**Gleaner’s Sunday School Lesson at First Baptist Church February 28, 2021**

**Good Morning Gleaners,**

**Unit of Study: Spiritual Disciplines:  Becoming More Like Jesus**

Spiritual growth requires the same disciplined approach as physical conditioning.  We have to know and actually take the steps.  This is the final lesson in our 6-week study of biblical principles related to spiritual health.  Believers who practice spiritual disciplines discover godliness, a great benefit for their efforts.

**Topic of Session #6: Joining God’s Work**

**Scripture Reference:** Primary Source: *Bible Studies for Life, the Senior Adult Personal Study Guide* **p. 148,** or open your Bible to the gospel of **John 15:1-8.** John, who refers to himself as “the disciple Jesus loved, “ is credited with writing the gospel of John, the letters 1,2 and 3 John, and the book of Revelation.

**Prayer:** Father God, as we conclude our study of spiritual disciplines, help us understand what it means to be connected to Jesus so we can produce fruit.  With humble and grateful hearts we praise your name and thank you for your love and forgiveness.  Bless the caregivers in our world, our families, friends, missionaries and our pastors as they work to keep us informed and connected to church and Your Word.  Help us in some way  to connect and provide comfort to others during this Season of Lent.  Help us understand how You accomplish Your will through our circumstances, especially when facing hardships with the aging process. We pray for forgiveness of our failures Lord, and pray Your Word will set each of our minds to Your call of ministry.

**Introduction:** We fill our lives with time commitments, but the question underlying busyness is: What’s the purpose? Some want to find a sense of purpose; others want to mask lack of purpose.  God wants us to engage in work and ministry for the sake of His kingdom. When we depend on Christ and work for His glory, we find ultimate purpose.

**Point: Believers are to join God’s work in both the church and the world.**

**Setting:** John 15 is part of the passage sometimes called the *Farewell Discourses* (ch13-17).  Jesus continued preparing His disciples for His death on the cross, His burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. On the night of His arrest, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples and instructed them emphasizing those who loved Him would keep His commandments (14:15). He explained  the only way they could do this was by staying connected to Him, their source of power. Jesus then traveled toward Gethsemane where He would pray and eventually be arrested.  While on the way, he used the example of a vine in the garden to describe what it meant to be a disciple. Using the garden imagery, Jesus taught His disciples how to join God’s work.

**Question #1: (p.149) When has a task looked bigger than your ability to get it done?**  When I became teacher of the Gleaner’s class, the task looked bigger than my ability to get it done. My experience teaching science was realized, but teaching God’s Word to adults was a huge responsibility and I didn’t feel prepared. Past experiences at church were using Bible story pictures with young children.  Jim Wilson, recalled the  cautious confidence he felt at his ministry ordination. Like Jim, I was jolted into reality, but discovered I too was not alone. God would help and work through me. We may not be formally prepared, but every follower of Christ is given spiritual gifts and a call to minister in some way.  Confidence is gained with the knowledge we are not alone.

**Read John 15:1-3 (p. 150) God expects believers to produce spiritual fruit.**

**Verse 1:** Jesus used the image of a vine and branches to emphasize the importance of staying connected to Him if  disciples were to live faithfully.. This passage includes the final **I am** saying of Jesus in John’s gospel.  In previous statements, Jesus called Himself “the bread of life,” “the light of the world,” “the gate,” the good shepherd,”  the way, the truth, and the life.” As Jesus prepared the disciples for His death, He declared, **I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.** Many Old Testament writers used “the vine” as a metaphor for Israel, God’s covenant people.  Sadly, Israel was often the vine that failed to bear fruit.  Jesus is the **true vine** that produces fruit.

**Verse 2:** While Jesus is the vine, His Father is the gardener who controls the whole process.  He plants, prunes, cleans the vineyard of dead branches, and harvests the fruit.  His crucial task is to determine which branches **do not produce fruit.**  If a branch appeared to be in Christ but did not produce fruit, it proved to be disconnected from the vine, and the gardener removed the branch.  Judas was never really connected to the vine and was cut down in his hypocrisy.  The gardener **prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit.** Peter was an example of one (branch) needing pruning to bear more fruit.  After denying Jesus three times, Peter had to be pruned to be made clean.  Dead wood restricts the growth of the vine.

**Verse 3:** Jesus declared the disciples were **already clean because of the word**   spoken to them. The word Jesus referred to included instruction He gave the disciples concerning Himself and salvation. Pruning/cleaning were accomplished by their response as Jesus condemned sin and called for holy living and spiritual productivity.

**Question #2:  What are some things that God expects believers to produce?** We see three concepts of fruit in Scripture that believers are to produce:

* Leading people to Jesus, or evalgelistic success (John 4:36)
* Serving people in Jesus’ name or acts of service (Matt. 7:16-20)
* Personal growth or developing the character of Jesus (Gal 5:22-23)

Merely giving verbal assent to being Jesus’ follower is inadequate.  Life change must happen, and continue to happen as proof of conversion; people will see that in how we influence others, perform ministry acts, and live with a Christ-like, Spirit-filled character.

**Read John 15:4-5 (p. 153) We will see that staying connected to Jesus is essential for believers.**

**Verse 4:** The only way a branch can bear fruit is to stay connected to the vine.  **Remain** means to abide, dwell or stay, and carries the idea of personal, intimate residence.  Jesus said His followers must abide in Him as closely as He abides in them.  **Just as a branch** cannot have life and **produce fruit** without connection to the vine, so Jesus’ disciples cannot produce spiritual fruit unless they remain connected to Him. Peter’s denial is a reminder the only way to be fruitful is to stay connected and not operate on our own power. Thankfully Peter expressed sorrow, returned and was restored to the Lord; he later was filled with the Spirit and preached a sermon saving over 3000 people.

**Verse 5:** This is a key verse in the passage.  Jesus restated **I am the vine; you are the branches.**  There is to be no question or confusion about the issue of identity.  **The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. If we remain in Jesus we will produce much fruit...** He is the source of all power for growth in discipleship and Christian living.  Those who attempt to live the Christian life on their own will inevitably fail.  Jesus said ...**you can do nothing without me.**  We should not expect spiritual fruit if we are not connected to the true vine.

**Question #3: What are practical things we do to stay connected to Jesus?**

**Read John 15:6-8 (p 155) Here we discover what happens to branches that do not bear fruit.**

**Verse 6: If anyone does not remain in me...**unconnected branches are good for nothing.  Once the branch separates from the vine, it is worthless, unable to produce fruit; it becomes dead, brittle, dry twigs.  The branches **wither** and the gardener **gathers them** to be **burned** in the fire. Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus is an example of a non-producing branch.

**Verse 7:** Jesus promised those who **remain** in Him and His word-- true believers may **ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.**  This is not a blank check to ask whatever we want from God. As we mature as believers, our prayers will be more aligned with God’s will and purposes.  We will desire what God desires, praying in accordance with God’s will and purposes. This process of sanctification or growth into greater and greater Christlikeness, is usually gradual taking  place over one’s lifetime.

**Verse 8:** God the **Father is glorified** through Jesus’ disciples producing **much fruit.**  This is how one proves to be a disciple of Jesus.  The glorification of God the Father is not a direct result of the disciples’ actions alone. True disciples are able to glorify God the Father because they  prove to remain in Jesus as His disciples. Any fruitfulness on our part comes from being connected to Jesus, so the glory is all His, never ours.

**Question #4:How do spiritual disciplines help us remain in Jesus?**

**Question #5:When have you seen God glorified through the spiritual fruit of believers?**

**Summary:** We live in a fast-paced society.  God calls all people to repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ.  As Jesus’ disciples, God desires we dedicate our lives to His purposes and for His glory.  When we live as Jesus’ disciples-- depending on and remaining in Him,  living lives of obedience to His commandments, and proclaiming the gospel of salvation--in Him we find our ultimate purpose.  When we produce spiritual fruit, we glorify God and prove we are Jesus’ disciples.  God is glorified not just because the fruit is produced, but because the fruit-bearing branches depend on Him no matter what.  As we live *in* Christ and live *for* Christ, we will bear fruit--and God will be glorified, honored and praised.

**Engage (p.156)** List some things you can do to stay connected to Jesus.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ List some types of fruit God can produce through you when you stay connected to Jesus. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Live It Out (p.157)** How will  you join God in His work ministering through you?

* Remain in Christ.  Surrender plans and choose to remain in Christ. Pray for eyes to see ministry opportunities He places before you.
* Mentor. If you are already involved in a ministry, offer to mentor someone who is not.
* Lead.  If God is calling you to ministry leadership, accept His call.  Talk with your pastor about your next steps.

**Class News:** The Gleaner’s class will  donate $25 to First Baptist Church in memory of Merle Williamson. The class also will donate $50 to the Paceline challenge John Wheeler is taking on in October to raise money for Augusta University Medical Cancer Research. Thank you to all who have donated to the Gleaner’s treasury now and in the past.  Thanks to Jo Lamb as our faithful serving treasurer!

**Watchword:** May the Lord watch between me and thee while we are absent one from another. Stay healthy, stay  safe, and have a great week. Joan