



IN CHRIST ALONE (21)

February 15, 2026

John 15:1-11

PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships
To participate in God's mission to the world

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Discussion Question

- If you were stranded on an island with an unlimited stock of one fruit, what would you choose?

WORSHIP 10 MIN

PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

RESPONSIVE PRAYER — Isaiah 65

They shall build houses and inhabit them;

They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;

They shall not plant and another eat;

For like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,

And my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

Before they call I will answer;

While they are yet speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;

The lion shall eat straw like the ox.

They shall not hurt or destroy,

In all my holy mountain.

SCRIPTURE READING

John 15:1-11

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

This week's passage is a standalone covering John 15:1-11, sometimes referred to as the "vine discourse." This passage presents union with Christ as the indispensable foundation of the Christian life. Jesus declares himself as the "true vine," the Father as the vinedresser, and believers as the branches, illustrating the fact that fruitfulness depends entirely upon abiding in him and in the mission the Father has sent him to accomplish. Therefore, apart from Christ, spiritual life and productivity are impossible (verse 5; cf. Galatians 2:20). The movement outlined in this passage — abiding in Christ (verses 1-4) leads to bearing fruit (verses 5-7) which results in God's glory (verse 8) in which the believer finds their ultimate joy (verses 10-11) — provides the biblical basis for humanity's purpose as articulated in the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: The chief purpose for life "is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." Joy is therefore not pursued independently but arises necessarily out of communion with Christ and participation in the Father's glory (verse 11; Psalm 16:11).

The Old Testament background helps us to understand the metaphor being employed by Jesus in this passage. Israel was repeatedly described as God's vine or vineyard (Psalm 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21), yet these passages largely portray a fruitless people facing judgment. Prophetic hope anticipated a future fruitful vine (Isaiah 27:2-6) which Jesus now fulfills by identifying himself as the true vine — indeed, the true Israel who accomplishes what the nation failed to achieve. Only those united to Christ constitute God's fruitful people (Romans 11:17-24). Entrance into this union occurs through receiving Jesus' words (verse 3; cf. Romans 10:17), and then the Christian life is one animated by the continued indwelling of and adherence to his teaching (John 8:31; Colossians 2:6-7; Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] 26.1).

Abiding, therefore, is neither a mystical vagueness nor a passive sentiment. Scripture consistently defines it as a living union expressed through faith and obedience (John 14:21; 1 John 2:3-6). It requires active obedience shaped by Christ's Word. As theologian Sinclair Ferguson observes, abiding means allowing "Christ's word to fill the mind, direct the will, and transform the affections." The Father, as divine vinedresser, sovereignly grafts believers into Christ (John 6:44; WCF 10.1), thereby enabling them to live a life of obedient faith, producing good works which in turn manifest gratitude, strengthen assurance, and above all glorify God (Ephesians 2:10; WCF 16.2). Such obedience mirrors Christ's own loving submission to the Father, even unto death (Philippians 2:8), and leads to true freedom and joy (verses 10-11; John 8:31-32).

The practical force of this passage, then, is that God's primary purpose for his people is not earthly ease or success (though these are not bad secondary things) but the fruit-bearing that glorifies him (verse 8; Matthew 5:16). As commentator Matthew Henry notes, "From a vine we look for grapes, from a Christian we look for Christianity; this is the fruit, a Christian temper and disposition, a Christian life and conduct." If that is the nature of the fruit that abiding in Christ produces, we should remember that it comes only by our union with him. Fruitfulness, then, is only properly understood as the result of sustained communion with Christ rather than human techniques or religious activity alone. Our abiding falls decisively on Christ himself, his person, his Word, and our faithful response to him. Where communion with him is cultivated, fruit follows, God is glorified, and the promised joy of Christ becomes an experiential reality for his people.

1. Looking at the Bible

- Share with the group some key phrases or ideas that stood out to you from the passage.

2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- Read Isaiah 5:1-7. How is Israel described there as God's vineyard, and what fruit was God expecting?
- How does Jesus, the "true vine," succeed where Israel failed?

3. Looking at our Hearts

- If faithfulness is tied directly to abiding in God's Word (verse 7), what does your current relationship to Scripture suggest about your own spiritual dependence on Christ?

4. Looking at our World

- According to a recent New Yorker article, the most popular class in Yale University's 300-year history has been Laurie Santos' course entitled "Psychology and the Good Life." In this course, it is suggested that human happiness can be engineered through habits, mindset, and/or circumstances. How does John 15 challenge this cultural understanding?
- In what ways do you see people around you searching for joy but looking in insufficient places? How might the image of the vine help communicate the gospel to those longings?

PRAYER 15 MIN

Pray for each other: Share any prayer requests you have.

Pray for each member of your group to find deeply fulfilling spiritual communion with Christ. Pray especially for those who may be experiencing pruning.