

DISCIPLESHIP. LESSON 12

1	PRAYER
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Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Dedicate this lesson about disciple making to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] JOHN 11:38 – 14:31
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Take turns and *share* (or *read* from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (John 11:38 – 14:31).

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

3	MEMORISATION (20 minutes) [CHRISTIAN ASSURANCES] REVIEW OF SERIES A
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A. METHOD OF REVIEWING MEMORISED BIBLE VERSES

Reviewing previously memorised Bible verses has the following parts:

1. **Review the new memorised Bible verses.**

Review means to repeat the last 5 Bible verses you have memorised once every day. Repetition is the best method to remember Bible verses and to quote them accurately. Therefore, review the last 5 Bible verses you have memorised at a minimum of once a day for the duration of 5 weeks. Thus, you review every new Bible verse about 35 times before it comes into the “back-review” system.

2. **Review the old memorised Bible verses.**

“Back-review” means to review all your previously memorised Bible verses once every 3 weeks. Back-review is the best method to remember all the Bible verses you have previously memorised. Therefore, for every 100 previously memorised Bible verses, back-review 5 of them every day. Thus you back-review all these previously memorised Bible verses once every 3 weeks.

3. **Keep cardholder at hand.**

Every day place the last 5 memorise Bible verses and 5 out of every 100 previously memorised Bible verses in your memorisation cardholder and keep it all day at hand. Use travelling time and spare moments during the day for review, meditation and prayer.

4. **Check accuracy.**

Check one another to see whether you still know the Bible verses that you have memorised accurately. During every group meeting check two by two one another’s last memorised Bible verse. Once in a while check two by two one series of 5 Bible verses that you have previously memorised. Check one another to see whether you still know the topic or title, the Bible reference as well as the whole Bible verse *without one mistake*. As a cue, sometimes give the topic or title, sometimes the Bible reference and at other times only the first few words of the Bible verse.

B. REVIEW TWO BY TWO SERIES A: “CHRISTIAN ASSURANCES”

1. Assurance of salvation: John 10:28. “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

2. Assurance of answered prayer: John 16:24. “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

3. Assurance of victory: 1 Corinthians 10:13. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

4. Assurance of forgiveness: 1 John 1:9. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

5. Assurance of Gods guidance: Proverbs 3:5-6. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Make use of the five steps method of Bible study to study John 15:1-17 together.

STEP 1. READ.
GOD'S WORD

Read. LET US READ John 15:1-17 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.

(The following are examples of people sharing what they have discovered. Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things, not necessarily these things)

15:5
Discovery 1. The importance of remaining in Christ.

“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.

15:8
Discovery 2. The importance of glorifying God.

“This is to my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples”. I want to glorify God in my life. The way to glorify God is to bear much fruit. However, the way to bear much fruit is that I remain in Christ and that he remains in me. It is clear to me that the highest goal of a Christian is *to glorify God*. Therefore, two things are indispensable in the Christian’s life: his continuing relationship with Jesus Christ and his fruitfulness.

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 15:1-17 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.)

15:1-17
Question 1. Which genre is this Bible passage? A straightforward teaching, a parable or an allegory?

Notes. 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. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. A parable has only one main message. For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan the main message is: “You are a neighbour to the one you show mercy.”

Examples of allegories in the Bible are John 10:1-16 and John 15:1-17. An allegory is an extended comparison and has several different points of comparison. For example, in the allegory of the vine and the branches “the gardener” represents God the Father, “the vine” represents Jesus Christ, “the branches that bear fruit” represent genuine Christians and “the branches that never bore fruit” represent nominal Christians or non-believers. Because “the vine” and “the branches” represent people, “the fruit” first of all represents 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 people can be compared to a vine and its branches. We should not attempt to explain every characteristic of the symbol (the allegory).

15:2

Question 2. What is the nature of the “fruit” that we Christians should bear?

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

- In Matthew 21:43 “the fruit of the kingdom” (the special standing and privileges of God’s Old Testament people) is given to a nation producing its fruit (that lives according to its position and privileges)
- In Luke 3:8-14 the fruit is “good works” that are in keeping with repentance (cf. Ephesians 2:10).
- In Colossians 1:6 the fruit produced by those who preach the gospel is “new Christian believers”.
- In John 15:16 the lasting fruit is “mature Christian believers (disciples)”. New Christians, who have grown to maturity and do not backslide into their old ways of life, are called “lasting fruit”.
- In Galatians 5:22-23 “the fruit of the Spirit” is the different aspects of “Christian character”.
- In Hebrews 12:11 “discipline produces the peaceful fruit of righteousness”
- In James 3:17-18 the good fruit is produced by (is the result of) “the wisdom that comes from heaven”.

Thus, the fruit that Christ expects Christians to bear is the fruit of evangelism (new Christian believers); the fruit of disciple making (mature Christian believers); the fruit of good works (Christian deeds) and the fruit of the Spirit (Christian character).

15:2

Question 3. What does pruning signify?

Notes. While God will cut away the dead and fruitless branches (the unbelievers, non-Christians and nominal Christians, cf. Matthew 13:41) in the final judgement, he will bring the living and fruit bearing branches (the believers) into the final phase of his kingdom (Matthew 13:38,43).

Before the last judgement day he prunes Christians. “Pruning” signifies rebuke and discipline, hardships and opposition in life. It signifies that believers are trained by these difficulties in order to change and bear even more fruit.

15:3

Question 4. Which “word” cleansed the disciples?

Notes. The word that “cleansed” the disciples is the word of the gospel that led to their rebirth and justification (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). Already now the disciples are genuine branches of the vine, that is, genuine children of God. Now Christ exhorts them to bear much fruit and fruit that remains. Of course, the word consisting of Christian teaching continues to lead them to sanctification and transformation (Ephesians 5:26).

15:4-5

Question 5. Who are the people who bear fruit?

Notes. In verse 4 we read, “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 who continue to relate to Christ every day. Because Christ remains in them, they are watchful, diligent and persevere to bear fruit.

15:6

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

Notes. This allegory does not describe the growth process of a vine that once in the past had a living green branch with fruit that later became a dead, dry and fruitless branch that is cut off. The allegory rather describes one picture of a vine with two kinds of branches: “living branches that bear fruit” and “dead branches that bear no fruit”. The allegory does not describe the history of the dead dry branch! One must not add one’s own thoughts and questions to the picture of Jesus.

“The branches that bear fruit” represent true believers. However, “the branches that do not bear fruit” do not represent people who were first believers and afterwards fell away from the faith! The allegory clearly teaches that the branches that are cut off and thrown into the fire represent people who are not alive and who never once bore fruit. They were never inwardly bound to Jesus Christ and never bore fruit, not even when they were in a close relationship to Jesus Christ (for example as a member of a church)! Maybe they identified themselves with Christians, were baptised with water and attended church meetings. There they heard the preaching, but bore no fruit! Although they were close to Jesus Christ in the church, they were “never in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ was never in them”! They have never been genuine Christians (sincere believers)! Their relationship to Jesus Christ was close, but purely outward. Their relationship was never a born-again relationship (John 3:3-8)! The allegory of the vine and the branches does not teach that a born-again Christian can lose his salvation! Such a notion is contradictory to the very clear teaching of Jesus Christ in John 5:24 and John 10:28 that a born-again Christian has eternal life, will never perish and no one will snatch them out of the hand of Christ! The Bible does not contain contradictory teachings!

The allegory rather teaches that, while nominal-Christians will remain fruitless, born-again Christians will bear much fruit! The people who do not bear fruit are those who come in close contact with Jesus Christ, but do not accept him. They only have an outward or formal relationship with Jesus Christ. They may even participate in a Christian congregation and in Christian activities, but because Jesus Christ does not live in them, they cannot bear any fruit that has significance for eternity. Jesus Christ stresses the responsibility of each person that is brought into close contact with him through the preaching of the gospel: if he disobeys the Word of God and rejects the light he received (John 1:9,11), there will come a time when God will stop all further work with him. “The Holy Spirit will no more contend with him” (Genesis 6:3) or “the Holy Spirit will no more try to convince him” (John 16:9), his conscience will no more warn him (Romans 2:15) and his heart will become hardened. He does not repent. Finally, he will be rejected and cast into hell (cf. Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:11-15; Hebrews 3:7-11; Hebrews 6:4-8). It is evident that such a person was never born-again!

Before the second coming of Christ, the present Christian Community (the Church), as a part of the kingdom of God in its present form, is a mixed community consisting of true Christians and nominal Christians (cultural Christians) (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43). These nominal Christians often look very much like real Christians, but in their hearts and lives they are not born-again. For example, there are nominal believers that speak and act as if they are real believers (Matthew 7:21-22). They are weeds that look like wheat (Matthew 13:24-30,47). They are dry and fruitless branches that look as if they belong to the Vine (John 15:1-6). They are members of the flock that arise in order to distort the truth and draw disciples away after them (Acts 20:29-31). They are false apostles that possess a different spirit and preach a different Jesus and a different gospel that is not found in the Bible (2 Corinthians 11:4,13-15). They are false brothers that infiltrate the church in order to distort the truth (Galatians 1:6-9; Galatians 2:4-5). They have never entered the kingdom of God. When the door closes, they are still standing outside (Matthew 25:11-12).

They are people that may have been enlightened by the Christian message (John 1:9), or may have been baptised, may have participated in the Lord’s Supper, may have enjoyed the preaching of God’s Word, may have seen God’s powerful deeds in their midst (in short: may have “had a share in what the Holy Spirit was doing” in the congregation) and yet fall away afterwards. They insult the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29) by hardening their hearts when they hear his voice (Hebrews 3:7-8) and by deliberately keeping on sinning after they have received the knowledge of the truth (Hebrews 10:26). They crucify Jesus all over again and subject him to public shame by their unbelief, disobedience and godless behaviour (Hebrews 4:2,6). When their lives continue to produce worthless thorns and thistles that are in danger of being cursed, they show what they always have been: not genuine living branches on the Vine, but dead and dry branches that are worthless and in danger of being cursed. In the end they will be burned (Hebrews 6:4-8). Only when such people are genuinely born-again, will God forgive them completely (Hebrews 8:10-12) and will they bear fruit.

15:5,7

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

Notes. In verse 7 we read, “Remain in me and my words remain in you...” To remain in Christ is connected to Christ’s words remaining in the Christian. And in verse 9-10 we read, “Remain in my love, ... obey my commands”. To remain in Christ is 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 a responsibility to respond to Christ’s love and words. He should make an effort to maintain a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to continually obey the words of Jesus Christ. The Christian must exert himself to love Jesus Christ with all his heart, mind and energy and the Christian must exert himself to do what Jesus Christ teaches. Whenever, a person thinks that he is a Christian, but he does not love Jesus 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.

15:7

Question 8. What is the difference between believers remaining in Christ’s words and Christ’s words remaining in the believers?

Notes. John 8:31-32 teaches that true disciples of Jesus Christ do something with the Bible. These disciples of Jesus remain in the words (teachings) of Jesus Christ. This means that the believers have the responsibility to hear, read, study, meditate, memorise, apply (obey) and pass on the words of Jesus in the Bible.

John 15:7 teaches that the words of the Bible do something with true disciples. The words of Jesus remain in true disciples. This means that the believers have the responsibility to let the words of Jesus Christ influence and control their thoughts and convictions, their motives and desires, their attitudes and feelings and their speaking and behaviour. In short, the words of Jesus in the Bible must change (transform) them!

15:7

Question 9. What relationship exists between prayer and the word?

Notes. In verse 7 we read, “If my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you”. When a Christian lets the words of Jesus Christ influence and control his life, then his prayers will be effective. Because he will not ask for anything against the words of Jesus Christ, he will experience many answers to his prayers (1 John 5:14). This is a great promise!

15:8

Question 10. What should be the degree of fruitfulness?

Notes. According to verses 5 and 8, Christians are expected to bear “much fruit”. They will bear much when they remain in Christ and Christ in them. That is the result when God prunes them, that is, when God rebukes them, corrects them and disciplines them through hardships (John 15:2). That is also the result when Christ sends them out to bear lasting fruit (John 15:16). That is why God and other Christians keep on caring for the new believers. They do not want them to backslide into unbelief. According to the parable of the sower (farmer) in Matthew 13, some Christians bear “100 fold fruit, others 60 fold fruit and others 30 fold fruit”.

The reasons why some Christians bear more fruit than other Christians can be the following:

- They are more penitent, trustful, loyal, diligent, courageous, meek, etc. in the way they respond to the word of God themselves.
 - They are more productive in their work of evangelism and disciple making than others.
 - They have been given different personalities, different spiritual gifts and different circumstances in life, of which God is the only Giver and the only Judge.
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15:9-12

Question 11. How can Christians love one another?

Notes. Verse 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 Jesus Christ and in Christ’s love. Only when Christians exert themselves to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and make a continual effort to obey Christ’s teachings, then Jesus Christ will give them the ability to love each other! In Mark 12:30-31 Jesus 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 also gives them the ability to obey that command! God commands love, but he also gives love!

15:10,14

Question 12. What relationship exists between obedience and love?

Notes. The practical way to remain in Jesus Christ, in Christ’s love and in Christ’s friendship is to obey his words! But we Christians must realise that our love did not come first. Jesus Christ loved us first and became obedient to God’s plan to save believers by dying in their place. After that Jesus Christ sent someone to preach the gospel to us. When we believed, Jesus Christ poured his Holy Spirit and his love out into our hearts. With Christ’s love in our hearts, we WANT to obey Christ’s words, we CAN obey Christ’s words and we WILL obey Christ’s words!

By obeying Christ’s words, Jesus Christ creates more love towards him in our hearts and in this way another and even better love cycle begins! Thus, Christ’s love creates love in our hearts. Our love leads to obedience. Our obedience causes Jesus Christ to create more love in our hearts. Our greater love leads to greater obedience. And so on.

15:13

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

Notes. In verse 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. Jesus Christ loved us with this greatest love. He died on the cross for us. His love was an unselfish love. It was a self-sacrificing love. It was a love that saved us. It is the love that makes us become the best we can ever become! This is the greater love.

And now 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 other people become their very best for God and mankind. Of course, we cannot die on the cross for others. But we can live our lives for others in an unselfish and self-sacrificial way. This is the greater love!

15:16

Question 14. What relationship exists between prayer and bearing fruit?

Notes. In verse 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

Jesus 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 Jesus 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. Jesus Christ promises that because they pray and work for lasting fruit, he will answer their prayers!

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 15:1-17.

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 15:1-17.

- 15:1. Realise that there is no other Saviour than Jesus Christ. He only is the true vine.
- 15:2. Allow the gardener, God the Father, to continually prune my life so that I may be able to bear genuine fruit, much fruit and lasting fruit.
- 15:3. Believe in the gospel and be justified by faith. To believe in more and more words of the Bible, so that more and more areas of my life may become righteous and holy.
- 15:4-5. Be deeply convinced that only when I remain in a continual and living relationship with Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ remains in me, I can bear much and lasting fruit.
- 15:6. Help people that come to church to really accept Jesus Christ into their hearts and lives (2 Corinthians 13:5).
- 15:7. Allow the words of the Bible to influence all the areas of my life, change me and control me.
- 15:7. Realise that two important conditions for God to answer prayers are to have a living relationship with Jesus Christ and to allow the words of the Bible to control my life.
- 15:8. Realise that the characteristic of a disciple is to bear fruit. To be committed to bear much fruit for Jesus Christ.
- 15:9-10. Continually remain in a relationship of love with Jesus Christ by obeying his words (John 14:21,23).
- 15:11. Christian joy is not the result of the success and happiness in the world, but the result of a living relationship with Jesus Christ, obedience to the words of the Bible and answered prayers.
- 15:13. Exercise the greater love, which is to lay down my living life for my friends.
- 15:14. Be a friend of Jesus Christ by obeying his words (James 4:4).
- 15:15. Share the things that I learn from Jesus Christ with my friends.
- 15:16. Take the initiative and go to other people and to other nations and make them disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).
- 15:16. Believe that when I am involved in the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) that Christ will answer many of my prayers!

2. Examples of personal applications from John 15:1-17.

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. Jesus 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 Jesus 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 15:1-17.

(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 for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

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

1. Commitment. Make a commitment to one of the possible applications.
2. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter from **John 15:1 – 18:27** each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
3. Memorisation. **Review the series A: “Assurances”.** (1) Assurance of salvation. John 10:28, (2) Assurance of answered prayer. John 16:24, (3) Assurance of victory. 1 Corinthians 10:13, (4) Assurance of forgiveness. 1 John 1:9, (5) Assurance of God’s guidance. Proverbs 3:5-6. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
Make it your habit to daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
4. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
5. Update your notebook on making disciples. Include the notes on your personal time with God, memorisation notes, Bible study notes and this preparation.