

Planting a New Vine

1. By nature, do you tend to be an independent "free spirit" or more of a group oriented person?

On the final evening before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion He talked at length with His Eleven disciples about how to face life without His visible presence. In His parting words He expanded their spiritual horizons by telling them of a new and wondrous relationship that would be made possible through the coming of the Holy Spirit who would dwell within them. He would not leave them as "orphans" in the world, but would come to them through the Spirit. In chapter 15 Jesus speaks candidly to His disciples about the importance of staying close to Him spiritually.

Drawing Near: *"Lord, I desire to be one with You in all that I say and do. I ask that there be no rivals to keep me from loving You first and foremost above all else."*

Begin your study of this chapter by **reading John 15:1-27 aloud** from your favorite translation. Try to get a sense of the flow and movement of thought as the chapter progresses. Make a mental note of the many repeated words and phrases. **Then focus in on verses 1-11.** The image of the vine was a rich one for the Jews since the land of Israel was covered with numerous vineyards. It had religious connotations as well. For background compare Jesus' imagery about the vine to Psalm 80:8-19 and Isaiah 5:1-7.

2. What is Jesus trying to communicate when He says "I AM the true vine?" (Emphasis added.)
3.
 - a. What three symbols does Jesus use while instructing His disciples about this new and living relationship (verses 1-6)?
 - b. Identify the spiritual parallel intended for each symbol.

An important part of looking after a vine is pruning. When left to itself a grape vine will produce large quantities of foliage. A gardener must do a good deal of pruning to encourage fruitfulness.

4. What two types of pruning does the Divine Gardener perform?

Certain aspects of verses 2 and 6 are difficult to interpret and will be addressed separately.

As we live out our Christian lives we will inevitably find God’s activity of pruning. There are things in our lives that should not be there and need to be removed. Part of the Father’s ministry as the gardener is to “cut off” all that is evil and thereby encourage growth of all that is good. This may be painful at times but it is necessary. Read Hebrews 12:4-11, James 1:2-4 and Hebrews 4:12 for a broader perspective.

5. Using the above references, describe the attitude God desires of us as He does His pruning work in our lives.

6. The Greek verb *kathairei* (“prunes”) literally means “He cleans.” The verb tense indicates He is continually at work. In what way have you experienced the Father’s pruning activity recently? What was the result?

7. In what sense were the disciples already clean (John 15:3 and 13:10)?

The allegory of the vine and the branches has many other interesting and beautiful lessons to teach us about the Christian life. The little word “in” becomes one of the most significant words in this passage. **Read and meditate on John 15:2-11** paying special attention to each occurrence of the word “in” (14 in all) in the NIV translation.

8. In the chart below record each phrase in which the word “in” occurs.

Vs. 2 example: every branch <i>in</i> Me	Vs. 6
Vs. 4	Vs. 7
Vs. 4	Vs. 7
Vs. 4	Vs. 9
Vs. 4	Vs. 10
Vs. 5	Vs. 10
Vs. 5	Vs. 11

Read verses 2-11 again. The relationship Jesus seeks to establish with His disciples (and us) is an intensely personal one. Consider and ponder the mystery of divine love that is illustrated so compellingly in the image of the vine and the branches.

9. Describe the spiritual reality behind the words “*in* Me,” “*in* you,” “*in* the vine,” “*in* His love,” etc.

The result of this intimate relationship with Christ is described as a *spiritually fruitful life*. Jesus is very clear about our part in this fruit-production— “abide” or “remain” in Me.

10. What does it mean to “abide” in Christ and what does “abiding” look like in real life? (Use the whole chapter for your answer.)

Personal Reflection

Think for a moment *in His presence* about your own life. God intends that fruit be produced by the life of the Lord Jesus living in us. Yet the temptation to try to produce fruit apart from the Vine is ingrained in human nature. As you observe your life ... are you bearing *spiritual* fruit, *healthy* fruit? Prayerfully reflect on Jesus’ solemn words: “Without Me you can do nothing.”

Study Skill: Interpretation

There are two phrases in this allegory that are not easily understood (John 15:2a and 6). When interpreting difficult passages it’s always important to study Scripture in light of Scripture. Because context rules in interpretation, both the immediate context of the chapter and book must be considered, as well as the broader context of the whole Bible.

11. Study John 15:2 and 6 carefully with these guidelines in mind. Also refer to the interpretative notes provided in the handout. When taking all these factors into consideration, what do you think Jesus is saying in these two verses?

Reread John 15:12-17 thoughtfully and *store these words in your heart*.

12. Notice how this section begins and ends. Compare with John 13:34. What is *true* love willing to do for the sake of another (verse 13)?
13. One of the special marks of favor shown in the Scriptures is to be called the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8). How did Jesus prove to His disciples that they were His friends (verse 15)?
14. What is the prerequisite and the end results of friendship with Jesus (verses 14 and 16)?

In the final section of chapter 15 Jesus begins the sharp and painful contrast between the joy of abiding in Christ and His love, with the hatred the world would express toward the disciples in the days ahead. It would be in this climate that the disciples' mission would be conducted.

Reread John 15:18-25 and listen in as Jesus' words echo through the minds and hearts of the disciples.

15. In the context of John 15, what does "world" refer to?

16. From John 15:18-21 and 7:7 list the reasons Jesus gives for the world's hatred.

17. Comment on how Jesus' proclamation "they will persecute you also" points to the practical unity of the vine with the branches.

18. What interesting statement does Jesus make about the fate of those who rejected Him in the face of the full revelation they had witnessed (verses 22-25)? (Also refer to Psalm 69:4.)

In the midst of warnings of hatred and persecution Jesus returns to the promise of His presence.

19. **Read** and consider each facet of **verses 26-27**. What crucial revelations are given to us in these verses?

About the Son

The Father

The Holy Spirit

The disciples

20. *What has God been speaking to you about in this passage?* Maybe it's receiving Christ. Maybe it's cooperating with His pruning. Maybe it's seeking a deeper level of spiritual intimacy with the Lord Jesus. Maybe it's a longing to truly love others as Jesus loves you, or the desire for strength to face persecution with the same courage and grace that Jesus demonstrated. ***Respond to the one thing that you have been convicted about this week.***

As we develop a lifestyle built around depending on Jesus, His fruit will gradually emerge and we will know increasing joy in our lives (John 15:11)! Praise His Holy Name!

Interpretative Notes

The phrase “in me” or similar phrases are used numerous times in the Gospel of John (6:56; 14:10-12, 20, 15:2, 4, 5-7; 16:33 and 17:21, 23). In each instance the phrase refers to fellowship with Christ and a person who is a true believer. These expressions are never used loosely or applied to anyone but a child of God.

Fruit-bearing is seen as the “norm” in the life of a Christian but Scripture also allows for the possibility of an unproductive child of God who would continue to do his or her own will and eventually be set aside or lose his reward (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 2 Peter 1:5-9 and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Some people might conclude that if a Christian fails to bear fruit he could possibly lose his salvation. However, God’s Word is absolutely clear when it comes to the security of our salvation. John says it well in chapter 10 verse 28. “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.” (See also Romans 8:31-39.)

Keep in mind that no analogy can fully express all sides of the truth. We must focus on the main emphasis that is intended here, which is fruit bearing, not our eternal salvation.