

Week Beginning: 13th October 2019

Worship Series: ICRTT #3

living sharing growing

Theme Verse

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing". John 15:5

Remember This Week

There is only one connection that is life-giving in every season. One connection that will not fail you in any circumstance. A connection with Jesus. He is with you, holding onto you, loving you and will not let you go. Even when it feels like you are cut down by life, hang in there, for growth is ahead, and new life will come. That's his promise.



I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard?"
- Isaiah 5:1-4a

Almighty God, you have done everything so that we may be a fruitful people. You have given us new life through your son Jesus. Refill us again with your Holy Spirit. May our time around your word be a catalyst for more of your fruit to be seen in our lives. Amen

1. *Share your highs and lows since you last met with one another.*
2. *Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?*
3. *How many friends do you think you have? How do you stay connected with them?*
4. *Do you remember a time before social media? How did you stay connected then?*
5. *Have you ever tried to grow your own fruit or vegetables? How did it go?*

Remember how easy it was to make friends as a kid? Just show up at the playground, bond over your shared love of football, cricket or chasey and bam! Instant connection. But today it seems you need an App for that. From Facebook to Instagram, WeChat to WhatsApp, LinkedIn to Bizzabo, there are hundreds of Apps designed to connect us with others all over the world. But what does it mean to be connected? Social media may have given us the promise of a connected world but it seems that everyone is feeling a little more isolated. Not every connection is equal, so what connections are you investing in? Jesus said there is one pivotal connection that can help our lives grow and flourish and the community thrive – the connection of a branch to the vine.

Read John 15:1-7

6. *What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?*
7. *Jesus says in verse 1, "I am the true vine" what do you think he means? What might a fake or false vine be?*
8. *What is the fruit that we, the branches, are expected to bear?*

There are two relationships at work in this passage. The one between the branch and the vine and also the one between the vine, with its branches, and the gardener. Jesus makes it pretty clear here that life for a branch only comes from its connection to the vine. Sometimes we can connect ourselves to things that feel like they bring us joy and life, but which ultimately fail us. In fact, a vine makes connections at multiple locations. Take a drive through any wine growing region and you will see vine branches clinging to trellises. These supports are important if the branch is going to bear the weight of a large crop but they do not





give life to the branch. The branches connection to the vine is the only connection that really brings life.

9. *What kind of connections do you have in your life that support your efforts to bear fruit?*
10. *What do you think would be the outcome of relying solely on those things as your source of life and hope?*
11. *What happens to a plant that doesn't have enough support, or whose supports become too tight, restrictive and damaging?*

Our life comes from being connected to the true vine, Jesus freely offers himself to us, his life, his power, his authority, all of these things are ours as long as we remain in him. God the Father, the Heavenly Gardener has also given us things to help our growth and development as vine branches. He has given His Word, His Spirit and His Church to help us to be fruitful branches. Yet sometimes there are times when we connect to things which offer themselves as an alternative to the true vine.

Read John 15:1-2,5 again...

Jesus says, "He [God, the gardener] cuts off every branch that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful". The process of pruning any plant serves two functions. Firstly to shape it according to the design of the gardener and secondly to stress the plant so that it focusses its energy on producing fruit or flowers.

12. *Pruning is productive but it can also be painful. When has God used the pain in your life to produce good fruit?*
13. *God sometimes also has to prune away parts of our lives that are causing damage to us and release us from our unhelpful connections. How does he do this?*
14. *In verse 5 Jesus says, "If you remain in me you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing". What do you think 'nothing' means in this case?*

There is a childrens book called 'Basil the Branch' it tells this story from the perspective of a vine branch called Basil who spends all his time and energy in trying to produce a bunch of grapes. All his effort amounts to nothing until he realises that the vine will help him produce fruit. We often make this same mistake. Producing fruit is not an effort when you are connected to the vine, it is a natural part of your existence. It is the purpose for which you were made and called to be part of God's family, part of his vineyard.

15. *What difference does it make to focus on Jesus rather than to focus on your own efforts?*

One of the other things about vines it that they are good plants for grafting. You can take a branch from one vine, and insert it into the wood of another vine and the vine will incorporate the new branch into itself. If you have been seaching for life in connections that were not Jesus, he is ready to take you into himself. If you have been striving to produce your own fruit, just chill out. Invest your time and effort in connecting with Jesus and watch him grow the fruit in your life.

16. *Is there a unhealthy connection in your life God might want to prune? Maybe your LifeGroup can be a support in that process?*
17. *Think about your social media use. Is it a helpful part of your life or is it a distraction from making real connections? Think about how you will use social media this week.*

- * Thank Jesus for the life he gives to all who trust in him. Ask him to help you live in the fullness of that life so that others may see his life in you.
- * Pray for those who are struggling with unhealthy relationships and connections. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring healing and reconcillation to broken relationships.
- * Pray for those who have found themselves attached and caught up in addictions. Ask God to free them and to help them find their life and strength in Jesus.
- * Pray for each other - that Jesus would continue to be your focus, that he would help you to bear good fruit in your own life and in the lives of others.

Turn to the person next to you and make the sign of the cross on the palm of their hand or forehead as you say:

Name, may the love of Christ bear fruit in your life! Amen.

