

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church. Two teachers will do Bible study together from John chapter 15. We will use “the five steps” method of Bible study. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. You may join our Bible study every week by preparing for the next Bible study. You may also gather a few people around you and use this method of studying the Bible together. Doing Bible study together with a few other Christians is one of the best ways to grow to maturity as a Christian.

(S)      **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read John chapter 15 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read John chapter 15 for yourself.

(T)      **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in John chapter 15. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S)      An important truth for me is in John 15:4, 12 and 27 about the three important duties of every Christian. Jesus uses three commands: “Remain in me” and “Love each other” and “You also must testify”. It seems to me that chapter 15 may be divided into three parts: Part one consists of verse 1-11, in which Jesus commands his disciples “to remain in him”. Part two consists of verse 12-17, in which Jesus commands them “to love each other”. Part three consists of verse 18-27, in which Jesus commands them “to testify about him”. The three most important things Christians must do are these three commands: to maintain a personal relationship with Christ, to walk in love with one another and to be Christ’s witnesses in the world.

First. What does it mean “to 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.

Second. What does it mean “to love each other”?

Verse 13 says that to love each other is to lay down my living life for others. 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!

Third. What does it mean “to 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.

(T)      An important truth for me is in John 15:5 about realising that apart from Jesus Christ I 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.

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in John chapter 15 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

**1<sup>st</sup> Question.** What is the nature of the fruit that we Christians should bear?

(T) The word *fruit* in the Bible has different meanings. In Colossians 1:6 the fruit produced by those who preach the gospel is *new Christian converts*. In Luke 3:8-14 the fruit produced by new Christians are *transformed deeds and a change of life-style*. In Galatians 5:22-23 the fruit of the Spirit is *Christian character*. And in John 15:16 the lasting fruit produced by those who help new Christians to grow to maturity in Christ and not to backslide into their old ways of life, are *disciples or mature Christians*. Thus, the fruit which Christ expects Christians to bear are first, Christian converts, the fruit of evangelism; second, Christian deeds, the fruit of conversion; third, Christian character, the fruit of the Spirit living in Christians and fourth, mature Christians, the fruit of making disciples.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Question.** Who are the people who bear fruit?

(S) In John 15:4 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 continue to relate with him every day. Because Christ remains in them, they are watchful, diligent and persevere to bear fruit.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Question.** Who are the people who do not bear fruit?

(T) 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 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 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 *never* once bore fruit, not even when they were in a close relationship to Christ. They were never true believers 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 believers could again lose their salvation. It teaches that nominal-Christians will remain fruitless and born-again Christians will bear much fruit. Therefore, the people who do not bear fruit are those who come in close contact with Christ, but do not accept him. They only have an outward relationship with Christ. They may even participate in a Christian church and in Christian activities, but because Christ does not live in them, they cannot bear any fruit that has significance for eternity. 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, his conscience will no more warn him and his heart will become hardened. Finally, he will be rejected and cast into hell.

**4<sup>th</sup> Question.** What should be the degree of fruitfulness?

(S) John 15:5 and 8 teaches that Christians are expected to bear *much fruit*. John 15:2 says that God prunes Christians so that they will bear more fruit. When God prunes Christians, he *rebukes* them, *corrects* them and *disciplines* them through hardships.

John 15:16 teaches that Christians are expected to bear *lasting fruit*. That is why God and other Christians keep on caring for the new Christian believers. They do not want them to backslide into unbelief, but help them to grow to maturity and also bear fruit.

The parable of the sower in Matthew chapter 13 teaches that 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.

One. Some Christians are more penitent, trustful, loyal, diligent, courageous and meek in the way they respond to the word of God than others.

Two. Some Christians are more productive in their work of evangelism and making disciples than others.

Three. Other Christians have been given different personalities, different spiritual gifts and different circumstances in life, of which God is the only Giver and the only Judge.

**5<sup>th</sup> Question. What does it mean to remain in Christ?**

(T) In John 15:7 we read, “Remain in me and my words remain in you.” To remain in Christ is connected to his words remaining in the Christian. And in John 15:9-10 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 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.

**6<sup>th</sup> Question. What is the work of the word of Christ in the Christian?**

(S) John 15:3 teaches that the word of Jesus Christ *cleanses* Christians from their sins. To be cleansed means to be forgiven, to be justified.

**7<sup>th</sup> Question. What is the responsibility of the Christian towards the word of Christ?**

(T) John 15:7 teaches that the responsibility of the Christian 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 as well as the responsibility to let the Bible do something within his life! The Christian must allow the Bible to change him.

**8<sup>th</sup> Question. What relationship exists between prayer and the word?**

(S) 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 life, 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!

**9<sup>th</sup> Question. What relationship exists between prayer and bearing fruit?**

(T) 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. He says that because the Christians pray in his name for lasting fruit, he will answer them and give them the ability to bear fruit.

**10<sup>th</sup> Question. How can Christians love one another?**

(S) John 15:1-11 says, “Remain in Christ and his love!” And John 15:12-17 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 also gives them the ability to obey that command! He commands love and he gives love!

**11<sup>th</sup> Question. What is the meaning of ‘greater love’ in verse 13?**

(T) 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. 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 and made us become the best we could 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 the others 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!

**12<sup>th</sup> Question.** What relationship exists between obedience and love?

(S) 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. 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. 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 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 Christ to create more love in our hearts. Our greater love leads to greater obedience. And so on.

**13<sup>th</sup> Question.** What is 'the world'?

(T) *The world* is here the realm of evil, the society of wicked people and their political and religious institutions that oppose Christ and his kingdom. In the early days of the apostles, this evil world was represented by those Jews and their leaders who defied God, rejected Christ as the Messiah and persecuted the Christian Church. That is why Jesus says that this evil world would put them out of their synagogues and even kill them. Today *the world* consists of people of many nations and their political and religious leaders that reject Christ and persecute Christians.

**14<sup>th</sup> Question.** Why does the world have such hatred against the Christians?

(S) The reason this world hates Christians is because Christians no longer belong to that world, but belong to Christ, whom the world hates. Christ chose Christians out of the world by drawing them away from the world and into his kingdom. Christians no longer want to do evil, no longer condone evil and no longer allow evil to go on unchecked. They repent from their own evil, preach against evil, expose evil and fight against evil. The evil world hates this opposition to their evil cause. The world is guilty of their sin, because Christ's words and works revealed Christ and God to the world in a very clear way. The people of the world saw the light and heard the truth and still rejected it. Therefore, their sin and hatred is without excuse.

(T) **STEP 4 and 5. APPLY and PRAY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*. Then take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in John chapter 15.

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Make a commitment to do Bible study every week. Prepare next week's Bible study. Use "the five steps" method to prepare John chapter 16.

Second. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".