

**Week Seven: Who Is Jesus and What Does He Offer?
Participant Sheet**

Session 7: Week of March 19, 2023

I Am the Vine

John 15:1-11

Brewster Baptist Church, Brewster, MA

Opening

Do you have a favorite type of plant or flower? What is it and why?

This week's passage is printed below. As before, look for and take note of repeated words and phrases.

Bible Passage John 15:1-11 (NRSV)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the **vinegrower**. He removes every branch in me that bears no **fruit**. Every branch that bears **fruit** he prunes¹ to make it bear more **fruit**. You have already been cleansed² by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear **fruit** by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. **I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing**. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much **fruit** and become my disciples. As the Father has **loved** me, so I have **loved** you; abide in my **love**. **If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love**, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his **love**. I have said these things to you **so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.**”

¹ The same Greek root refers to pruning and cleansing.

Key Verse John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

(NRSV)

Small Group Discussion Questions:

The first verses of *John 15* come with a sharp edge – Jesus says his Father is the vinegrower or the gardener, “*He removes every branch in me that bears no **fruit**. Every branch that bears **fruit** he prunes to make it bear more **fruit**.*”

1. What do you think of Jesus’ statement that every unfruitful branch in him will be cut off?

2. How do you respond to the idea that God has expectations for you being fruitful if you’re receiving the benefits of being “in” the vine and that there are consequences if you’re not?

3. Jesus also says that those who are fruitful will be pruned for greater fruitfulness. If you’re experiencing the knife of God, how do you know if you’re being punished for unfruitfulness or pruned for greater service?

4. What do you think of Jesus’ statement that apart from him “*you can do nothing?*” What does that mean?

5. “*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*” How does this work? Have you ever experienced something that seemed to either confirm or deny what Jesus says here?

6. Why is abiding or remaining in Jesus so important?

7. Jesus says, “*I have said these things to you **so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.***” Is it possible to experience more of the joy of Jesus in our lives, especially given the world in which we live? How can we do it?

Intimate Friendship with Jesus

Leslie Weatherhead wrote in, *The Transforming Friendship*, (page 18): “***Christianity is the acceptance of the gift of the friendship of Jesus.***”

8. In all friendships, we take seriously what our friend takes seriously which in *John 15* means the commandments of Jesus. In what ways do you sense Jesus wants you to deepen your friendship and follow him more fully?

Leslie Weatherhead wrote in *The Transforming Friendship*, about the transformation that takes place in the lives of those who become friends of Jesus. “*In all who come near Jesus manners soften, hearts become gentle.*

There is new tenderness, a new sympathy, a new joy, a kind of infectious goodness. The disciples begin to say things, do things, be things, which they never could have said or done or been before. But those friends who have watched the change know the secret. They have been with Jesus. The friendship has done it. Friendship will always do that for us. It will make us like the friend we admire and see much of.”

9. Can you share a way in which you see your friendship with Jesus “softening your manners,” or making you gentler, tender, sympathetic, or joyful?

Closing Prayer

Jesus we thank you for being our friend, our teacher, our Savior, and the leader and the source of our life. Fill us with your Spirit, your love, and your joy every day so we may bear much fruit and be a blessing to others. In your name and for your sake, Amen.