

Small Group Guide

"Jesus, the True Vine" | John 15:1-8

Based on the message by Pastor Reny DeGuevara

BACKGROUND FOR GROUP LEADERS

This message was delivered by Pastor Reny, a bishop from Bolivia, whose own family came to faith because a missionary group planted a church next door to his childhood home. His personal testimony and pastoral experience give rich context to this study. The sermon draws on John 15:1-8, the agricultural imagery of pruning, and the contrast between Israel as an unfaithful vine and Jesus as the true vine.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Jesus declaring "I am the true vine" was a bold and provocative claim, because Israel had long understood itself to be the Lord's vine. If there is a true vine, there is one that is not true.
- God the Father is the gardener. His pruning is not punishment but purposeful work to produce more and better fruit in our lives.
- The fruit we bear does not originate in us. It flows from Christ through us, just as nutrients flow from a root through a trunk and into the branches.
- Pruning takes many forms: the shaping of our character, the removal of destructive patterns like anger and wrath, the redirecting of relationships, and the reorienting of our life's purpose.
- Authentic Christian living is not what is displayed in a church service. It is what is lived out daily in marriages, homes, and families.
- The missionary impact of a local church extends far beyond what any one person or team can see or measure. One act of faithful witness can change entire family lines for generations.

OPENING QUESTION

(Use this to help the group ease into conversation before diving into the text.)

Think of a time in your life when something was taken away from you, a relationship, a plan, a habit, or an opportunity, that turned out to be for your good. How did you feel in the moment, and how did you feel later looking back?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Section 1: The True Vine and the False One

1. Pastor Reny explained that Israel saw itself as the Lord's vine, with images of the vine even carved into the walls of the temple. When Jesus says "I am the true vine" in John 15:1, what is he actually claiming about himself and about Israel's failure to bear good fruit?
2. Israel had every advantage: the law, the priests, the prophets, and the presence of God. Yet the fruit that came forth was described in Isaiah 5 as wild and sour rather than good. What does this tell us about the difference between having access to God's resources and actually being connected to God himself?
3. Pastor Reny said, "If there is a true vine, it means there is a vine that is not the true one." In your own life or in the broader culture, what are some things that promise to produce life and good fruit but ultimately cannot?

Section 2: The Work of the Gardener

4. Pastor Reny described two types of pruning used in the vineyards of Tarija, Bolivia. The winter pruning cuts back branches that have already given fruit so that energy is concentrated close to the main vine. The green pruning removes leaves and sprouts that look promising but would spread the nutrients too thin. What stood out to you about this imagery? How have you experienced either of these kinds of pruning in your own walk with God?
5. Pastor Reny said, "When the father prunes, he does it exactly. It hurts, but it is for life." How does understanding the gardener's intention change the way you respond to painful seasons or unexpected losses?
6. The sermon pointed to anger and wrath as examples of things God prunes from us so that love and goodness can shine through. Read Ephesians 4:26-27 and Colossians 3:8, where Paul urges believers to deal with anger and set it aside. Why do you think unresolved anger is so damaging to Christian witness, especially in marriage and family life?

Section 3: Purpose, Relationships, and Remaining

7. Pastor Reny shared the story of Moses, who at 80 years old had his life planned out, only to have God redirect him entirely into an eternal purpose. He asked the group, "Who said that you are in the final stretch of your life if you have not yet fulfilled that purpose from God?" How does this challenge the way you think about your current season of life?

8. Pastor Reny also shared a deeply personal story about a romantic relationship he believed was right for him, which God eventually removed from his life. He said, "There are relationships that God will cut off from us, and many times that cutting is painful, but it is for our good." How do you discern the difference between a difficult relationship that needs perseverance and one that God may be calling you to release?
9. John 15:5 teaches that apart from Christ, we can do nothing. Pastor Reny emphasized that the fruit we produce is not added from the outside but flows from the vine itself. What does it look like practically, in your daily life, to remain connected to Christ as the source rather than striving to produce fruit through your own effort?

Section 4: The Reach of Faithful Witness

10. Pastor Reny's entire family came to faith because a missionary group held an all-night prayer meeting next door to his childhood home on a night his mother was fleeing a dangerous situation. He said, "If it hadn't been for that spring of life, who knows where we would be today as a family." Has your faith ever been shaped by someone who had no idea of the impact they were having? How does that reality change the way you think about your own acts of faithful witness?
11. Pastor Reny also described a young man who followed his ministry team around during a mission trip, eventually joined a Bible school, and became a minister. He said, "If you hadn't gone, who knows if he would have come to serve the Lord." What holds people back from participating in missions, whether locally or internationally, and how does hearing stories like this address those hesitations?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or more of the following to discuss or commit to as a group:

- **Personal inventory:** Identify one area of your character, a habit, a pattern of speech, a recurring attitude, that you sense God may be pruning right now. Write it down privately and commit to bringing it honestly before God in prayer this week.
- **Marriage and family audit:** Pastor Reny said, "The authentic Christian life is what you live in your marriage and in your home." Have an honest conversation with your spouse or a close family member this week about whether the person they live with reflects the person others see at church.
- **Anger and reconciliation:** If there is an unresolved conflict or accumulated bitterness in a relationship, take a concrete step this week toward reconciliation. That may mean a conversation, a written apology, or simply beginning to pray for the other person by name each day.

- **Remaining in the vine:** Evaluate your current habits of prayer, Scripture engagement, and worship. Are they keeping you close to the vine, or have they become thin and scattered? Identify one adjustment you can make to deepen your daily connection to Christ.
- **Missions engagement:** Learn more about one of the mission fields your church supports. Pray specifically for the work there. Consider whether God may be calling you toward a short-term trip or a more sustained form of support.
- **Caring for the vulnerable:** Pastor Reny shared the story of widows in rural Bolivia surviving on the equivalent of \$35 per month. Ask God to show you a person in your own community who is in a vulnerable or overlooked situation and take one practical step to serve them this week.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Pastor Reny closed his message by blessing the church with these words:

"I bless this church, this spring of life, this Lifespring church. Bless Pastor Todd, bless all of the congregation. I bless you for the missionary heart that this church has. We ask you to make your name great here in the United States, here in this land, and also, Heavenly Father, in the nations. Thousands and thousands would come to you."

Close your group time by praying together. Ask God to reveal where he is currently pruning in each person's life, and invite him to produce in your group the authentic, juicy, abundant fruit of a life truly connected to Jesus, the true vine.