

# **WHERE LOVE ABIDES**

**Abiding in the True Vine to Bear Lasting Fruit**

*by Donna Pyle*

Leader's Guide

A Bible study based on John 15:1-17

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## Introduction

One of the most effective, life-changing, ways of growing as disciples of Jesus Christ is to gather around the Word of God. There are many excellent Bible studies, so it is an honor that you have chosen this study, *Where Love Abides*.

Although this is an eight-week study, you may choose to expand it to sixteen weeks, or even longer, if your group desires.

While Scripture is the centerpiece of our study time together, *Where Love Abides* provides the structure. To absorb the maximum benefit, every participant should have their own Study Guide in which to record answers and write personal notes and prayers. Each lesson is accompanied by a DVD teaching session which lends further insights into each week's study.

In the New Testament, Jesus uses the vineyard metaphor in the Gospel of John to comfort His disciples on Maundy Thursday. Drawing on an Old Testament writing with which the disciples would have been familiar, Jesus paints the picture of God as the vinedresser (caretaker) and owner of the vineyard. He also talks about good fruit from the choicest vines with one crucial difference: Jesus Himself is the true Vine!

This study covers Jesus' teaching to His disciples regarding the Vine, the Vinedresser, and our purposes as branches in God's vineyard. My hope is to provide a clear, meaningful picture (through the Study Guide and DVD lessons) of what it means to live fruitful lives for the glory of God in His vineyard.

## **PREPARATION**

First, determine the dates, time, and place to hold this Bible study. If it will be held in a church, remember to secure permission and request that your gatherings be added to the church calendar. This will allow even more women to know about the study.

These studies tend to draw women of all ages, so strive to offer childcare options and consider handicap accessibility needs. Pre-registration is beneficial to ensure that your meeting place will be big enough and childcare is adequately covered. Also, consider buying the Study Guides in bulk to save postage for individuals, and perhaps a few extra copies for any who did not pre-register.

## **GETTING THE WORD OUT**

Without a doubt, women are busy. Consequently, start promoting the study four to six weeks before the start date. You can use the short DVD trailer video to promote the study, as well as social media promotional materials at [www.lwml.org/bible-studies](http://www.lwml.org/bible-studies). Be sure to utilize social media! Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are all helpful in getting the word out.

Check with local newspapers and radio stations since many offer free public service announcements. Include location, date/time, and study information, along with childcare, cost, and a contact number.

If you are hosting this Bible study in your home (well done!), a handwritten note, quick text, or telephone call personalizes the invitation. If your home will accommodate it, encourage them to bring a friend to the study who may find a church environment intimidating.

## **LEADING THE STUDY**

This Bible study is designed to lead your group on a path toward a more intimate relationship with God. You can walk through this study in a variety of ways: individually, in a

small group, and during family discussions. Consider encouraging your church's small group to undertake this study together or asking your pastor to offer it as a Sunday morning Bible class.

Each lesson provides valuable tools for exploring important aspects of your faith walk with other believers who also desire spiritual growth. During this process, you will get to know one another, your stories, struggles, and victories. Some will be similar, others will differ greatly from your own, but my hope is that they will provide you with a fresh perspective.

As you and your group exchange insights, pray for God to expand your understanding of Scripture and deepen the bonds of faith, friendship, and Christ-centered purpose among your group.

If you are walking through this study individually, take your time. Work through each lesson carefully, allowing time for God to move you along at your own pace. But, keep moving!

One person should be designated as the group facilitator. She does not need to have prior training in leading a Bible study or discussion group. The facilitator simply ensures that the discussion stays on track using this Leader's Guide. She can also speed up or slow down the group time by choosing to skip some questions or concentrate longer on others to fit your allotted study time, ensuring that no one gets left out of the faith-building, friendship-solidifying process.

Each group's dynamics and study pace will vary. You may complete an entire lesson each time you meet. Other groups may take their time to get as far in a lesson as time allows, then pick up where they left off during their next gathering. This study may take you eight weeks, sixteen weeks, or a year, but the most important focus is learning God's Word and growing in faith together.

The DVD portions of each lesson run between sixteen and thirty-five minutes, and each lesson in the Study Guide takes forty-five to sixty minutes to walk through (depending on

discussion generated). Those are important numbers to know when you are organizing your group. You may want to meet for two hours to watch the DVD and then work through the corresponding Study Guide's lesson together. However, many groups do not meet for two hours.

This Leader's Guide contains detailed instructions on how to lead the eight-week, sixteen-week, and study-at-your-own-pace plans.

### **Keep in Mind**

As a facilitator, be aware that such in-depth Bible study may be an entirely new experience for some people. At first they may feel a tad overwhelmed – I certainly was when I did my first one! I wanted to give the right answers, but over time realized that sometimes arriving at those together was a more rewarding process. It was comforting to discover that I was rarely the only new person to this kind of a class. Yes, I felt silly when I did not know the right answers or understand where the writer was coming from. However, that lessened over time as God worked in my heart through His Word and the encouragement of fellow class members.

Just remember to be sensitive about calling on someone to answer a question directly, because they may or may not feel prepared to do so.

Around midway through the study or sooner, some people might stop attending class for various reasons. Be sure you have a list of your class members' phone numbers and emails so that you can reach out to them and provide a prayerful nudge for them to finish strong. It also provides an opportunity to discover if something has happened in their lives that the class can pray them through or help in a tangible way. Then be sure to follow up with that person to let them know that the class specifically prayed for them. Such level of care and concern bonds the class even closer together. My deepest desire is that no one is left behind. Being part of a vibrant, growing spiritual community makes all the difference in our faith walks.

## **Tips for Facilitating the Class**

Many leaders believe that the study questions flow easily by themselves. As women begin to share what the Lord has revealed to them through the Word during their study time, conversation is lively as they learn from each other. Sometimes, however, the conversation needs simple guidance.

You will likely face those study times when the conversation does not flow easily because only a few women have done their homework. This is where you, as the Leader, need to be prepared. Look through the lesson beforehand and mark which ones are likely to provide the best conversation according to the interests of your study group. Be willing every now and then to offer one of your answers first, to break the ice and stimulate discussion.

There are two things powerful steps that a Leader can take to best guide your study group: (1) ask God to stir in you a genuine love for each woman in the class; and (2) pray for each of them faithfully that God will grow and enlighten them through the study and for the tenacity to complete each lesson.

If you have led a class before, you know that sometimes one or two people may monopolize the conversation. Sometimes that person is the Leader! Guide the conversation in order to take back the helm, keep the class on track, and draw each woman into the discussion.

Making eye contact with quieter class members encourages their involvement in the discussion. If she appears hesitant or unwilling to talk, steer the conversation easily to the next question to avoid awkwardness.

When the conversation is flowing well, sometimes the class can get sidetracked on a parallel issue. Gently bring it back to the study's topic by reading a Scripture passages provided in that lesson or re-asking the question. Those not involved in the sidetracked conversation will be grateful.

You may run into a situation where the opinions or answers shared do not line up with Scripture, or where the conversation has turned toward a gripe or gossip session. Offer a silent, quick prayer for wisdom, and gently steer the conversation back on track. Sometimes it is unnecessary to correct the issue during that class time, but keep your eyes open for opportunities to bring the light of Truth to those people – even if it happens in the following lesson. It is important to avoid arguments or make anyone look foolish. Speak gentle truth and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. Remember to ask your pastor to provide his wisdom and direction, as well.

### **Encouragement and Prayer**

It is difficult for some people to simply get through each day, much less each lesson, so when they show up to class be sure to encourage them. Thank them for coming and for faithfully remaining in the group. Though it may not seem important, make sure that the study group's space is clean, ready for class, even providing extra Bibles, pens and pencils (if available). These little touches go a long way in removing any stress or barriers to women participating in the study. Snacks and coffee or tea are always welcome! If your class is large, consider offering a sign-up to bring snacks. Involving the class members helps encourage faithful attendance.

Prayer is a vital part of this study. Be sure to take time to allow women to share the challenges and victories they are experiencing through the study with the group. This goes a long way in encouraging transparency and participation.

### **Take Heart, Leader**

I want to encourage you not to be disheartened if the class starts shrinking over time. That's a normal occurrence with in-depth Bible study. Many reasons exist for it that we cannot change, such as family situations and change of schedules. However, some reasons like interpersonal conflicts, or frustration with lack of structure, can be addressed by you. Be sure to

follow up with the people who miss each class to find out if they are okay and how you can pray for them. Personal contact goes a long way in bringing back wayward members.

Finally, YOU are in my prayers, dear Leader. Thank you for stepping forward – keep doing so! Don't shrink back because God is using you in His strength as a tool to open His Word to others. And, dear friend, God will grow and bless you in extraordinary, unexpected ways – simply because you said, “Here am I, send me!”

### **USING THIS LEADER'S GUIDE**

Even though many of you will not need this detailed Leader's Guide, it may be helpful to skim through the week's checklist to ensure you are hitting the important points.

The Eight-Week Study Plan is designed for an approximately one-hour class over eight weeks. Unfortunately, with time constraints you will miss out on uninterrupted, in-depth conversation together as a group. You'll have time to watch the video, discuss a few questions, and then dismiss the class to do the homework on their own.

The Sixteen-Week Study Plan is also designed for a one-hour class over sixteen weeks. This plan alternates one week of video and discussion with one week of working through the Study Guide lesson together. There may be some lessons when the discussion gets so rich that you will not be able to work through the whole lesson. Encourage them to finish the lesson at home and call you if they have any questions during their private study time.

The Study-At-Your-Own-Pace Plan is designed to walk through all of the DVD lessons and entire Study Guide lessons as a group. You will watch the DVD one week, then meet as many weeks afterward as necessary to walk through the companion lesson in the Study Guide. Some groups have taken the better part of a year using this method, but their resulting relationships with the Lord and with each other are deep and rich.

The general layout of each of these plans is included below. **NOTE: The questions for each plan are located at the back of the Leader's Guide in one place to save repetition.**

### **WHAT THIS STUDY INCLUDES:**

- DVD teaching videos – Eight live teaching lessons from forty-five to sixty minutes each.
- One Study Guide and one Leader's Guide – You can order each member a Study Guide in bulk or ask them to obtain one on their own.
- Memory Verses – eight Bible verses that correlate to each lesson. Although this is optional, memorizing Scripture is powerful. Please consider asking the group to memorize at least two of the eight, if not all eight. **NOTE:** These verses are available at [www.lwml.org/bible-studies](http://www.lwml.org/bible-studies).

## **GETTING READY FOR CLASS**

### **Preparation:**

- Arrive early for a quiet moment to pray for each student and the upcoming lesson.
- Test video equipment to ensure all is working properly with the lesson's DVD.
- Set up the meeting room, brew coffee, and set out refreshments for a warm welcome.
- Ensure you have nametags handy so that women get to know one another.
- Greet class members as they arrive and ensure they have a Study Guide.

### **EIGHT Week Plan**

- The first time you meet, provide the following overview so that class members are comfortable with what to expect each week. Each week the class will:
  - Start with prayer, discuss a couple of questions, and watch video.
  - End with discussing a couple of questions and close with prayer.
  - Homework completed on your own.

## **SIXTEEN Week Plan**

- The first time you meet, provide the following overview so that class members are comfortable with what to expect each week. For each lesson the class will:
- *The first week:*
  - Begin with prayer, discuss a couple of questions, and watch video.
  - End with discussing a couple of questions.
  - Assign Lesson 1 homework from Study Guide to complete for discussion next week and close with prayer.
- *The second week:*
  - Begin with prayer and walk together through that week's lesson, getting as far as class time allows.
  - Discuss questions and talk through insights.
  - Close with prayer.
- Alternate first and second week formats until the study is completed.

## **STUDY-AT-YOUR-OWN-PACE Plan**

- There is no set number of weeks to this plan.
- Watch the lesson's DVD and then take your time walking through Study Guide.

## **EIGHT-WEEK PLAN**

- Welcome the class warmly.
- Open with prayer, then ask the pre-DVD questions, allowing time for answers.
- Watch DVD.
- After watching the lesson, ask the post-DVD questions, allowing time for answers.
- End class at the appointed time, asking members to complete the current lesson in their Study Guide during the upcoming week. You will move to the next DVD lesson when you gather again.
- Ask if anyone has any prayer requests for the group. Close with prayer.

## **SIXTEEN-WEEK PLAN**

*(Each of the eight lessons will cover two meeting dates.)*

### **MEETING 1 OF 2**

- Welcome the class warmly.
- Open with prayer, then ask the pre-DVD questions, allowing time for answers.
- Watch DVD.
- After watching the lesson, ask the post-DVD questions, allowing time for answers.
- End class at the appointed time, asking members to complete the current lesson in their Study Guide during the upcoming week. You will discuss the homework together next week.
- Ask if anyone has any prayer requests for the group. Close with prayer.

### **MEETING 2 OF 2**

- Welcome the class warmly.
- Open with prayer. If you have a large study group, consider breaking into smaller groups of ten or less so that each person will have a chance to participate in the discussions.
- Walk through the lesson in the Study Guide together, looking up Scripture passages and discussing the questions together in your group.
- At ten minutes before the end of class, bring the groups back together (if applicable). Ask if anyone has a prayer request that the group can pray for over the coming week.
- Next week, you will begin the DVD for the next lesson.
- Close in prayer.

## **STUDY-AT-YOUR-OWN-PACE PLAN**

### **DVD Portion**

- Welcome the class warmly.
- Open with prayer, then ask the pre-DVD questions, allowing time for answers.
- Watch DVD.
- After watching the lesson, ask the post-DVD questions, allowing time for answers.
- End class at the appointed time, asking members to keep the group in prayer and look over their notes from the DVD session. Next week, you will begin walking through the homework for Lesson 1 together as a group.
- Ask if anyone has any prayer requests for the group. Close with prayer.

### **Study Guide Portion**

- Welcome the class warmly.
- Open with prayer. Remain as one large study group since you have opted to allow time for people to answer and discuss as the Lord leads. There is no rush to complete any lesson on a specific timeframe other than your own group's agreement.
- Walk through Lesson 1 together, looking up Scripture passages and discussing the questions together. Get as far as class time allows within the lesson.
- End class at the appointed time, asking members to keep praying through what the Lord has taught them from the lesson during the upcoming week. You will pick up together exactly where you left off in that lesson's Study Guide next week. If you finished, you will move on to the next lesson.
- Ask if anyone has any prayer requests for the group. Close with prayer.

## **MY PRAYER FOR YOU**

My prayer for you, dear Leader, is that God has used your time facilitating this study to grow and stretch your faith. As you studied His Word, I pray that He drew you closer to Him and created lasting bonds of friendship among your study group. I pray that God has strengthened your leadership skills and increased your love and compassion for those you have led. But most of all, I pray that our Lord continues to ignite a fire in your soul to follow Him more closely and know Him more intimately. Thank you for being brave!

# INDIVIDUAL LESSON QUESTIONS

## LESSON 1

### PRE-DVD QUESTIONS

- As we begin this study of the Vine and God's vineyard, we learn that — just like physical vineyards — we undergo seasons. Some are harvest seasons of abundance while other seasons are harsh winters. What seasons are you experiencing right now where the Lord has placed you?
- God chose you to be in His vineyard, grafted into Christ our Vine. What does that mean to you?

### POST-DVD QUESTIONS

- What did you find most surprising about actual vineyards?
- When we related what happens in vineyards to our spiritual life, what struck you as the hardest part?

## LESSON 2

### PRE-DVD QUESTIONS

- We learn in this lesson about being pruned and cleansed as being part of God's vineyard. What does pruning mean to you?
- What is the biggest change of submitting to God's pruning shears, metaphorically speaking?

### POST-DVD QUESTIONS

- Do you struggle sometimes with what God chooses to prune out of your life? Why?
- What did you learn about God's pruning and cleansing of believers that you found new or impactful?

## LESSON 3

### PRE-DVD QUESTIONS

- In this lesson we finally reach the topic of abiding! What does abiding in Christ mean to you? What does it look like in your life?
- Abiding defines the relationship within the Trinity and also between Christ and believers. What most often inhibits your abiding in Him?

### POST-DVD QUESTIONS

- We learned that the Greek word for abiding is a verb *and a place*. Where do you sometimes abide other than in Christ? What is the result?

- A vital part of being in God's vineyard is the other branches (believers) to whom we are connected. What do you find comforting about that? What do you find difficult?

## LESSON 4

### PRE-DVD QUESTION

- This lesson begins with the sobering topic of what happens to those who do not abide in Christ (using Judas as an example). There is no such thing as a Christian who does not bear fruit, because we are all in God's vineyard. Jesus makes the distinction in this lesson that anyone *who does not abide* is thrown out. What is the main difference between those who abide and those who do not abide?

### POST-DVD QUESTIONS

- We learned that sin does not necessarily equate with failing to abide, since we are all sinful by nature. However, willful sin is a different story. What do you consider to be willful sin?
- Branches cannot attach themselves to the vine and begin producing fruit for outward appearances (like stapling fruit to driftwood). Are you attempting to produce fruit apart from Jesus, our true Vine? If so, how?

## LESSON 5

### PRE-DVD QUESTIONS

- This lesson moves us into the beautiful topic of the love of the Father and Christ toward believers. How would you define such love?
- Does knowing how much you are loved by God and Jesus impact how you love others? How?

### POST-DVD QUESTIONS

- We learned many things about love, but one particular part God's loving relationship with believers is obedience. Do you struggle with obeying what He has commanded? How?
- The lesson wrapped up with the truth that God's joy is in us so that our joy may be full. As you live your everyday routine, what does that look like in your life?

## LESSON 6

### PRE-DVD QUESTION

- This entire lesson is based on John 15:12 where Jesus commands us to love one another as He has loved us. Do you find it difficult to love other believers? Why or why not?

## POST-DVD QUESTIONS

- We are in God's vineyard because of the sacrificial work and matchless love of Jesus Christ. How does that make you feel?
- How can you live your life and love others in such a way as to honor Jesus' sacrifice for you?

## LESSON 7

### PRE-DVD QUESTIONS

- In this lesson, we study that we are friends and not servants of Christ. What are the differences between the two?
- Is it hard to grasp that Christ is your friend? Why or why not?

### POST-DVD QUESTIONS

- Jesus laid His life down for us, His friends, and He teaches that there is no greater love. What does laying your life down for your friends mean to you? Is it easy? Why or why not?
- We talked about three "rules" of friendship about not letting friends stumble alone, give up, or forget Jesus. How do you live in your life among your friendships?

## LESSON 8

### PRE-DVD QUESTION

- We have reached our last lesson! Here, we will turn our attention to the fact that we have been chosen by God to bear good fruit. Do you find that intimidating? Why or why not?

### POST-DVD QUESTIONS

- It is an indescribable privilege to be chosen by God by His divine grace. That means that you are His for eternity. How does that make you feel?
- As we have studied God's vineyard and our place in His vineyard, how has it impacted you personally? How has it affected your relationship and walk with Christ?



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*Mission: Assist each woman of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in affirming her relationship with the Triune God so that she is enabled to use her gifts in ministry to the people of the world.*

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