

ABIDE



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS,
GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL . . .

IF WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT,
LET US ALSO BE GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT

GALATIANS 5: 22-25

ON GROWING GRAPES

As the union of the branch with the vine is one of growth, never-ceasing growth and increase, so our abiding in Christ is a life process in which the divine life takes ever fuller and more complete possession of us.

**Andrew
Murray**

A MATURE GRAPEVINE CAN YIELD 8 TO 12 POUNDS OF GRAPES AND MAKE A GALLON OF WINE.

THE BEST PLACE TO PLANT A GRAPEVINE IS THE THIRD QUARTER UP A SLOPE.

GRAPES GROW BEST WHEN PLANTED IN VERY DEEP, WELL-DRAINED SOIL.



PRUNING IS NECESSARY FOR OPTIMUM FRUIT PRODUCTION YEAR AFTER YEAR.

BUDS FORMING ON THE WOOD OF LAST SEASON'S GROWTH WILL BEAR THIS SEASON'S FRUIT.

NO FRUIT SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO BEAR DURING THE FIRST TWO YEARS AFTER PLANTING A VINE.

GRAPES RIPEN BEST WITH GOOD AIR CIRCULATION AND DIRECT SUNLIGHT.



ABIDE

“I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.”
 John 15:1-2

The Theme

If the Spirit of Christ animates the church then it should be bearing the fruit of that Spirit. There are indications, however, that the church is having difficulty forming disciples who embody in their daily lives the fruit of Christ’s Spirit. Why is that? And more importantly how are we to respond?

The Word

- ◆ **DAY 1: Read John 15:1-27 (*Jesus as the true vine*)**
 Meditate on Jesus’ metaphor of the vine. Consult a concordance or a Bible dictionary to find out where and how the image of vine or vineyard is used elsewhere in Scripture.
- ◆ **DAY 2: Read Psalm 80:8-18 (*Israel as God’s vine*)**
 This psalm is a prayer for deliverance, a kind of community lament. Picture in your mind the devastating image psalmist describes.
- ◆ **DAY 3: Read Isaiah 5:1-7 (*song of the vineyard*)**
 Notice how God’s love of Israel and judgment of their unfruitfulness are intertwined in the text. How does Isaiah’s picture of God as the vine-grower compare with Jesus’ description in John 15?
- ◆ **DAY 4: Read Luke 13:6-9 (*parable of the fig tree*)**
 Then compare Jesus’ parable of the fig tree in Luke 13:6-9 with parallel passages in Matthew 21:18-19 and Mark 11:12-14. Consider the similarities and differences between the parable in Luke and Jesus’ cursing the fig tree in Matthew and Mark. What do you make of the detail in Luke that the fig tree was planted in a vineyard?
- ◆ **DAY 5: Read *Life On the Vine*, Chapter 1** After reading the chapter, work through the study guide on the following pages.

The Book

As Christians we affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, but what effect does such an affirmation have on our everyday lives? There seems to be little evidence, for example, that divorce rates differ for Christians and non-Christians, just as there seems to be little evidence that Christian teenagers are less likely than their non-Christian counterparts to be sexually active outside of marriage. Moreover, though the church is largely silent on the matter, spouse and child abuse seem as rampant inside the church as they do outside it. Thus although many Christians in this country continue to insist that they believe things that “make them different,” it’s often difficult to determine where that difference lies. Even if the church in the United States is not completely barren of the Spirit’s fruit, it hardly seems to be producing a bountiful harvest of such fruit as love, patience and kindness.

On this point, however, we must be clear: any concern we have about our barrenness is inseparable from God’s purposes for calling us to bear the Spirit’s fruit. . . . Our concern is tied to God’s mission in the world. . . . In short, God has called us to embody visibly before the world the reconciliation that God desires for all creation. Part of that vocation to the world is to bear the fruit of the Spirit as a testimony to God’s continued presence and work in the world. To fail to bear this fruit, therefore, is to fail to provide the world an embodied witness of God’s reconciling presence. The church may, of course, continue to speak to the world of God’s reconciling work, but without the fruit of that work, its words will sound hollow and its witness will lack credibility and power.

Why does the church in this time and place seem to have such difficulty forming disciples who embody in their daily lives the distinctiveness of the Spirit?

(Kenneson, pp. 16-17)

The STUDY GUIDE

Exploring the Roots of Fruit-bearing

Read the statements listed under “On Growing Grapes” grapes on page 2 of this participant guide.

- ◆ Based on this general understanding of vine-growing, what would you say are the key principles for the successful cultivation of grapes?
- ◆ Why is pruning important for growing grapes?
- ◆ What’s the logic in waiting three years before harvesting any fruit?
- ◆ How would you describe the relationship between nurture (i.e., the grower) and nature (i.e., sun, soil, rain) in the production of grapes?

Consider John 15:1-27.

- ◆ What word sums up each of the three dimensions of the believer’s life set forth in this passage—relation to Christ, relation to one another, relation to the world?
- ◆ What insights into those three dimensions of the believer’s life does the image of the vine make possible?
- ◆ What do you think Jesus had in mind when he talked about the necessity of pruning (v. 2)?
- ◆ What is Jesus saying about the connection between obedience and fruit-bearing?
- ◆ According to Jesus, what are the consequences of *not* bearing fruit? What are the consequences of bearing fruit?
- ◆ Jesus uses the term “abide” (NRSV, KJV) or “remain” (NIV) often in this passage. In using that term, what actions or attitudes on the part of believers do you think he is calling for?

Examining the Challenges of Fruit-bearing

In Chapter 1 of the book, the author raises a question central to his thesis: “*Why does the church in this time and place seem to have such difficulty forming disciples who embody in their daily lives the distinctiveness of the Spirit?*” How would you respond to that?

One way the author addresses that question is by implicating the powerful “cultivating” force of our own mass culture, which he defines as, “*those shared practices, convictions, institutions and narratives that order and give shape to the lives of a particular group of people*” (p. 21).

- ◆ What would you say are some of the practices, convictions, institutions, and narratives that order your life? Or the life of most people in the community where you live? Or your congregation’s life?

Recall Isaiah 5:1-7 and Luke 13:6-9. Note that both Isaiah and Jesus issue warnings to God’s people: not bearing fruit carries consequences.

In the case of Isaiah, the people have forsaken the covenant practices of justice and righteousness. According to Jesus' parable, religious practices have become barren and in need of the fruit of repentance, that is, a life turned Godward. Kenneson suggests that in order to avoid becoming like a trampled vineyard or a barren fig tree, the church needs to confront the challenge of mass culture in at least three ways:

(1) by discerning between those forces in our culture that inhibit and those forces that encourage fruitful Christian living;

(2) by pruning from our lives some of those actions or activities that do not lead to growth in faith; and

(3) by recognizing that the purpose of bearing fruit is to embody the mission of God in Christ.

Bearing Fruit in the World

Reflect on the three ways Kenneson thinks we need to confront the challenge of mass culture.

- ◆ How can you tell which forces inhibit and which forces encourage fruitful Christian living?
- ◆ What actions and activities in your lives do you need to prune away?
- ◆ How would seeing your fruitful living as part of God's mission change how you live day to day?

What are some other ways Christians can confront the challenge our culture poses to our bearing the fruit of the spirit?