

A SUMMER UNDER THE VINE

Discovering the Fruit the Spirit Grows

Study Guide Week Five

Five Weekly Sessions for Small Groups

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Almost Fruitless

Book Reading

Read the Epilogue before you meet (pages 115–129, about 15 minutes).

Late one night, a whoosh and a thud came from the backyard. When the outside lights came on, a wall of green was pressed flat against the back door, the market lights still glowing in the leaves. The grapevine had come down. Termites had been hollowing out the posts that held it up. The Epilogue starts there and looks at what threatens fruit and what protects it, from hungry critters and a lime tree with no taste to the pruning that comes before a harvest. It ends where the summer did, at a table under the vine.

Scripture Readings

Little Foxes

15 Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.

Song of Solomon 2:15 (ESV)

The Lime Tree

17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Matthew 7:17–20 (ESV)

Pruning

2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

John 15:2 (ESV)

Under the Vine

10 In that day each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree, declares the LORD Almighty.

Zechariah 3:10 (NIV)

Between You and God

Take your time with these questions, as you read or after, before your group meets. You can write, pray, or simply sit with one. You won't be asked to share your answers.

1. The trellis posts looked fine from the outside, but termites had been working through the middle of them for who knows how long. Is anything hollowing you out from the inside that no one else can see yet? What would you want to say to God about it?

2. The lime tree looked like the real thing from every angle and had nothing behind it. Looking honestly at your own life, has that ever been true of you? Ask God to show you what you may not have been able to see for yourself.

3. Some of what you scroll through probably feeds you, and some of it may not. Think about the voices in your feed over the past few weeks. Are they encouraging more love and peace in you, or something else, like impatience or a low hum of anger that's easy to mistake for conviction? What might you want to keep, and what might you want to let go?

4. Every winter the vine is cut back to its trunk and about ten thin canes. The canes that bore this year's grapes are cut away, and the ones that stay will carry next year's fruit. What might the Father be pruning in your life right now? Could what looks like loss be what next season's fruit depends on?

5. Your abiding space can be anywhere you make time and space for Him, your bed with His Word open, your car loud with a worship song. Where is yours?

What You Noticed

Last week you were asked to notice what's shaping you, and which things help you stay connected to the vine. What did you find? Your time in Between You and God is yours to keep, but if something stood out, you're welcome to share it.

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To Discuss with Others

The Story

1. The vine came down in the night, and it took neighbors to lift it back up. When has your community helped carry something you couldn't lift alone?

Little Foxes

Read Song of Solomon 2:15

2. The backyard critters eat away at the grapes one bite at a time. In Song of Solomon 2:15, little foxes threaten a blossoming vineyard, a picture of love and what can spoil it. The book applies that image to the small compromises that damage growing fruit in our lives. Why are those compromises easy to overlook? Who could you trust to help you recognize and address them?

The Lime Tree

Read Matthew 7:17–20

3. You can't tell a counterfeit by looking at it. You can only tell by tasting what it produces. How do we taste the fruit in our own lives? Are you the best judge of your own? Who in your life would tell you honestly whether your fruit is sweet and real, or as tasteless as that lime?

4. It's easy to trust a voice that always agrees with us. Influencers and even AI can agree with us so often that it starts to feel like confirmation, even like God nodding along. Jesus said we would recognize false prophets by their fruit (Matthew 7:15–16). Have you ever been fooled by something online or on social media? What does it look like to test the voices we listen to most?

5. Most of us know someone who is remarkably kind and doesn't follow Christ. Their kindness to us is real, a reflection of the image of God they bear and His goodness to all (Psalm 145:9). But the fruit of the Spirit grows only from abiding in Christ (John 15:5). How does that change the way you see the kind people in your life who don't yet know Him?

Pruning

Read John 15:2

6. The Father prunes branches that are already bearing fruit. Why would He cut back what's growing well? Where have you seen a loss turn out to be what the next season's fruit depended on?

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Under the Vine

Read Zechariah 3:10

7. The book opens and closes with Zechariah 3:10, an invitation to sit together under the vine. Looking back over these five weeks, what has this group given you? Where have you seen fruit growing in the people around this table?

Share Communion (Optional)

On the last Sunday under the vine, we shared communion, with bread and with juice pressed from the grapes we had watched ripen all summer. We ate and drank and remembered Jesus, whose life was given for us, and whose life now flows through us. And we remembered that fruit only grows on a branch that stays connected to the vine.

If your group would like to close the study the same way, the table doesn't have to be under a vine. You can gather where you are to remember Jesus and give thanks together.

Churches practice communion in different ways. Follow the guidance of your church about sharing it in a small group. If sharing communion isn't right for your group, read the passage below together and close in prayer, giving thanks for what Christ has done.

Before sharing the bread and cup, take a quiet moment to examine your heart, confess your sins to God, and give thanks for His grace. Communion is for those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ. If you haven't yet, you're welcome to sit with the group and listen. Our prayer is that you would come to know Him. The prayer near the end of Chapter One offers a place to begin, and you can always ask your group leader or someone you trust to talk and pray with you.

> [23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
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> 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (ESV)

Close in Prayer

Going Forward

The study ends here, but the vine keeps growing its fruit.

Love · Joy · Peace · Patience · Kindness · Goodness · Faithfulness · Gentleness · Self-Control

You don't grow fruit by trying harder.

You grow it by staying connected.

Keep making room for Jesus in your ordinary days, trusting the Spirit to grow His fruit in you. And remember the promise the book began with, God's promise to His people through the prophet Zechariah. "Each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree" (Zechariah 3:10, NIV).

What you've received is meant to be shared, maybe over a meal or a long conversation, somewhere a person can bring their questions and be heard. There is room at the table. Who could you invite to sit under the vine with you?

Find the book and the complete study guide at asummerunderthevine.com, or scan the QR code.

One Fruit, Nine Displays

You don't grow fruit by trying harder. You grow it by staying connected.

The Interior Life / Love, Joy, Peace

Who you are before anyone else is even in the room.

- Love is action, not a feeling you wait to fall into.
- Joy is gladness rooted in who God is, not in how circumstances happen to be going.
- Peace is wholeness rooted in reconciliation with God, not the mere absence of conflict.

The Exterior Life / Patience, Kindness, Goodness

The interior life walking into a room with another person in it.

- Patience is steady grace with people, not just endurance of hard circumstances.
- Kindness is love that's become tangible.
- Goodness is what's right, put into action, even when it costs something.

The Test / Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control

Who you are after everyone else has left the room.

- Faithfulness is consistency.
- Gentleness is integrity of manner.
- Self-control is the integrity of the interior life.

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