

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.  
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

## questions

### OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

Read John 15:1-8.

1. In this analogy, identify the **vine**, the **gardener** and the **branches** (15:1, 5).

Jesus is the true vine; Father God is the gardener; Christ-followers are the braches

♥ Describe the first picture that comes to your mind when you read 15:1 and 5a.

♥ What is the significance of Jesus calling his disciples "branches" (15:5)?

The perfect analogy! Branches are important and they bear fruit, but they are useless and die if separated from the vine. No matter how hard a branch tries, no matter how healthy it is or what a perfect specimen it is, it simply has no life and can do nothing if separated from the vine. When separated, it may look good for a while, but it will cease to bear fruit and die. There is no better image of our relationship to Jesus. Apart from him we can't accomplish anything of spiritual value. We simply were not made to live independently. We are "hard-wired" to be in relationship with God and to do everything with him.

2. Describe the different types of branches found in this analogy (15:2, 5).

The branch that produces no fruit (v.2)

The branch that produces fruit (v.2)

The branch that produces that more fruit (v.2)

The branch that produces much fruit (v.5)

♥ How does a person become a branch of the true vine?

A good question to ask and one that every Christ-follower should be able to verbalize. You can review **John 14:6** and what it means to come to the Father through Jesus Christ. Only repentant sinners who accept Jesus' sacrifice of death can become branches of the true vine.

3. What is the job of the gardener or vinedresser (15:2)?

He takes care of the vine and the branches. He cuts off those branches that don't produce fruit and he prunes the braches that do produce fruit so that they become more fruitful.

♥ How much fruit does a branch have to bear to avoid being cut from the vine (15:2)?

We are all at different places in our spiritual journeys. Quantity is never the issue. Some fruit it what the Gardener looks for.

♥ **What** do you think it means that the Father cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit? **When** and **how** might this happen? **Why** does the Father do this?

Not all Christians agree on what this verse (15:2) means. Some say it means you can "lose" your salvation and are cut from the vine if you do not bear fruit. Some say these branches are persons who profess to be Christians, but they really are not. In the end, they will be judged and cut off. Others say that the "cutting off" is a picture of God's discipline in the life of a unproductive Christian and it is a more severe image of pruning.

The interpretation of this verse lies in how one translates the Greek verb that often reads "cuts off" in English. This verb can also be translated "takes away" or "takes up" or "lifts up." If this verb is translated "takes up" or "lifts up" is can give us a whole different picture of what is happening.

It has been said by people who are knowledgeable about vineyards that new branches on a vine have a tendency to trail down and grow along the ground. And, because these branches are covered by dirt and mud and do not get any sun, they cannot produce fruit if left to grow along the

ground. Because these branches are not where they should be, the vinedresser (gardener) must "take up" or "lift up" these branches, wash them and wrap or tie them around the trellis so that they begin to produce fruit. New lives or "new branches" in Jesus may have a tendency to trail down and grow along the ground because they have not yet been trained to live Christ-like. The Gardener lifts these new branches up out of the sinful habits of their old life and washes them and puts them in a place where they can begin producing fruit.

This image (of lifting up and washing off) also fits well with what Jesus says next in **15:3** – "You are already **clean** because of the word I have spoken to you." When the vinedresser "lifts up" or "takes up" the branch, it is for the purpose of "cleaning" it and putting it where it should be. Jesus is saying in 15:3 that the disciples are **already clean** because they have heard the good news from Jesus. Even though they are "new branches," they are not "growing along the ground covered with dirt and getting no sunshine." Jesus, through his ministry to them, has already lifted them up and wrapped them around the trellis so that they can produce fruit. The Word of God (the Bible) does the same thing for us today.

Since Jesus says that these branches are **in him (15:2)**, we have to assume that these branches are not "fake Christians" or people who say they are Christ followers, but really aren't. It seems that the last explanation given is a good one and it fits well with what we know is the character of the Gardener (Father God). The gardener does not "cut off" the branch that is producing no fruit; rather, he gently "takes up" or "lifts up" this branch to the sun so that it has opportunity to produce fruit. The first step of the Gardener is not **judgment**, but **encouragement!**

4. Can you think of other functions a gardener might have in a vineyard? **Isaiah 27:2-3** and **Jeremiah 2:21** might help you with your answer.

Trimming and pruning branches is not the Gardener's only job. The verses in Isaiah and Jeremiah point out that God (as Gardener) also **plants** the vineyard with good seed or stock, he **waters** it, **watches over** it, and **protects** it night and day. A gardener would also watch over the **soil** so that it can adequately nourish the vine. It seems there is always something to do in the garden or vineyard and Father God the Gardener is continually working in the vineyard taking care of his vines.

♥ How does God the Father fulfill the function of gardener in your life and in your relationship to Jesus?

5. What is pruning and what is its purpose (**15:2**)?

To **prune** means to remove what is unnecessary or unwanted. With plants, it is to cut away and remove the dead wood and to trim the live wood back to increase fruitfulness and growth in the plant. Dead wood harbors insects and disease and may cause the vine to rot, and it makes the vine unproductive and unsightly. Live wood must be trimmed back in order to prevent such heavy growth that the life of the vine goes into the wood rather than into the fruit.

The Greek verb for "prune" can also be translated "to cleanse" or "to purify." Note that pruning is NOT punishment for not producing fruit. It is something that the Father does to the branch that **IS bearing fruit** in order to make it **more fruitful**. Pruning is not a bad thing – it is a good thing, although at the time it may not be pleasant! The Father loves us too much to leave us where we are. He desires to we grow spiritually and become more and more fruitful. The spiritual vineyard is tended by God Himself, who knows best how to train and develop the personality of persons. We can think of pruning as the "old self" being cut away and removed so there is room for the new, Christ-like nature to grow.

God often **uses** (not causes) hard times, difficult situations, tests and trials to prune us. Why? Because hard times are usually what causes us be dependent on God and to leave all of the other false securities in our lives. Hard times also train and discipline us. They build our character and produce Christ-likeness in us. "Pain produces" is one of the primary laws of spiritual growth. This

principle works not because God is a masochist, but because we, as sinful, broken creatures, seem more responsive and more obedient when we are in difficult circumstances. In hard times we turn to God and his Word and we desire to grow. In a difficult circumstance, what we know in our head is worked out in our lives and our hearts. Pruning can be thought of as spiritual "exercise" that builds spiritual "muscle." It is not pleasant while we are going through it (like exercising or dieting), but we are pleased with the end results – and so is the Father!

6. What do you learn about pruning from **James 1:2-4** and **Hebrews 12:7-11**? What fruit does it produce?

Both these references are good descriptions of what pruning is and what comes from it. James says that any trial or hard time can cause our faith to grow which develops perseverance in us. When these qualities are fully developed, we can face anything and it will not destroy us. We only become stronger. When we realize what is happening and what the end result is, we can actually be joyful – not because we like pain, but because we will so like what we become!

Hebrews tells us that sometimes pruning is God disciplining or correcting us by confronting and cutting away the sin in our lives. Sin (disobedience) will grow and destroy us if it is not dealt with. God is a good Father and he knows how to train and discipline his children. Hebrews 12:11 sums it up: ***No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.*** James 1:12 says that God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Pruning is not just going through a difficult time. We can go through hard times and not benefit from them if we **resist** and **resent** what God is doing in our lives. Attitude is important if we are to reap the fruitfulness that comes from the Father's pruning; we must **accept** and **submit** to what he is doing.

♥ Is pruning always painful? Why or why not? Is pruning always correction? Why or why not?

Pruning usually refers to God using difficulties in our lives and so it usually has some amount of pain involved. It is important to remember, however, that pruning is not the only way God works in our lives! James 1:17 tells us that **all good things** that come to us are **gifts from God**. God constantly showers us with love, mercy, grace and kindness. He delights in giving good gifts to his children (Matt. 7:11). He is the perfect Father with a perfect balance between discipline and showing great affection.

♥ In the past, how has the Gardener trimmed and pruned you? What happened? What was the result?

♥ What do you see in your own life that needs trimming or pruning? What tools might the Gardener use? What fruit would result?

7. From the following Scripture, list the fruit that the Gardener is looking for in your life.

Scripture	Fruit
Galatians 5:22-23 -	love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control
Ephesians 4:2 -	humility, gentleness, patience; making allowance with each other's faults because of your love
Ephesians 5:8-9 -	fruit of light – goodness, righteousness and truth
Colossians 3:12-13 -	compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, forgiving the person who offends you

♥ Is bearing a lot of this kind of fruit important enough to you to go through pruning? Why or why not?

♥ For what purpose is our fruit-bearing (15:8)? We show we are Christ-followers and our "fruit" brings glory (admiration, praise, honor, fame, splendor, beauty) to Father God  
Why is this important? Our fruit is a testimony to who we are and who God is. Our fruit draws people to God. Our fruit reflects God's character and demonstrates why we were created. No one is offended by good fruit – a thought, attitude or action that brings glory to God. Everyone is drawn to good fruit.

♥ As a branch on Jesus' vine, how would you describe your fruit: Ripe? Green? Growing? Wormy?

8. What is the *only way* you can bear this kind of fruit (15:4-5)?

Be remaining (abiding, dwelling) in Jesus, as he remains or abides in us. We can **never** produce Christ-like fruit on our own. It comes only as Christ's life in us changes us from the inside out.

♥ When Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing," (15:5) did he really mean nothing or was he just using a figure of speech? How so?

There is no way to get the fruit of Christ without Christ. Fruit-bearing for God is not a human possibility. Separate from Christ, no fruit; united to Christ, much fruit. A continual dependence upon Jesus, communing with him through the Holy Spirit is what produces fruit in our lives. To be connected to the vine means that the life of Jesus is flowing through us and this always leads to fruitfulness. Fruitfulness will be the inevitable outcome of an interior spiritual life with Jesus.

9. The Greek verb *meno* is translated into English as *remain, abide, dwell, live, endure* or *continue* and it means "to stay" or "to be present." To remain in Jesus means to be close to Jesus spiritually and to stay in his presence. What are some specific things that you do to remain or abide in Jesus?

The answers may be a little different for everyone, yet they will be similar. Remaining in Jesus is not something that happens automatically just because we are in Christ. Remaining or abiding is intentional and takes effort. The things a person does to remain in Christ can be thought of as spiritual exercises or holy habits. They help us keep the presence of Christ in our minds and our hearts.

Certainly we need communication (prayer) with Jesus to remain in him. It's great to get in the habit of having a continual conversation with him. Reading and meditating (thinking about) his Word is also necessary. The primary requirement for remaining is a heart that longs for God. Have several in your group share what they do **to stay close to Jesus**. Answers may include things like music or worship, fasting, solitude, service, etc.

For more suggestions see the heart question below.

♥ According to **John 6:56, 1 John 2:6, 24; 3:24** what are some things that help us to remain in Christ?

Eucharist or the Lord's Supper is a way of receiving and practicing the Presence of Christ. Letting his Word remain in us by studying, meditating, memorizing and obeying it helps us remain in Christ. Living life as Jesus lived life (totally dependent on the Father) helps us remain. Obedience to his commands keeps his Presence close.

♥ Have you ever felt far from Christ since becoming a Christ-follower? What made you feel this way?

♥ What part of our remaining depends on Jesus? On us?

The needed change in us and the producing of godly fruit is God's work, not ours. It is an inside job and only God can work from the inside. Fruit is a grace that is given. But this does not mean that there is nothing that we can do. We don't just wait for God to come and transform us. There are things we must do.

A farmer cannot make his seed grow; all he can do is provide the right conditions. He cultivates, plants and waters, but God makes the seed grow. Producing fruit is a spiritual planting and harvest (Gal 6:8). We must consciously choose a course of action that prepares our hearts and gets them in the right place so that God can come and bring the change. Praying, meditating on

God's word, worshipping, communion, etc. don't change us or cause us to be fruitful. However, they do put us in the place and in the right frame of heart (much like planting a seed in good soil) so that God can then come and change us and cause his fruit to grow in us. If we don't do our part, God cannot do his. However, change itself is never our responsibility. We don't TRY to change. But, by doing "spiritual exercises", we just put ourselves in the place where God can bring the inner change and cause his fruit to grow in us.

10. What are some specific reasons why remaining in Christ is important (15:4-7)?

So that we can produce fruit (v. 4-5). (Fruit not only glorifies God, but it is a wonderful and satisfying way to live.)

If we don't remain in Christ, we become as useless as a dead branch. It is not good for anything, so it is picked up and burned. If we don't remain in Christ, we become just as useless (v 6).

Remaining produces the fruit of answered prayer (v.7). If we remain in Christ we will be asking those things that are his will and they will be given to us.

♥ Is it possible to be in Christ (14:20), but not to *remain* in Christ? Why or why not?

As seen in the above heart question, it is possible to be in Christ (experience salvation) but not grow spiritually because we don't do what is necessary to remain in Christ (keep in constant communion and dependence). If we choose not to do the things we need to in order to remain in Christ, we can be sure that God loves us too much to just let us go our own way. He will discipline and prune us in order to bring us closer to him and to begin to produce his fruit in our lives. Being in Christ but not remaining in him is a miserable way to live. It takes all the joy out of being in Jesus. It is a life of straddling the fence. We don't really know which side we are on and we don't seem to belong to either the community of Christ or the world. Jesus wants us to have his joy and have it to the full – but we must choose to remain in him.

♥ *When* or *why* do you find it difficult to maintain a close, personal relationship with Jesus?

♥ Sometimes a parent says to their child, "Stay close to me and hold my hand. Don't let go and we won't get separated." What might Jesus say to us, his children, to prevent our spiritual separation from him?

Read **John 15:9-17**

11. How can you be sure to experience Jesus' love for you (15:9-10)? How can you know his commands?

If we obey Christ's commands we will remain in his love. We can't know his commands unless we know the Bible. Reading, meditating on and studying God's Word must have a priority in our lives. It is not an optional activity for the serious Christ-follower.

12. What is a huge "perk" of living life in the presence of Jesus (15:11)? How would you define this term?

We are filled to overflowing with Jesus' joy – feelings of great happiness or pleasure. Every human being is hungry for joy. An intimate relationship with God is the source of joy of the believer's joy, rather than material or external things. The believer's joy is produced from within by the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22; 1Thess. 1:6). In the New Testament, believers seemed to experience the most joy when they suffered for following Christ (1 Peter 1:6-9). Love, expressed in prayer and obedience is the Christian's full experience of joy. God is a joyful being who wants his children to have and experience his joy.

♥ For Christians that you know, what percentage, would you say, live lives more characterized by a joyless observance of rules than the genuine experience Jesus' joy? What makes the difference?

♥ Jesus desires that our joy be *complete* or *overflowing* (15:11). On a **scale of 1 to 10**, how complete is the joy you are now experiencing in life? How might you boost your joy level?

13. Jesus continues to stress that after he leaves, it is of utmost importance that his followers love one another (15:12, 17). List as many reasons that you can think of as to why this is so important.

- Love is who God is – and as children of God, we should be like our Father
- Loving each other is a witness to the world that will attract people to Jesus
- Loving each other brings glory to God



- Learning to love is being Christ-like and reflects spiritual growth
- We are in a spiritual war with Satan and his kingdom; we need the strength and unity of love
- The world may hate the Christ-follower; we need each other and our love for each other
- For kingdom work to continue, we need unity instead rivalry; trust instead of suspicion; submission instead of self-assertion; love instead of disdain

♥ To what extent are we to love our Christian brothers and sisters (**1 John 3:16**)? Is this realistic?

♥ What effect does loving others have on your relationship to Jesus?

Loving others only strengthens our relationship with Christ but being unloving and apathetic toward each other will diminish our receiving and giving love from Jesus. You cannot separate love for Christ and love for others.

**1John 4:7** Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

14. Who are Jesus' friends (**15:14**)? Do you see your relationship to Jesus as a friendship? Why or why not?

Whoever does what Jesus commands or obeys Jesus

Have several share about how they feel about having a **friendship** with Jesus

15. In your own words, what is the difference between being Jesus' friend or his servant (**15:15**)?

A servant or slave is never given a reason for the work assigned to her; she must perform it because she has no other choice. A friend or partner is a confidant who shares knowledge of his superior's purpose and voluntarily adopts it as his own.

**From the Message:** Servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father.

♥ Do you feel more like Jesus' friend or servant? Why? What will you do to strengthen your friendship?

♥ Who is your best friend? How is your relationship with Jesus similar to this friendship? How is it different?

♥ What kind of friend do you think Jesus sees you as? Best friend? Fair-weather friend? Faithful friend? Soulmate? Comrade? Pen pal? Why?

16. How is it that we become friends of Jesus (**15:16**)? Why is this significant?

Jesus chooses us – we didn't choose him. This humbles us and gives us great security in the relationship. The relationship is dependent on grace, not our performance. He didn't choose us because we worthy, or equipped, or attractive, or skilled or experienced or suitable in some other way. He chose us out of love for us, his creation. We love him because he first loved us.

♥ How does it make you feel that you were chosen? How will you show your gratitude?

### **Response**

- What is the biggest promise you see Jesus making *you* in this chapter?
- In light of how you are doing spiritually in your life today, which verse in this chapter do you think is the most important for you at this time? Why?
- Which of these terms do you now have a better understanding of because of this lesson: True Vine? Gardener? Prune? Fruit? Remain? Love? Joy? Friend? Chosen? What difference will this new understanding make in your life?

**BELOW IS THE EXTRA SCRIPTURE FOR LESSON 10 THAT YOU CAN PRINT OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME**

**NIV - Isaiah 27:2** In that day— “Sing about a fruitful vineyard: **3** I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it.

**Jeremiah 2:21** I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?

**James 1:2** Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3** because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. **4** Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

**Hebrews 12:7** Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? **8** If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. **9** Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! **10** Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. **11** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

**Galatians 5:22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

**Ephesians 4:2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

**Ephesians 5:8** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light **9** (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

**Colossians 3:12** Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **13** Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

**John 6:56** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.

**1John 2:6** Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

**1John 2:24** See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

**1John 3:24** Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

**1John 3:16** This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

**NLT - Isaiah 27:2** “In that day we will sing of the pleasant vineyard. **3** I, the LORD, will watch over it and tend its fruitful vines. Each day I will water them; day and night I will watch to keep enemies away.

**Jeremiah 2:21** “How could this happen? When I planted you, I chose a vine of the purest stock – the very best. How did you grow into this corrupt wild vine?

**James 1:2** Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. **3** For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. **4** So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

**Hebrews 12:7** As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined? **8** If God doesn’t discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children after all. **9** Since we respect our earthly fathers who disciplined us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to the discipline of our heavenly Father and live forever?

**Hebrews 12:10** For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness. **11** No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

**Galatians 5:22** But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

**Ephesians 4:2** Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.

**Ephesians 5:8** For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! **9** For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

**Colossians 3:12** Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. **13** You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

**John 6:56** All who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I in them.

**1John 2:6** Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did.

**1John 2:24** So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning. If you do, you will continue to live in fellowship with the Son and with the Father.

**1John 3:24** Those who obey God’s commandments live in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Holy Spirit lives in us.

**1John 3:16** We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters.