



# JOURNEY with JESUS

## Connected to the Vine

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Beautiful landscaping, manicured lawns, and city parks are ways we enjoy nature weaving in and out of this concrete city. I'm thankful to see God in nature and how often the small moments bring me closer to him: the intricacy of veins on leaves, sunlight breaking through the tree canopy, morning blooms, rustling leaves, and water running in a creek. I'm in awe of the interconnectedness of nature and the metaphors it provides for our journey to Heaven.

In a similar way, John 15 shares Jesus' words on life and death:

### John 15:1-8

(condensed for clarity)

*"I am the true vine (you are the branches) and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful... Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me... apart from me you can do nothing... like a branch that is thrown away and withers; picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

### Reflection

It is clear that if you are within Christ, the life-giving vine, then God will nurture, support and shape you into what is needed to bear fruit for his kingdom. But that does not mean that the storms of life will cease. For those who don't garden, take a deep breath and stay with me. A **pruned** branch is not a **dead** branch. Some plants require a "heavy prune," but in the following seasons it will erupt with growth! It's a beautiful process, but that does not make the pruning easier for you to endure or the gardener to perform.

Hard seasons have taught me to see the fresh and fallen blooms simultaneously and am reminded that his mercies are new every morning (Lam 3:22f). I encourage you to bring joy, encouragement, and consistency into the soil which is our congregation. May the naïve be rooted and the wise stretch out their canopy to protect them. Remain diligently connected to the vine, and identify the roles and gifts you can give to God's garden (1 Cor 12:12f) so that all may flourish.

## Closing

Lord, we bow our heads with humble and vulnerable hearts asking for your help. We are thankful you keep us close and under your care! May our actions be true representations of the vine and our branches and fruit are far from harm's way. When pruning is needed, guide each of our hearts to remain soft and obedient under your shears. May we support and uplift one another. In the off-season, do not leave our side, but replenish the nutrients in our soil with your wisdom, discernment, and love. Lord, keep our security hedges low, so that others can see your beauty and our flower beds wide so we can grow in number for your glory. Amen.

## Questions

- What does your branch look like in God's garden? Has this been a growing or pruning season?
- Can you identify the weeds in your life that could be hindering your growth? \*Pro-tip: Weeds are often pretty and deceiving to our eyes.
- Do you notice the trailing vine that is searching for structure while trying to grow? How can you use your unique gifts and story to support the children of our congregation?