

What is the true vine?

Apart from Me you can do nothing.

JOHN 15:5

Written by Bill Perkins

Forgiveness exposes this truth
faster than anything else.
We meet our limits
the moment we try to release
the one who wounded us.

You may not know this about Jesus:
He never expected forgiveness
to rise from human strength.
He expected it to rise
from His life
in us.

Israel learned this the hard way.
They were God's vineyard—
planted,
tended,
protected—
yet unable to bear
the fruit God desired.

The prophets said the vine
produced wild grapes (Isaiah 5),
turned degenerate (Jeremiah 2),
and withered under judgment (Ezekiel 15).
Psalm 80 cried out
for God to restore the vine
that had collapsed
under its unfaithfulness.

What fruit was missing?
Mercy.
Justice.

Compassion.

Forgiveness.

These were covenant fruit—
the very things God required.

But Israel could not produce them.

And Paul tells us why:

the Law did not create righteousness;
it exposed sin (Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7).

The commands were holy,
but the people were powerless.

The vine was real,

but it had no life.

It carried the words of God,

but not the power of God.

It had the form of righteousness,
but not the source.

This is why Jesus didn't say,

"I am the vine."

He said,

"I am the true vine"—

the faithful Israel,

the living root,

the source of the life

that produces forgiveness.

Jesus steps into Israel's failed story

and names the truth

behind every fruitless branch:

"Apart from Me

you can do nothing."

Not less than you hoped.

Nothing.

The branch is not weak.

It is incapable.

It cannot produce

what only the Vine can supply.

It cannot manufacture mercy,

cannot force forgiveness

from wounded flesh.

This is the limit
that sets us free.
Jesus is not shaming the branch.
He is liberating it.

Forgiveness is not
the triumph of our will.
It is the overflow
of His life.

Where am I still trying to forgive
from my own strength
instead of His life?

My limit is not failure.
It is the doorway
to His power.

Father, I confess my limits.
I cannot forgive
without the life of Your Son.
Let His mercy flow through me.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.