

MAY MISSION MONTH BIBLE STUDY



Key Text John 15:1-17

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also 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.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business.

Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other."

The foundation of our mission is a beautiful, life-giving Vine that provides sustenance, support and direction. Branches are held up by the Vine in order that they can produce heavy, lush, abundant fruit.

Our passion is to see more people in least-reached communities follow Jesus. Our prayer is that you will be part of the Vine and your branches will intertwine with ours so together, we can all produce more fruit.

So slip on the gumboots and get ready for a four session course in spiritual viticulture as together we study how we can be branches so connected to the Vine that lavish fruit is produced. (For anyone unfamiliar with 'vineyard' speak, viticulture is the science of grapes.)

We pick up the story after the disciples allow Jesus to wash their feet, hear Him predict His own betrayal and death and then comfort them with the promise of the Holy Spirit. The air in the room must have been stifling, thick with emotion, confusion, anxiety and doubt. Perhaps this is why Jesus announces, "Come now, let us leave."

And Jesus leads his disciples up to a vineyard. He says, "I am the true vine..."

Session 1

We are branches!

Have you ever seen grapevines grow along the ground? Without being a viticulturist (i.e. someone who knows a lot about vineyards) we can still understand that grapes grow best when they're grown on a supporting trellis and when they have a gardener to tend to and train the branches of the vine.

What would happen if the branches were left to grow across the ground? They would get dirty, trampled on, and be more susceptible to disease and pests.

JOHN 15:1-4

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also 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.

IN THESE VERSES:

- › Jesus uses an everyday, familiar plant to teach and speak to the disciples
- › God is identified as a gardener who nurtures and sustains the Vine and the branches
- › The disciples are reminded that they have been created and cleansed to have a deep relationship with God through Jesus
- › Jesus is also bringing the disciples back to their Jewish teaching where the people of Israel were referred to as God's branches reaching out to the world

Global Interaction branches out across Africa, Asia and Outback Australia through cross-cultural workers who are called by God to invite people to meet Jesus in a real and culturally relevant way.

For over 135 years Australian Baptists have supported God's mission, and through the work of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit we continue to reach out, so that more people may experience a life-giving relationship with God.

PONDER. DISCUSS. ACT.

- › How does Jesus speak to you in your everyday life and what does He use to teach you?
- › What has God pruned back in your life? How does God nurture and sustain you?
- › Catch up with a cross-cultural worker or candidate and ask them how they have heard from Jesus in their calling to cross-cultural work. (Contact your State Office to connect with candidates and cross-cultural workers.)
- › Pray for our cross-cultural workers to remain in the Vine and branch out further. For prayer ideas, visit www.globalinteraction.org.au/pray
- › How can you seek God in your everyday in order to become a healthier branch and hear God's calling on your life?

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Session 2

We must remain

The word remain is a verb, an action word. What does 'to remain' mean to you? We can think of related words like abide, stay, wait or even endure, persist and last. These are all things that we actively have to choose to do.

When Jesus was talking to His disciples in the vineyard He knew that difficult times were ahead. But He also knew that if His disciples endured the trauma and grief that was to follow they were to bear much fruit. Jesus was urging His disciples to stay steadfast in their devotion to Him and their faith in God because He knew what the coming weeks held. Jesus knew the bigger picture, however the disciples were yet to understand. Once again the Vine was able to keep things simple and illustrate what the disciples needed to do.

JOHN 15:5-8

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

THESE VERSES SHOW US THAT:

- > We can only bear fruit through staying connected to Jesus
- > Remaining is a reciprocal process... Jesus wants to be close to us as well!
- > There is consequence to not remaining in Jesus
- > But there is so much more to gain from remaining in Him

For our cross-cultural workers to be sustained in their, sometimes challenging, work, they need to build up a trusty toolbox of spiritual disciplines. These practices not only allow them to remain in Christ and empower their work, but also can be used as tools to connect with those they desperately want to share the message of Jesus with. And the same can be true for you as well.

PONDER. DISCUSS. ACT.

- > What's more important, our devotion to Jesus or our service to Him? Why?
- > When do you feel most connected to God? How do you 'remain' in Him?
- > Do some research on spiritual disciplines? Read a book or chat to a mentor. Which spiritual disciplines resonate with you? Try them out!
- > Explore a spiritual practice that you haven't tried before. Challenge yourself to give it a go and reflect on your experience.
- > Read the previous Resonate article on attentiveness www.globalinteraction.org.au/SharingFaithPart2 and find out how our cross-cultural workers are using this spiritual practice.

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Session 3

Abundant fruit

Did you know it takes a vine up to three years to produce grapes? The yield will always depend on how well the vine has been cared for and pruned.

Jesus isn't exactly clear what the fruit signifies when He speaks to the disciples. It is thought that it is the fruit of God's mission, of more people following Jesus' example. Others connect this passage directly with the fruits of the Spirit, the characteristics of a life lived to glorify God that we read about in Galatians 5. Overarching this is the idea that the fruit is a manifestation of living the divine life itself, knowing God and knowing His love.

JOHN 15:8-11

⁸ *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.* ⁹ *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."* ¹⁰ *If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."* ¹¹ *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

THESE VERSES CELEBRATE THAT:

- > Our fruitfulness is an example of Christ that brings God glory
- > We are loved!
- > Jesus desires us to be joy filled
- > Obedience in Christ is all about love and joy

In 1969 Yvonne and Ian and their three young children boarded a plane from India to return to Melbourne. After six years serving with Global Interaction in the state of Assam in North East India it was time to return for home assignment. When they left their small village of Tukrajhar there was approximately 30 faith communities dotted across the area. They were looking forward to returning after their home assignment to continue to support the Boro people of Assam.

Unfortunately, changes in the Indian Government's religious visa laws meant that they never did return to Tukrajhar and were the last Baptist cross-cultural workers to serve in that area. However, the Holy Spirit continued to move and the local believers responded. Today there are over 300 churches that make up the Boro Baptist Church Association. These are the fruits of the Global Interaction branches that we joyfully celebrate today.

PONDER. DISCUSS. ACT.

- > Investigate the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Which fruits do other people see in you? Ask someone you trust. Which fruits could God be working in you to develop?
- > Take time to celebrate the fruit that has come from you remaining in Jesus. Write a list, draw a picture, pray a prayer of praise and share with a friend over a big bowl of juicy grapes or lunch at a vineyard.
- > Get in touch with a cross-cultural worker and ask them to share a story of the fruits God has produced through their work. This is what our workers love to talk about! (Contact your State Office to connect with cross-cultural workers.)
- > Get excited about the fruitfulness of our ministry in Thailand among the Ethnic Thai. You can read about Ethnic Thai believers being equipped to lead faith communities of their own people in this article: www.globalinteraction.org.au/Celebrating
- > Wait in anticipation for the fruit that God will produce in you in the future. Think about how you can be obedient to Him in order to be fruitful and be filled with love and joy. What does being filled with joy and love feel and look like for you?

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Session 4

Together we can do so much more

Jesus knows He soon will no longer be with His disciples physically. He needs to reassure them that even though He will be gone they will still have each other.

Then, as if in an important part of a farewell speech, He loves on them, calls them His friends, announces that it is their time to bear long-lasting fruit and urges them to love each other. How would you feel if you were in their sandals? In fact, how do you feel right now, knowing you actually are a disciple of Christ?

JOHN 15:12-17

¹² "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other."

THESE VERSES TEACH US THAT:

- › Jesus is our greatest example
- › Jesus would rather us be his friend than his servant
- › We are chosen and appointed by Jesus to bear fruit
- › When we seek and call upon Jesus He will show up
- › We need to love other disciples (as well as everyone else)

Styled in a vase or draped across a table, one branch of a vine is lovely. However how much more beautiful is a whole vine of branches, intertwined together. And how many more bunches of grapes can we harvest! The fruits that come from the sustenance of Jesus and the committed work of our cross-cultural workers branched across Africa, Asia and Outback Australia could not be grown without the partnership of the Australian Baptist movement.

Global Interaction needs more branches to bear more fruit so more people from least-reached communities can know Jesus for themselves. We see partnership as discipleship. Our prayer is that as you partner with us in following God's missional call, you will grow closer to God. This year we are excited to see more of our candidates begin their cross-cultural ministry with the partnership of people like you.

PONDER. DISCUSS. ACT.

- › How can you practically love and support other Christians in their bearing of long-lasting fruit?
- › What does it mean for you to be called a friend rather than a servant? How does this affect the way you respond to Jesus?
- › Can partnering with cross-cultural workers enhance your walk with Jesus? If so, how?
- › What could partnering with one of our workers look like for you, your small group or church?
- › Want to go share some love with a Global Interaction team in Africa, Asia or Outback Australia? Explore how you could become a short-term volunteer or visit on a Global Xposure trip. Right now, many teams have a particular need for volunteer home school teachers (more information on the back of this Resonate.)

Cathie Staunton is the Young Adults Consultant in our VIC/TAS office. She loves spending her time encouraging young people to engage with God's mission in far flung places as well as locally, especially over a good coffee. She is very excited about one day, sooner rather than later, becoming a cross-cultural worker along with her husband Andy and three kids.

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