

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

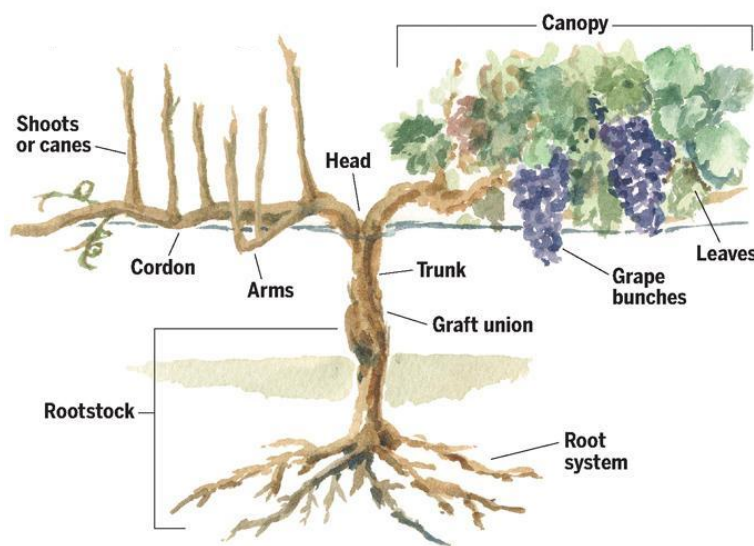
GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 29

CONVERSATION STARTER

When you think back to all the places you've ever lived, which holds the fondest memories for you?

ABIDING IN THE VINE

Jesus says, "I am the true vine," linking back to an image from the Hebrew Bible where Israel was described as a vine (Psalm 80:8). The prophets spoke both of Israel's inability to produce good fruit, the coming judgment they faced because of their fruitlessness, as well as the hope that one day they would once again "fill the whole world with fruit" (Isaiah 27:6). When Jesus



calls himself the true vine, he's saying that he is the true fulfillment of Israel, the one who is able to produce good fruit and enable God's people to produce good fruit in return.

How is this possible? Jesus calls his followers, including us, to *abide*, to remain or stay, in the vine. The trunk was the thickest part of the vine, and it's what Jesus envisions himself being in the metaphor. All branches or shoots would spring

off of this main trunk. These were the branches that would produce fruit. But not without help. Jesus calls God the Father the gardener, or the vinedresser, who lovingly lifts wayward branches off the ground and prunes overly leafy shoots to increase the health of the plant at large. The picture is of a caretaker who wants to maximize the plant's ability to produce good fruit—what it was created to do!

Apart from the vine, we will simply wither away. But as long as we remain connected, we will produce good fruit because we are both connected to the life-giving source of nourishment and

watched over by the vinedresser. The image is of a close relationship between us and Jesus, and the Father. We're called to prune away any habits, practices, or patterns of thinking that don't produce in us the good fruit we were created for. Galatians 5:22-23 describes this good fruit as, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Talk for a moment together in your group. What are some things God might be calling you to prune from your regular routines, habits, or practices in order to make room for more fruit to develop in your life?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
2. What are some alternate vines that the world calls us to "abide" in? What kind of fruit do those vines produce in us?
3. How are we called as Christians to "abide" in Jesus? What kind of fruit does that produce in us?
4. Read John 15:19-20 together as a group. Is persecution something you ever think about? What do we know about the reality of Christians who are persecuted around the world today?
5. Read John 16:24-33 together as a group. What does this passage reveal about whether or not we should expect to face trials or troubles even as followers of Jesus? What hope does Jesus say we have when these troubles arise?

WEEKLY PRACTICE

For the next few weeks, we'll follow along with the Lenten Companion Guide as our weekly practice. Each week, we'll encourage you to either give something up or take on something new in hopes of simplifying our lives, standing in solidarity with those who are suffering, and becoming people who love God and love others well.

Week Four: Pray on Your Knees

Prayer is a powerful way to stay connected with God throughout the day. This week, begin and end each day by physically getting on your knees to pray if you are able. This is a great practice to do with your family or on your own. At the end of the week, reflect on your experience: *Did changing your posture during prayer change the way you prayed?*