

PURE PASSION

AN ATHLETE STUDY

WHEN I'M WEAK, HE IS STRONG

Sports are about strength—physical and mental toughness. Never in the history of sports has a coach wanted a team full of weaklings. They want athletes who can think and act quickly, who can recognize and react as the play develops. Elite physical and mental abilities draw fans to come witness greatness. With God, however, nobody is strong enough or tough enough to accomplish his purposes.

God doesn't use the strongest, toughest, best-looking people; or he doesn't use them *because* of those qualities. God actually has an ironic track record; he uses the lowly, the imperfect, and the weak to accomplish his purposes. You and I are no exception. God does not want our strength; he wants our weakness and our total reliance upon *his strength*. Only then, can the power of Christ work through us.

As Jesus continues teaching the disciples in our passage today, he wanted them to understand the harsh reality of their circumstances after he is gone. Like us, the disciples are weak. They spent years walking with Jesus, and still their ability to bear fruit will remain entirely on their connection to the vine.

MATTHEW



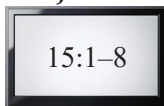
MARK



LUKE



JOHN



JOHN 15:1-8

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"Glory to the Father; You deserve the praise, Lead me to your altar; Wash away my shame."

God is a good Father who wants our best, he is our best, so he wants us to want him. Unfortunately, sin drives us away in shame. Instead, our sin should cause us to run to the Father, to abide with him, that we need not fall back into sin. Scan the QR Code and worship.



DISCUSSION

Who is the most capable person you know? Why?

ICEBREAKER

1. What metaphor does Jesus use in these verses? (1-6)

2. Identify the various parts of the metaphor:

- Vine (1) -
- Gardner (2) -
- Branches (4) -
- Fruit (2, 4, 5, 8) -

OBSERVATION

3. How much can we accomplish for Jesus apart from him? (5)

4. What do you think it means to "abide" in Jesus? (4-7)

INTERPRETATION

5. What does it look like to "abide" in Christ at home, at school, or on the field?

APPLICATION

Not sure what it looks like to abide? Not sure what producing fruit looks like? If you're wondering about these questions or others like them, talk to your coach today.

PURE PASSION

WEEK 5

AN ATHLETE STUDY

STUDY NOTES THE GAME PLAN

Preparation is the key to victory! Watching tape, reviewing the playbook, practicing drills, scrimmaging—all are necessary components to sharpen the team. However, when faced with an opponent, a team must have a game plan. Great teams and players learn as much about their opponents as they can, they think through how to minimize the opposition's strengths and exploit their weaknesses. They do this by maximizing their own strengths and finding ways to compensate for their weakness.

Our passage today picks up Jesus' Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17) well underway. He's said some astonishing things like, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (John 14:6). Also, Jesus told the disciples that he will send a *Helper* and *Advocate—the Spirit of truth* (John 14:15–17) who "*will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you*" (John 14:26).

Jesus couldn't have been clearer that his suffering loomed near. Although they never really picked up what he was putting down, he gave them what they needed to continue on in his absence. It's like Home Depot's motto, "*How doers get more done.*" Jesus needed them to understand that they'll never accomplish anything on their own—they had no strength to maximize. If they wanted to "get more done," they needed to understand their true power source.

GODLY PASSION PREPARES FOLLOWERS

Jesus is the **true vine**; his **Father** is the **gardener**, and each disciple is a **branch**. The branches derive their life from the vine; the vine produces its **fruit** through the **branches** and each **branch** exists to **bear fruit**. A good **gardener prunes** the **branches** to **bear more fruit**.

In Israel, vineyards and their lessons were everywhere. Thus, Jesus' disciples immediately understood the vine/branch relationship. They knew that every year in Palestine, gardeners pruned their vines, cut off the dead wood, and trimmed the living branches so that they would produce more grapes.

Anytime a passage repeats a word or phrase it's probably important. The fact that the word "**abide**" is used nearly ten times in just four verses (4–7), makes it really important. So what does abiding in Christ mean? Simply put, abiding in Christ means being continually dependent on him for spiritual fruitfulness. So, success would never be about

the disciples—they would need to remain connected to God the Father through Christ, abiding with him.

Unfortunately, many things can hinder our "abiding." Namely, sin. At its core, sin is disagreeing with God about what he calls "good" in our heart and actions. We cannot remain connected to the vine if our hearts fail to align with God's. Those things that pull us away must be "pruned" so that we may be more fruitful.

GODLY PASSION PREPARES WITH CAPABILITY

Jesus said plainly in John 14 that he would soon go. As Jesus laid out the game plan, he told the disciples how they can compensate for their weakness. Jesus put it bluntly, "**apart from me you can do nothing.**" That's a huge weakness, but the opposite is true; their strength is his strength—that created and sustains the universe (Hebrews 1:2–3).

But what about the "nothing" part? It's subtle but simple. Many people accomplish things. Atheists get stuff done every day. It means that apart from God nothing we accomplish will be honored by God.

And that leads us to the disturbing part about **branches** being **thrown away...gathered** and **thrown into the fire and burned**. What did Jesus intend to teach through all this imagery? Importantly, it does *not* mean that true Christians can lose their salvation. Instead, it refers to any fruitless thing that lacks eternal value. Not only will the sinful things be "burned" up, but also those things we invest in that are worthless—not necessarily good or bad, just unproductive. Additionally, those people who have never surrender to their hearts to God will be eternally separated from him in hell. Sometimes, these people claim to be Christians, they claim his name but don't truly follow him. Their works may fool us, but not God.

In your life, Jesus urges **that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples**. Jesus suffered and died for the sins of humanity that we may be reconciled to God. If we're connected to the vine and God is pruning our hearts to align to his, what is the fruit he wants to see? Jesus gave his disciples the marching orders right before he ascended to heaven, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28:19a). Those you lead to Christ is your fruit. That is the thing that will not be pruned and burned.

As Jesus continued teaching in the Upper Room, he knew he will soon leave them, but he has not left them without a plan. Their strength is his strength; they have all the capability they need through him. All they must do is remain in the vine.