

The True Vine

John 15

Each week, read the entire Scripture passage before you begin. Record verses where you find your answers.

Memorize God's Word for the week: John 15:5.

Discuss review questions from the previous lesson.

Day 1: John 15:1-3—The True Vine

1. In the metaphor Jesus used, who is represented by (a) the vine? (b) the vinedresser? (c) the branches?
2. Jesus was drawing on a metaphor that the Old Testament writers had used. (a) From Ps. 80:8-9 and Isa. 27:2-6, what did the vine or vineyard represent in the Old Testament? (b) From Isa. 5:1-7 and Jer. 2:21, what happened to the vine or vineyard God had planted? (c) From what you've learned from these verses, what was the significance of Jesus's calling Himself "the true vine" (Jn. 15:1)?
3. What does the vinedresser do with the branches that bear no fruit? (See also 15:6). Read Matt. 3:12; 25:41; Jude 7; and Rev. 20:14. How do these verses help you understand what this means?
4. There are many reasons a gardener prunes plants. What are some of them?
5. Drawing from Jesus's agricultural example, what might be some reasons that God prunes human "branches"?
6. Have you seen the effects of God's pruning in your own life? If so, and if it led to greater fruitfulness, how so?

Day 2: John 15:4-11—Abiding with Joy

7. Look up the dictionary definition of *abide* that seems to best fit the context of today's passage. Then compare it with 15:4. How would you describe what it means to abide?
8. In one of his epistles, John gave more information on what it looks like to abide in Jesus. Read 1 Jn. 2:5-6 and 3:6. What did he say, according to these verses?
9. Review Jn. 15:5 alongside 5:19. What is true of both Jesus and the disciples?
10. Compare 15:7 with 14:13-14. How are they similar, and how does 15:7 expand on Jesus's promise in the earlier verses?
11. According to 15:8, what is the outcome of the fruit produced by Christ's followers?
12. How do love and obedience factor into abiding? How do they all relate to joy?

Day 3: John 15:12-17—No Longer Servants, but Friends

13. What example were the disciples to follow regarding how to love one another?
14. According to 1 Jn. 4:20, what is the connection between loving God and loving our brothers and sisters?
15. For the first time in John's Gospel, Jesus referred to the disciples as *friends*.
 - a. What did Jesus say is the highest act of love one friend can demonstrate for another?

- b. Read Rom. 5:6-8. How did Jesus go above and beyond this high measure of friendship?
16. If you have put your trust in Jesus, then you are His friend too. How is being a friend different than being a servant?
17. Jesus said He chose His disciples for the purpose of bearing fruit that abides.
- a. Although Jesus didn't define that fruit, other Scriptures help us know what He probably meant. Read Prov. 11:30; Isa. 5:7; Gal. 5:22-23; and Eph. 5:9. From these verses, what kind of fruit does God look for?
 - b. What are some practical ways that modern-day disciples of Jesus can live out this same purpose?

Day 4: John 15:18-21—Hated by the World

18. Jesus warned His disciples that the world would hate them. Why was this true? (See also 3:20; 7:7.)
19. Read 2 Chr. 36:16; Neh. 9:26; and Matt. 5:12. Considering the history of their people, why might the disciples not have been surprised by Jesus's warning?
20. Read Lk. 21:12-19. (a) How did Jesus expand on the hatred His followers would face? (b) How did He say He would help them? (c) How could these verses encourage you if you were to be hated because of your faith?
21. According to the last sentence in Jn. 15:20, why would the disciples' efforts be worthwhile, even though they were hated? (See also 13:20.)

Day 5: John 15:22-27—No Excuse for Sin

22. Why did the nonbelieving Jews no longer have an "excuse for their sin"?
23. Review 9:39-41. How did the Pharisees in that passage prove the point Jesus was making in 15:22-24?
24. By not believing, what had they, in effect, inadvertently chosen?
25. How are those of us who have "seen" and "heard" from Christ through the book of John accountable for how we respond to Him? (See also Mk. 4:24-25.)
26. From Jn. 15:26-27, how do you see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together?
27. In light of the persecution Jesus's followers would face, how would the promise of the Holy Spirit encourage them?

Day 6: Participate in Class

Apply the truth. Jesus told the disciples they would "bear witness, because [they had] been with [Him] from the beginning." Whether you've known Jesus for most of your life or you're just getting to know Him, there are things about Him you can bear witness to. What are they? See if you can find someone to share these things with this week.

Day 7: The True Vine

John 15

Jesus had said earlier that “the Son can do nothing of his own accord” (5:19). Here in chapter 15, Jesus declared that apart from Him the disciples too could do nothing. Using the metaphor of a vine, Jesus said that they would have fruitful lives if they were connected to Him. And the Holy Spirit would come to help them, Jesus promised. But those who rejected Him bore the fruit of hatred, which after His death would be aimed at His followers.

The Vine and the Branches (John 15:1-8) Throughout the Old Testament, Israel is described as a vineyard that God planted to bear good fruit. In return, God expected them to yield a crop of justice and righteousness. But the crop had turned bad. In the New Testament, we see that the ones responsible for establishing justice and righteousness were out for Jesus’s blood. But Isaiah had prophesied hope: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit” (Isa. 11:1). That shoot would be the Messiah, the only one capable of bringing true, lasting justice and righteousness. Now the Messiah—Jesus—would commission His disciples to do the same. Here we see Jesus’s seventh and final “I am” statement: “I am the true vine.” The branches stemming off the true vine are supposed to bear good fruit (see Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:9). And pruning is essential to enable the branches to bear even more fruit. God’s intent in pruning is always to cleanse His people and make them more fruitful.

Think about the importance of pruning. To prune is to remove parts of a plant. Gardeners know that pruning keeps the plant healthy, corrects problems, encourages fruit, cuts away disease, and makes the plant beautiful. In a similar way, God prunes His children, cutting away the unhealthy parts so they can flourish spiritually. The “branches” remain firmly attached to the vine even as they’re being pruned.

Jesus told the disciples: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.” Jesus was telling the disciples that, in order to bear spiritual fruit, they would have to stay connected to Him. He was their source of life and nourishment. The Greek word for “abide,” means “to remain.” It carries the image of grafting, as a branch is grafted into a vine from which it draws nutrients. Without this abiding, the branch withers and dies. When this happens, “the [dead] branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

We may wonder how a branch could be “in [Jesus],” yet still be thrown into the fire of judgment. Many commentators think that 15:2a describes those who had been interested in Jesus but were never genuine believers. If this is correct, Judas would have fallen into this category. However, those who remained connected to Jesus and His words would see the multifaceted fruit of Christlikeness. They would be able to ask anything they wished, and it would be done for them. As Christ’s followers desire the same good fruit that He desires, so they pray according to His will. As a result, they bear much fruit. They also bear testimony to Jesus, and God is glorified.

Not Servants, but Friends (John 15:9-17) Jesus told the disciples, “Abide in my love.” Jesus associated love with obedience: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” The disciples were empowered to abide and obey because they had received perfect love from Jesus, a love that He had received from His Father. Jesus’s life was filled with joy, and He wanted His disciples to know this joy too. The outcome of their love for God and one another is that they would be filled with His joy.

He went on to explain, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus was about to die as payment for their sin—the ultimate demonstration of His love for them. Jesus was not only the disciples’ Savior but also their friend. The Old Testament refers to only two people as God’s *friends*: Abraham (see 2 Chr. 20:7) and Moses (see Exod. 33:11). But now all who are obedient to Jesus have that distinction: “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” He reminded them, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” Theirs was a position of honor, but it came with responsibility—to abide in Jesus, to bear good fruit in His name, and to love one another as He had loved them.

Think about friendship with Jesus. With our friends, we learn what brings them joy. We also learn that we need to adapt to keep our relationship healthy. We do this because we love our friends. It’s the same with Jesus. We learn through studying the Bible what brings Him joy, then adapt our lives to please Him.

The World's Hatred (John 15:18-25) In addition to love and joy, Jesus talked to the disciples about difficulties they would face. The world hated Jesus, and it would hate them too. From 1:10, we know that He “was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.” Jesus lived on the earth that He Himself had created. And yet the world did not recognize Him. Specifically, Israel’s ruling elites did not acknowledge Him for who He is. Instead they hated Him and wanted to kill Him. Jesus had warned the disciples that they would be hated for the sake of His name. In the face of opposition, Jesus’s followers were supposed to “rejoice and be glad” (Matt. 5:12) as they followed in the footsteps of the persecuted prophets. And Jesus assured His followers that their heavenly reward for this persecution would be great. Here Jesus used a series of “if” statements to remind His followers of the hatred He had warned them about:

John 15:18—“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” Those who sought to kill Jesus recognized the disciples as His followers. Since they were out for Jesus’s blood, they would be out for the disciples’ blood too. Anyone associated with His name would be a target.

John 15:19—“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.” The world’s love is conditional. Jesus had come preaching a message contrary to the world’s message. Among other things, He taught that the humble and meek will “inherit the earth,” that we should “love [our] enemies,” and that “the last will be first, and the first last” (Matt. 5:5, 44; 20:16). These are not the world’s terms, so the world tends to reject anyone choosing to live by them.

John 15:20—“If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” Jesus returned to a statement He had made when He had washed the disciples’ feet: “A servant is not greater than his master.” The world’s hatred for the master, Jesus, would have consequences for the servants, His disciples. Because they belonged to Him, the world would persecute them. Left unchecked, the final outcome of hate is murder. Loyalty to Jesus would put the disciples at odds with those in power. And the Jewish leaders would resort to nothing short of death in an attempt to keep power.

John 15:22, 24—“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin.” The witness of Jesus’s words and works had forced people into a decision. Would they believe that Jesus had been sent to reveal God the Father and then follow Him? Or would they be blind to the truth and reject Him?

The leaders had been put to the test when they saw Jesus healing a blind man on the Sabbath. They knew that a miracle had occurred, and yet they refused to recognize the one who had performed it. Jesus had said to the Pharisees, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains” (9:41). Most of these leaders did not believe, despite Jesus’s words and works. What they failed to realize, however, is that Jesus’s closest association was with God the Father. By hating Jesus, they also hated God. Quoting Ps. 35:19 and 69:4, Jesus called their hatred of Him a fulfillment of their Law. Jesus had told His brothers, “The world ... hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil” (7:7). Jesus had shed light on the darkness of those committed to power, and “everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (3:20).

The Holy Spirit’s Help (John 15:26-27) The disciples would not be left to stand alone. God would send the Helper, “the Spirit of truth.” God’s presence through the Holy Spirit would provide them with wisdom and courage to counter the world’s hatred. The Father sent the Spirit to bear witness about the Son. Together, they are the fullness of God’s revelation to humanity. “He will bear witness about me,” Jesus said of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would lead the disciples so that they would not become discouraged and so that they could bear witness about Christ. The Spirit would empower them to tell what they had seen and heard. Later, when confronted with the choice between death and bearing witness for Christ, Peter declared that they could not help but speak about what they had seen and heard (see Acts 4:20). The boldness to bear witness for Christ, even in the face of persecution, is evidence of God’s Spirit.

Personalize the truth. What do other people notice about the fruit you’re producing? If what they might notice is different from what you’d like it to be, think through the changes you could make. Write a description of the kind of fruit you’d like to see in your life. Then ask the vinedresser to enable you to produce good fruit.

Review: The True Vine

28. From this week’s study, what did you learn—or what were you reminded of—about what it means to abide in Christ?