

SESSION 8: JESUS THE VINE

8.0 OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this course called “Walking the Good Path.”

In this course, we are trying to discover who Jesus is, not in a religious or “churchy” way, but as a real person who walked the good path of God the Creator, whom He called Father.

From early times, the people who followed Jesus became known as *people of the way* because they lived and acted in the ways that Jesus lived and acted in relation to God and to others. What Jesus taught and how He lived was all about helping people and showing people how to walk the good path of life with God their Creator and Father. He said, *“I am the Great Spirit’s pathway, the truth about who He really is, and the life of beauty and harmony He offers to all. There is no other guide who can take you to the Father. To know Me is to know My Father”* (John 14:6 FNV).

We are looking at Jesus as described in the Gospel of John which is in the Bible and contains stories about the life and teachings of Jesus. It is called the Gospel of John because it was written by John, who was one of the earliest followers of Jesus. The word gospel means good news. For John, the life of Jesus was good news because Jesus showed him how to walk the good path of life. In this course we are looking at what John discovered about Jesus.

During our previous sessions, we discovered Jesus as:

1. The Word – Jesus was sent by God the Creator to us. He is the message of God’s love.
2. The Truth – Jesus spoke the truth and is the Truth. He is trustworthy.
3. The Way – Jesus taught and showed us the way of living in God’s love.
4. The Life – Jesus came from God the Creator to offer fullness of life to all people.
5. The Light – Jesus illuminates the way to fullness of life on the Good Path of God’s love.
6. The Good Shepherd – Like a shepherd, Jesus cares for, provides, and protects those who follow Him.
7. The Bread and Water of Life – Jesus nourishes and satisfies the deepest needs and yearnings of our lives.

8.1 REVIEW SESSION 7

In the last session, we talked about the satisfaction we all want out of life. We crave satisfaction. Jesus talked about this as a hunger and thirst that only He can satisfy and described Himself as the Bread of Life and Living Water. When Jesus says that He is the “bread of life” and “living water,” He is talking about satisfying the deepest hunger and thirst in our lives – our deepest yearning, longing, desire, craving etc. Jesus offers to fill the emptiness or void in our lives because He loves us and wants us to walk with Him on the good path of life that leads to beauty, harmony, peace, satisfaction, and fulfillment. Jesus says, **“The ones who come to Me will hunger no more. The ones who trust Me will thirst no more”** (John 6:35 FNV). Basically, Jesus is saying, **feed and drink on Him.**

At the end of the last session, you were asked to read and think about the stories about Jesus offering Himself as the bread of life to the people (John 6:22-51) and Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:6-28) and to respond to two questions. Let’s share our responses to these questions:

Discussion:

- *What is the satisfaction Jesus means when He says that He is the Bread of Life and the Living Water?*
- *How does a person drink the living water or eat the bread of life Jesus offers to become satisfied or fulfilled?*

8.2 THE GOOD LIFE

You may have all seen signs or T-shirts with the words, “Life is Good.” What we don’t know is if the person who posted the sign or is wearing the T-shirt is really living the good life or just dreaming of living the good life.

Our American friends talk about the good life as achieving the “American Dream” – whatever that may mean. But, in one way or another, we all want to live a good life. Some of us might have an idea what this good life should look like; others of us may have seen or met people who seem to be living the good life, and we would like our life to be like theirs. But do we really know what it takes to have a good life?

Discussion:

- *Make a list of 3-5 things you think are necessary to live the good life and write each item on a separate sticky note.*

- *Post your responses on a wall or flip chart. Group similar responses together.*
- *What one thing from this list do you think is most important for living a good life? Why?*

8.3 THE SOURCE FOR A GOOD LIFE

When we think about having a satisfying and good life, mostly what we think of is – what’s in it for me? What do I get out of life? But we do not think about what the true source of the good life is. People typically think that the source of the good life is money. Yet there are countless examples that show money does not buy happiness, or peace, or even true friendship.

John’s Good News about Jesus begins by describing Jesus as the source of life – ***“Through the Word all things came into being, and not one thing exists that He will not create. Creator’s life shined out from the Word, giving light to all human beings. This is the True Light that comes to all the peoples of the world and shines on everyone.”*** (John 1:3-4 FNV).

In our last session, we considered Jesus’ reference to Himself as the Bread of Life and the Living Water. At the end of that session, there was a question – how does a person eat the Bread of Life and drink the Living Water Jesus offers?

Jesus answered that question by way of the example of a branch attached to a vine. Jesus used that example to show how He is like a vine providing life and nourishment to people. To be connected to Jesus is to be connected to the source of life – being fed and nourished by Him, just as the branches are fed and nourished by the vine.

Read John 15:1-8 (MSG):

1-3 “I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn’t bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken. 4 “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me. 5-8 “I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can’t produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be

sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.

Group Exercise and Discussion

Divide into small groups of three or four and read John 15:1-8 a couple of times aloud. After reading the passage, write a short answer as a group to each of the following questions.

- *What does the vine do?*
- *What do the branches do?*
- *How can you tell if a branch is fully alive?*
- *How is Jesus like the vine, and how are you like a branch?*

8.4 SOUL FOOD

Like the branch of a tree and other living things, our lives depend on food and water, they are essential.

- *How long do you think a person can live without food?*
- *How long do you think a person can live without water?*

Medical research indicates that the average person can survive up to a maximum of three months without food. But a person will usually die between 46 and 61 days without taking in any kind of nourishment. Without food, the body begins to feed on itself and shrivel up.

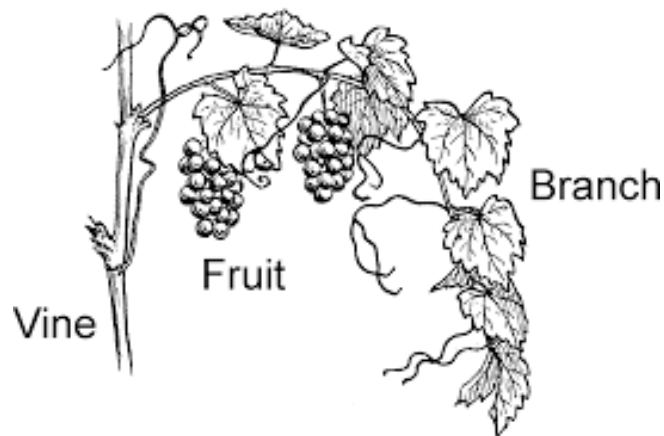
A person can survive for even less time without water. Scientists tend to agree that the maximum time a person can survive without water under the best conditions is less than one week. The average time is three days or less. Water is essential to life; without water the body begins to dehydrate, and death follows.

What is true for us physically is also true for our whole being. We have all met people who are well fed and who are strong physically but who are under-developed and unhealthy in other ways. Just like our bodies need food and water, our souls need continual spiritual nourishment for us to live a good and healthy life of inner peace, satisfaction, and harmony. Without food for the soul, our lives will be under-developed and unhealthy.

Remember the crowd of people who caught up to Jesus after He had provided them with bread in the wilderness and they had eaten their fill. Jesus told them that they should work as hard for the food that nourishes eternal life as they work for physical food that doesn't last (see John 6:26-27).

Exercise and Discussion

- In small groups, read John 15:1-8 again.
- On the drawing of a vine and branches, write your answer to the following questions in the place that seems right.



- *Who is like the vine?*
- *What is a person like who is nourished by Jesus?*
- *What does the fruit represent?*
- *What is the connection between a person and Jesus?*
- *How does a person remain connected to Jesus?*
- *What happens when a person stays connected to Jesus?*

8.5 ABUNDANT LIFE

Being connected to and nourished by the source of life, results in health and well-being. Jesus said, ***“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*** (John 10:10 NIV).

Most translations of John's Good News talk about the “full” life as being “abundant” life. What this means is life so full that it overflows in fruitfulness. One version of John's Good News about Jesus says this: ***“I have come to give the good life, a life that overflows with beauty and harmony”*** (John 10:10 FNV).

In the example of the vine and the branches, Jesus said that a branch fulfills its purpose by being fruitful. As it is nourished by the vine, it lives and grows until it matures to produce fruit. The branches of an apple tree produce apples; the branches of a grape vine produce grapes. This outcome only happens when the branch has a healthy connection to the source of its life and draws nutrients from the vine or tree to produce fruit.

Jesus says, ***“I am the vine, and you are the branches. The ones who stay joined to me will grow much fruit, for without me nothing grows.”*** (John 15:5 FNV). The evidence or proof of a healthy branch is seen in its bearing fruit. The evidence of a healthy life is one of abundance or fullness – full of life and overflowing with good fruit.

Discussion

Read John 15:9-17 together in small groups.

- *In this reading, how does Jesus describe the “branches” that are connected to Him?*
- *What are the signs or the evidence of abundant life in a person who is connected to Jesus?*

8.6 WRAP-UP AND ASSIGNMENT

John’s Good News is that Jesus was sent by God the Creator as a sign and as an expression of God’s love for us. Jesus was sent by God the Creator to humanity because God loves us and wants us to live a good life. We cannot do that without being nourished, and Jesus offers to nourish us as the vine nourishes its branches.

Assignment

To prepare for our next session, read John’s Good News about Jesus. Select one story in John that shows the relationship of Jesus to another person.

- *Describe Jesus’ relationship with that person.*
- *What does Jesus teach that person about God the Creator’s relationship with humanity?*
- *What nourishment do you receive from Jesus?*