

"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."

John 15:5

Introduction

We've all depended on someone for something. Maybe it's as simple as needing someone to pick us up from the airport or trusting our employer to pay us for our hard work.

But dependence on God is more serious than all of that. If our friend doesn't show, we could call someone else or a ride-sharing service and we are only mildly inconvenienced for a moment or two. If we don't get paid for our work, we'll find another way to make money. If God doesn't come through, however, we have no hope at all. There is no backup plan.

Depending on God is similar to how newborn infants depend on others to survive. If someone doesn't feed them, change them, and at least occasionally clean them, they will die. They cannot provide for their own needs in even the slightest of ways.

That's where we find ourselves when we try to accomplish unity with other Christians – with all other Christians - without God. Completely without hope.

In John 15:5 Jesus tells His disciples, *"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."* Apart from Christ, we can do nothing. Humility, peacemaking, forgiveness, appreciating and accepting differences, or even grasping the importance of unity will not be possible without God working within us. There is no amount of energy, effort, or intellect that can accomplish these tasks in our flesh. God alone is capable.

This week, we'll explore what it looks like to be a branch wholly sustained by the Vine. Spirit, we pray you would move in our hearts this week so that we would depend on you and not on our own wisdom, cleverness, or strength. Amen.

Group Video Discussion

Watch Video 6 Trusting the Holy Spirit's work in us

Your notes:

What can only be accomplished by the Spirit when it comes to unity?

1. _____

2. _____

Your personal response:

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Have you experienced a time when the Holy Spirit accomplished unity between you and someone else in the Body of Christ that you couldn't have done on your own? When have you felt a moment or season of unity with other believers that was comparable to oneness found in God?
2. Even in your good relationships with other Christians, there might not be the level of unity for which Jesus prayed. What is left for the Spirit to do in even these relationships?
3. During this series, what relationship of yours with someone else in the Body of Christ has continued to come to your mind where you need to give attention?

Personal Daily Devotions

Day 36

Spirit-filled

*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.
Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*
Ephesians 5:18

At first glance, we might be surprised to see “*drunkenness*” and “*filled with the Spirit*” mentioned as countering but comparable experiences. On further study, however, we might see why being filled with the Spirit came to Paul’s mind when addressing drunkenness.

First, when people are drunk, alcohol influences every aspect of their being. Reaction time slows, speech slurs, tactile sensation lessens, vision blurs, inhibitions lower, self-control disappears, and decision-making muddles. Every cell is influenced.

Second, when people are filled with too much alcohol, it’s obvious to everyone. Drunkenness isn’t really something that can be hidden.

Paul says, instead of being filled with wine, be filled with the Spirit. Let the Spirit so fill you that He influences every aspect of your being and is such an overpowering force that others can’t help but notice.

Imagine what would change in our relationships with other believers if all of us were so overflowing with the Spirit that His presence in us was undeniably obvious. Imagine if every time other Christians interacted with us, they felt as if they had been near the Spirit Himself. Imagine if all the relational unity steps we’ve discussed over the last few weeks weren’t so much something we worked to achieve, but instead were something that naturally spilled out of us. Imagine.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

When was a time you felt *“filled with the Spirit?”* How did that influence your interactions with other Christians?

Have you ever known people so filled with the Spirit that His presence in their lives was obvious? What was it about them that made you feel that way? How do you believe that influenced their relationships with other believers?

Day 37

Spiritual fruit

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...*

Galatians 5:22

Good news. As a Christian, God's Spirit lives inside each of us and He will produce His fruit. An orange tree produces oranges not so much because it stresses and strains to do so, but because that's its nature. Making oranges is the result of being an orange tree. In the same way, we produce what we are. As Christians, we are new creations filled with God's Spirit, so we will produce His spiritual fruit in increasing measure.

Think about the fruit of the Spirit in regard to your relationships with other believers. Do you love them? Does seeing them bring you joy? Are you at peace with them? Are you kind to them? Are you good to them? Are you faithful to them? Do you treat them with gentleness? Are you controlled in your actions toward them?

Let's not think only about if we are able to act loving, kind, and gentle, but let's think about what's on the inside because again, fruit will come out of the heart. Do we feel peaceful when we think of our relationships with other Christians? Do we naturally treat them with goodness and faithfulness or is it a strained effort sometimes?

Wherever you identify falling short, simply confess it to God and others and ask the Spirit to continue His work in you. As a tree moves through seasons of producing more and less fruit, along with frequent winters, so will we. Growth may be gradual and pruning may occur, but the end result is guaranteed.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Do you feel like the fruit of the Spirit is more something you work to produce or something God produces in you? (See Philippians 1:6, 2 Corinthians 1:21, Ephesians 2:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

Looking back over the last 10 years, how has God grown the fruit of the Spirit in your relationships with other believers? In what ways are you more loving, peaceful, faithful, good, gentle, etc.?

What tools, circumstances, or life events has God used to develop the fruit of the Spirit in you? When have you seen growth happening the most and what caused it?

Day 38

Spirit-led

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:25

... those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Romans 8:5b

We may find it difficult at times to follow through with some of the relational goals discussed in the last thirty-seven days. How can we show love and kindness to those who hurt us? How can we appreciate and accept people who are so different from us?

If we hear these commands and try to follow them in our own strength we may choose to give up when we encounter difficulty. We may do our best to look humble on the outside but still feel superior to others in the Body of Christ on the inside.

But if we're living by the Spirit, it will be different. Living by the Spirit isn't occasionally checking in with God during emergencies. He isn't a 911 service. He isn't even like an accountant with whom we might have regular but infrequent conversations. We don't "*live by*" a 911 service or an accountant.

To "*live by*" something means it's the thing which enables our life. We couldn't move and we would die without it. We live by our heart pumping blood through our bodies. We live by taking oxygen into our lungs and food into our stomachs.

When the Spirit sustains us like our hearts sustain us, we will live out these **Perfectly One** principles in our lives. God will write the law on our hearts so our efforts are less "ought to" and more "want to." He will carry us into more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Looking back over your life, can you see ways that the Spirit has improved your relationships with other believers? Have you lost some rough edges? Can you accept and appreciate those who are different from you more now than in the past? Look over the different weeks of this **Perfectly One** study and use it as a list to identify where the Spirit has done a significant work in your life already.

How do you feel the Spirit working in you now to improve your relationships? How can you tell it's Him and not something else?

Day 39

Do not quench or grieve the Spirit

*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*
Ephesians 4:30

We can make God grieve. By not following His lead, we hurt ourselves and others, and therefore cause Him to grieve. God wants His children to share the unity He has within Himself in the Trinity (see John 17:21) because He knows how wonderful that kind of community is.

When we take steps to break unity within the Body of Christ, God knows what we're missing and the pain we experience as a result. Because He loves us and wants to see us flourish in every way, He grieves for us and with us.

When God taps us on the shoulder telling us to apologize, let's do it. When God reminds us that we should call and check in with another believer, let's follow that lead. When we haven't forgiven someone in the Body of Christ, let's put our agenda aside and embrace God's. When we want to push our preferences and needs in front of others, let's pull back. Let's celebrate those with different opinions, perspectives, and gifts instead of resisting or criticizing them.

God is working to accomplish unity among all of His followers. Let's not oppose Him. Let's not get in His way. If we do, we'll hurt ourselves, others, and ultimately the unity for which Jesus prayed. And God will grieve.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Is there an area in your life where you are grieving God by refusing to follow His instructions for maintaining unity within the Body of Christ? What is standing in your way of letting that go?

When you take a step in the other direction from any of the principles we've discussed over the last thirty-eight days, do you typically think you're hurting yourself by doing so? Hurting others? Grieving God?

Which one of those consequences (hurting yourself, others, or God) is most motivating to pursue unity with other Christians?

Day 40

Pray without ceasing

Pray continually.
1 Thessalonians 5:17

The last words John records Jesus saying before He was arrested, beaten, and crucified are of Jesus praying for the unity of all believers. That all Christians throughout all ages would be perfectly one as Jesus and the Father are one.

How often do we pray for this? How often do we cling to God as the One who can make us perfectly one with all Christ-followers? If even Jesus looked to God to provide unity, how could we ignore that same pursuit, or think that we might accomplish it without Him?

Without God's direct, supernatural intervention we may accomplish some measure of civility with each other, but we will never be perfectly one as God is one.

Let us join with Jesus' prayer. If this is what was on our Savior's mind before He was betrayed and tortured, let it be on our minds during prayer as well. Let there be a sense in which it never leaves our lips. Let it be our continual unceasing prayer.

When we disagree with other believers, let us pray for unity before we pray to get our way. When we want to seek revenge, let us pray for unity. When we have wronged someone in the Body of Christ but are too prideful to apologize, let us pray for unity. When we are irritated by another Christian's personality, parenting, wardrobe, giftedness, work ethic, or even smell, let us pray for unity.

On all occasions, without ceasing, may this be our prayer. And may God be gracious enough to grant it.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Take a few minutes to pray for unity with all the Christians with whom you have contact, particularly within your local church.

Take another few minutes to pray for the Body of Christ throughout the world. Pray that in spite of our many differences – races, denominations, languages, practices – that the world would see that we are all one in Christ.

Now pray for unity in any Christian relationship in which you are not currently perfectly one. Don't think so much about grievances this person has committed against you. You aren't praying for that person to wake up or repent or get with it. You are praying only for unity.

Who came to mind? What step can you take toward unity with this person? Call? Text? Apologize? Encourage? Invite?