

I AM THE VINE

We Long for Joy

LESSON 6

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:5



WELCOME

What experiences or aspects of life epitomize joy to you?

BACKGROUND

Experiences of joy are beautiful moments that we cherish. For many of us, however, joy can feel elusive or temporary, giving way to the struggles and routine of life. Believers are not promised a life free of challenge or impervious to monotony. What we are offered is the lasting joy of deep connection to God.¹ Just as people long to experience joy in life, Jesus also longs for us to have joy. In **John 15:1–17**, Jesus used the metaphor of a vine to share with His disciples some keys to the joyful, fruitful life He offers.

Because society in the ancient world revolved around agriculture, vine imagery was common.² For the Jewish people, vines and vineyards were sacred images. These images were present in their places of worship and on their coinage. They are found in biblical texts as well as other ancient Jewish texts.³ In Jesus’ time, Jews approaching the west side of the altar at the Temple would see steps leading to “a linen curtain covered with purple, scarlet, and blue flowers ... Above the curtain (beneath the roofline) [was] a gigantic grapevine of pure gold, representing Israel ... Wealthy citizens could bring gifts to add to the vine (gold tendrils, grapes, or leaves), and these would be added

¹ Joy is a deep and substantial sense of contentment, regardless of our situation, which grows in the lives of those who are connected to Jesus Christ. Joy is different from happiness which is affected by situations, experience and environment.

² Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. 513

³ Burge, Gary M. *John: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 2000. 416-417; Milne, Bruce. *The Message of John*. InterVarsity, 1993. 219

by metal workers to the ever-growing vine.”⁴

Throughout the Old Testament there are passages that use the vine or vineyard as a symbol for God’s people, Israel.⁵ These passages emphasized their failure to produce good fruit and the resulting judgment.⁶ Jesus’ use of vineyard imagery in His teaching also emphasized a failure to produce good fruit. In this passage, however, Jesus used the metaphor to make a strikingly new statement—the only way to be connected to God was by being connected to Jesus Himself, the true vine.⁷

1. If you were to describe your current level of joy as a body of water, how would you describe it (a drip, a pitcher, a trickling spring, a deep ocean, etc.)? And why?



WORD

As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you.

Context: Beginning in **John 13**, we see a major shift in John’s gospel. The focus moves from Jesus’ ministry years to the cross, as well as the mission that will be passed on to His disciples. Jesus acknowledged that it was almost time for the end of His earthly ministry (**John 13:33**). Everything was about to change for His disciples. Jesus gathered them together to share their final Passover meal. Judas Iscariot’s impending betrayal was exposed and he walked out into the night leaving Jesus alone with the other 11 disciples (**John 13:21–30**). To the remaining gathering of devoted followers Jesus began a farewell address (**John 13:31–17:26**). **John 15:1–17**, the subject of this

⁴ Burge, Gary M. *John: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 2000. 416

⁵ **Psalm 80:8–16; Isaiah 5:1–7; Jeremiah 2:21, 12:10; Ezekiel 15:1–8, 17:1–21, 19:10–14; Hosea 10:1–2**

⁶ Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. 513

⁷ *Illustrated Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., 2015. 1933

lesson, sits in the middle of that farewell address.⁸ Enter into Jesus' teaching:

John 15:1–17

¹ *I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener.* ² *He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.* ³ *You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you.* ⁴ *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.*

⁵ **Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches.** *Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.* ⁶ *Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned.* ⁷ *But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!*

⁸ *When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.*

⁹ *I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.* ¹⁰ *When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love.* ¹¹ *I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!*

¹² *This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you.* ¹³ *There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.* ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command.* ¹⁵ *I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.* ¹⁶ *You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.* ¹⁷ *This is my command: Love each other.*

⁸ It follows Jesus' I AM statement that He is the way, the truth, and the life and the promise that when He leaves He will send Holy Spirit to indwell His followers (addressed in Lesson 7).

2. In Jesus' vineyard metaphor, identify the role/descriptor and actions of each of the following:

a. Jesus

Role/descriptor – **John 15:1, 5:**

Actions – **John 15:3–4:**

b. His Father

Role/descriptor – **John 15:1:**

Actions – **John 15:2:**⁹

c. Disciples/You

Role/descriptor – **John 15:5:**

Action – **John 15:4:**

⁹ This I AM statement adds, “and my Father is the gardener” (**John 15:1**). Jesus' role remains central in the metaphor, but the Father's role is also significant.

The statement in **verse 2** about the Father cutting off branches that do not bear fruit has prompted many interpretive questions. The clear purpose of the metaphor is to show that because a Christian is connected to the life-giving vine, they will produce some measure of fruit. Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. 515

Fruit-bearing should not be seen as a test to pass or fail—a branch does not have to demonstrate a particular level of productivity in order to be safe from destruction.

Fruit-bearing is a natural byproduct of connectedness to the vine. Burge, Gary M. *John: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 2000. 418

3. Jesus stated that His disciples had already been pruned and purified by the message He gave them (**15:3**). In other words, from the moment they believed they were made clean and fruitful.¹⁰ Read the following Scriptures and comment on their significance, or potential significance, in your faith journey.

a. **1 Corinthians 6:11**

“... you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

b. **Ephesians 2:9–10**

“Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done ... we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.”

4. When a branch shows signs of life, it is the heart of the Father to see those branches become even more fruitful (**John 15:2**). While it is true that we are made clean and fruitful from the moment we believe, He also continues to work in our lives to make us more and more fruitful. He prunes and disciplines us in order to promote growth. As you have allowed your life to be shaped by God, what are some ways you have seen the benefit of His pruning?

¹⁰ Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. 515

5. Jesus' concept of "remaining" (15:4) is rooted in the idea of an intimate, enduring relationship—one in which the two parties make each other their home.¹¹ Carson describes the interconnectedness of "remaining" this way: "No branch has life in itself; it is utterly dependent for life and fruitfulness on the vine to which it is attached."¹² The living branch is embedded in the vine and the life of the vine flows into the branch. What do you appreciate about these descriptions of "remaining"?

a. Is any part of this understanding of "remaining" uncomfortable for you? If so, why do you think that is the case?

b. What part of "remaining" do you perceive as your work and what part do you perceive as Christ's work?

c. How might these descriptions of "remaining" produce joy in the life of a Christian?

¹¹ *Illustrated Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., 2015. 1936

¹² Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. 516

6. **John 15:5–6** essentially repeats Jesus’ previous statements: Jesus reiterates that He is the vine, He clearly identifies His disciples as the branches, and He further strengthens the expectation associated with remaining in Him—fruitfulness. As you read the following verses, comment on God’s part in bringing about that fruitfulness.

a. **Philippians 1:11**

“May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.”

b. **Galatians 5:22–23**

“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ...”

7. Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah [Jesus] and described the fruit that would be displayed in the Messiah’s life. In His farewell address, Jesus expressed His desire that His disciples also be fruitful in these ways. As you compare the Scriptures in the following chart, reflect on and note where or how you see Holy Spirit producing this fruit in your life as a result of your connection to the vine.

Isaiah's prophetic words about Jesus	Jesus' words for His disciples	Where or how is Holy Spirit producing this fruit in your life?
<p>Filled with Holy Spirit</p> <p><i>"The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him ..."</i></p> <p>Isaiah 11:2</p>	<p><i>"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth ... you know him, because He lives with you now and later will be in you."</i></p> <p>John 14:16–17</p>	
<p>Obedient to God</p> <p><i>"He will delight in obeying the LORD ..."</i></p> <p>Isaiah 11:3</p>	<p><i>"When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in His love."</i></p> <p>John 15:10</p>	
<p>Acts of Justice</p> <p><i>"He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited ..."</i></p> <p>Isaiah 11:4</p>	<p><i>"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works ..."</i></p> <p>John 14:12</p>	

<p>Righteous Character</p> <p><i>“He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment.”</i></p> <p>Isaiah 11:5</p>	<p><i>“Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.”</i></p> <p>John 17:17 (Jesus’ prayer)</p>	
<p>Salvation Mission</p> <p><i>“... as waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD. In that day the heir to David’s throne [Jesus] will be a banner of salvation to all the world ...”</i></p> <p>Isaiah 11:9–10</p>	<p><i>“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other ... your love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”</i></p> <p>John 13:34–35</p> <p><i>“Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.”</i></p> <p>John 17:18 (Jesus’ prayer)</p>	

As you reflect on the chart, are there any areas you would like to invite Holy Spirit to move in your life in deeper ways?

8. What incredible statement does Jesus make in **John 15:7**?

a. In what sense might this be a risky statement for Him to make?

- b. Those who remain in Christ experience the kind of transformative work described in the passages in question six (**Philippians 1:11; Galatians 5:22–23**). Those transformations enable us to pray in line with God’s heart. It is because of this transformation that Jesus can assure believers that they can ask for anything they want and it will be granted. What changes have you noticed in the way you pray as Holy Spirit has brought about transformation in your life?
- c. Think of a time when you saw a prayer answered, small or large—a prayer that you knew was in line with God’s desires. Describe the joy you experienced in seeing that prayer answered.
9. What does Jesus indicate is the sign of a true disciple? And what is the outcome of their discipleship? (**John 15:8**)
10. In **John 15:9–17**, Jesus’ focus turned to the subject of love, the first fruit of the Spirit. The kind of love Jesus was describing here is *agapē* love, which is defined as “an attitude or emotion of deep affection ... with a focus on loving action and not feelings alone.” In your own words, write a few thoughts about the relationship between love, obedience and remaining, as explained by Jesus in these verses.

11. What was Jesus' purpose in telling the disciples all of these things about remaining in Him? **(15:11)**

How has a growing relationship with Jesus been a source of joy in your life?



WORSHIP

Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.

Joy is a deep and substantial sense of contentment that grows in the lives of those who are connected to Jesus Christ. Jesus' metaphor of the vine reminds us of the deep realities of our connection to God:

Jesus is the source of the life within us—spiritual life, which is growing and productive (**15:5**). God has made us clean by cutting off the sin that kept us from fruitful growth (**15:2–3**). As we remain in Jesus, He promises to remain in us (**15:4**), and share the same love that is shared between the Father and the Son. (**15:9–12**)

These stunning realities all come about in our lives because He chose us to receive the incredible gift of being fully connected with Him! What joy this brings!

On your own, or with your group, praise God aloud for the life of joy that is yours because of your connection to Him.



WITNESS

Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.

The joy of finding your home in Christ is a joy that God is inviting the whole world to join in. Who in your life, whether a believer or unbeliever, might benefit from hearing that there is a home for their soul that promises joy?

Ask God for an opportunity to share with that person—ask Him to make your heart ready and eyes alert for the opportunity.

CONVERSATION PROMPTS

Consider using one of the conversation prompts this week to begin having a spiritual conversation with someone in your life.

- What brings you joy?
- Who do you feel connected to?
- If you were to describe your current level of joy as a body of water, how would you describe it (a drip, a pitcher, a trickling spring, a deep ocean, etc.)? And why?

TAKE-AWAY SUMMARY

As you have worked through this lesson and listened to Holy Spirit, what is your one significant take-away?

Write a brief summary of your take-away on page 102.

SERMON NOTES

Lesson 6

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for the user to write their sermon notes for Lesson 6.

