

## REFLECTION GUIDE

### JOHN 15:1-5 | ABIDE

#### KEY TERMS

**Vine/vinedresser** - Vine imagery was common in ancient literature, including in the Old Testament, from which Jesus draws upon in John 15. In the OT, the vine was a common symbol for Israel (e.g., Ps. 80:9-16, Is. 51:1-7, Ho. 10:1-2), with most references emphasizing Israel's failure to produce good fruit. Thus, Jesus' claim to be *the true vine* (v. 1) suggests Jesus is the one to whom Israel pointed and the one able to produce good fruit. The Father—both in the OT imagery and in Jesus' usage—is the *vinedresser* who "plants" and "cultivates" the vine.

**Clean** - When Jesus tells his disciples, *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you* (v. 3), he means that his teaching in its entirety (i.e., what he is, what he says, and what he does) has taken hold in them and has given them new life.

#### SYNOPSIS

As John chapter 15 begins, Jesus is delivering his final section of teaching to his disciples just moments before he is arrested and hours before he is crucified. Jesus opens this section of teaching with his final "I am" statement saying, *I am the true vine* (v. 1). This "I am" statement, however, uniquely pairs a statement with Jesus' identity with one about the Father: *and my Father is the vinedresser* (v. 1). With this statement, Jesus is claiming to be the true Israel—the faithful embodiment of what Israel was called to be. Jesus then says, *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* (v. 2). Jesus' point is that "fruitfulness" is the mark of a true disciple, and those who do not produce such fruit will be removed, while those who do will be pruned in order to produce more and better fruit. Lest his words come across as too harsh, Jesus then encourages his disciples saying, *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you* (v. 3). In other words, Jesus' disciples ought to pursue fruit in their lives, but as a response to Jesus' work in their lives, not as a way of earning their "cleanness." Jesus then tells them how to produce fruit: *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing* (v. 4-5). Jesus' main call in this passage is to *abide* in him. He is inviting his disciples to receive their life from his life, and to produce meaningful fruit out of dependence upon him, not out of their own striving.

#### GOING DEEPER

Read Colossians 2:6-7 and Galatians 2:20. Jesus' invitation to *abide* in him is not a call to increased effort but to ongoing dependence. According to these passages, where does spiritual life actually come from? How do these verses challenge the ways you may be tempted to live the Christian life in your own strength? What would it look like for you this week to draw life from Christ rather than trying to produce fruit apart from him?

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The word *abide* (μένω) is a common word in John and typically describes a close, ongoing relationship. It carries the sense of "remaining" or "dwelling." When Jesus calls his disciples to *abide in me*, he is inviting them into a settled, continuing life with him and sustained by him.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

### **JOHN 15:1-5 | ABIDE**

#### **LEARNING THE WORD**

1. Read John 15:1-5. Make 3-5 quick observations. What words or phrases are repeated?
2. The main thrust of this passage is our spiritual growth. What evidence do we see in these verses of God's commitment to our spiritual growth?
3. What does it mean to "bear much fruit"? What "fruit" do you think Jesus is talking about here?
4. In Jesus' image, what does it mean for a physical branch to abide in the vine? In other words, what is the relationship of the branch and the vine?

#### **LIVING THE WORD**

5. When Jesus says, "apart from me you can do nothing" (v. 5), he speaks to our total dependence upon him. How could this be read as "bad news"? If you turn it around to look at it from a different perspective, how could this also be read as "good news"?
6. In this teaching, what do you think Jesus is trying to communicate about the importance of his life flowing through you and the nearness of his life in you?
7. As you consider your life, have you seen *much fruit* grow in you? What spiritual fruit would you like to see grow abundantly in your life?
8. How are you seeking to abide in Christ, the true vine, this year? What are one or two ways you will practice abiding in the next 30 days?