

Book of Faith Bible Study

John 15:5

Jesus said, "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."

Scripture is overgrown with vines, all of them references to God's people. The psalmist speaks of God's people as a vine that God brought out of Egypt and planted, so that it took deep roots and filled the land (Psalm 80:8-16). According to the prophet Jeremiah, God calls God's people "a choice vine from the purest stock," that turned degenerate and became a "wild vine" (2:21). In Ezekiel, God threatens to dispose of God's people as easily as we toss vine branches into the fire as fuel (15:1-8). For Isaiah (5:1-7), the vine becomes a vineyard; the prophet relates both the loving care with which God planted a vineyard and the anger with which God intends to destroy it. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus enters the vineyard as the son sent to collect his father's share of the produce, whom the tenants kill in order to keep the vineyard for themselves (Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). Scripture makes clear that, no matter how lovingly and carefully God plants the vine that is God's people, when left to ourselves, things go terribly wrong.

Jesus says, "I am the true vine" (John 15:5). For those who know that the vine of God's people inevitably grows wild, Jesus' declaration is the good news that, in Christ, God does not lovingly and carefully plant us, and then leave us to our own devices. Jesus is the vine through whom God sends God's people grace, life, nourishment, and ability to bear fruit. Jesus is the stem in which we who are the branches find fulfillment and life. Our relationship with Christ, which is as connected as branches are to a vine, gives us a share in Christ's very life, the faith community that is Christ's people, and the fruits of discipleship, service, and justice, which are Christ's own works.

As you consider opening Scripture individually or with others, you may wish to consider these general questions:

How does the Bible feed your daily life?

How does the Bible feed the life of this community?

How are we renewed, empowered, and enlivened by the Word?

What stands in the way of our opening the Bible and joining the conversation?



Christ the vine nourishes the branches within Christian community. A vine with a single branch looks silly, even sickly. Such a vine certainly does not produce much fruit. When Jesus calls himself the true vine, and his people the branches, Jesus reminds us that grace, faith, Christian love and service come to us in and through community. When we remember that Jesus called himself the true vine on the night when he was betrayed, we might recall the Lord's Supper and the cup of "the fruit of the vine" that we share in remembrance of Christ.

Christ comes to us when we open God's Word together in the same way that Christ comes to us when we share the bread and cup in his name. As a faith community reads, prays over, and studies Scripture together, Christ the vine provides the branches with all that we need to abide in Christ and bear much fruit. Christians report that they vividly recognize Christ working in and through Scripture when they break open God's Word with people they do not do well or with people whose experience is different from their own, and when they read their Bibles in unexpected places — at work, in a restaurant — or listening to the Bible while driving. Jesus promises to be the true vine, through whom we have life and bear much fruit. Opening Scripture together, like Holy Communion, is one way that Jesus keeps this promise.

Craig A. Satterlee teaches at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Illinois.

In addition to questions found in the studies, here are general questions that can be used for each of the texts:

What is God saying to us through this passage?

What does this passage tell us about God?

How does this passage speak to us as individuals and to us as a community?

What does this passage teach us about our neighbors and our world?

Questions on John 15:5

- *The image of the vine is scattered throughout the Bible. How do biblical images become a way we understand the world?*
- *What associations do you have with the image of the vine? Are they the same as the associations found in the Bible?*
- *How you hear the claim that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches?*

