

# CHURCH.

# LESSON 34

<b>1</b>	PRAYER
----------	--------

**Group leader.** Pray and commit your group and this course on building Christ's Church to the Lord.

<b>2</b>	SHARING (20 minutes) <span style="float: right;"><i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> HEBREWS 4 - 7</span>
----------	--

**Take turns** and **share** (or **read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Hebrews 4 to 7).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

<b>3</b>	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <span style="float: right;"><i>[KEY VERSES IN JOHN]</i> (14) JOHN 14:6</span>
----------	--

**Review** two by two.

(14) John 14:6. I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

<b>4</b>	BIBLE STUDY (85 minutes) <span style="float: right;"><i>[THE GOSPEL OF JOHN]</i> JOHN 15:1-27</span>
----------	--

**Introduce.** Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study John 15:1-27 together. John chapters 14 to 17 consist of the discourses and prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper. In John chapter 15, *Jesus exhorts* his followers to discipleship. The characteristics of a disciple are: to continually remain in Christ, to let the Word of Christ continually remain in you, to pray, to love one another, to obey his commandments and to bear fruit in the world and to witness to the world.

**The allegory** of the Vine and its fruitful branches. Shortly before his trial and crucifixion Jesus urged his disciples to persevere in faith and to bear much fruit that lasts! "The vine" was in Israel the symbol of fruitfulness (Psalm 80:9-16; 128:3; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; Ezekiel 17:1-10; Joel 2:22; Zachariah 8:12; Malachi 3:11).

During this last Passover meal with his disciples Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and spoke clearly about the fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20). It is thus possible that Jesus gave instruction about the Vine and the branches in connection with the institution of the Lord's Supper. Jesus wanted the disciples to see beyond the symbols used in the Lord's Supper: the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine, and see the reality: remaining in Jesus Christ himself and being a fruit bearing branch.

## STEP 1. READ.

## GOD'S WORD

**Read.** LET US READ John 15:1-27 together.

Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.

## STEP 2. DISCOVER.

## OBSERVATIONS

**Consider.** WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU?

Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART?

**Record.** Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook.

**Share.** (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share).

Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered.

(Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things)

15:4

### Discovery 1. The three important duties of every Christian.

Jesus uses three commands: "Remain in me" and "Love each other" and "You also must testify". These three commands divide chapter 15 into three parts and teaches the three most important things a believer can do:

- to maintain a personal relationship with Christ
- to walk in love with one another
- to be Christ's witnesses in the world.

(1) John 15:1-11. Remain in Christ.

Verse 4 says, “Remain in Christ” and verse 9 says, “Remain in Christ’s love”. But verse 5 says, “Christ remains in us” and verse 7 says, “Christ’s word remains in us”. Christ makes it possible for me to remain in him and his love, because he remains in me and his word remains in me! But although Christ is *first* to speak his word to me and first to show his love to me, I have the responsibility to make an effort to maintain a personal relationship with Christ and to exert myself in respect to Christ’s Word and Christ’s love.

(2) John 15:12-17. Love each other.

Verse 13 says that “to love each other” is to live every day for other people. It is to spend my time, efforts and possessions on others so that they may experience the love of Christ through me. These two commands are inseparable. Verse 10 says that if I obey Christ’s commands, then I will remain in his love. And verse 14 says that if I do what Christ commands, then I am truly his friend. The great lesson I learn from this passage is that my relationship to Christ cannot be separated from my relationship to my brothers and sisters. Loving Christ means loving my brothers and sisters. And not loving my brothers and sisters means not loving Christ. “Remaining in Christ’s love” and “loving each other” are inseparable!

(3) John 15:18-27. Testify about Christ.

Jesus is literally commanding his disciples to continually testify about him to the people of the world. The disciples could do it, because they were with Christ during his earthly sojourn and because the Holy Spirit would dwell in them. Likewise, the Holy Spirit will use Christians as a means to testify about who Christ is, what he has done and how people can have a personal relationship with him and be saved.

---

15:5

*Discovery 2. The realisation that apart from Jesus Christ a Christian can do nothing.*

It says, “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” I want to be a person who bears much fruit for God. This verse tells me that this will only be possible when I remain in Jesus Christ and he remains in me. As a matter of fact, without Jesus Christ, I can do nothing that will have everlasting significance.

Sometimes this truth scares me, because I am a Christian who is very active. Now I am asking myself, will all my activities bear fruit for God in eternity? I can only continue to believe that my activities will bear fruit for God in eternity, as long as I remain in Christ and he remains in me. I do not want to discover one day that I have been very active for God, yet I did not bear any fruit for God.

**STEP 3. QUESTION.**

**EXPLANATIONS**

**Consider.** WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in John 15:1-27 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

**Record.** Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

**Share.** (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

**Discuss.** (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

15:1

*Question 1. What is John 15:1-17? Is it a straightforward teaching? Is it a parable? Or is it an allegory?*

**Notes.**

A teaching. An example of a straightforward teaching in the Bible is John 14:15-27. An example of a parable in the Bible is Luke 10:30-35. Examples of allegories in the Bible are John 10:1-16 and John 15:1-17.

A parable has only one main message. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the question is not “Who is my neighbour?”, but “To whom am I a neighbour?” The main message is: “You are a neighbour to the one you show mercy.”

An allegory is *an extended comparison* and has several different points of comparison. For example, in this allegory “the gardener” represents God the Father, “the vine” represents Jesus Christ, “the branches that have a living connection to Christ and therefore bear fruit” represent genuine Christians. “The branches that have no living connection to Christ and therefore bear no fruit” represent nominal Christians or non-believers. Genuine believers always bear fruit. But non-believers or nominal Christians never bear fruit, even though they may be closely associated with Jesus Christ, for example by being a member of a church denomination. Because “the vine” and “the branches” represent people, “the fruit” first of all represents people who are born-again, are mature and functioning Christians and have influence in other people.

The allegory does not say that Jesus is actually a vine with branches and grapes on it. It implies that the relationship between Jesus and the people can be compared to a vine with branches and fruit. We should not attempt to give every symbol within the allegory a specific meaning.

---

15:2 Questions about fruit.

Question 2. How do we explain the seemingly unmerciful cutting of the gardener?

**Notes.** The gardener represents God the Father. In verse 2 he prunes the branches (the believers). He cuts away the old nature and bad habits, so that the believers will bear more fruit. The pruning represents “sanctification” now on earth.

But in verse 6 he cuts away the branches that have never born fruit (the unbelievers, the nominal Christians) and throws them into the fire to be burned. The cutting off in verse 6 represents the final judgement at the second coming of Christ (cf. Matthew 3:10,12).

---

15:2

Question 3. What is the nature of the “fruit” that we Christians should bear?

**Notes.** The word “fruit” in the Bible has different meanings.

- In Colossians 1:6 the fruit produced by those who preach the gospel represents new Christian converts.
  - In John 15:16 “the lasting fruit” produced by those who help them to grow to mature and functioning Christians and not to backslide into their old ways of life, represents new Christian disciples.
  - In Luke 3:8 “the fruit in keeping with repentance” represents good works, the fruit of genuine repentance.
  - In Galatians 5:22-23 “the fruit of the Spirit” represents Christian character which the Holy Spirit produces in the Christian.
- 

15:4

Question 4. Who are the people who bear fruit?

**Notes.** John 15:4 says, “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.” The people who bear fruit are those who come close to Jesus Christ, accept him into their hearts and lives and continue to relate with him every day. Because Christ remains in them, they are watchful, diligent and persevere to bear fruit.

---

15:5

Question 5. What should be the degree of fruitfulness?

**Notes.**

Christians are expected to bear *much fruit* (15:5,8). That is why God prunes them (John 15:2). The pruning represents rebuking, correcting, disciplining and shaping through hardships. Christians are also expected to bear *lasting fruit* (John 15:16). That is why they help young Christians to become disciples (mature, functioning and persevering followers) of Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). They want to help them not to backslide into their old life.

Some Christians bear 100 fold fruit, others 60 fold fruit and others 30 fold fruit (Matthew 13:23). The reasons why some Christians bear more fruit than other Christians can be the following:

- Some Christians are more penitent, trustful, loyal, diligent, courageous, and meek in the way they respond to the Word of God.
  - Other Christians are more productive in their work of evangelism and disciple making than others.
  - Or God has given them different personalities, different spiritual gifts and different circumstances in life. Of this God alone is the Giver and Judge.
- 

15:6

Question 6. Who are the people who do not bear fruit?

**Notes.** John 15:1-17 contains an allegory, which is an extended comparison. It does not say that Jesus is actually a vine with branches and grapes on it. It implies that the relationship between Jesus and people at any moment of their life can be compared to a vine and its branches. However, we should not attempt to explain every characteristic of the symbol. The branches that bear fruit represent true believers.

However, the branches that do not bear fruit do NOT represent people who were first born-again Christians and afterwards fell away from the Christian faith. The allegory clearly teaches that the branches, which are cut off and thrown into the fire, represent people who never once bore fruit, not even when they were in a close relationship to Christ. They were never genuine (born-again) Christians and their so-called “in-Christ-relationship”, although close, was merely an outward relationship. The conclusion is that this allegory does NOT teach that born-again Christians could again lose their salvation.

The allegory teaches that nominal Christians could live together with genuine Christians in the same church (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43), but while the genuine Christians always bear fruit, the nominal Christians remain fruitless. The nominal Christians come close to Christ, but do not accept him! They only have an outward, traditional or cultural relationship with Christ. They may participate in the Christian religion and activities, but because Christ does not live in them, they bear no fruit that has eternal significance.

Jesus Christ stresses the responsibility of each person who is brought into close contact with Christ: If he rejects the Word of God and the light he received, there will come a time when God will stop all further work with him!

- The Holy Spirit will no more plead with him (Genesis 6:3)
- His conscience will no longer warn him (Romans 2;15; 1 Timothy 1:19-20)
- His heart will become hardened (Matthew 13:14-15)
- He continues to bear only thorns and thistles (Hebrews 4:7-8)
- Finally, he will be cast into hell (Matthew 3:10,12).

---

15:7            Questions about remaining in Christ.

Question 7. What does it mean to remain in Christ?

**Notes.** Jesus says, “Remain in me” (John 15:5) and “If my words remain in you...” (John 15:7). To remain in Christ is here connected to the words of Christ remaining in the Christian. Jesus also says, “Remain in my love, ... obey my commands” (John 15:9-10). To remain in Christ is here connected to the Christian obeying the words of Christ.

Although Christ is the first to speak his words to each Christian and he is the first to love the Christian, the Christian has the responsibility to respond to his love and his words. He should make an effort to maintain a personal relationship with Christ and to continually obey Christ’s Word. The Christian must exert himself to love Christ with all his heart, mind and energy and the Christian must exert himself to do what Christ teaches. Whenever, a person thinks that he is a Christian, but he does not love Christ or obey his words, then he is in danger of becoming like a dry branch that will be rejected and cast into the fire.

---

15:3            Questions about the Word.

Question 8. What is the work of the Word of Christ in the Christian?

**Notes.** The word of Christ cleanses the Christian. According to John 15:3, the word of Jesus Christ *cleanses* believers from their sins. That means that Christians are justified (completely forgiven) when they in accordance with the Bible believe in Jesus Christ and his work of salvation the very first time.

---

15:7

Question 9. What is the responsibility of the Christian towards the Word of Christ?

**Notes.** The responsibility of the Christians is to let the words of Christ influence and control his thoughts and convictions, his motives and desires, his attitudes and feelings and his speaking and behaviour.

- The Christian has the responsibility to do something with the Bible (that is, hear, read, study, meditate, memorise, apply and pass on/teach)(John 8:31-32)
- The Christians has the responsibility to let the Bible do something with him, change things in his life (that is, his thoughts, convictions, motives, desires, words, deeds/behaviour) (John 15:7)

---

15:7            Questions about prayer.

Question 10. What relationship exists between prayer and the Word of Christ?

**Notes.** In John 15:7 we read, “If my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” When a Christian lets Christ’s words influence and control his mind, convictions, motives and deeds, then his prayers will be effective. Because he will not ask for anything against the words of Christ, he will experience many answers to his prayers. This is a great promise about prayer!

---

15:16

Question 11. What relationship exists between prayer and bearing fruit?

**Notes.** In John 15:16 we read, “I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” A true Christian will pray for fruit and he will bear fruit in answer to prayer. When Christ sends Christians to go and bear lasting fruit, we Christians realise that we can only do that in the power, wisdom and love of Christ. Therefore we Christians pray for courage and obedience to go to people and we pray for his power, wisdom and love to help these people to become lasting fruit. And again Christ gives a wonderful promise about prayer, that when he prays in the Name of Christ for fruit that remains, God will give what he asked for!

15:9,12 Questions about fellowship.

Question 12. How can Christians love one another?

**Notes.** John 15:1-11 says, “Remain in Christ and his love!” And verse 12-17 says, “Love each other!” Therefore it is plain that Christians can only love one another when they remain in Christ and in Christ’s love. Only when Christians exert themselves to have a personal relationship with Christ and make a continual effort to obey Christ’s teachings, then Christ will give them the ability to love each other! In Mark 12:30 Christ gives Christians the command to love God and to love their neighbour as themselves. But in Romans 5:5 God pours out his love into the hearts of Christians through the Holy Spirit. When God gives Christians a command, he always gives them the ability to obey that command! He commands love and he gives love!

---

15:13

Question 13. What is the meaning of “greater love” in verse 13?

**Notes.** In John 15:12-13 we read, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” The greatest kind of love is the love that lays down its life for its friends. This greater love has two aspects: his death as an expiation for sin is unique and cannot be emulated, but his death as an example of self-sacrifice can be emulated.

Christ died on the cross for us as an atonement sacrifice for sin. He made expiation for our sins, that is, he paid the penalty for our sins and appeased God’s righteous anger against our sins. This “greater love” no one can emulate. We cannot die for the sins of others.

But at the same time this love was an unselfish love, it was a self-sacrificing love, it was a love that benefitted us and made us to become the best we could ever become! This “greater love” can be emulated. Jesus Christ commands us Christians to love one another with this greater love. Christians should love one another with unselfish love, with self-sacrificing love and with love that will help the others become their very best for God and mankind.

---

15:14 Question about obedience.

Question 14. What relationship exists between obedience and love?

**Notes.** The practical way to remain in Christ, in Christ’s love and in Christ’s friendship is to obey his words! But our obedience did not come first. “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). Christ loved us first and died for us. Then Christ sent someone to preach the gospel to us. When we believed, Christ poured his Holy Spirit and his love out into our hearts (Romans 5:5). With Christ’s love in our hearts, we can and do obey Christ’s words.

But by obeying his words, he creates more love towards him in our hearts (John 14:21,23) and in this way another and even better love cycle begins! Thus, Christ’s love for us creates love in our hearts for him. Our love for him leads to obedience to him. Our obedience to him causes Christ to create more love in our hearts. Our greater love for him leads to greater obedience to him. And so on.

---

15:18 Questions about the world.

Question 15. Who is “the world”?

**Notes.** See the explanation of the word “the world” in John 1:10. “The world” is here the realm of evil, the society of wicked people and (political, military, social, judicial, religious) institutions, who oppose Jesus Christ and his kingdom. In the early days of the apostles this evil “world” was represented by those Jews and their religious and political leaders who defied God, who rejected Christ as the Messiah and who persecuted the Christian Church. That is why Jesus says that this evil “world” would put Christians out of their synagogues (literally: places of gathering together) and even kill them (John 16:2). But soon the “world” would consist of people from all nations on earth who reject Jesus Christ and persecute Christians.

---

15:18

Question 16. Why does the world have such hatred against the Christians?

**Notes.** The reason the world hates Christians is because Christians are “in the world” (John 17:11) but no longer “of the world” (John 17:14). The world hates Christians because it hates Jesus Christ! Christ chose Christians out of the world by drawing them away from the world and into his kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Christians no longer want to do evil, no longer condone evil and no longer allow evil to go on unchecked. Christians repent from their own evil, preach against evil, expose evil and fight against evil (injustice). And the evil world hates this opposition against its evil cause. The world is guilty of their sin, because Christ’s words and works clearly revealed the only true God, the God of the Bible, as well as his commandments (John 15:22). The people of the see the light and world hear the truth, yet reject it and harden their heart. That is why its sin and hatred is without excuse! “We know that whatever the law says, it says to

those under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God” (Romans 3:19).

**STEP 4. APPLY.**

**APPLICATIONS**

**Consider.** WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

**Share and record.** Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from John 15:1-27.

**Consider.** WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

**Record.** Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

**1. Examples of possible applications from John 15:1-27.**

15:2. Regard God’s rebukes and corrections as a way to sanctify you and cause you to bear more fruit.

15:5. Maintain a personal and intimate relationship with Christ every day. He will cause you to bear much fruit.

15:7. Allow the words of Christ to influence your thoughts and behaviour, attitudes and motives, and to change you.

15:9-10. Genuine love for Christ will cause you to obey Christ’s teachings and commands. And obedience to Christ leads to greater love for Christ. Thus, let your love grow by obeying Christ more diligently.

15:13. Think how you could lay down your life every day for Christ and his cause on earth.

15:16. Consider that Christ has chosen you and has appointed you to go and bear lasting fruit.

15:21-23. Do not be surprised that the world hates you, because it also hates God and Christ and the light and the truth.

**2. Examples of personal applications from John 15:1-27.**

I am asking God for the grace to develop my personal relationship with him more and more. I want to spend enough time every day to read his words and meditate about how I can obey them. I believe that obeying Christ’s words will lead to greater love for Christ and to greater fruitfulness.

I am asking God for the grace to bear more fruit and to bear lasting fruit. Christ has saved me and made me a living green branch in his vine. His life flows into me through the Holy Spirit and this life can cause me to bear fruit. I desire to bear much fruit. I desire to bear lasting fruit. Therefore I will continue to develop my personal relationship with Christ through obedience to his word, prayer and loving his other children.

**STEP 5. PRAY.**

**RESPONSE**

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in John 15:1-27.

(Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

**5**

PRAYER (8 minutes)

*[INTERCESSION]*  
PRAY FOR OTHERS

**Continue to pray** in groups of two’s or three’s. Pray with one another for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

**6**

PREPARATION (2 minutes)

*[ASSIGNMENT]*  
FOR NEXT LESSON

**(Group leader.** Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples and build Christ’s Church.
2. **Preach, teach or study** the Bible study of John 15 together with another person or group of people.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of Hebrews 8 – 10 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (15) John 15:5. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
6. **Update your notebook** on building Christ’s Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your Bible study notes and this preparation.