Leader’s Guide

Living Faithfully
The Making of a Disciple
John 15:1-17
Pastor Julie Lehman
November 22, 2026

Conversation Goal

To help group members recognize that spiritual maturity grows through dependence on Jesus rather than self-sufficiency, identify areas where they may be resisting God's transforming work, and respond to the Holy Spirit with a practical step of surrender, trust, or sacrificial love.

Sermon Synopsis

In John 15, Jesus is preparing His disciples for life after His departure. They will face uncertainty, hardship, and responsibilities beyond their own strength. Rather than telling them to become stronger or more self-sufficient, Jesus offers a picture of a vine and its branches.

A branch doesn't produce life on its own. It receives everything necessary for growth and fruitfulness through its connection to the vine. Likewise, Jesus invites His followers into a life of continual dependence on Him.

The sermon explored three interconnected realities of discipleship:

RECEIVE: Before Jesus commands His disciples to remain, He reminds them that they are already clean. Their identity and belonging are rooted in what He has done, not what they have accomplished. We receive forgiveness, new life, purpose, and everything necessary for godly living through our relationship with Him. (2 Peter 1:3)

REMAIN: Spiritual maturity isn't becoming increasingly independent of Jesus. It's learning to depend on Him more fully. This requires surrendering our need for control and trusting the Father's work, including the uncomfortable process of pruning. God isn't simply removing things from our lives; He is cultivating greater fruitfulness.

LOVE: The life we receive from Jesus and the transformation that happens as we remain in Him are meant to benefit others. Spiritual fruitfulness becomes visible through Christlike character, obedience, participation in His mission, and sacrificial love.

We don't produce the life of Jesus through our own efforts. We receive His life, remain connected to Him, and allow His love to flow through us to others.

Discussion Questions:

1. RECEIVE: Before Jesus tells His disciples to remain in Him, He reminds them that they are already clean. Why is it important that Jesus establishes their identity and belonging before calling them to a life of fruitfulness?

Teaching Point

Jesus doesn't tell His disciples they must become fruitful enough to earn their place with Him. He reminds them that they already belong to Him.

Our relationship with Jesus begins with receiving, not achieving. Through Him, we receive forgiveness, a new identity, purpose, and the resources necessary for a godly life. Our worth isn't established by our spiritual accomplishments, productivity, or ability to meet expectations.

Fruitfulness flows from belonging to Jesus; it isn't how we earn that belonging.

When we forget this, even good things, like serving, leading, studying Scripture, or participating in church, can become ways of trying to prove our worth.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Why is it sometimes easier to focus on what we need to do for Jesus than on what He has already done for us?
- What are some ways Christians unintentionally measure their spiritual worth through performance or accomplishments?
- Where are you most tempted to look for your identity or significance apart from Jesus?
- How might remembering that you already belong to Him change the way you approach spiritual growth?
- What is something you've received from Jesus that you need to remember more intentionally?

Additional Scripture

- **2 Peter 1:3–4** God's divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life.
- **Ephesians 2:8–10** Saved by grace and created for good works.
- **Colossians 2:6–7** Continue to live in Christ, rooted and built up in Him.

2. REMAIN: The sermon challenged our understanding of maturity by suggesting that spiritual growth means becoming more dependent on Jesus rather than more independent. How does that challenge the way you typically think about spiritual maturity?

Teaching Point

In most areas of life, maturity means becoming more capable and independent. We celebrate learning to do things for ourselves, but Jesus describes a different kind of maturity. A branch never reaches a point where it no longer needs the vine. In fact, its ability to bear fruit depends

entirely on remaining connected. Likewise, growing in Christ doesn't mean eventually becoming capable of living the Christian life on our own.

Spiritual maturity isn't needing Jesus less. It's recognizing our need for Him more fully in every area of life.

We may practice spiritual disciplines faithfully while still approaching our relationships, responsibilities, and decisions as though the outcomes depend entirely on us. Remaining in Jesus means learning to depend on Him throughout the day, not simply during designated moments of spiritual activity.

Follow-Up Prompts

- How might the cell phone illustration reflect the way we sometimes approach our relationship with Jesus?
- What's the difference between spending time with Jesus and living in continual dependence on Him?
- In what areas of life are you most likely to operate independently of God?
- Why is it sometimes harder to depend on Jesus when life is going well?
- How can our desire to be responsible or productive gradually become a need to control outcomes?
- What might ongoing dependence on Jesus look like in your everyday responsibilities?

Additional Scripture

- **Galatians 2:20** Christ living in us.
- **Proverbs 3:5–6** Trust God rather than relying solely on our own understanding.
- **Philippians 4:13** Strength through Christ.

3. TRUST THE GARDENER: Jesus says the Father prunes branches that are already bearing fruit so they can become even more fruitful. Why do we often desire spiritual growth while resisting the very changes that growth may require?

Teaching Point

Pruning isn't necessarily evidence that something is wrong. In John 15, even fruitful branches are pruned.

The Father's goal is greater fruitfulness. Sometimes His transforming work exposes attitudes we've justified, habits we've grown comfortable with, or expectations and preferences we've held too tightly. We may want greater patience but resist situations that expose our impatience. We may desire humility but struggle when our pride is challenged. We may pray for deeper trust while refusing to release control.

We often welcome the idea of transformation more readily than the process of being transformed.

The encouragement in this passage is that the One doing the pruning is also the One tending the vine. We can trust His character and love even when His work in us is uncomfortable.

At the same time, we should be careful not to assume that every painful experience is something God deliberately caused. The invitation is to remain open to His transforming work in the midst of our circumstances.

Follow-Up Prompts

- What makes pruning different from punishment?
- Why might we interpret discomfort or change as evidence that something is wrong?
- What attitudes, habits, or expectations are especially difficult for us to surrender?
- Have you experienced a time when God used an uncomfortable realization or correction to help you grow?
- How can we distinguish between something God may be inviting us to surrender and something we simply feel pressured to give up?
- Is there an area of your life where you sense God inviting you to change, but you've been resisting?

Additional Scripture

- **Hebrews 12:9–11** God's discipline produces righteousness and peace.
- **Psalm 139:23–24** Invite God to reveal what needs attention.
- **Romans 12:1–2** Transformation through the renewing of our minds.
- **James 1:2–4** Perseverance and spiritual maturity.
- **Philippians 1:6** God continues the good work He began in us.

4. LOVE: The sermon reminded us that a branch doesn't produce fruit for its own benefit. How should the fruit of our relationship with Jesus affect the people around us?

Teaching Point

Jesus connects remaining in His love with loving one another as He has loved us.

Spiritual fruitfulness isn't simply about becoming a better version of ourselves. It's about becoming more like Jesus so that His character and love become visible through our lives. As we remain in Him, the Holy Spirit cultivates patience, kindness, humility, generosity, forgiveness, and sacrificial love. And other people begin to experience the benefit of that transformation. Our families experience greater patience. Our coworkers encounter kindness. Our neighbors experience generosity. Our church family experiences humility, forgiveness, and service. The fruit of our dependence on Jesus becomes a blessing to others.

Jesus' example of laying down His life reminds us that love is more than a feeling. It is expressed through choices that place the good of others ahead of our own convenience or preferences.

Follow-Up Prompts

- How do we sometimes make spiritual growth primarily about ourselves?
- What does spiritual fruitfulness look like beyond attending church, reading Scripture, or serving in ministry?
- Which characteristics of Jesus would you most like the people closest to you to experience through your life?
- How can remaining in Jesus change the way we respond to difficult people?
- What does sacrificial love look like in ordinary relationships?
- Who might benefit if you became more patient, forgiving, generous, or humble?
- Is there someone the Holy Spirit may be inviting you to love differently?

Additional Scripture

- **Galatians 5:22–25** The fruit of the Spirit.
- **John 13:34–35** Love one another as Jesus has loved us.
- **1 John 3:16–18** Love expressed through actions and truth.
- **Philippians 2:3–5** Humility and concern for others.
- **Matthew 5:14–16** Lives that bring glory to God.

5. RESPOND: As you reflect on receiving, remaining, and loving, where do you sense the Holy Spirit inviting you to depend more fully on Jesus rather than continuing to rely on your own strength or control?

Teaching Point

The invitation of John 15 isn't to leave determined to try harder. It's to recognize our dependence on Jesus and become more willing to participate in His transforming work.

For some, that may mean resting in the identity and belonging they've already received from Him. For others, it may mean recognizing how much they've been trying to control an outcome or manage a situation through their own strength. Still others may recognize an attitude or habit they've been unwilling to surrender, or a relationship where Jesus is inviting them to demonstrate greater love.

Our responsibility isn't to manufacture spiritual fruit. It's to remain in Jesus and respond faithfully to the work He's doing in us.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Which part of the sermon challenged you most: receiving, remaining, pruning, or loving?
- Where have you been acting as though the outcome depends entirely on you? What might surrender look like in that situation?
- Is there something God may be asking you to release or change? How could you intentionally depend on Jesus in that area this week?
- What is one action or habit that could help you respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting?

Additional Scripture

- **John 15:9–12** — Remain in Jesus' love and love one another.
- **2 Corinthians 3:18** — Being transformed into Christ's image.
- **Galatians 5:16, 25** — Walk and keep in step with the Spirit.
- **Philippians 2:12–13** — God works in us to desire and act according to His purposes.