



LEADER GUIDE

JOHN

SIGNPOSTS OF
THE SAVIOR

THE SIGN OF HIS LOVE

BIG IDEA: God's pruning is a gift of His love and for our good.

DATE: Sunday, March 22, 2026

SCRIPTURE: John 15:1-17

OPENING QUESTION

What's the longest you have ever gone without electricity? What was that like? What did you miss the most?

When the electricity goes out, we discover just how reliant we are on our kitchen appliances, laptops, cell phones, and even hair dryers in everyday life! We forget how difficult life can be when we are not connected to our power source. The same holds true in our spiritual life.

Today we pick up the text as Jesus and the disciples had just left the upper room where they ate the Last Supper. They likely walked towards the Kidron Valley with Jesus teaching along the way perhaps inspired by the grapevines they may have seen here or above the temple. He uses this time to teach them the importance of staying connected to Him – their true power source – using the imagery of a grapevine.

OPTIONAL: Leaders, bring in a cluster of grapes to share as you teach this lesson to provide a sensory visual aid.

SETTING THE STAGE

To understand just how radical of a statement it was for Jesus to declare Himself "the true vine" we need to look at what the vine symbolized. Above the temple in Jerusalem was something the people were very familiar with - a golden vine, sculpted in incredible detail, hanging over the entrance. Ancient historians described the vine as a masterpiece, its grape clusters as large as a grown man. For those who entered the temple, it was more than an architectural wonder - it was a symbol of Israel, God's chosen vineyard.

LEADERS: Summarize the following in your own words to provide more background information on Israel being known as the vine.

As Jesus and His disciples left the Last Supper and walked toward Gethsemane, they likely passed the temple's massive golden vine—a symbol every Jewish person knew well. In the Old Testament, Israel was repeatedly described as God's vine, a vineyard planted with care and meant to bear good fruit. Yet prophets like Isaiah and the psalmist lamented that Israel continually failed to produce the fruit God desired as they continually turned away from God's ways.

Against this backdrop, Jesus made a striking declaration: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.” By saying this, He revealed that He—not Israel as a nation—was the true, faithful vine who would finally bear the fruit God intended. His followers would no longer find life or spiritual fruitfulness through their country but through remaining connected to Him as their source of life.

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 15:1-17 (CSB)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.

⁹“As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. ¹⁰If 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 these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. ¹²“This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. ¹⁷“This is what I command you: Love one another.

DISCUSSION

A PROMISE TO PRUNE

READ John 15:1-8

For Jesus’s audience, the image of the vine would have brought to mind the meticulous care a gardener provides. In first-century vineyards, tending the vine was both an art and a necessity. Gardeners carefully trained the vines, allowing the branches to grow along the ground, lifting them up with poles, or guiding them onto trellises. Pruning was equally essential. In spring, gardeners trimmed tender shoots to prevent overgrowth, ensuring the remaining clusters would produce high quality fruit. In autumn, after the harvest, they removed old branches to prepare the vine for the next season, and the discarded cuttings were burned.

Let’s note who each phrase describes – the Father, Jesus, or His disciples.

the true vine

the gardener (vinedresser)

the branches

the pruner

What do these descriptions teach us about the character of the Father and Jesus? What spiritual truths about our relationship with God emerge from this gardening illustration?

On the board write **CUT IT OUT** and the following words underneath it.

jealousy	generosity	pride
honesty	loyalty	hospitality
love	bitterness	compassion
sexual impurity	hot temper	resentment
gossip	pornography	patience

ASK: The pruner cuts off unproductive branches and prunes productive branches. What would the Father cut out of a believer's life in the above list?

Now see the words that remain (*and read them out as you circle them.*) See how they empower a person to flourish! Now ask your group to reflect on this list – what things do you need God to cut out? Which ones are you growing in?

Certainly, the Father wants to cut away sinful things, but other times He may remove *good* things that have become distractions to growth. He prunes the productive branches to make us even more fruitful. It could be a job, relationship, habit, volunteer project and or a sport that takes up all your time, etc. At the time of removal, we often experience pain and possibly confusion. But we can trust that our heavenly Gardener is lovingly allowing pain with purpose.

When have you grown because of His pruning? Why were you better for having been pruned by Christ?

Pruning is never about punishment – it's about preparation. A gardener prunes with care and purpose, removing what is unnecessary so the plant can thrive. God does the same for us through His Word.

SAY: Think about a vineyard. *What does the vine do for the branch?* (provide all that is needed for life and fruit) *What does the branch do for the vine?* (produce fruit)

THE PROMISE OF FRUIT

Jesus promised if we remain in Him we would produce much fruit. He also said that apart from abiding in Him, we could accomplish nothing. We can do a lot of good things on our own, but without His supernatural power, they won't amount to anything in His kingdom.

What does it mean for us to abide or remain in Christ and Christ in us? (*Staying connected to Him throughout our day. Abiding with Jesus also means allowing Him to shape our character. It's not about what we get from God but about becoming more like Him.*) What does abiding look like in your life? How do you do it?

(Some practical ways to abide: talking to God every day, even when life is not in stress; personal Bible reading and study with an open mind to receive His truth; listening to God in prayer; sharing Christ with others; engaging in personal times of praise and worship; meditating on God's Word throughout the day)

The Greek word for “abide” or “remain” is *meno*, which means “to continue to be present.” *Meno* is used eleven times in the first 11 verses of John 15. We all have a tendency toward self-reliance. Using the vine illustration, Jesus tells us to hang with Him – to stay connected to Him. When we are tempted to stop praying, studying His Word or any of the other spiritual rhythms that connect us to God, He tells us to continue to show up. When we do, He will supply the power we need to produce fruit.

How would you define spiritual fruit?

In the Old Testament, fruit sometimes illustrated offspring and other times consequences. Paul told the Galatians that the fruit produced in our lives when we yield to the Holy Spirit is godly character - love, peace, patience, and so forth. Also in the New Testament, fruit is seen as “praise to God” (Heb. 13:15), meeting needs (Rom. 15:28), and leading people to Christ (Rom. 1:13; Col. 1:6). So basically, **our connection to the Vine will be evident by the fruit of our character and influence.** If we lack evidence of this fruit, we shouldn’t beat ourselves up, strive harder, or give up. Instead, we can ask the Lord for help in reconnecting and remaining with Him.

THE PROMISE OF JOY

READ John 15:9-17

Summarize what Jesus said about joy in verse 11.

When we abide with Him, Jesus said our joy will overflow. He wasn’t talking about a feeling of happiness based on circumstances. He was talking about a sense of joy that is present even in the midst of grief, disappointment, and difficulties. Like peace, joy runs deeper than circumstances because it rests on God’s character.

What promises from Jesus in John 15 stands out most to you today? Why?

What spiritual disciplines or practices help you continue to remain in Jesus? How can you engage in these more often?

RESPONSE

As God prunes us, He makes us more fruitful people who reflect His love, joy, peace, and truth to the world. Let us approach the Word with open hearts, inviting God to do His work in us - this is pruning. Like a vine in the hands of a skilled and caring gardener, we can trust that every cut, every correction, and every moment of renewal has a loving purpose: to help us bear more fruit for His glory. Let us stay connected to our power source so we can truly flourish.

READING PLAN

3/22 – John 17; 3/23 – John 18; 3/24 – John 19; 3/25 – Mark 15; 3/26 – Hebrews 2; 3/27 – Psalm 22; 3/28 – Psalm 69; *Memory Verse: Galatians 3:26-27*

Next week we talk about the ultimate sign of Jesus’s divinity – the resurrection! Read John 20 this week and come ready to discuss.

John 15:1-17 presents a profound teaching from Jesus about **the importance of abiding in Him to live a fruitful life marked by love and obedience**. Using the imagery of a vine and branches, Jesus explains the vital connection between Himself, His followers, and God the Father, emphasizing that **a thriving spiritual life depends entirely on remaining in Him**. This passage reveals the transformative power of abiding in Christ, which results in fruitful lives and relationships that glorify God. The crux of this passage is Jesus's declaration at the beginning: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener" (v.1). This statement positions Jesus as the source of all spiritual nourishment and growth, while God the Father tends to His people like a skilled gardener, pruning and shaping their lives through His word. Jesus continues, "every branch in me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit" (v. 2). **This pruning process illustrates God's work in the lives of believers, removing anything that hinders their spiritual growth and cultivating their ability to bear good fruit.**

The central message becomes clear in Jesus's repeated emphasis: "remain in me, and I in you" (v. 4). This **mutual abiding** reflects an intimate relationship between Jesus and His followers akin to the life sustaining connection between a vine and its branches. Without this connection, believers cannot bear fruit. As Jesus states, "just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me" (v. 4). This underscores believers' dependence on Jesus for spiritual vitality. **The fruit mentioned throughout the passage represents more than good deeds; it signifies the evidence of a transformed life that glorifies God** (of which deeds are certainly a part). Jesus explains, "My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples" (v. 8). This fruit is the natural outpouring of a life abiding in Christ. It is not the result of human effort but the work of God through the believer's connection to Christ.

The theme of love permeates the latter half of the passage, culminating in Jesus's command: "Love one another as I have loved you" (v. 12). The love Jesus calls His followers to embody is sacrificial and selfless mirroring His own love demonstrated through His life and death. He emphasizes this by saying, "No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends" (v. 13). **This love is both the hallmark of genuine discipleship, and the ultimate expression of the fruit believers are called to bear.** Jesus concludes by reminding His followers of their unique relationship with Him: "You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain" (v. 16). This reinforces the idea that the Christian life is not self-driven but a response to God's initiative and grace. It also speaks to the enduring impact of a life lived in an alignment with Christ's purposes.

In this passage, Jesus invites believers to a life of deep, abiding connection with Him. This text reveals that abiding in Christ is the foundation of a fruitful, God glorifying life defined by love. The call to remain in Him is not merely about individual growth but about participating in His mission to spread love and truth, reflecting His transformative power in the world.

