



# Groups

**Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides!** If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions at the end of page 2.

---

**SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE**  
for the sermon preached on September 12, 2021  
Vision Sunday 2021 - "Beyond Normal" - John 15:1-17



Welcome back to a new ministry year of small group life where our hope is that together, we will practice the way of Jesus. To state the painfully obvious, it's been quite an up and down ride for most, yet, we are grateful for the Lord's nearness and provision along the way. We see the faithfulness of God throughout the entirety of Scripture and we receive it today. May we trust that the Holy Spirit will empower and guide us in this new ministry year.

On this year's Vision Sunday, Pastor Bryan preached from John 15:1-17 and conveyed the preaching theme of the year, "Living Well, Loving Well" and what that might look like in such times. In this study we want to see and discuss what "remaining in Jesus" could mean together and how we can apply the truth of this passage to our everyday lives.

## Group Discussion Questions

Q - The message began with quoting from an article in the New York Times by professor Esau McCauley. He writes, "The pandemic has disabused us of the illusion of time as a limitless resource and of the false promise that the sacrifices we make for our careers are always worth it." This has led to a dramatic number of changes in people's lives for an array of reasons. As a result, McCauley wonders aloud, "Maybe we weren't all that happy before the pandemic?" Let's wonder this too. What changes have we seen people around us undergo and what do you find yourself wondering out loud about as it relates to how we were feeling prior to the pandemic and the affect it has now?

Q – Read John 15:1-17 out loud and then silently for a few minutes. When you are ready, what words of the text resonate with you. What do you find surprising or even confusing. And lastly, what is the dominant metaphor?

Q – Let's focus on the first verse – *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful"* and consider N.T. Wright's teaching here:

*"Within Jewish tradition, the vine was a picture of Israel. God brought a vine out of Egypt, and planted it in the promised land (Psalm 80:8–18). It had been ravaged by wild animals and needed protecting and re-establishing. The vineyard of Israel, said Isaiah in chapter 5, has borne wild grapes instead of proper ones. Other prophets used the same picture.*

*Now Jesus is saying that he is the 'true vine'. This can only mean that he is, in himself, the true Israel. He is the one on whom God's purposes are now resting. And his followers are members of God's true people—if they belong to him and remain 'in' him. The picture of the 'vine' isn't just a clever illustration from gardening. It is about who Jesus and his people really are, and what is now going to happen to them as a result."*

Part of the brilliance of Jesus' use of imagery is both wonderfully illustrative and deeply informing on theological and practical levels. How does this help you connect the Old and New Testament together?

Q – "Pruning" a vine sounds helpful. Pruning in our lives definitely raises serious concerns and questions including, "How painful will this be?" "What if I like what's being pruned?" and "Is it really worth it?" What concerns can you relate to and what would you add to your concern of "pruning in your life?"

Q - Further, there is a temptation in our Western, highly individualized society to "go it alone." Let's consider N.T. Wright's words again:

*"Branches that decide to 'go it alone', to try living without the life of the vine, soon discover their mistake. They wither and die, and are good for nothing but the fire (verse 6). But branches that remain in the vine, and submit to the pruner's knife when necessary, live and bear fruit. That is the prospect that Jesus holds out to his followers, to all of us."*

We need God at work in our lives and the gift of community and Jesus is saying that we will remain in him if we let God prune our lives and grow together. And so we pause, reflect, and ask, what needs to be pruned in my life so that I can grow more like Jesus? And what of my "go it alone" attitudes must be pruned so that I might grow on the vine

of Christian community alongside others? What must we do as a group in order that we might grow on the vine, and live out this year's theme of *"Living Well, Loving Well?"*

### **Prayer Suggestion**

Sunday's message began a year-long journey toward living and loving well and as Bryan said, "I think McCauley is right. I think we're all contemplating changes to our lives and work and relationships as we try to envision life beyond COVID. And many of us are wondering what role faith and church will play in the new normal." Let's spend time praying together that we will confront the challenges of the year with courage, wisdom and grace and that we would be empowered to do it a community with each other.

---

### **How to Use These Study Guides:**

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don't feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
  - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
  - Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

**Group Leader Support:** Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Pastor Rachel from the Group Life team.