

Prayers to Remain

As we continue walking together through such a difficult situation in Ukraine, we lift our heart to Jesus as our true hope, and we lift our voices in prayer to be love and light in a suffering world around us. As we go back and forth in our times of grief, we continue to share these struggles with honest hearts before the Lord and ask him for his divine help – to guide our situations and to help our hearts respond faithfully to his love and grace. This is difficult to do, but by persevering in suffering *with* Jesus instead of *without* him, we find strength and comfort. As we receive his comfort, we can turn and comfort others.

As we suffer, we begin to see our sin more and more, and as a result, we also see our need for Jesus's grace and forgiveness. He longs to give us this grace, and we also long to repair broken relationships so that all may know Christ and be unified under his name. Our loving Savior longs to shape us more and more into his image – in the way we love God and love others. We long to be used by God as a light in this world to bring him glory and help others find true and eternal hope in his name. This doesn't happen by ourselves. Rather this on-going transformation comes only from the power of Jesus in our lives. In this study we will learn how we can become a light for Christ in the darkness around us and explore new ways we can serve our Lord as he shapes our hearts for his glory.

Lesson 1

(Answers are provided by Ukrainians and other attendees.)

John 15:1-17

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims (or purifies and cleans) so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain 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. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and dries up; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This 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. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You 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.

От Иоанна 15

Я есмь истинная виноградная лоза, а Отец Мой--виноградарь. ² Всякую у Меня ветвь, не приносящую плода, Он отсекает; и всякую, приносящую плод, очищает, чтобы более принесла плода. ³ Вы уже очищены через слово, которое Я проповедал вам. ⁴ Пребудьте во Мне, и Я в вас. Как ветвь не может приносить плода сама собою, если не будет на лозе: так и вы, если не будете во Мне.

⁵ Я есмь лоза, а вы ветви; кто пребывает во Мне, и Я в нем, тот приносит много плода; ибо без Меня не можете делать ничего. ⁶ Кто не пребудет во Мне, извергнется вон, как ветвь, и засохнет; а такие [ветви] собирают и бросают в огонь, и они сгорают. ⁷ Если пребудете во Мне и слова Мои в вас пребудут, то, чего ни пожелаете, просите, и будет вам. ⁸ Тем прославится Отец Мой, если вы принесете много плода и будете Моими учениками.

⁹ Как возлюбил Меня Отец, и Я возлюбил вас; пребудьте в любви Моей. ¹⁰ Если заповеди Мои соблюдете, пребудете в любви Моей, как и Я соблюл заповеди Отца Моего и пребываю в Его любви. ¹¹ Сие сказал Я вам, да радость Моя в вас пребудет и радость ваша будет совершенна. ¹² Сия есть заповедь Моя, да любите друг друга, как Я возлюбил вас. ¹³ Нет больше той любви, как если кто положит душу свою за друзей своих. ¹⁴ Вы друзья Мои, если исполняете то, что Я заповедаю вам. ¹⁵ Я уже не называю вас рабами, ибо раб не знает, что делает господин его; но Я назвал вас друзьями, потому что сказал вам все, что слышал от Отца Моего. ¹⁶ Не вы Меня избрали, а Я вас избрал и поставил вас, чтобы вы шли и приносили плод, и чтобы плод ваш пребывал, дабы, чего ни попросите от Отца во имя Мое, Он дал вам. ¹⁷ Сие заповедаю вам, да любите друг друга.

What does it mean to “bear fruit” for Jesus? How have you seen others “bearing fruit” for Jesus?

- Bearing fruit for Jesus it means to live our lives like he lived, and through my life, show Jesus's kindness and love.
- People must follow the teachings of Jesus – what the Bible teaches us to do: to love each other, to be patient, to be a good person.

TalkEnglish

- This can also mean to be fruitful in spiritual gifts – patience, kindness, love, etc. It can also mean reaching those who are not Christians, help them to be born again. Helping baby Christians can also be a type of “bearing fruit.”
- We need to grow spiritually and bring others to Christ. Jesus also healed, delivered people, gave them hope, drove out demons. So, bearing fruit means to glorify Christ and do these things for others. It’s not about bringing glory to ourselves, but we do all these things to bring glory to the Father. What Jesus has done, we can also do.
- Bearing fruit can mean serving God, serving the church, using our spiritual or physical gifts to build up the church and encourage others.
- There are material fruit and spiritual fruit. There is charity / physical service and also bringing people to Christ – teaching and preaching about Christ. These fruits work together and support each other.

Reread verses 13, 16-17. What do you think loving others and bearing fruit have in common?

- If you love God, you will serve others. And if you serve others out of love, you will bear fruit.
- Laying down our lives for others means that we sacrifice something for others – our time, our patience, our comfort in order to show our love to God and to each other.
- People also may die for other people, like in war, so that other people can be free. Some people are driving to dangerous places, like Mariupol, to save people. They can be killed but they risk their lives to help others. Stephen in the Bible defended his faith in the Bible, but he also offered his life for others to be saved. Even Paul was saved through Stephen’s death. And Christ also died for us, laying down his life for our salvation.
- Love is the foundation of bearing fruit. Love is the heart behind the things we do. It can be as simple as investing in our marriages, encouraging another person, praying over a meal in thanks to God, taking care of the needs of others, stopping to talk with someone and listening to them, giving a hug and a smile.
- Jesus wants us to love not only those who love us but also our enemies. This is only possible if we remain in Jesus. If our enemy is hungry, give him food. If he is thirsty, to give him water. This applies to people in Ukraine and even Russia. What would we do if we encountered our enemy?
- When a person poisons their enemy, someone who has hurt others, then everyone honors that person. It is hard to bless our enemies. So, as Christians, how should we respond to our enemies, as in a war? There are people assigned by God to protect the community and that is their job to defend.
- Jesus says to “Love, love, love (divine love) your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” In this way, God is the judge and not us. I have to check my heart every day. Even Christ on the cross did not curse the Romans who were crucifying them.

Have you ever felt really loved by a servant of Christ? What did that feel like or look like?

- My friend Terri studied the Bible with me, and she spent time with me, listening to me. She sacrificed a lot of time to care for me and my sister. We are still friends today.
- We feel genuine love. We feel people’s energy, and we cannot be fooled. I feel it in my heart, soul, and spirit.
- My friend she always cares for me. I cannot explain it with words. We spend time together over Zoom, listen to each other. Pray for one another – it’s a true friendship.
- Anyone who points you toward God in any way is loving you, even if they are sharing something that we’ve done wrong. They are pointing us back to the truth of the Gospel.

TalkEnglish

- I feel loved when people listen, they ask questions about my life, and they sacrifice time with me. They call and check to see how I am doing. They return phone calls or texts. For me, it's all about consistency – people consistently reaching out, maybe even once a month.
- Praying for one another. Following up about our prayers. Checking in. Being there for people when they are sick or need something.

What do you think Jesus means when he says he will cut off every branch in us that does not bear fruit? Give examples.

- Jesus wants to change us. At times, he will discipline us, and the unfruitful parts will dry up. He can create circumstances or use circumstances around us to change us. The situation may force us to trust God, like the war. He uses suffering sometimes to do this.

Have you ever experienced Jesus cutting out areas of your life that were keeping you from being fruitful? Consider your attitude, habits, behavior, time management, sins, speech, doctrine, relationships, etc. How did this change make you more fruitful for Jesus?

- For me – wasting time on the internet or cell phone, social media and junk, doctrine, learning new things and putting myself around people who really get to the heart of the Gospel, helping me to make changes in my heart, being around healthy people who love what I love – Christian fellowship, Christians who want to talk about Jesus and be about him. In the past years, I see time wasters, COVID also isolated me from the fellowship. We are now in a Gospel-centered community to help us.
- For me – the Lord has taught me to love my enemies but not to make them the center of my life. I need healthy, loving Christian relationships. Jesus also taught to focus on him more than social things, the news, social expectations, even family expectations that were not his expectations – really setting me free of those things so I can focus on serving him. I had to make significant room in my life and my heart and my mind to be able to make Jesus #1 in my life.

Is there any area of your life that you feel Jesus is calling you to change or give up? Perhaps it is a struggle for you. Share about this area. Why do you think this change will allow you to be more fruitful for Jesus?

- For me there are many areas of my life that need to be changed. For example, to be more patient, to learn time management, to be more kind, to have more wisdom, to better understand other people.
- I feel the same – more patience, ask more questions when I feel frustrated with someone so that I can understand why they are saying something or feeling a certain way. I might just get really quiet.
- In relationships – I wanted to keep relationships with people who were not being kind to me – heavy drinking or people who didn't know God. I wanted to stay there, but I decided to quit because this environment was not good for me. Class reunions were also difficult – drinking and sexual things. They would call me asking me to join. I said "No." I felt from the Spirit that I should attend.

Prayer Statement: Pray for one another in the areas where you feel Jesus is wanting to change you.

Time of prayer