

## HIS NAME IS WONDERFUL

## STUDY SEVEN

## “I Am the True Vine”

*John 15:1–11*

*We possess nothing in our nature that can save us. For us to produce a kind of fruit that will bring eternal reward, the Father and the Lord Jesus give life to the branches. We are simply a part of the process.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**H**ow beautiful is the colorful mosaic of produce at a farmers’ market! Yet before you could enjoy that delectable fruit, it had to take a long trip.

The journey begins with a tiny seed planted in the ground. With enough water and sunlight, that seed takes root in the soil, and a bright green sprout breaks through the earth. Over the next several days, that sprout grows taller and stronger. Yet these are just the first steps.

On its voyage from a small seed to a strong, fruit-bearing plant, the young sprout receives the assistance of an experienced gardener. The gardener ensures that the plant receives the right amount of water and sunlight—neither too much nor too little. He protects the plant from insects that would infect its branches or small animals that would eat its growing buds. He removes the dead branches and prunes the healthy branches, allowing them to grow even stronger.

After months—or even years—of intentional care, the gardener sees little pale fruits blooming from the plant’s branches. The patience and hard work have finally paid off. The harvest will be here soon.

The life cycle of a plant is like the life cycle of a Christian. Our heavenly Father is the gardener who takes a new believer’s seed of faith and grows it to produce the fruit of good works. How? By keeping us attached to Jesus Christ—the true vine.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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## “I Am the True Vine”

*John 15:1–11*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before you open your Bible today, come to the Gardener in prayer.

*Father, thank You for providing a way for me to have a relationship with Your Son despite my own sin. Please use this study to draw me closer to You and prune me that I may bear much fruit for Your kingdom. I pray these things in Jesus’ life-giving name. Amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *John 15:1*, Jesus told His disciples, “I am the true vine” (NASB). For readers of John’s gospel, this statement sounds familiar because John organized his account around Jesus’ seven “I am” statements.

Elsewhere, Jesus refers to Himself as “the bread of life” (6:35), “the light of the world” (8:12), “the gate for the sheep” (10:7), “the good shepherd” (10:11), “the resurrection and the life” (11:25), and “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6). By teaching with metaphors, Jesus communicated deep truths about His character and mission through each of these statements.

Yet the meaning of these statements calls back to the story of Israel. Centuries earlier, when Egypt enslaved God’s people, God appeared to Moses offering a plan of liberation. During this encounter, Moses asked God what he and the Israelites should call Him. How did God respond in *Exodus 3:14–15*?

God’s name *Yahweh* in Hebrew, means “I am.” And by so regularly saying, “I am,” Jesus communicated that He was more than just a vine or bread or even life itself.

He was—and still is—God.



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*John 15:1–11*

### **Observation: Exploring the Metaphor**

Before Jesus’ crucifixion, He met with His disciples one last time to enjoy the Passover feast. After Judas departed to betray his teacher, Jesus offered His parting words to His true disciples. Though He would soon depart, He wanted them to know how they could maintain an intimate relationship with Him.

In *John 15:1–11*, Jesus explores a metaphor of a vine and its branches. Through this metaphor, Jesus made an abstract idea concrete by comparing it to something His disciples knew very well.

As you read and observe these verses, focus on the symbolism of the vine, and fill in what each following image represents. The next section will consider what these images *mean*.<sup>1</sup>

**Vine (15:1):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gardener (15:1):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Branches (15:5):** \_\_\_\_\_

Read 15:4 in a few different *Bible translations*. What command did Jesus give His disciples in this verse? According to 15:5, what is the result for those who follow this command?

According to 15:2, what does the gardener do with the branches that produce fruit? What does he do with the branches that do not produce fruit (see also 15:6)?



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What was Jesus’ second command in *15:9*? According to *15:10*, how will it be evident that someone is following this command?

*When you remain in Christ, it is amazing how your life glorifies God. You’re motivated by love. Jesus’ life flows through you. Just as He kept the Father’s Word and love began to flow, so you keep His Word. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Understanding the Metaphor

In *John 15:1–11*, Jesus used two illustrations in tandem to describe His relationship with believers: the vine and abiding. At this point, you may feel unsure of what each of these images actually mean for Jesus’ followers—both then and now. Interpretation will reveal what each of these symbols represent.

Jesus explicitly stated what the vine, the gardener, and the branches represent in His metaphor, though not the fruit. What does the fruit represent?

The Greek verb behind Jesus’ command to “remain” (sometimes translated “abide” or even “stay”) in Him is *meno* (*15:4*). This term contains imagery that’s easy to miss in a translation. John’s original readers knew that *meno*’s noun counterpart referred to a dwelling place or a home (see *14:2*). You can see this connection in the English verb *abide* and its noun counterpart *abode*.



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Based on this context, what does it mean to remain in Jesus? Feel free to consult your *Bible Study tools* to explore further the meaning of *meno*.

What’s the difference between a branch who remains in Jesus and one who doesn’t?

Although Jesus offered this teaching to His disciples as a message of joy (*John 15:11*), some read Jesus’ words in *15:6* and feel an overwhelming sense of fear. *What if I’m a branch that doesn’t produce enough fruit? Does that mean I’m in danger of losing my salvation?*

Yet Jesus never intended for His disciples to walk away from this conversation feeling hopeless. Reread *15:1–5*. What encouragement do these verses offer someone struggling with questions about his or her eternal security?

Just as the earthly gardener plants the seed in the ground and patiently tends to it until it produces, so also the Heavenly Gardener places the seed of faith in the hearts of Jesus’ followers. And if He planted the seed, then He will cultivate the branch until it produces beautiful, nourishing fruit.



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*John 15:1–11*



### Correlation: Unpacking the Metaphor

Despite Jesus’ ability as a master teacher, He did not come up with the image of a vine on His own. Instead, He borrowed a metaphor used all throughout the Old Testament. *Ezekiel 15:1–8* addresses this theme in great detail.

According to *15:2–5*, how did God describe a vine that doesn’t produce fruit?

To whom did God compare these vines in *15:6*? What consequence awaited them for not producing fruit? According to *15:8*, why did God extend such a harsh judgment to His own people?

How does the context of this passage from Ezekiel provide a fuller understanding of Jesus’ words in *John 15:1–11*?



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In the era of the Old Testament, God intended to use the nation of Israel as a vine that would bear fruit God would use to bless the whole world. Yet the Israelites turned away from God toward false idols, so their vine withered. God then sent the *true* vine to bring life to all who would abide in Him—both then and now.

### **Application: Applying the Metaphor**

From Jesus’ metaphor of the vine, Pastor Chuck Swindoll developed two practical applications.

1. The result of remaining in Jesus is fruitfulness. *Don’t miss it!*
2. Refusal to remain in Jesus is barrenness. *Don’t chance it!*

What fruit does your life bear, making it evident to others that you abide in Jesus?

What practical steps can you take this week to draw closer to Jesus than you have before?

You might be wondering about Christians who seem to bear no fruit at all. Thankfully John’s gospel speaks to this topic as well.



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While Jesus was on trial, Peter lingered on the outskirts of the temple and denied knowing his teacher three separate times. This branch appeared to want nothing to do with the true vine. Yet even though Peter appeared not to abide in Jesus, Jesus abided in him. After His resurrection, Jesus approached Peter and offered reconciliation (*John 21:1–19*).

Peter ultimately endured some difficult and painful pruning, but He lived the rest of His life committed to Jesus and the gospel. How does Peter’s example offer you encouragement as you wrestle with the difficult elements of this passage?

Many attach themselves to false vines like power, pleasure, or wealth. Yet these vines eventually produce the fruit of dissatisfaction and disillusionment. Jesus is the true vine, and those who remain in Him will reap a harvest of joy that will last for eternity.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for giving me life through Jesus Christ, the true vine. Give me the strength to remain in Him. Prune me. My heart’s desire is to bear the fruit of love and faithfulness so I might show You to others. In Jesus’ faithful name, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”

