

LESSON SIX

JOHN: 7 “I AM” STATEMENTS

“The Vine: A disciple will bear fruit ”

SCRIPTURE | John 15:1-5

MEMORY VERSE

“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT

When we are attached to Christ, His life flows through us so that we bear fruit.

GROUP TIME

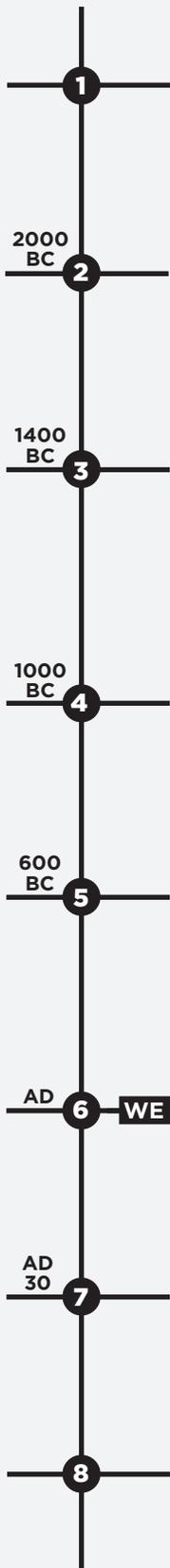
5 minutes	Welcome
5-10 minutes	Attention Grabber
10 minutes	Story / Context
25 minutes	Discussion
5-10 minutes	Closing & Prayer

PRAYER FOCUS

- **Easter (Apr. 4/5)** – Pray for Easter services and the opportunity to declare that Jesus is risen! Pray for many to place their faith in Him and be connected to the vine that sustains life and produces fruit.

BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

GOD'S STORY TIMELINE



1. God Creates the World and Promises a Rescuer (*Genesis 1-11*)

God created everything good and placed humans in a garden to live in close relationship with Him. But Adam and Eve chose to trust themselves instead of God, and sin entered the world. Relationships, creation, even our connection to God was broken. Yet even in judgment, God promised that one day, a descendant of Eve would crush the serpent and bring healing.

+This points to Jesus as the promised Rescuer who defeats sin, Satan, and death.

2. God Calls a Family and Makes a Promise (*Genesis 12-50*)

God chose a man named Abram (later Abraham) and gave a covenant to him: that he would have a large family, receive a land, and be a blessing to all nations. Though Abraham and his descendants were deeply flawed, God continued His promise through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

+This points to Jesus as the true offspring of Abraham, through whom all nations are fully blessed.

3. God Rescues His People and Forms a Redeemed Nation (*Exodus-Deuteronomy*)

Generations later, Abraham's descendants were enslaved in Egypt. God raised up Moses to rescue them from oppression and slavery. God called His people into a relationship with Himself. He made a covenant with them, gave them the law, and instructed them in worship. He was forming a people who would live differently and show the world what it looked like to belong to Him.

+This points to Jesus as the greater Moses, who rescues us from slavery to sin and writes God's law on our hearts.

4. God Gives a Home and Promises a King (*Joshua-2 Chronicles*)

God brought His people into the promised land under Joshua's leadership. Over time, they asked for a king like the other nations. It was a disaster. But God graciously gave them David, with whom he made another covenant: one of David's descendants would rule forever. Solomon built the temple, but after his death, the kingdom split into two and began spiraling into idolatry and injustice again.

+This points to Jesus as the forever King from David's line, who reigns with justice and peace.

5. God Removes His People and Reminds Them of His Promise (*Ezra-Nehemiah*)

Because of their rebellion, God allowed His people to be conquered and taken into exile. First, it was the Northern Kingdom, Israel (to Assyria), then the Southern Kingdom, Judah (to Babylon). The temple was destroyed, and the glory of the kingdom faded. Yet God continued to speak through the prophets, reminding the people of His promise to restore them, give them new hearts, and send a Rescuer.

+This points to Jesus as the one who brings the new covenant, restores hearts, and fulfills every prophecy.

6. God Sends His Son and Fulfills His Promise (*Matthew-John*)

At just the right time, God sent Jesus into the world—born of a virgin, fully God and fully man. He perfectly obeyed the law, pointed us to the Father, and laid down His life as a sacrifice for our sins. On the third day, He rose again, proving that He is the Savior, the King, and the fulfillment of every covenant promise God has ever made.

+Jesus is the center of the story—all of Scripture leads to Him.

7. God Sends His Spirit and Builds His Church (*Acts-Jude*)

After rising from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to empower His followers. The early Church spread the good news of Jesus across the Roman world—planting churches, welcoming both Jews and Gentiles, and learning to live as God's new covenant people. Though imperfect, the Church carries Jesus' mission forward today.

+This points to Jesus as the risen King who gives the Spirit to dwell in us and send us on mission.

8. God Restores All Things and Dwells with His People (*Revelation*)

The story isn't over. One day Jesus will return to judge evil and make all things new. There will be a new heaven and new earth, where God's people from every tribe and nation will live with Him forever. There will be no more pain, no more death, and no more sin—just joy, justice, and unbroken peace.

+This points to Jesus as the one who brings the story to its perfect and eternal culmination.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

LEADER TIP

To grab your participants' attention, start your lesson by telling a story related to the lesson's main idea. We have provided you with three options in this section, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: THE IMPACT OF A SIEGE

In the ancient world, one of the most effective ways to defeat a fortified city was not to attack its walls; it was to cut it off. Assyrian, Babylonian, and later Roman armies learned cities could withstand direct assault for months or even years. Walls were thick. Gates were strong. Defenders were disciplined. But no city could survive long without access to water, food, and supply routes beyond its walls. So armies surrounded the city and waited.

At first, life inside continued almost as normal. People went about daily routines. Markets opened. Guards stood watch. The city looked intact. From the outside, nothing appeared broken. But once the supply lines were severed, the outcome was no longer in doubt. You can't sustain life detached from sources of life.

But if a city had sources of life flowing from inside, independent of outside resources, a siege wouldn't work as effectively, if at all. The key here is being attached to life-giving resources.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Why do you think Jesus described the Christian life in terms of connection rather than effort or output? What does that suggest about how growth happens?*
- *Why do you think Jesus began this teaching by telling us who He is before telling us anything about ourselves?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:

This picture reminds us that life is not sustained by effort alone but by staying connected to what gives it life. In John 15, Jesus spoke to that reality by describing Himself as the true vine, the source of life that makes fruit possible.

OPTION 2 : JEREMIAH'S TWO TREES

In Jeremiah 17, the prophet described two lives side by side. One is compared to a shrub in the desert. It survives in dry ground, exposed and fragile, at the mercy of the weather. When heat comes, it withers. When drought lingers, it has no reserves to draw from.

The other is compared to a tree planted by water. Its roots grow toward a steady source. When heat comes, it does not wither. When drought lasts, it does not cease to bear fruit. Not because conditions are easier, but because its life is being sustained from somewhere deeper.

The difference between the two is not effort, intention, or environment. It is proximity to a source that can sustain life over time.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *What stands out to you about the difference between the shrub and the tree in this picture? What seems to matter most in Jeremiah's description?*
- *How does this image challenge the idea that fruitfulness depends mainly on favorable circumstances?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:

This picture reminds us that fruitfulness flows from being connected to a reliable source of life, not from striving or ideal conditions. In John 15, Jesus spoke to that reality by describing Himself as the one through whom life and fruit truly flow.

OPTION 3 : THE HUMAN BODY TELLS THE STORY

When you think about how the human body works, one thing becomes clear very quickly—life is shared. A hand has no independent source of life. Neither does a foot or an eye. Each part receives what it needs—movement, strength, and sensation—because it is connected to the body as a whole. As long as that connection remains intact, life flows naturally. The parts do not have to be reminded how to function. They receive life and respond accordingly.

We instinctively understand this. We do not speak of body parts as separate units. We talk about them in terms of belonging—my hand, my arm—because their life is inseparable from the body they are joined to. That everyday reality gives us a simple way to think about how life is meant to flow.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *When you think about being “fruitful” in life, what kinds of things do you naturally focus on first?*
- *How does this picture help you think about life flowing through connection rather than originating in isolation?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:

This picture reminds us that life is not something we possess independently but something we receive through connection. In John 15, Jesus spoke to that reality by describing Himself as the source of life from which fruit flows.

2 SET THE STAGE

LEADER TIP

This section provides the historical, cultural, and literary context needed to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

- I. Prologue: Christ as the Eternal Word (1:1-18)
 - A. The Word (1:1)
 - B. The Word and creation (1:2-5)
 - C. The Word and the world (1:6-18)
- II. Presentation of Christ as the Son of God (1:19-12:50)
 - A. By John the Baptist (1:19-34)
 - B. To His disciples (1:35-51)
 - C. Through miraculous signs (2:1-12:50)
- III. Instruction of the Twelve by the Son of God (13:1-17:26)
 - A. The Last Supper (13:1-38)
 - B. The way to the Father (14:1-31)
 - C. The true vine (15:1-27)**
 - D. The gift of the Spirit (16:1-33)
 - E. Jesus's high-priestly prayer (17:1-26)
- IV. Suffering of Christ as the Son of God (18:1-20:31)
 - A. His arrest, trial, and death (18:1-19:42)
 - B. His triumph over death (20:1-31)
- V. Epilogue: The Continuing Work of the Son of God (21:1-25)
 - A. Appearances to His disciples (21:1-14)
 - B. Assignment to His disciples (21:15-25)¹

CONTEXT

John 15 comes after Jesus shifted from public ministry to focused instruction for His disciples. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus revealed who He was through signs and teaching that invited belief. As the narrative moves toward the cross, that public work gave way to private preparation. Jesus began speaking about what lay ahead to those who already followed Him.

By this point, the disciples understood that Jesus was leaving, even if they did not yet grasp what that departure would mean. He had spoken about going where they could not follow, about sending help in His place, and about a future that would look different from the life they had known with Him. Their relationship with Jesus was not ending, but it was clearly changing.

Much of what Jesus had said so far centered on trust and belief. He called them to rely on Him, to take His words seriously, and to hold on to the promise that they would not be left alone. What remained unanswered was how life with Him would continue when His physical presence was no longer the anchor of their daily experience.

John 15 addresses this question by giving the disciples a concrete way to think about their ongoing relationship with Jesus. Instead of explaining future events or offering instructions for self-management, Jesus used an image drawn from everyday life to describe how connection to Him continues. The vine-and-branches language was meant to help the disciples understand what remained constant even as everything around them was about to change.

¹Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1663.

CONNECTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

The image Jesus used in John 15 did not come out of nowhere. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel is repeatedly described as a vine or vineyard planted by God. This imagery was meant to communicate privilege, care, and purpose. God had chosen Israel, placed them in a land, and expected their life with Him to bear fruit.

Several passages develop this theme clearly. In Isaiah 5, God describes Israel as a carefully tended vineyard that produced wild grapes instead of good fruit. Psalm 80 speaks of God bringing a vine out of Egypt and planting it, only for it later to be damaged and vulnerable. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both return to vine imagery to describe Israel's unfaithfulness and failure to live out the purpose God intended.

By the time of Jesus, this image carried a heavy moral and spiritual weight. To speak of a vine was to speak about covenant relationship, fruitfulness, and accountability. The story Israel knew was not simply about being planted but about failing to produce the kind of life God desired.

When Jesus said, "I am the true vine," He was intentionally placing Himself within that story. He was not rejecting the Old Testament image but redefining where life and fruitfulness were now found. The connection to God is no longer described primarily through national identity or covenant membership but through relationship to Him. John 15 takes a familiar Old Testament image and redirected it to Jesus Himself.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

We are prone to live as though life and fruit can be sustained apart from ongoing connection to Christ. Even when we believe in Jesus, we drift toward independence, relying on effort, habit, or experience rather than dependence. In doing so, we attempt to bear fruit without remaining attached to the only source of life.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

The good news is that Jesus does not call us to produce life on our own but to receive His. He offers Himself as the source of life, inviting us into a relationship where fruit flows from connection rather than effort. What we cannot generate through discipline or resolve, Christ freely supplies through union with Him.

LEADER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your group through Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the leader, work through all the exercises below to ensure you understand the text well.

When Jesus identified Himself as “the true vine,” He was deliberately invoking a well-established biblical image while at the same time redefining it. In Israel’s Scriptures, the vine consistently symbolized the covenant people as a whole, planted and tended by God yet repeatedly failing to produce the fruit He desired. Against that background, Jesus’s claim carries a sharp contrast. By calling Himself the true vine, He presented Himself as the one in whom Israel’s calling was finally realized. Fruitfulness before God was no longer centered in the nation, as such, but in the person of Jesus. The adjective “true” signals fulfillment rather than mere authenticity. Jesus is not one vine among many but the one to which the earlier image pointed.

The addition of “my Father is the gardener” ensures that this redefinition does not diminish the Father’s role. The Father remains actively involved in the life of the vine, exercising authority, care, and oversight. The image reflects the consistent pattern in John’s Gospel, where the Son’s work unfolds in obedient dependence on the Father’s will. Life flows from the Son, yet it is the Father who cultivates, evaluates, and directs that life to its intended end. From the opening verse, then, Jesus established a framework in which fruitfulness is neither self-generated nor accidental. It is the result of divine initiative, sustained through the Son and shaped by the Father.

In verse 2, Jesus described the Father’s ongoing work with the branches by placing two actions side by side. Branches that bear no fruit are removed, while branches that do bear fruit are pruned so they may become even more fruitful. The contrast is not between impressive and unimpressive growth, but between the absence and presence of life. Fruitlessness signals a failure of connection to the vine, while fruit-bearing branches are assumed to possess genuine life. Yet even living branches are subject to the gardener’s cutting. Pruning is not punishment but purposeful shaping aimed at greater fruitfulness, underscoring that growth under the Father’s care involves both sustenance and refinement.

Jesus made a statement in verse 3 that can initially sound confusing: He told the disciples they were already clean because of the word He had spoken to them. The comment raises questions about how this “cleanness” relates to the pruning just described. Jesus did not mean the Father’s work was finished, nor was He redefining pruning as something the disciples did to themselves. Rather, He anchored their present standing in what had already occurred. His word had taken hold in their lives and established their connection to the vine. The life that produces fruit was already at work in them. The gardener’s ongoing pruning does not create that life but builds upon it.

In verse 4, Jesus moved from explanation to command, calling the disciples to remain in Him. The imperative signals that continued connection is not automatic or incidental. While life originates in the vine, the branches are addressed as responsible participants in the relationship. Jesus immediately explained the necessity of this command by appealing to the nature of the image itself. A branch

does not possess life in itself, nor does it have the capacity to bear fruit independently. Its fruitfulness is entirely contingent upon remaining attached to the vine. By framing the command this way, Jesus removed any notion that fruit could be produced through effort, imitation, or proximity alone.

Jesus then pressed the point by restating it in unmistakable terms. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine, so the disciples could not bear fruit apart from Him. The repetition was deliberate. Jesus wanted to ensure the image was not softened into a general encouragement or spiritual metaphor. Remaining in Him is not one factor among many contributing to fruitfulness; it is the condition that makes fruit possible at all. The mutual language of remaining anticipates what Jesus had already promised about ongoing fellowship through the Spirit, but here the emphasis falls on dependence rather than mechanism. Life and fruit flow only where there is sustained connection. Verse 4 therefore establishes abiding not as a spiritual ideal but as the essential posture of all genuine life with Christ.

Jesus stated explicitly in verse 5 what the image had been moving toward all along. He is the vine, and His followers are the branches. Fruitfulness depends entirely on remaining in Him. Where that connection is sustained, much fruit results; where it is not, no fruit is possible. Jesus's statement, "apart from me you can do nothing," rules out any notion of partial independence. The life that produces fruit cannot be generated apart from Him.

Together, verses 1–5 present a unified picture of life with Christ. Jesus is the source of life, the Father is the one who tends and shapes that life, and the disciples are branches whose fruitfulness depends on ongoing connection to the vine. Fruit is not the result of effort detached from relationship but the outcome of shared life under the Father's care.

JOHN 15:1-5

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 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.

5 "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.²

²*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), John 15:1–5.

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Gather in groups of three to five people to discuss the Observation and Interpretation questions.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: THE VINE IMAGE

Read John 15:1. How did Jesus describe Himself and His Father in this verse?

Suggested Response: Jesus described Himself as the true vine and His Father as the gardener. The verse introduces the image and identifies the main roles within it.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BRANCHES

Read John 15:2-3. What did Jesus say happens to branches that bear fruit and branches that do not? What did He say about the disciples' present condition?

Suggested Response: Jesus said branches that do not bear fruit are removed, while branches that do bear fruit are pruned so they will become more fruitful. He also said the disciples were already clean because of the word He had spoken to them.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: ABIDING AND FRUITFULNESS

Read John 15:4-5. What did Jesus say about remaining in Him? What result did He connect to that?

Suggested Response: Jesus said His followers must remain in Him to bear fruit. He explained that a branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine and that apart from Him they could do nothing.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: MEANING OF THE TRUE VINE

Read John 15:1. Why do you think Jesus described Himself as the “true” vine instead of simply “a vine”? What does that suggest about where real life and fruitfulness are found?

Suggested Response: By calling Himself the true vine, Jesus was distinguishing Himself as the genuine source of life. The wording suggests that not every source that claims to give life actually does. Jesus was identifying Himself as the place where real, lasting fruitfulness is found.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: THE MEANING OF FRUIT AND PRUNING

Read John 15:2-3. What do the images of fruit-bearing, pruning, and being “clean” suggest about God’s expectations and work in the lives of those connected to Jesus?

Suggested Response: The images suggest that fruit is expected wherever there is real connection to Jesus. Pruning shows that God is actively involved in shaping those who belong to Him, even when growth is already present. Being “clean” points to a relationship that has already been established through Jesus’s word, not something that must be earned.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: WHAT REMAINING MEANS

Read John 15:4-5. What did Jesus mean by “remaining” in Him? Why did He connect that so closely to fruitfulness?

Suggested Response: Remaining in Jesus describes an ongoing, dependent relationship rather than a one-time decision. Jesus connected remaining to fruitfulness because life and growth flow from continued connection to Him. Without that connection, fruit is not just difficult but impossible.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: Which words or images from John 15:1–5 felt most noticeable or memorable to you, and what do you think made them stand out?

Suggested Response: Responses will vary. Encourage participants to name specific words, phrases, or moments in the conversation that caught their attention. Use follow-up questions to invite deeper reflection rather than quick answers.

LEADER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God calls them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

QUESTION 2: Jesus stated that fruit comes from staying connected to Him, not from effort alone. Where do you notice yourself focusing more on outcomes than on connection right now?

Suggested Response: Some may mention work, family responsibilities, spiritual habits, or personal goals. Others may recognize a general pressure to “keep things going.” This question helps reveal places where productivity or results may be overshadowing dependence.

QUESTION 3: Jesus said a branch cannot bear fruit by itself. What does trying to carry life or growth on your own look like in everyday terms for you?

Suggested Response: Some participants may describe the pressure to keep everything functioning through personal effort, planning, or control. Others may recognize patterns of over-responsibility, where rest feels unsafe because things might fall apart. Still others may notice emotional independence, avoiding vulnerability or prayer until exhaustion sets in. The goal of this question is to help participants name familiar habits of self-reliance rather than dramatic failures of faith.

QUESTION 4: What practices or rhythms help you stay aware of your connection to Jesus during ordinary, unremarkable weeks?

Suggested Response: Answers may include prayer, Scripture, silence, community, or simple moments of attentiveness to God. Encourage honesty about what is life-giving versus what feels performative or forced.

QUESTION 5: If remaining in Jesus is the source of fruit, how might our group help one another stay connected rather than measure one another by visible success or spiritual progress?

Suggested Response: Participants may suggest prayer, listening well, checking in throughout the week, or creating space for honesty. Emphasize that group support is about shared dependence, not accountability through pressure. Sometimes the support people need most is permission to slow down and stay connected rather than feeling the need to prove growth.

4

CHALLENGE

LEADER TIP

End your study time with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

Much of life trains us to focus on results. We measure progress by what we can see, track growth by outcomes, and feel steady when things appear productive. Over time, that way of thinking can quietly shape our faith. We begin to assume that fruit comes from effort, discipline, or consistency rather than from connection. Jesus directly addressed that assumption by placing life itself at the center. He did not begin with what we should produce but with where we are to remain.

Following Jesus as the true vine invites us to reconsider what we depend on to sustain us. His words press us to ask whether we are trying to carry growth on our own or staying close to the source of life. Fruit, in this picture, is not something we force or manage. It is what emerges when we remain connected to Him.

- Where in my life am I most tempted to focus on outcomes instead of staying connected to Jesus?
- What rhythms or habits help me remain aware of my dependence on Him during ordinary days?
- How can our group encourage one another to value connection over performance?

The way of Jesus is not sustained by effort or visibility. It is formed by remaining close to the one from whom life flows.

Let's pray.