

John 15 Growth

PREFACE

God's Word contains the answers to all of life's problems and needs. As we apply God's Word to our daily lives, the Holy Spirit strengthens us, our faith grows, and our lives are transformed.

But for many the bible is a complex book, too huge to tackle.

By selecting important chapters of the Bible (20 from the Old Testament, 20 from the New Testament) and focusing on them, I hope to encourage you to get into God's Word. To help accomplish this, I have prepared a visual memory aid for each key chapter. The aids are purposely *weird* in order to increase retention. Each aid has three elements:

1. The *book* of the Bible
2. The *chapter*
3. The *theme* of the chapter

By studying the memory aid several times and focusing on it, you will recall the image and consequently the book, chapter and theme.

Remembering these key chapters will enrich your daily life. It will also help you to relate God's Word to others. As you write greeting cards or speak with people, you will be able to apply God's Word directly to their problems or needs.

At times, you will be unable to speak directly to a person. Send them a Key Chapter booklet! They are designed for sharing!

Each Key Chapter booklet is presented in the same format:

1. *Background* for the chapter
2. *Key verses* of the chapter
3. *Thoughts* on the theme of the chapter

Bible classes and small study groups will find the third section helpful for discussions. The *thoughts* will provide a variety of applications upon which to reflect.

God will not let his Word return void (Isaiah 55:11)!

He will bless you abundantly as you meditate on his Word (Psalm 119:48)!

He will enable you to be a blessing to others as you spread his Word (Genesis 12: 2-3)!

Soli Deo Gloria,
Paul R. Schroeder

Explanation of the Memory Aid

1. The BOOK of the Bible:
Think of a tractor: *John Deere* = **JOHN** (the beloved)
2. The CHAPTER:
The *number* of grapes = **CHAPTER 15**
3. The THEME:
Grapes *grow* on branches, which depend on the vine = **GROWTH**

JOHN 15: BACKGROUND

Growth, spiritual growth, is the theme of John 15. God wants his people to grow. God has designed all living things so that they grow. This is a universal truth: Everything alive must grow to stay alive. This is true of fish, birds, ants, elephants, flowers, weeds, carrots—all living things. There are no exceptions.

Humans also must grow in order to stay alive. If an infant stops growing, it will soon be dead. What about the elderly? Are they growing? Certainly! Their hair and fingernails may be all we see in terms of physical growth, but their minds continue to expand with new relationships and experiences. We equate a total lack of growth with death. We say of those who are not open to new experiences that they are “as good as dead.”

The same is true *spiritually*. If we are not growing spiritually, we are dead spiritually. To be alive spiritually means to be growing in our relationship with God, in our faith, hope, and love.

Satan is a receiver. Many who are spiritually dead are deceived into thinking they are still live Christians. Terrible! As long as they feel they already know *about* Christ, they will see no need to repent and become alive followers of Christ.

God has freely given us salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ. We cannot by our works or actions do anything at all in any way to merit this gift. It is free. It is undeserved. God’s mercy alone has given us salvation. But once God has saved us and made us his people, he expects a response. He expects his gift to be taken seriously. He wants faithful people who really love him and want to serve him. He wants them to grow. He enables them through his Word and Sacrament so that they can grow.

In biblical language the evidence of our faith is called “fruit”. When alive in him, we grow and produce fruit. God doesn’t want mere words of praise. He wants commitment, loyalty, obedience, and growth towards spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:13). The “end product” or “bottom line” of what we say we believe must be proved by what we do (James 2:17).

Matthew 7: 21: Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord.” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

KEY VERSES OF JOHN 15

Verse 2

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

No dead braches are allowed. Producing branches are pruned, so they will produce more abundantly.

Verse 4

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

There can be no spiritual life separate from Christ. Where there is no life, there is no fruit.

Verse 5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Christ is the source. We draw our strength and “fruitfulness” from him. He expects and provides an abundant crop.

Verse 6

If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

The unattached cannot live spiritually; therefore, they die. They are of no value, so they are destroyed.

Verses 7

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Our relationship to Christ gives us the marvelous privilege and blessing of answered prayer.

Verse 11

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

God wants his people to be happy. Joy in Christ does not depend on circumstances. (See Key Chapters booklet *Philippians 4: Joy*).

Verse 12-13, 17

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down for life for his friends. This is my command: Love each other.

Christ’s love in us produces a love for each other. That is why loving one another gives evidence of our faith.

Verse 16

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

God does the choosing. He has a purpose and plan for our lives. Our good works are to bring glory to his name. To that end he puts the gift of prayer at our disposal.

Verse 23

He who hates me hates my Father as well.

You can't separate god. If you reject Christ, you have rejected the Father also. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one inseparable God.

Verse 26

When the counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

Christ promised the Holy Spirit would be sent. (See John 14: 16, 26). The Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth. The essence of truth is Jesus Christ—John 14:6.

THOUGHTS ON GROWTH

Day 1

It is not surprising that Jesus uses the plant kingdom to illustrate growth. In plants we see the principle of growth—the miracle of life.

Plants cannot care for themselves. Neither can we. There must be a caretaker. God our caretaker is described in many metaphors. The Father is the gardener (John 15:1). Christ is shepherd (John 10: 11-16). The Holy Spirit is helper (John 14:16) and truth revealer (John 16: 7-15).

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Different seeds grow at different speeds. The Holy Spirit does not operate according to human timetables. God's timing is always perfect. Trust Him!

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Pruning is necessary for a healthy, productive vine. Yet, from the viewpoint of the grape, pruning is traumatic. The cutting appears to be negative. We know better. Our intelligence is greater than a grape's. We know that the purpose of pruning is positive and productive. When God comes into our lives to prune, do we:

- A. Complain and murmur with the "understanding" of a grape?
- B. In faith, accept God's promise that he is pruning us so we develop patience and endurance (James 1: 2-4)?

Prompted by faith (2 Thessalonians 1:11), we should praise him in the confidence that he will deliver us in his perfect timing (Psalm 50:15; 34:17) and work everything out for our good (Romans 8:28).

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The best fruit is love.

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James 1: 6-8: but when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

A tree that is transplanted every day will find it's almost impossible to grow. A person who vacillates will have the same problem with growth. Sink your roots down into the Word! Fix your heart on Christ! Stand firm!

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Fertilizer does for plants what God's testing does for faith.

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Day 2

Growth requires change. If you are not open to change, you won't grow. Tough, but true.

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God is interested in *quantity*. That is for sure. Look again at John 15: verse 2, "more"; verse 5, "much"; and verse 8, "much". Just as certainly, he is also interested in quality. We must abide in him for it to be acceptable fruit (John 15: 2,4,5,7 and 10)

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We can assume an apple tree is "happy" having apples, a grapevine is "pleased" to have grapes. So, also, God wants us to have joy in doing good works. In addition, God wants his people to be joyfully confident even in difficult times. He wants his joy to be in his people (John 15:11).

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The Greek word for "pruning" in John 15: 2-3 carries the thought of "purging" or "cleaning". The heart must be cleansed (repentance and faith in forgiveness) before action is regarded as a good work by God (Acts 15:9). He looks at the heart. The motive must be love for God and a desire to glorify his Name. We do this must directly when we proclaim Jesus as the Savior of the world. As we show love to people, God is glorified. The more fruit, the more God is glorified.

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Matthew 13: 20-21: the one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

Speedy growth is not always good, for it may lack roots.

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We are often inept at recognizing true good works because we cannot see the motives of the heart. We even fail to see some good works. And sometimes we applaud works that really aren't good in God's eyes.

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Day 3

With caution, we can sometimes evaluate our growth by comparing ourselves to others. Scripture encourages imitating some Christian examples (Hebrews 13:7). It's safer to evaluate our growth on the basis of our personal response to God-given challenges and opportunities.

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It's tough to grow in concrete. You will grow best in the soil God chooses to plant you in. Grow where God plants you!

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We can't take any credit for our fruit. God prepared the soil, planted the seed, provided the sunshine and water, did the cultivating, and produced it all. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

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Luke 12:48: From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Small amounts of fruit are acceptable to God from young (new) trees, but a well-watered and tended tree is expected to produce much fruit.

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God works are often spontaneous, but it's also helpful to think about and plan good works. Prayerful thoughts based on the Word applied to human need will generate feelings and these feelings help move us to plan and to implement the doing of good works (Ephesians 2:10; Romans 7:4).

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When people show no fruits of faith—they don't pray, don't worship, don't witness, don't confess their sins, etc.—then they are not Christians regardless of how persistently they claim they are.

Day 4

Galatians 6:1: Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

Never despise or ridicule the person who grows slowly or slips back into sin. God uses his own measuring stick. That person needs your support, love, and encouragement.

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Growth is no always pleasant. Growing pains can be very real.

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There are only two types of branches: producing and non-producing. Either you are in Christ or you are not. There are no other alternatives.

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Growth in spiritual maturity does not necessarily follow chronological maturity. As Jesus pointed out, often a child may have deep trust in God, while an adult can be an infant in faith.

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Stewardship is usually one of the slowest fruits to grow. I have seen Christians with large fruits of faith in their worship, moral life, family, etc., whose stewardship fruits resembled raisins.

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A certain fig tree looked healthy, but it had a serious problem: it didn't produce any figs. Jesus cursed the tree and it withered (Matthew 21: 18-22). God is patient and long-suffering (Luke 13: 6-9), but the time of judgment does come.

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More fruitfulness is the reward for faithfulness in bearing fruit.

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Pruning takes time. Don't be impatient with God.

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Apart from Christ there is no such thing as a "good work" in God's eyes.

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Artificial trees cannot produce fruit.

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Without Christ we can do nothing. With him we can do anything.

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Notice the repeated emphasis on love in John 15 (verses 9, 12-13). God's love for us is reflected and passed on as we demonstrate our love for one another. That's bearing fruit.

Day 5

Psalm 92: 12-14: the righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.

Spiritual growth continues throughout our lives.

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2 Peter 3:18: But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

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Tumors, cancers—unnatural growths on the body—are harmful. Cares, worries and guilts that fasten themselves to our spirit are harmful and stunt our spiritual growth. If not cured, they can cause death—spiritual death, unbelief.

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We measure growth in trees by a different standard than we measure flowers. God's assessment of your growth will be uniquely personal.

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2 Thessalonians 1:3: We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

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2 Corinthians 3:5: Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

Those who pride themselves in their growth are actually regressing.

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Matthew 13: 31-32: He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”

We can be certain that God’s kingdom will expand and grow. God’s Spirit will see to that. The same Spirit of God has also brought us to faith. He also desires our growth.

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1 Corinthians 15:10: but by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

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Ephesians 4:16: From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

While individual Christians grow personally in faith, hope and love, a group of Christians grows as a body.