciples who live with Jesus on their minds, disciples who live with a sense of his presence, remain close to him.

Brother Lawrence, an obscure French monk from the 1600s, has had a profound influence on the lives of people today, people who want to "practice the presence of God." About him one author writes, "Despite Brother Lawrence's rough exterior and plain-speaking ways, others recognized the profound peace he eventually found in his life. The humble cafeteria worker was sought out for his wisdom and no-frills spirituality by all kinds of people from both inside and outside the monastery" (Robert Elmer, *Practicing God's Presence: Brother Lawrence for Today's Reader*, 10, 11). Brother Lawrence practiced the presence of God by having an ongoing conversation with him. "We can find deep joy," he said, "by simply being with the Lord" (18).

The same author goes on to explain, "When another Carmelite brother asked how he'd developed such a habit of knowing God, Brother Lawrence knew he needed to explain. He said that ever since he had arrived at the monastery, he had tried to focus all his thoughts and desires on the Lord. God was his target, his terminus.

At first, as a novice monk, he spent his private prayer hours simply fixed on God. His goal: to convince his mind of God's presence and impress it deeply on his heart. His method: dedicating his convictions and feeling to the Lord while following

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the light of faith rather than heady philosophical arguments or elaborate mediations. This short, sure exercise helped him know and love God better, and in the process, he resolved to do all he could to live in God presence and, as much as possible, to never forget his Lord.

As soon as he dedicated his mind in prayer to the highest thought of his infinite God, he reported to his job assignment in the kitchen (he was the monastery cook). Once he'd figured out all the details of his work, he spent every possible moment of downtime, as well as before and after work, in prayer.

Each time he began his work, he said to God with the trust of a son or daughter: 'O my God, I'm obeying now Your command to pay attention to what I'm doing here. Since I know You're with me, I ask You to please grant me grace to stay and continue in Your presence. Please help me. I give You the work of my hands and the fruit of all my affections.'

As Brother Lawrence continued his work, he kept up his close and easy conversation with his Maker, asking for grace along the way while making his work an offering. Each day when he finished in the kitchen, he reviewed how he had done his work. If he'd done well, he thanked the Lord. If not, he asked God's pardon and set his mind right without getting too discouraged about it. Then he slipped right back into this exercise of God's presence, as if he'd never missed a beat.

'By getting right back up after I fall,' he said, 'and by keeping my walk of faith and love fresh and alive, I've gotten to the place where it would be just as hard for me not to think of God as it was in the beginning to get used to the idea'" (35, 36).

day **1** ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

John 15:1-17

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other. (NIV (c)1984)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Bracket the metaphors "true vine" and "gardener" in v. 1.
- * Circle "fruit/full" in vv. 2-8, 16.
- * Highlight "remain" in vv. 4-10.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in vv. 2, 11.
- * Box "like" in v. 6, "as . . . so" in v. 9, "just as" in v. 10, and "as" in v. 12 indicating *comparison*.
- * Double underline "my command is this" in v. 12 and "this is my command" in v. 17.
- * Circle "love/d" in vv. 9-13, 17.
- * Draw a line from "because" to "for," and box "instead" indicating *contrast* in v. 15.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. If Jesus is "the true vine" and God is "the gardener," then what are we?
2. What is the divine gardener's primary concern?
3. Put the requisite for bearing fruit in your own words.
4. In verse 5 Jesus said, "apart from me you can do nothing." He didn't mean nothing at all did he?
5. What is the point of the *comparison* in verse 6?
6. Put what "and my words remain in you" means in your own words.
7. Identify the mark of a true disciple.
8. Jesus said, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love." Does that mean if we don't obey his commands he won't love us anymore? Explain.
9. Explain the secret to having joy in the Christian life.
10. Explain the *contrast* in verse 15.
11. **Discussion:** Prayer is mention in verse 7 and again in verse 16. Talk about the relationship of remaining in Christ to prayer.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

In John 15:1-11 Jesus uses a vine analogy to indicate that our Heavenly Father wants us to lead fruitful Christian lives and to explain that we must remain in him to do so. He begins by identifying himself as "the true vine" and his Father as "the gardener." It follows that his disciples are the branches. His Father tends the vine with loving care to make it as fruitful as possible; even so, "no branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine." Lest the disciples miss it, Jesus clarified the point of his analogy in verse 4, "Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." One commentator summarizes the importance of Jesus' analogy this way, "The allegory of the vine brings before us the importance of fruitfulness in the Christian life and the truth that this is the result, not of human achievement, but of abiding in Christ" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, NICNT, 668). "The point is clear: continuous dependence on the vine, constant reliance upon him, persistent spiritual imbibing of his life—this is the *sine qua non* of spiritual fruitfulness" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC, 516).

In verses 5-8 Jesus goes on to explain what will happen if we do not remain in him and what will happen if we do. Since apart from him we can do nothing (v. 5), if we do not remain in him, we will be unproductive—useless as far as bearing fruit is concerned—like unproductive branches that are thrown away and burned. The point of his comparison is that unproductive believers are like unproductive branches; they are useless since their purpose is bearing fruit. The point of the comparison is not that unproductive believers will be burned up like unproductive branches—that they will be thrown into hell because they did not remain in him, i.e., either they lost their salvation, or were never truly saved in the first place. If we remain in him our prayers will be answered because we will pray in accord with his words to us and we will bear much fruit showing that we are his disciples.

In verses 9-16 Jesus gives us a commentary on his analogy. On the relationship between these two sections, one author writes, "The links

between vv. 1-8 and vv. 9-16 are intricate. Both sections speak of 'remaining', the first of remaining in the vine/Jesus, the second of remaining in Jesus' love (vv. 4-7, 9-10). Both hold up fruitfulness as the disciple's goal (vv. 5, 16); both tie such fruitfulness to prayer (vv. 7-8, 16). And both sections are built around a change in salvation-historical perspective, i.e. both depend on a self-conscious change from the old covenant to the new: under the image of the vine, Israel give way to Jesus (cf. notes on v. 1), and under the impact of fresh revelation, 'servants' give way to 'friends' (v. 15). Whatever the individual points of comparison between the two sections, the imagery of the vine and the branches becomes clearer as soon as it is recognized that vv. 9-16 serves as commentary on the metaphor" (510, 11).

In verses 9-11 he exhorts us to remain in his love by obeying his commands just as he remained in his Father's love having obeyed his commands indicating again that obedience is the key to remaining in him and his love. All of what he said he said so that his joy might be in us and our joy might be complete. One author calls Christian joy a "defiant 'Nevertheless'" (Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 120) because it is grounded in the spiritual blessings that God has given us in Christ Jesus that can never be taken away or diminished by our circumstances no matter how trying.

In verses 12-17 he concludes by identifying his first and foremost command. Lest we miss the point, first he says, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Then he says last, "This is my command: Love each other." Sandwiched in between he explains the rationale for his command. He laid down his life for his friends. We are his friends. Therefore, we should lay down our lives for each other.

The Message of this Passage
Remain in Jesus and his love by remaining in his words and obeying
his commands, so you may be fruitful, your joy may be
complete, and your prayers may be answered.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“On Hold”
(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **true vine** Israel is often referred to as a vine in the OT (Ps 80:8, 9; Isa 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Eze 15; 19:10; Hos 10:1). Later the vine became a symbol for Israel and is found on coins minted by the Maccabees. Although God had planted Israel like "a choice vine of sound and reliable stock," the nation turned into "a corrupt, wild vine" (Jer 2:21) in contrast to Jesus "the true vine" (Morris, 668).
- v. 1 **gardener** The Greek word translated here is the common word for "farmer," but this word is seldom used in English in connection with raising grapes, and "viticulturist" is unfamiliar. Other possible translations include: "vinedresser" (NKJV; cf. "husbandman" KJV), "vinegrower" (NRSV), or simply "gardener" (TEV, NEB, the NET Bible).
- v. 2 **cuts off** Cf., "takes away" (ESV, NKJV); "removes" (HCSB). The verb means to "lift up" or "take away." Perhaps in this context it refers to lifting up branches so they might bear fruit. "To conserve moisture in dry land, vines were allowed to run on the ground until the blossoms began to appear. It was then necessary for the gardener to lift the vines off the ground so that the blossoms could germinate. Vines were lifted up either on sticks or on stones. The vines thus were put in a place where they could produce fruit" (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 441). "There are plays on words in the Greek that cannot easily be reproduced in English; 'he removes' ('cuts off' NIV, 'takes away' NKJV) is *airei*, and 'he prunes' is *kathairei*. Moreover, *kathairei* can also mean 'he cleanses' and is linked with 'clean' in verse 3: 'you are *kathairoi*' (F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 308).
- v. 2 **prunes** Lit., "cleanses," here in the sense of "cleanse by pruning" (cf., most English translations). However, one author writes, "The cleansing of the vine required not only the removal of sterile branches, or old growth, but also the removal of insects that would consume the vine. This had to be done tediously by hand. In the dry climate in which the vine would grow, the leaves would accumulate a thick layer of dust. This dust would weaken the vine. It was necessary for a gardener to sponge the leaves to remove the accumulate dust so that the vine could remain healthy" (Pentecost, 441).
- v. 4 **remain** Jesus was referring to remaining in *fellowship* with him rather than remaining in *relationship* with him for the consequence of not remaining in him is fruitlessness whereas fruitfulness is the mark of his disciples. "In the upper room the Lord had taught these men that obedience to His commands would bring with it the experience of His Father and Himself 'abiding' ('make our home' 14:23 NIV) in their lives. Now, on the slopes of Olivet, He changes the visual image as He communicates precisely the same truth. The relationship that these men had to Him as His disciples could be compared, Jesus said, to a vine/branch relationship. And just as in the horticulture of vineyards, where branches could be severed from their vines, so too this could transpire in the experience of His disciples as well. If that happened, fruitfulness would cease. Hence, the disciples must be careful to 'abide' in the True Vine" (Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 135).
- v. 5 **bear** "The man who so abides in Christ and has Christ abide in him keeps on bearing fruit in quantity. In isolation from Him no spiritual achievement is possible" (Morris, 670).
- v. 6 **fire** Identifying this as a reference to hell fire amounts to "an unjustified interpretive leap" (Hodges, 137). Pruned vine branches are burned because they are useless (cf. Eze 15:3-5) as is the believer who does not abide in Jesus and hence can do nothing (cf. v. 5).
- v. 11 **my joy** Does he mean "so that I may have joy in you," or "so that you may have the joy that I will give you," or "so that you might have the joy that comes from obeying my commands the same joy that I have from obeying my Father's commands"? I'm inclined to the final nuance. Verses 9-10 do not imply absolute alternatives, perfect obedience or utter apostasy. Our obedience is imperfect; our joy is relative. To the extent that we obey; to that extent we experience joy.
- v. 12 **my command** See Jn 13:34, 35. Jesus' "new command" wasn't his only command (Mt 28:20), but it was his first and foremost command.
- v. 14 **if you do** "This obedience is not what *makes* them friends; it is what *characterizes* his friends" (Carson, 522).
- v. 16 **then** The NIV's translation obscures the grammar and parallelism. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that [*hina*] you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that [*hina*] whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you" (ESV).

Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

List three things necessary for a friendship to grow? Playing and spending time together should have been on your list! That's when you really get to know someone. Read John 15:9-17. Jesus told his disciples that needed to "remain" or spend time with him so they could become even better friends. A great way for you to spend time with Jesus is to slow down long enough each day to read your Bible and pray.

Pray it!

As a parent you can teach your child to pray by using actual scriptures as a guide. Pray this scripture with them this week..

Father, help me to love others as Jesus loves me.
Jn 15:12

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Personal God – I believe God cares about everything in my life.

Memory verse – "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. " Jn 15:10

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *What was the command Jesus gave his disciples?
- *What is the greatest display of love that can be shown to a friend?
- *How can you show Jesus you are his friend?
- *Why does Jesus call his followers "friends" rather than "servants"?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

Reading the Bible is one of the best ways for kids (and adults) to learn how God really wants to know and care for them personally. The Bible is so big, it can be overwhelming to kids (and adults). Try using an age-appropriate devotional book, such as "Jesus Calling," each day to help make the Bible easier to get into. You can pick one up in the church bookstore.

Kids K through fourth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.



Family completes **Experience It** _____
 Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____
 Family participates in **Live It** _____ and **Pray It** _____
 Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Child's name _____

Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.