

Week 2: Learning Together

John 15:1-17 To be studied in response to January 27, 2019.

life together

A people apprenticed to
the Life of Jesus

Begin with Prayer

Gather in a comfortable setting. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Consider including a few minutes of silence.

Introduction:

As always, *our common goal as apprentices of Jesus is to learn to be loved by Jesus, to be led by Jesus, to become like Jesus, to lead others to Jesus.* This study is part of a six-week series, "Life Together," focused on the essential practice of **Christ-centred community**. For us to open up to God and one another, let's remember to respect the following guidelines for a safe environment:

- Practice *good listening skills*
- Honour *"sharing boundaries"* and *confidentiality*
- Practice *healthy conflict resolution*
- Seek to be *co-learners* and make this a safe space to ask *any and all questions*.
- *Don't try to fix, problem-solve or rescue.* Our aim is to apply the truth of our identity in Christ and the completed work of his life, death, resurrection and reign to the circumstances of our lives.

Re-connecting and Debriefing (10 minutes)

If you are in a community of seven or more, divide into small groups of 3-4 people each (ideally same-gender). Spend a few minutes catching up on life (e.g. highs and lows of past week). Discuss these debrief questions:

1. *Were you able to hear Sunday's teaching on John 15:1-17? What's one way God spoke to you?*
2. *Do you have a people in your life who help you to "abide" in Jesus and his teachings? If you're able, share a time when someone loved you by "speaking the truth" to you. How did you receive it?*

Listening to God's Word: (20-25 minutes)

Gather as a whole group, and read the following: Many are saying we live now in a "post-truth" culture. Many claim to speak the truth, but "spin" it for the benefit of themselves or their group; others speak "the truth" with a harshness that tears others down. Still others claim to love (and speak for love), but have abandoned truth to do this. But speaking the truth must always be *getting in touch with reality* together.

The first community of Jesus' apprentices were "devoted to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). Hungry for the truth, they fed on a *daily* spiritual diet: the apostles' witness of how Jesus had fulfilled all their hopes in his life and ministry, redeeming work on the cross, and victorious reign as Risen Lord and Messiah. This sharing of truth fueled their personal and corporate health. *As 21st century apprentices of Jesus, what is the role of the truth in our lives, and who has permission to speak the truth to us?* Today's study and practice will deepen our understanding of how we can experience the word of Jesus to us *through* our experience of community.

Setting the Scene for John 15:1-17: In the last hours before Jesus' suffering and death, Jesus shared his deepest desires for his 12 disciples and all who would come after them. In John 13, he demonstrated his love by washing their feet, commanding them to love one another in the same way. In John 14, he promised "another Counselor," the Holy Spirit, who would give them peace and help them to keep all that he has taught them as they faced spiritual opposition. In John 15, Jesus used a beautiful picture of branches that draw their life from a vine to teach the disciples the importance of remaining "in him." This abiding, Jesus would explain, is not merely an individual mystical experience; it is how his apprentices *together* devote themselves to his teachings. As you listen to Jesus' teaching here: **What do you relate to most in this teaching, and why?**

1. **Tell the Story:** From memory or by reading, listen together to John 15:1-17.

2. **Rebuild the Story:** With Bibles open to **John 15:1-17**, verse by verse, identify...
 - *“Who, What, Where, When, How”? Where did the leader add or omit details?*
3. **Debrief the Story:** Respond to these questions:
 - *What do you relate to in this teaching, and why?*
 - Jesus’ **words** (v 7)/**commandments** (v 10, 14)/**knowledge** (v 15) act as the nourishing “sap” through which he, the Vine, gives life to the branches – his community of disciples. *What are practical ways Jesus uses a Christian community (such as this Life Group) to feed you and me with the Word, each according to our need?*
 - To speak to one another’s need, we must take the risk of (1) being vulnerable and (2) being humble enough to receive a word for us from others. *What helps us take that risk with one another?*

Practice: Speaking the Truth in Love (15-20 minutes)

As we see in John 15, “speaking the truth in love” to one another is always connected to “the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42), i.e. Scripture. It’s not an exercise in sharing personal opinions or expertise. Rather, we **listen** together, with heart, mind and strength, to what we read; we discern its **connection** to the specific details of our lives; and we encourage and exhort one another to repent, be renewed, and respond with obedience. This week’s practice models a simple framework by which a small group of apprentices can engage together with Scripture. As we do this together, remember, this is not a competition; this is a gathering of souls around the Word.

[LEADER: Each group may facilitate their own time together, or you may lead the groups through it step-by-step.]

1. Divide into groups of 3-4 (same gender – smaller is better).
2. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the Word.
3. Re-read **John 15:12-17** slowly out loud.
4. Discuss the following together:
 - What is the **main CONCERN** addressed in this teaching (*opportunity, threat, question, need, longing, struggle*)?
 - What is the **ANSWER** offered in this teaching (*gospel, promise, warning, principle, practice*)?
 - Now that you’ve paid attention to what is going on in the passage, pause for a few moments of silence. Then Read the passage together one more time, and continue your conversation.
 - What is the **CONNECTION** to your life right now? (*Where do you experience this concern? How do you need to hear this answer?*) Take a risk to be vulnerable about a reality of your story.
 - ** As each individual shares... (1) acknowledge and thank them for sharing... (2) if it appears to have unearthed something significant for them, pause and ask the Holy Spirit to minister to them, and take a moment to listen together. (3) If a word of encouragement or exhortation comes to mind, ask permission to share it with them.... (4) If granted, briefly share your insight. Avoid phrases like, “The Lord is telling me/you...” Just put it out there as the thoughts of a fellow pilgrim, and see if it “lands.” If so, give thanks!
 - Finally, what **RESPONSE** do you sense God’s Spirit inviting you into (*repentance, new perspective, conversation, decision, habit, practice, reconciliation*)?
 - ** As each individual shares, take a moment to pray what you have sensed God saying to you for one another.

Listening to One Another (10 minutes)

After you have completed this conversation, regroup and discuss the following questions together:

- ❖ *How is this kind of interaction with Scripture different from a personal quiet time? What is gained? What is stretching for you?*
- ❖ *What difference would it make in your life if you made this Word-centred conversation with a few others a habit in your life? How might it influence other potential conversations with fellow apprentices?*
- ❖ *If you’re willing share the response you sensed God inviting you into with the larger group. How could the process of maturity described in Matthew 4:19 inform your approach to that step of obedience (“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.”)?*

Then, using **the Lord’s Prayer** (Matthew 6:9-13) as a guide, based on what you’ve shared together, spend time listening to God and praying for one another.

Leader Notes

Jesus' teaching in John 15 shows us how devotion "to the apostles' teaching" works in the life of the community. A few highlights to point the group toward as you study together:

- This first Christian community didn't have a bound "Bible" of 66 books. They had a deep knowledge of their own Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament), rituals and traditions. They had the apostles' personal witness to what they had experienced with and learned from Jesus. Finally, they now had the Spirit giving insight to understand how Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies and promises they had longed to see come to pass. The eventual collection of the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament), and the writings about the Gospel of Jesus Christ (the New Testament) happened over the following decades.
- In the ancient world, the cost of writing materials meant there were very few personal copies of any document. A single community would have one copy of a letter or collection of writings, and if they were to hear that Word, they would hear it in their gatherings. If you were reading, you were reading aloud, and you were doing it in community with others. So when you hear Jesus say, "Keep my commandments" or "Abide in my word," you should hear him saying, "Get together often to hear, discuss, and keep discerning fresh responses to these teachings!"
- Obviously we don't have the original apostles to consult in person. However, in the New Testament we have a written record of the teachings that the church found to be of enduring and value to its common life, across time and space. They are both a record of "the gospel" – that is, the world-changing events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection – and of the apostles' deepening understanding of the meaning of the gospel as it applied to the questions and challenges of the Jesus movement as it spread across the empire and took root in new places. We devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching today by studying, meditating on, and responding to these Scriptures.
- The Word is not only for discussion. It is meant to be enfolded in our lives through specific acts of obedience, summarized in Jesus' new commandment, "Love one another." Community is the place where we find the help we need to discern an appropriate expression of this love in our unique time and place. It is also the place where we practice *with one another* the acts of love we are called to offer *every* person we meet.
- This is why *vulnerability* and *humility* are so important. If we want our spiritual family to be able to speak truth that meets our needs, we must let them know what our needs really are. Vulnerability is an act of coming to terms with the reality of who we are – our joys and struggles, hopes and disappointments, passions and doubts – within the embrace of a grace-filled community. Humility is similar. If we want to benefit from the wisdom and healing love our spiritual family has to offer, we must be willing to accept that we cannot be independent; we need the encouragement, exhortation, and warning that we receive from our community.
- This week's practice is similar to a typical Life Group discussion. However, in this case it isn't just that. It is a "practice" that is meant to model something that could be reproduced in any intentional relationship between apprentices (or even seekers) of Jesus. Encourage your group to take what they experienced during your meeting and to try it with others (e.g. their Apprentice Group, or with someone they are discipling).