Key idea

We were created by God for the sake of flourishing, of fully developing all our powers (intellectual, emotional, physical), of becoming a whole, complete human being made in the image of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is the perfect power of God’s perfect love that enables us to be all God created us to be.

Key Verse

“My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.”

— John 15:8 (CEB)

Readings for the week to prepare for the small group discussion:

John 15:1-8
Isaiah 5:1-7
Psalm 80:9-15
Chapter 1 of A Plain Account of A Plain Account of Christian Perfection Theologically Considered by Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki pp.105-114.
Section VI of A Plain Account of Christian Perfection by John Wesley pp. 61-72.
Overview

In John 15:1, Jesus connects the church, the New Israel, with these images of the vineyard in the Old Testament. Jesus is now fulfilling the Old Testament promise of God’s redeeming activity.

A healthy vine requires careful tending to promote wholesome, orderly growth. Often a gardener may turn his or her back on the vineyard for a while only to discover that the vines have grown wild. But in the case of the present vine, the New Israel, God is the gardener or vinedresser. Jesus is the vine. The disciples constitute the branches. For the disciples to produce the best fruit, they must both receive power from the vine and be pruned.

This image of the vine and branches along with Wesley’s writings help us to consider what it means to be perfected, that is, renewed in God’s love.

Gathering Prayer

God of love, plant us in the soil of your grace. Nurture us with the strength of Christ, the vine of everlasting life. Enlighten us with the wisdom of your Spirit, which flows through us today and all days. Abide in us, that we may abide in you and live in your love. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be branches of the vine, which is the source of life?

2. What does Jesus mean when he says, “Remain in me”? How does justifying and sanctifying grace become a part of us remaining in Jesus?

3. Wesley preached about Christian perfection as that assurance of salvation in the life of a believer (66). What does Christian perfection look like in practice?

4. What connections do you make between the idea of Christian perfection and pruning?

5. With the image of the vine and branches in John 15 in mind, what significant pruning would you say God has already accomplished in your life?
6. Wesley asked this question: “By what fruit of the Spirit may we ‘know that we are God’s children,’ even in the highest sense?” (68). What precisely is the fruit we are to bear?

7. In what ways is your community connected to or disconnected from the true Vine?

8. Is your community fruitful or not? If your community is fruitful, what does it look like? If your community isn’t fruitful, why?

9. In what ways is your community abiding in Christ?

10. What is needed for your community to produce a bountiful harvest, to draw more power from the vine, or to go through a time of intentional pruning? How might you do this?

Close with Prayer

Almighty God, Architect of the Universe, may we find our place in Your design, may we build our lives in accordance to Your ways and will. May we connect with one another through Your love and build up Your loving-kindness in this world. May we perceive Your design through the ancient scriptures and traditions passed down to us and grow in our understanding through our relationships with one another today. In this moment, may we know that we are part of something beyond our understanding, something incredible You have designed, that surpasses this life and continues through eternity. In the name of Christ, who shows us Your design of love, forgiveness, and justice, we pray. Amen.

1 Adapted from The Abingdon Worship Annual 2012 http://www.ministrymatters.com/#axzz2WhKTr5N6