



Week Four Study Guide – October 4
The Jesus Way: Fruitfulness
John 15:1-8

Opening Questions:

- Share what you know about the importance of pruning for plants and trees.
- Have you ever had an experience that was initially painful but later you were able to recognize how necessary it was for your growth? Share that with the group.

Read aloud this introduction:

Most of us are familiar with modern Western-world vineyards where grape vines are planted in neat rows with extensive trellising to keep the vines growing upward. This allows for good airflow and sunlight to reach the vines for optimum growth. This is a very different picture than that of an ancient Middle Eastern vineyard.

“In a Judean vineyard of Antiquity, a vine left to its own natural tendencies would grow spreading along the ground. Given the warm days and cold nights in the south of Israel, and the moisture laden, prevailing westerly winds coming in from the Mediterranean, heavy morning dews in the spring and early summer are common. This predawn moisture fosters the development of mold and fungus in anything that stays in contact with the ground.



Modern Middle Eastern Vineyard with vines growing along the rocky ground

Knowing all this, the first priority of a Middle Eastern vineyard manager is to keep all parts of the vine from touching the soil. The vinedresser first wedges a substantial rock up

against the vineyard trunk, thus lifting the vine. This has the effect of “repositioning” the vine so that the winds and breezes can circulate around its growing branches, evaporating any moisture. . . . Later in the growing season, smaller rocks similarly lift up branches growing out from the trunk when they sag too close to the ground. Lastly, the runners that shoot off from these branches are likewise lifted up with Y-shaped twigs to keep them from touching the ground.”

—*The Rest of the Story*, Doug Greenwold

Invite someone in the group to read John 15:1-8 aloud.

Pray this prayer (one person or the whole group together):

Lord, as we come together to study your Word, we bring all of who we are with our needs, our hopes, and our expectations. Meet us here in the power and presence of your Holy Spirit. Give us insight and understanding as we listen carefully for your voice. And then give us courage and conviction to align our lives with the way of Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

A Mind-Blowing Possibility That Requires A Greek Lesson:

- John 15:2a has traditionally been translated “He cuts off . . .”
- The Greek verb used here for “cut off” is **airo**
- The meaning of this Greek word, starting with its primary usage and progressing to its lesser uses, are as follows:
 1. to lift up literally
 2. to lift up figuratively
 3. to lift up with the added thought of carrying it away
 4. to remove (or “cut off”)
- This understanding of being “lifted up” fits consistently with both the context of the Middle Eastern ancient vineyard practices and the context of Jesus’ words about those who remain in him.



Traditional rock wall surrounding a Middle Eastern Vineyard. The pruned branches are piled on the wall ready to be gathered and taken into the village.

One More Fascinating Thing About Ancient Middle Eastern Vineyards:

“Nothing is ever discarded in an ancient Judean vineyard. Resources are far too scarce for anything to be thrown away. There is always a secondary use for everything. Those branches that do get pruned are set aside for a secondary use. The vinedresser deliberately places each pruned branch on top of the rock wall that surrounds the vineyard. There the branches will dry out for several weeks. When sufficiently dry, they are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned as kindling (John 15:6) in the village’s bread ovens. Even though these pruned branches will not be producing grapes, they still serve a useful purpose in the making of bread.”

-The Rest of the Story, Doug Greenwold

Questions for Exploration:

- What/who are the elements and characters in this teaching of Jesus?
- What is the job of the gardener?
- What is the purpose of the vine?
- What are the branches meant to do?
- How does the understanding of the gardener “lifting up” the vine for repositioning change your understanding of this passage?
- What insight do you gain from the understanding that even the pruned branches are put to use?

Questions for Pressing it Out:

- What does Jesus’ teaching reveal about who God is?
- What does it reveal about God’s priorities?
- What does it tell us about who we are?
- How does this passage inform us about our own priorities in living out the way of Jesus?
- What does God want us to do?
- What are some “repositioning” experiences you have had that resulted in greater fruitfulness?
- Share any way you particularly sense right now that God may be repositioning you for greater fruitfulness.

Closing Prayer:

Depending on the needs/desires of your group here are some options:

- Ask one or two group members to close the group in prayer
- Pray the Lord’s prayer together aloud:

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”