



Reflections on John 15

Intimate Leaders

Are Transformed by Jesus

Are Fruitful for Jesus

Bring Glory to Jesus

Love Like Jesus

Are Friends of Jesus

By Jon Byler

About the Author

Jon Byler has a passion to serve the body of Christ by using his gifts of teaching, writing and encouragement. He especially enjoys serving the leaders who build the church. He lives with his wife, Loice in East Petersburg, PA. Together they pastor an emerging church and are the parents of three adult children.

Jon served in Kenya for 13 years and in different capacities in the church including pastoral ministry and leadership development. He currently serves in Center for Serving Leadership. He has authored several books including *7 Keys to Financial Freedom*, *The Heart of Christian Leadership*, *The Art of Christian Leadership*, and *Signposts for the Journey, Vol. 1, II, and III* and several booklets on other topics. He writes a bi-weekly e-Zine *Reflections for Serving Leaders* which is distributed by email in English and Spanish. (Sign up to receive a free copy on his website.)

Jon is available for speaking and consulting especially in the areas of leadership, church growth, and missions. For more information see his website, www.LeadersServe.com.

The following is a compilation of a biweekly email newsletter series reflecting on Intimacy from John 15. These “Reflections for Serving Leaders” were written for serving leaders around the world to learn what it means to lead like Jesus. The issue number and date used are the dates for the original publication.

You can use these freely for teaching or training provided you do not use them for commercial benefit. You can subscribe to receive these bi-weekly emails at

<https://centerforservingleadership.com/reflections-for-serving-leaders-blog>



Published by Leaders Serve, Copyright 2025.

Intimate Leaders are Transformed by Jesus

Issue #404, August 6, 2025

We naturally view leaders as independent and able to guide and direct on their own. But serving leaders are dependent on an intimate relationship with Jesus that transforms them.

In John 15, Jesus speaks to His disciples about the relationship He wants to have with them—one of a deep, life-giving connection. He uses the image of a branch and a vine: He is the vine and the disciples are the branches.

While this concept is relevant for every follower of Jesus, the implications for leaders are even more critical as leaders influence others. The strength of a serving leader flows directly from a life that has been shaped by intimacy with Jesus. That gives a leader the power to influence others. In this series we'll look at several marks of leaders who are in an intimate relationship with Jesus from John 15.

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He 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. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you (John 15:1-3, NIV).

The first characteristic of a leader who has an intimate relationship with Jesus is that their lives will be transformed by Him. Transformation produces integrity and authenticity that are essential in leadership. Internal change must happen before inviting others to follow. God uses several tools to produce this transformation.

Intimate leaders are transformed by God's redirection.

"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit..." The word Jesus uses here can speak of judgement as in cutting off from the vine. But it also means "lift up" which better fits the context.* Lifting up is what a gardener does to a branch that is on the ground in the dirt and needs to receive more sunlight and air. It is a redirection of the branch that brings more life. In our leadership God gently redirects us when we get bogged down. This may come as an exposure of a blind spot, a nudge to consider a different approach with a team member or a call to refocus priorities.

Some leaders move ahead with little awareness of their own deficiencies. But serving leaders stay close to Jesus and allow Him to gently redirect their lives, expose their blind spots, and breathe more of His life into their leadership.

Intimate leaders are transformed by God's pruning.

"...while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." When there is no fruit God redirects and where there is fruit He prunes to produce more! The process of pruning is painful and may often seem extreme. But the gardener knows that dead leaves, overgrowth and excess shoots need to be cut away so that what remains will be more fruitful. This may come through trials, painful experiences, or challenges that stretch us.

Some leaders resist the pruning process and try to avoid all pain. But serving leaders cooperate with God's pruning work and seek to learn all they can through the process. The fruit that results make them leaders worth following.

Intimate leaders are transformed by God's word.

"You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." Jesus indicates that His words have already brought transformation to the lives of the disciples. Leaders that remain in intimacy with Him are shaped by consistent exposure to His word.

Some leaders are shaped primarily by books they read, conferences they attend and social media that they consume. But serving leaders prioritize time with God's word that has the power to transform their life and leadership.

For further reflection and discussion:

As I reflect on my own leadership regarding how much my life is transformed by Jesus, how would I rate myself on a scale of 1 to 10? What blocks me from greater transformation?

How does my transformation by Jesus impact the way I lead? Can the people I lead see my transformation?

In what ways might God right now be redirecting my life and leadership? Am I close enough to Him to notice? What do I need to change?

In what ways is God pruning my life right now? Have I fully accepted His authority to do this and do I fully embrace His love that prompts the pruning?

How deeply does God's word impact my life and leadership? Are there other sources that shape my leadership more than His word? What can I do to more fully allow His word to transform my life?

After reflecting on these questions, read the entire chapter, John 15. What additional insights do I find in this chapter about how my intimacy with Jesus shapes my leadership?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at how intimate leaders bear fruit for Jesus.

*The Greek word *airei* can be translated as "cut off," "to take up," "to lift up," "to remove," or "to carry away." I prefer the concept of "lifting up" rather than the judgment implied by "cutting off." Later, in v. 6, Jesus clearly speaks of judgment regarding branches that are detached from the vine, then thrown away and burned. Therefore, judgment does not seem to be His intent in v. 2. His grace precedes judgment.

Intimate Leaders are Fruitful for Jesus

Issue #405, August 20, 2025

Leaders love results! They measure progress, celebrate wins and dream of seeing their vision become reality. But serving leaders learn that fruit comes, not from their striving, but because of their intimate relationship with Jesus. Consider His words to the disciples:

⁴ Remain in me, as I also 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. ⁵ "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. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned (John 15:4-5, NIV).

Jesus calls His disciples to produce results. He desires fruit. But He teaches that the fruit will come only through intimacy.

Intimate leaders are fruitful when they focus on relationship.

"Remain in me, as I also remain in you...If you do not remain in me you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers..." Jesus begins and ends these verses on fruitfulness with a reminder that fruit comes from remaining or abiding in Him. He calls His disciples to focus on their relationship with Him above all else. Where there is a strong relationship with Him, there will be fruitful results. Where that relationship does not exist only dead wood results.

Some leaders focus on the tasks at hand and focus on producing fruit. They focus on the results instead of the relationship. But serving leaders see their task as strengthening their relationship with Jesus. When they focus on the relationship the fruit will come naturally.

Intimate leaders are fruitful when they acknowledge their inadequacy.

"No branch can bear fruit by itself...apart from me you can do nothing." These are tough words for an action-oriented leader used to producing results by their own efforts. But Jesus calls us to first acknowledge that without Him, we cannot produce the kind of fruit He desires. He doesn't say we'll produce less without Him—He says we'll produce nothing without Him! Without intimacy we may work like the disciples trying to catch fish the whole night without results (see John 21:1-6). But as we remain in an intimate relationship with Jesus, fruit is produced from our lives.

Some leaders refuse to acknowledge that they need help. Others are willing to admit they need *some* help. But serving leaders acknowledge that in themselves they are inadequate to produce anything of lasting value.

Intimate leaders are fruitful when they remain in Jesus.

"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit..." Jesus teaches that our fruitfulness as leaders will be in direct proportion to our continued intimacy with Him. It is a relationship that goes both ways, the leader remains in Jesus and Jesus remains in the leader. It is so easy to think that to be fruitful we need to work harder and do more; but our fruitfulness will only increase as we learn to remain in Jesus. This is much more than a one time commitment to follow Him; it is a commitment to remain with Him through all the challenges of our leadership journey.

Some leaders start well, knowing that they have much to learn and areas that need improvement. But with time, they become more self-reliant and less intimate with Jesus. But

serving leaders remain in a strong intimate relationship with Him realizing that intimacy produces eternal fruit. Without it, all their efforts fade away.

For further reflection and discussion:

As I reflect on my own leadership regarding how much my life yields fruit for Jesus, how would I rate myself on a scale of 1 to 10? What blocks me from greater fruitfulness? What steps can I take to strengthen my relationship with Jesus on a daily basis? How might this strengthen my leadership?

Do I act in ways that indicate that I am capable of all that is needed in my leadership? In what ways is Jesus inviting me to acknowledge my inadequacy?

In what ways am I tempted to produce fruit (results) without intimacy? What is the result in my leadership?

After reflecting on these questions, read the entire chapter, John 15. What additional insights do I find in this chapter about how my intimacy with Jesus shapes my leadership?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll examine how intimate leaders bring glory to Jesus.

Intimate Leaders Bring Glory to Jesus

Issue #406, September 3, 2025

Leaders naturally gravitate towards the front of the room. They often enjoy being in the spotlight, recognized and acknowledged as important people. They bring glory to themselves and use their positions to build their own name. But when a leader walks in deep intimacy with Jesus, everything in their life will bring genuine glory to God, not themselves. Jesus told His disciples:

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15:7-8, NIV).

Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that when they are in an intimate relationship with Him, they will bear fruit. That fruit brings glory to the Father and identifies them as His disciples. He identifies three ways that they bring Him glory.

Intimate leaders bring glory to Jesus by immersing themselves in the Word.

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you,...." The primary thing a serving leader can do to grow in intimacy is to saturate themselves in the words of Scripture. They allow it to sink deep into their hearts. As they need daily food for their body, they also need daily food for their soul. Immersing themselves in the Word allows God's nature and character to be formed in their own lives.

Some leaders immerse themselves in social media, podcasts and read books to be more successful. But serving leaders immerse themselves in Scripture in ways that deepen their intimacy with Jesus. Whether leading a church or a business team, leaders who spend time with Jesus make decisions that honor Him and bless others. Then their success brings glory to Jesus.

Intimate leaders bring glory to Jesus by consistent prayer.

Jesus continues, *"...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."* He invites His followers to let the Word transform them and then to bring their requests to Him in prayer. Serving leaders recognize that time spent in reading Scripture and prayer is an essential part of their leadership journey. Prayer grows intimacy and intimacy leads to more prayer.

Some leaders seek results in well-developed strategy and work hard to produce results. But serving leaders stop and ask Jesus to lead and guide their decisions, attitudes and progress. They learn to depend on His guidance more than their own intuition and ability. As they deepen their intimacy with Jesus, they bring glory to Him as He provides guidance.

Intimate leaders bring glory to Jesus by identifying themselves as disciples.

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." Jesus teaches the disciples that when they immerse themselves in His Word and spend consistent time in prayer, He will respond, and produce fruit. The fruit will mark them as His disciples. This fruit is much more than just profit or attendance numbers. When serving leaders walk in intimacy with Jesus, all around them people flourish and come to life. There is healthy growth that brings glory, not to the leader, but to Jesus, the author of abundant life.

Some leaders focus on producing results that they consider the fruit of their efforts. But serving leaders focus on developing intimacy with Jesus which produces beautiful and lasting

fruit. A manager who spends time in Scripture and prayer can guide their team with wisdom, not simply chasing results. Serving leaders bring glory to Jesus as they produce fruit that identifies them as disciples of Jesus.

Many leaders live to bring themselves glory, but serving leaders bring glory to Jesus as they deepen their intimacy with Him.

For further reflection and discussion:

As I reflect on my own leadership regarding how much my life brings glory to Jesus, how would I rate myself on a scale of 1 to 10? In what ways do I take glory for myself?

What blocks me from bringing Jesus greater glory?

In what ways do my daily habits of Scripture reading and prayer shape my leadership? Are there ways that I have relied more on other sources for guidance and how has that impacted my leadership?

Are there ways in my current leadership role that I am focused more on results than intimacy with Jesus? How does this impact my leadership and what, if anything, do I need to change?

After reflecting on these questions, read the entire chapter, John 15. What additional insights do I find in this chapter about how my intimacy with Jesus shapes my leadership?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at how intimate leaders love like Jesus.

Intimate Leaders Love Like Jesus

Issue #407, September 17, 2025

Most leaders say that their people are valuable. But serving leaders actually love like Jesus. An intimate relationship with Jesus becomes the foundation of the way they treat their teams, make decisions and build culture. Jesus talked about this dynamic love relationship:

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:9-13, NIV).

Jesus calls His followers to live and lead with His love.

Intimate leaders experience the love of Jesus.

Jesus encourages His disciples, *“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love.”* Jesus experienced the love of the Father, shared that love with His disciples and now urges them to deeply and permanently experience His love. He calls them to “remain” in this intimate relationship with Him. Jesus never intended for us to only know Him in our minds; He wanted us to experience His love in a way that transforms our relationship with Him. This experience with the love of Jesus should come before our attempt to love others.

Some leaders know they should love others and treat them correctly, so they work hard on people skills and the art of influence. But serving leaders cultivate an intimate experience of the love of Jesus before they try to love others.

Intimate leaders respond to the love of Jesus.

“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love,... I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” Jesus understood that genuine love for another produces a desire to please them and to do what they want. So, He immediately links loving Him with obedience. He certainly wants His followers to obey what He calls them to do. But this is not a heavy, burdensome obligation, it is a response to love. He knows that we will be tempted to obey without experiencing His love, so he links obedience with joy—complete joy!

Some leaders seek to obey rules or a moral code but find it legalistic rather than life-giving. But serving leaders have experienced the love of Jesus and from that position respond with joy to His instructions. Their obedience flows from a loving relationship rather than an obligation.

Intimate leaders imitate the love of Jesus.

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus tells His disciples that the greatest expression of their love will be to lay down their lives for others. This is the essence of serving leadership, giving one’s life in service to others. Jesus expects this result to flow from an intimate experience of His love.

Some leaders seek to serve others because they are convinced it will produce good results. They serve their team to achieve results. They serve with their head. This is commendable but very different from serving leaders who love others in response to the love they have received from Jesus. They reflect Jesus' love in tangible ways in their workplace. They serve with their heart.

For further reflection and discussion:

As I reflect on my own leadership regarding how much I love like Jesus, how would I rate myself on a scale of 1 to 10? What blocks me from loving Him more?

At what level have I experienced the love of Jesus in my own heart and soul? Does my service for Him flow out of a sense of duty or a response to His love?

Does my obedience result in deep joy in my heart or do I continually wonder if I am doing enough?

Do I approach my daily work with a sense of moral obligations or joyful obedience that flows out of a love relationship with Jesus? How does this impact my leadership?

Does my service to others flow out of my head or my heart? Is my concern for my team based on universal leadership realities or my intimacy with Jesus?

After reflecting on these questions, read the entire chapter, John 15. What additional insights do I find in this chapter about how my intimacy with Jesus shapes my leadership?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll examine how intimate leaders are friends of Jesus.

Intimate Leaders are Friends of Jesus

Issue #408, October 1, 2025

Do you consider yourself a *follower* of Jesus or a *friend* of Jesus? The difference is profoundly significant. The words Jesus gave His disciples invite us to an intimate friendship:

¹⁴*You are my friends if you do what I command.* ¹⁵*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* ¹⁶*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.* ¹⁷*This is my command: Love each other (John 15:14-17).*

Friendship implies a close intimate relationship. Jesus reveals to the disciples that He desires an intimate friendship with them, much deeper than they have imagined. And He graciously shows them the way to this intimacy.

Intimate leaders are friends as they obey the commands of Jesus.

Jesus says, “*You are my friends if you do what I command.*” Obedience is expected and required for the followers of Jesus. He gave many commands to be obeyed. His commands in the context of this chapter focus on remaining or abiding in Him. Obedience to the commands to abide will produce intimacy and friendship. This is not a burdensome journey to win His friendship; it is a journey of deepening intimacy of relationship. Intimacy without obedience is impossible; but obedience without intimacy happens to many leaders, myself included!

Some leaders seek to win God’s favor through obedience alone without abiding. But serving leaders seek to walk so intimately with Jesus that they obey as friends on a journey.

Intimate leaders are friends as they understand the desires of Jesus.

Jesus clarifies why simple obedience is not what He wants, “....a servant does not know his master’s business.” Jesus contrasts friendship and service and cautions all leaders that it is possible to perform actions of service for Him without intimacy with Him. Servants are able to obey without really understanding the heart and desires of the master. They simply follow instructions. Jesus invites His disciples to move beyond mere obedience to a deeper understanding of His heart. He wants us to walk in obedience that flows from a deep friendship with Him.

Some leaders dutifully obey the commands of Jesus but remain far from His heart. They don’t cultivate the intimacy that is required to be a friend of Jesus. But serving leaders press in to find the heart of Jesus and as they understand His heart, live lives of joyful obedience.

Intimate leaders are friends as they respond to the invitation of Jesus.

Jesus makes it clear that this friendship is His choice, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you....*” We have the privilege of choosing our friends and Jesus has the same choice. Jesus chose us to be His friends! This must have been an astounding truth for the disciples who first heard these words. Jesus was inviting them into an intimate friendship with Himself. He was opening up His own life and heart to them and calling them to move beyond simple obedience to radical friendship. This was the culmination of all He had taught them about abiding in Him, to respond to His invitation to an intimate friendship.

Some leaders focus on their choice to follow Jesus and congratulate themselves for making the right choice. But serving leaders are amazed that Jesus chose them and joyfully choose to deepen their intimacy with Him. Then all their leadership flows from and is shaped by that response to the invitation of Jesus for friendship.

For further reflection and discussion:

As I reflect on my own leadership regarding how much I am a friend of Jesus, how would I rate myself on a scale of 1 to 10? What blocks me from being a closer friend?

Is my obedience my attempt to win Jesus' friendship, or does it flow out of my abiding in Him? What is an example of that in my life in the past week?

Do I see my relationship to Jesus more like a servant or a friend? How does this impact my leadership?

After reflecting on these questions, read the entire chapter, John 15. What additional insights do I find in this chapter about how my intimacy with Jesus shapes my leadership?

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler