

Life Group Discussion Guide

No Greater Love – Part 2: Remaining in Jesus

Week 1: The Vine and the Branches • John 15:1–8

As a church, we've spent the last six weeks in the upper room with Jesus—the room where He shared the Passover meal with His disciples prior to His arrest.

The upper room was off-limits to the masses, a place only for His closest disciples. It was here that Jesus drew His dearest friends nearer than ever to His heart. The crowds are gone. Seats are limited. Few belong here.

As we consider the intimacy of the upper room, Pastor Jon challenged us:

*“Do **you** belong in the upper room? In the place where Jesus wears His heart on his sleeve, and speaks with the disciples as with the closest of friends, and expects them to actually love **Him**? Do you belong in the upper room with Him, or do you simply hang with the crowds?”*

- Take time now to self-reflect on the question Pastor Jon posed above. In your relationship with Jesus, do you share upper-room intimacy, or have you been simply hanging around with the crowds? Why do you answer that way?
- If you were to consider your relationship with Jesus from His perspective, what do you think He would desire to see change or grow?

This week, as we seek greater intimacy with the Savior, we are focusing on one of the most memorable images of our union with Him: the vine and the branches.

1. The Meaning of the Vine

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener...I am the vine; you are the branches.” John 15:1, 5

The metaphor of the vine shows up in a number of places in the Old Testament—particularly Psalms, Isaiah, and Ezekiel—where the vine represents the people of Israel, and the vinedresser is God. Isaiah 5, as an example, tells of how God planted the nation of Israel as His vineyard, which He tended, protected, and delighted in. And yet, His beloved vineyard produced bad fruit.

“The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.” Isaiah 5:7

As much as God devoted Himself to His people Israel, the vine of His choice, they did not devote themselves to Him. They did not produce good fruit. So when we come to John 15 and Jesus says, “I am the true vine,” do you understand what He’s saying?

“What the people of Israel collectively could not deliver, Jesus as the single seed from Abraham brought forth: the true vine. He will not shed the blood of others but rather His own blood to bring about the fruit of righteousness and justice.”

- In what ways did Israel fall short of God’s design and intention for them?
- In contrast, in what ways is Jesus the true and perfect vine?

2. The Nature of Our Relationship to the Vine

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He 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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 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. I am the vine; you are the branches.” John 15:1-5

The key command Jesus gives the disciples in this passage is, “Remain in me.” So how do we, the branches, remain in the vine? Pastor Jon outlined three realities of what it is to remain in Jesus.

Remaining in Jesus is:

- Spiritual:** Up to this point, Jesus had been physically with His disciples. But now He’s preparing them to remain in Him even once He’s physically away from them. This is the same reality we live in today, which is what makes remaining in Christ a spiritual activity.
- Ongoing:** The very definition of “remaining” entails “ongoing.” Do not give up. Do not quit. Do not lose heart. You’re going to see other things that will seem more real, more enticing, more urgent. But Jesus is urging you, “Remain in me.”
- Organic:** We are vitally connected to Jesus as a branch is to a plant. If we cease to be connected to Him, we are no longer alive spiritually.

So, if remaining in Jesus is spiritual, how do we know whether we’re doing it? In verse 7, Jesus gives us something more tangible when He says, “If you remain in me and **my words** remain in you.” Many people today would call themselves Christians yet affirm things Jesus rejected. As Jesus reveals here, it’s not possible to remain in Him without remaining in His words—His teachings, His ways.

- Explain in your own words what it entails to remain in Jesus. Be practical and specific.
- What is the correlation between remaining in Jesus and upholding His words?
- Consider this quote from the message: *“Jesus’ words are like sap in a plant. His words carry spiritual nutrients from the vine to the branches, nourishing our spiritual life, strengthening what’s sick or weak or dying in us. His words are our food. Without them we perish.”* Have you pursued Jesus’ words with this tenacity—as vital nourishment without which you spiritually die? What would it look like for you to hunger and thirst for Jesus’ words in this way? What might change if you did?

3. The Outcome of Remaining in the Vine

Jesus made it undeniably clear what happens to branches who remain in the vine, and branches who don't:

- a. **Branches disconnected from the vine cannot bear fruit:** If we do not remain in Jesus—like lifeless branches scattered on the ground—it's impossible for us to bear fruit. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. (v. 4-5)
- b. **Branches that bear no fruit are ultimately cut off:** This doesn't mean that you can lose your salvation. This verse refers to the many people who have only a loose association to Jesus, but are not vitally attached to Him. (v. 2)
- c. **Branches that remain in the vine will bear much fruit:** We simply remain in Jesus, and the fruitfulness follows. (v. 5)
- d. **Branches that bear fruit are pruned to produce more:** The pruning of a branch always involves some kind of knife, which is painful, but the result is that they are even more fruitful. (v. 2)
- e. **Bearing much fruit has a dual purpose:** Glorifying the Father and showing that we are Jesus' disciples. (v. 8)

These realities lead us to this week's **Big Idea: Those remaining in Christ the vine bear much fruit.** Do you?

Pastor Jon shared three things that may keep us from bearing much fruit. If you don't see fruit in your life, ask yourself:

- a. **Is it because you're not in the vine?** Remaining in Jesus is not a one-time decision, but an everyday pursuit.
 - b. **Is it because you're in the vine but flatter yourself too much to detect and hate your sin?** To remain in Christ is to reject the flesh. Have you waged war against your sin?
 - c. **Is it because you run from the Father's pruning?** The pruning knife of God is both loving and painful. Do you allow yourself to come under His pruning? When hardship comes, do you sense not only the knife, but the loving hand of the Father who holds it?
 - d. **Finally, is it because you haven't truly given your life to Christ?** Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." Do you ache from the emptiness of a life apart from Him?
- Do any of the above questions resonate with you? Talk about it.
 - Take time now to pray together for growth in remaining in Christ. Repent of sins, confess your reliance on Jesus, and pray that you would be abundantly fruitful—all to the Father's glory.