

Lesson Four

Remain in Me

Unlock with Questions:

1. Do you like to plant and work in a flower, herb, or fruit/vegetable garden? Why or why not?
2. What is your favorite season? Why?
3. Which fruit of the spirit do you sense most fully in your life? Which do you lack? Reference Galatians 5:22–23 for the list.
4. What do you find most difficult to love in other people?
5. How do you know that you are truly a follower of Christ, a Christian?

Unlock New Thoughts: John 15:1–17

This is the last of the I AM passages in John: I am the good shepherd, I am the way, the truth, the life, I am light the world, I am the bread of life

This passage is like a bottomless well and it's not possible to touch on everything Jesus has stated directly and is inferring here.

Jesus and his disciples are probably walking from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives here. It's like the grand finale of the fireworks show we all watched last weekend. Jesus is pouring out his last teachings and prayers to his disciples.

What's he talking about here? Growth, fruit: in Jesus, you have the potential for enormous change. The word fruit in the bible always has to do with character. Galatians 5 (fruit of the spirit) love, joy, peace, patience (forgiving), kindness (unselfishness), goodness (transparency and integrity), faithfulness (courage), gentleness (humility), self control. Jesus is saying I am the key to all of this.

Let me put it another way. How can selfish person become unselfish? How can a controlling, manipulative person become a liberator? How can a worrier become a rock? How can a cowardly person become courageous? How can a bigot become understanding? That's the question. Jesus is saying he's the king of that. You need to have the concrete, personal relationship with Jesus and know how to draw on his pulsating life like a branch does on a vine.

The branch is not rooted in the ground. The vine is. The vine receives the nutrients and water from the ground and passes them along to the branches. The branch cannot do anything on its own. The branch cannot achieve the life and fruit it was designed to on its own. Without Christ you cannot become what you're created to be. But with Christ you receive everything you need to bear fruit. You receive the very essence and being of the vine. You want fruit ... ask of me. Draw it out from me.

Through Christ (the vine), whose roots are in the godhead, we can enter into the life of God. God's life interpenetrates our life and the result is supernaturally fueled character change. That's what growth is.

To be born again is not just an emotional experience. It's to be grafted in to Christ. To participate in the trinity. To bear fruit. The branch is to remain in Christ to receive the growth. Jesus is the vine. And his father is the gardener. What does he do? He's looking for the dead branches to get rid of them. He prunes the live branches that are bearing fruit so that they bear more fruit.

This is a fact. Jesus is completely engaged in one goal. Our fruit. His desire is to give us his beauty, his power, his glory. Our fruit is a reflection of his being in us. His greatness, his life. Jesus says I'm committed to hooking you up to me and giving you my pulsating life.

You may have come to Christianity for a little help over a couple bad habits. You've got things in your life that are making you unhappy, making the people around you unhappy, and are grieving the heart of God. And you're living with them. You're just leaving them there undisturbed. You may be pessimistic and unhelpful about ever being able to change. Jesus Christ says all the power I used to create the cosmos, to defeat evil, to uphold this earth is committed to making you a person of beauty, a person of greatness, a holy person. Do you recognize that in your life? Are you taking that seriously?

No, of course we don't. That's so scary! Who knows what he'll make of us then. But it's so incredible. Give up your small ambitions for your own character. Lose your life now so that you will gain the life of Christ.

Here are a couple points to help us determine if we are truly attached to the vine and drawing on Jesus. First, it's an organic connection, not a mechanical one. We are grafted in. (picture) Do you have the vital connection that transforms you from the inside? Metal—if you want to change the shape of metal, you heat it so that it molds to the new form. If I just bend the metal with my hands, one of two things is going to happen. It will either snap back to its original form when I let go or it will break in half. That's what happens when I'm in charge of developing fruit. When I'm merely following the Christian guidelines. That's why Jesus doesn't simply jump to verse 12 in his discourse, his commands. The Christian life, the Christian faith isn't about following the rules, although the rules are important. If they weren't that important, Jesus wouldn't have included them here. But he gives us, first, the metaphor of the vine. When you are transformed from the

inside, when the metal is heated, then there is real change. It's not strictly about following rules.

Let's look at the difference between mechanical compliance and organic change. Don't focus on busyness and serving Jesus, focus on friendship with Jesus. We as Christian women, especially as women, we like to focus on what we're doing. We go to a bunch of meetings. We feed people. We help people. We listen to people. We serve on the committee. We study Scripture. We greet on Sunday mornings. And we get rid of the big, juicy, obvious sins in our lives. And what are we doing? We're saying surely God must love me. Surely there's enough water of grace in the bathtub. Surely I'm at the point in the justification cycle where God and I are on good terms. We're on the same page. But what you're actually doing is attempting to mimic the love of God rather than drawing on it. There is no transfer of love and power when we manufacture our own fruit. It's not organic, coming from the root, the source of life, the vine. Abide in me and you will bear much fruit.

The branch doesn't walk up to the vine and say, "Hey look at me. Look at all the beautiful fruit I have here. Let's hook up." The branch bears the fruit because it's a part of the vine. So how do we abide rather than manufacturing fake fruit? We are grafted into the vine. What does that mean?

God is examining the branches to see if their relationship with him is formal or vital. I want you to be able to do that as well. What is a dead branch? One that has a formal connection (it's stuck there) but it's not vital. All of us here are connected to vine. We're here at a Bible study. The question is do you have a formal connection or a vital one? Are you a mechanical Christian or an organic one? How do you know? The fruit. God's footprints in your life—something that's so hard to account for, that people will have to say, "God has been here." Jesus mentions two fruit specifically.

Love and obedience. Verse 9-10 When people think about you do these words come to mind? When the world is so selfish, cruel, and rebellious, it shouldn't be so hard to distinguish these qualities in us. We have to be growing in God's love. Growing in love to God. Growing in love for God. That doesn't mean you become a nicer, more charitable person to others. Spend time with him. Enjoy praise from him.

Obedience-do you obey my commands? Christian obedience is different from all other forms of obedience because it grows out of love. Your wish is my command. The attitude of someone in love is never "what do you want now?" a Christian's attitude toward the commands of God is honor. Psalm 1 "his delight is in the law of the lord and he meditates on it day and night."

CS Lewis *Mere Christianity*: The Christian way is both harder and easier. Christ says, "Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there; I want

to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours.” It’s both harder and easier than what we’re trying to do on our own.

To be a Christian means to come into the vine. Jesus is saying I want to become your reason for doing everything. I want to be your life. I want you to give up the right to yourself. To give up your psyche. To give up the right to call the shots in your life. To give up the right to decide what’s right and wrong.

Unlock the Scriptures: the True Vine

Below we find references to Israel as the Lord’s vineyard and the Lord God’s displeasure with their disobedience and misplaced love. These are hard but insightful passages that contrast with Jesus’ words in John. What do we learn from Israel’s example?

Isaiah 5:1–7

Jeremiah 2:20–22

Psalms 80:8–10

Isaiah 27:2–6

Lock It In: The Sheers

What does it mean to be vitally connected to Jesus, to the vine? There are four things that must be in your life if you’re going to be vitally connected to the vine.

The knife of the Lord v.3
The joy of the Lord
The friendship of the Lord
The love of the Lord

You won’t grow without pruning. V.2 Jesus making an astounding claim. A vineyard at pruning time (picture) looks like a disaster. I’ve never seen this but I’ve done some reading about it. The gardener attacks the poor vine and seemingly tries to kill it. All over the ground lie beautiful things (branches, leaves, grapes). The plant looks like it’s bleeding.

Pruning is the most important thing you can do to stimulate the power, and growth, and beauty and productivity of the vine. Not fertilizing, not the planting. Owners of vineyards, I was reading, are very careful whom they will let onto their land to prune. They say each individual leaves his mark on the vine that will last for years after it's been pruned. What the vine becomes is in direct correlation to how it's pruned. Gold is put into the furnace. An athlete is told to run one more lap around the track and they're dying. The child is disciplined.

But we know a skilled gardener never prunes or cuts off anything that would not have been a loss to keep and is a gain to lose. Everything was removed from the plant so that it can reach its fullness, its productivity, its potential.

When the knife the sheers comes into your life (and it will) and the things you've always wanted are denied or removed. All the awful things and the horrible, difficult situations, you look at them with the untrained eye and you say, "this is a waste. Pointless waste. There's no reason. These things should never have happened to me." And Jesus says "you don't understand gardening."

And right away someone in here is thinking, "hold on one minute." You get pretty upset and I understand why. Are you telling me that God looks out at us and says, "There's Emily. There's Amy. What would it take to make her noble and great? I know. I'll send terrible things into her life." And we say, "Wait a minute. I didn't think it was supposed to work like this. Where is the God of love?"

The idea that suffering is what it takes to make us noble and great is hard to stomach. But that's not what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is saying the knife comes on to every branch. The same knife to every branch. Jesus is saying, if you're hooked into me, if you're grafted into me, the same troubles that come to every single person in this life won't make you hard, they will make soft. They won't make you stupid, they'll make you wise. They won't make you insignificant and small; they'll make you great. But if you're not connected to me, what will happen? That same knife that comes into everyone's life, instead of cutting you back to produce fruit, will cut you off.

Let me put it another way. Tell story of teen lying and getting grounded. Her life is ruined. Why did we laugh at that story? Because the teen doesn't have perspective. We know the kid's life isn't ruined and she will go on to great things. We have the perspective to see what lies ahead for her. Why do we assume the things that look like have been merciless attacks on you by God are out of his control? Are meant for harm? Because we don't have perspective. We're like the teen that can't see 20 years down the road.

If you want to see the world the way God wanted it, without suffering, without disease and death, look at the garden of Eden. The world's broken because we broke it. We decided to be in charge of it. The same thing happens when you give your car to an eight year old. Watch what happens. It won't take long for that car to be broken. What did God put at the gate of the Garden of Eden after he threw everyone out? A sword.

And when the temple was built, there was the holy of holies, and in it there was the presence of God. And the only person who could get back into the presence of God was the high priest once a year at yom kippor. And he had to go by way of the alter in front. He had to have a blood sacrifice under the knife. What God was saying under the old covenant is the only way you're going to get back into my presence is through a sacrifice of blood. And what Jesus Christ did on that good Friday was rip the veil to the holy of holies in half. He was cut off from the land of the living. He was cut off so that you would only have to be cut back. Jesus doesn't embrace suffering and troubles, he came to die to end them. When we remain in the vine, and when the sheers come, we remain in friendship, in joy, in love with Jesus.

CS Lewis Mere Christianity: "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace."

Lock It Down:

Take two minutes for journaling, wondering, recording a lesson, or answering a question. Is there anything you want to know more about, or is there a new thought today that surprised you? How has Jesus challenged you?

Bonus Features: More Resources; Conversation Starters at the Table or in the Car

Lee Reich, *The Pruning Book: Completely Revised and Updated*, Tauton Press 2010

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