

The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: The Useless Vine and the Unfaithful Bride

Ezekiel 15:1–16:63

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake in these chapters is the nature of election and grace and the seriousness of covenant unfaithfulness. The parable of the vine teaches that God chooses a people for a purpose, namely fruitfulness, and that being chosen is never a guarantee of safety apart from faithfulness. The teacher should connect this to Jesus as the true vine in John 15 and press the truth that a fruitless branch is cast out and burned, which warns against any notion that the chosen are secure regardless of how they live. This stands against once-saved-always-saved: Israel was God's covenant people and still fell under judgment for unfaithfulness, and the chosen vine that bears no fruit is fit for the fire.

The allegory of chapter 16 displays grace in its purest form. Jerusalem contributed nothing to her rescue; she was a helpless, unwanted infant whom God chose to save, cleanse, raise, and marry, and every beauty she possessed was His gift. The teacher should let this dismantle all human boasting and merit, showing that salvation is by God's mercy and not by anything in us (Titus 3:3–7). At the same time, the chapter exposes idolatry as spiritual adultery, a betrayal of covenant love, and here the teacher should draw on God's design for marriage as a lifelong, exclusive, one-flesh union (Ephesians 5:25–32) to illumine why God responds to His people's unfaithfulness with such grief and severity. The imagery of the chapter is frank, and the teacher should handle it with candor and pastoral care, never sensationalizing it, but letting its honesty press home the real ugliness of sin.

Finally, the teacher should bring the class to the wonder of the closing promise. After laying bare the full extent of the betrayal, God pledges to remember His covenant and to establish an everlasting covenant, atoning for all that His people have done. This is grace that outlasts our unfaithfulness. The teacher should show that this everlasting covenant finds its fulfillment in the new covenant in Christ (Hebrews 8:6–13), in which God remembers our sins no more, and that the proper response to such grace is not presumption but a humbled, ashamed, and grateful repentance that leads to renewed faithfulness.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 15:1–8 God compares Israel to the wood of the vine, useful for nothing but bearing fruit and fit only for the fire when it is fruitless. What does this parable reveal about the purpose for which God chooses a people, and why being chosen never excuses fruitlessness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezekiel 15 is a brief but pointed parable. God asks, How is the wood of the vine better than any other wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? (15:2). The answer is plain to anyone who has worked a vineyard: it is not. Vine wood is too soft and twisted to make even a peg to hang a vessel on (15:3). Its only value is its fruit.

God presses the image. If the wood is good for nothing when whole, how much less when it has already been charred by the fire at both ends and scorched in the middle (15:4–5). The picture points to Jerusalem, already partly consumed by earlier judgments, now facing final burning. A vine that does not bear fruit has no other use; it becomes fuel.

So God declares, I will set My face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them (15:7). The chosen vine, when fruitless, is not protected by its chosenness. Its very identity as a vine means it exists for fruit, and apart from fruit it is worse than useless.

The lesson for Israel was that election was never a license for barrenness. God had planted them to bear fruit for Him, and a people who refused that purpose forfeited the only thing that gave them value. Being God's vine was a calling, not a charm.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Vine wood has value only in bearing fruit, not in itself.
- Israel was chosen for fruitfulness, not for privileged barrenness.
- A fruitless vine is fit only for the fire.
- Election is a calling to bear fruit, not a guarantee of safety.
- God set His face against His people because of their fruitlessness.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is vine wood worthless except for its fruit?
- What does this parable teach about the purpose of being chosen?
- Why does chosenness not protect a fruitless people from judgment?

Question 2

Student Question:

The vine had value only as it bore fruit (Ezekiel 15:2–4). Where in your own walk with God are you tempted to rest in your standing or background rather than actually bearing fruit for Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The vine had no value apart from its fruit (15:2–4), and the same searching truth applies to us. Jesus took up this very image, calling Himself the true vine and us the branches, and said that the branch that does not bear fruit is taken away and burned, while the fruitful branch is pruned

to bear more (John 15:1-8). Our worth before God is not in our standing alone but in abiding and bearing fruit.

It is easy to rest in our background, our church membership, our reputation, or our past, as though these were enough. But God did not call us to be admired vines; He called us to be fruitful ones. Fruit is the love, holiness, good works, and changed character that the Spirit produces in a life genuinely joined to Christ.

The honest question is whether we are bearing fruit or merely occupying space in the vineyard. A branch may look alive and still be barren. The call is to abide in Christ so deeply that real fruit appears, for it is the Father's design that we bear much fruit and so prove to be His disciples (John 15:8).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our value before God is bound up with bearing fruit, not standing alone.
- Resting in background or reputation can mask spiritual barrenness.
- Fruit is the Spirit-produced character and works of a life joined to Christ.
- Abiding in Christ is the source of all genuine fruitfulness.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you resting in your standing rather than bearing fruit?
- What does genuine spiritual fruit look like in your life?
- How does abiding in Christ produce the fruit God seeks?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 16:1-14 God describes Jerusalem as an abandoned infant He rescued, cleansed, raised, and entered into covenant with, adorning her with beauty that was His gift. What does this allegory reveal about the nature of God's grace and the truth that everything good in His people is His own gift and not their merit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezekiel 16 opens the long allegory with a portrait of utter helplessness. Jerusalem is pictured as a newborn cast out into an open field on the day of her birth, her cord uncut, unwashed, unsalted, unwrapped, with no eye to pity her (16:4-5). She was unwanted and abandoned, left to die in her own blood. This is where God found His people, with nothing to commend them.

Then comes the turning point of pure grace. God passed by, saw her wallowing in her blood, and said to her, Live (16:6). He did not find a beautiful child to adopt; He spoke life over a dying one. He caused her to grow and flourish, and when she was grown He passed by again, spread His

garment over her, entered into covenant with her, and she became His (16:7-8). The marriage was His initiative from first to last.

What follows is lavish love. He washed her, anointed her, clothed her in fine linen and silk, adorned her with bracelets, jewels, and a beautiful crown, and fed her with the finest food (16:9-13). Her renown went out among the nations because of her beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that God had bestowed on her (16:14). Every bit of her beauty was His gift, not her achievement.

This is the gospel pattern in miniature. We contribute nothing to our own rescue; God finds us helpless and dead in sin and speaks life over us (Ephesians 2:4-5). Everything good in the redeemed is the gift of His grace, washed and renewed not because of works but according to His mercy (Titus 3:4-7). The allegory leaves no room for human boasting.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jerusalem began as a helpless, abandoned, unwanted infant.
- God's word Live was an act of pure, unmerited grace.
- The covenant marriage was entirely God's initiative.
- Every beauty Jerusalem possessed was God's gift, not her merit.
- The allegory pictures the gospel pattern of grace to the helpless.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the abandoned infant reveal about our condition before grace?
- Why is it significant that God said Live before she was beautiful?
- How does this allegory exclude all human boasting in salvation?

Question 4

Student Question:

God said to the helpless infant, Live, and made her flourish (Ezekiel 16:6-7). When you consider how undeserving you were when God showed you mercy, how should that memory shape your humility and gratitude today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God said Live to a dying infant who had done nothing to deserve it (16:6). Remembering our own helplessness when God showed us mercy is essential to a humble walk. We did not earn His rescue; we were wallowing in our blood, and He passed by and chose to save us. Any beauty in our lives is His gift, not our boast.

Forgetfulness of grace breeds pride. When we lose sight of where God found us, we begin to imagine that our standing rests on our own goodness, and gratitude cools into entitlement.

Jerusalem's later sin began precisely here, in trusting her beauty as though it were her own (16:15). The memory of grace is a guard against that drift.

So the discipline is deliberate remembrance. Recall the pit from which you were lifted, the mercy that found you, the gifts you never earned. Such remembering keeps the heart soft, humble, and thankful, and fuels a love for God that flows from realizing how much we have been given (Luke 7:47).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We were helpless and undeserving when God showed us mercy.
- Any good in us is God's gift, not grounds for boasting.
- Forgetting grace breeds pride and entitlement.
- Remembering grace keeps the heart humble and grateful.

Discussion Prompts

- How undeserving were you when God first showed you mercy?
- How does forgetting grace lead to pride?
- What practice helps you keep the memory of grace fresh?

Question 5

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 16:15–34 the bride trusts in her own beauty, plays the harlot, and even pays her lovers, using God's own gifts to pursue idols. What does this expose about the nature of idolatry as spiritual adultery, and why is covenant unfaithfulness such a grievous betrayal of the God who has given us everything?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The allegory turns dark in Ezekiel 16:15. The bride God had rescued and adorned trusted in her own beauty and used her renown to play the harlot, lavishing her favors on everyone who passed by. The very gifts God had given her, her garments, her gold and silver jewels, her fine flour and oil and honey, she took and offered to idols (16:16–19). She turned the tokens of His love into the instruments of her betrayal.

The unfaithfulness grew grotesque. She even took her children and sacrificed them to idols, forgetting the days of her youth when she lay naked and helpless until God clothed her (16:20–22). The further she went into idolatry, the more she forgot the grace that had made her. Forgetting the rescue made the betrayal possible.

God then exposes a perversion that goes beyond ordinary harlotry. A prostitute at least receives payment, but Jerusalem paid her lovers, hiring the nations to come to her, the opposite of every

other harlot (16:31–34). Her idolatry was not driven by need but by a craving to give herself away to anyone but her husband. This is the strange, self-destroying logic of sin.

Here is the heart of the matter: idolatry is spiritual adultery. To turn from God to idols is not merely to break a rule; it is to betray a covenant love, to take the affection owed to a faithful husband and squander it on others. That is why Scripture so often speaks of idolatry in the language of marital unfaithfulness, and why God grieves it as a wounded spouse, not a detached judge.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jerusalem trusted in her own beauty and played the harlot.
- She used God's own gifts to pursue idols.
- Forgetting God's rescue made the betrayal possible.
- Her idolatry was so brazen she paid her lovers rather than receiving payment.
- Idolatry is spiritual adultery, a betrayal of covenant love.

Discussion Prompts

- How did Jerusalem misuse the very gifts God had given her?
- Why does the chapter call idolatry a form of adultery?
- What is the strange logic of sin in paying her lovers?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jerusalem turned the very gifts God had given her toward other lovers (Ezekiel 16:17–19). What blessings from God's hand, your time, talents, relationships, or resources, are you in danger of using to pursue things other than Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jerusalem took the gifts of God and turned them toward idols (16:17–19). We are prone to the same misuse. God gives us time, abilities, relationships, money, and influence, and these very gifts can become the means by which we pursue things other than Him. A blessing becomes a snare the moment it draws our trust and love away from the Giver.

Notice that her sin was not in having the gifts but in where she directed them. The gold and garments were good; the betrayal was using them for idols. So the personal question is not whether we have blessings but whether they are serving God's purposes or our idols. The same talent can build up the body of Christ or feed our vanity.

Faithfulness means consecrating God's gifts back to Him. What has He placed in your hands? Examine where each blessing is actually pointing, and bring any that have drifted toward an idol

back into His service. The gifts are safest, and we are most faithful, when everything we have is held for the One who gave it (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's good gifts can be redirected toward idols.
- A blessing becomes a snare when it draws love from the Giver.
- The issue is not having gifts but where we direct them.
- Faithfulness consecrates God's gifts back to His service.

Discussion Prompts

- Which of God's gifts are you in danger of misdirecting?
- How can a blessing become a snare?
- What would it look like to consecrate your gifts back to God?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 16:35–43 God announces judgment on the unfaithful bride, exposing and shaming her for breaking the covenant. How does God's design for marriage as a lifelong, exclusive, one-flesh union illumine the seriousness of His response to His people's unfaithfulness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In Ezekiel 16:35–43 God announces judgment on the unfaithful bride. He will gather all her lovers against her, expose her shame, and judge her as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged (16:37–38). The language is severe because the betrayal was severe. This is the response of a husband whose covenant has been broken, not the indifference of a stranger.

God's design for marriage illumines the gravity of His response. From the beginning He made marriage a lifelong, exclusive, one-flesh union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24), a bond of total faithfulness. Adultery is so wounding precisely because marriage is so intimate and exclusive. When God uses this picture for His covenant with His people, He is saying that idolatry wounds Him as deeply as adultery wounds a faithful spouse.

We should feel the jealousy of God here rightly. His is not petty jealousy but the holy jealousy of covenant love that will not share its spouse with rivals (Exodus 34:14). Because He has given Himself wholly to His people, He rightly asks for their whole devotion in return, and He is grieved and angered when it is given to idols.

This reframes how we understand God's judgment. It is not cold legalism but wounded love responding to betrayal. The severity of the response is the measure of the depth of the love that was spurned. A God who did not care would not grieve; it is precisely because He loves His bride that her unfaithfulness provokes such a response.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God judges the unfaithful bride as a wronged husband, not a stranger.
- Marriage is a lifelong, exclusive, one-flesh union by God's design.
- Idolatry wounds God as adultery wounds a faithful spouse.
- God's jealousy is the holy jealousy of covenant love.
- God's severity is the measure of the love that was betrayed.

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's design for marriage illumine the seriousness of idolatry?
- What does God's jealousy reveal about His love for His people?
- Why is God's judgment here an expression of wounded love?

Question 8

Student Question:

God's judgment on Jerusalem flowed from a wounded, covenant love (Ezekiel 16:38). How does seeing sin as a betrayal of the One who loves us, rather than merely breaking a rule, change the way you grieve and repent of your own sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God's judgment flowed from a wounded covenant love (16:38), and that reframes how we ought to grieve our own sin. When we see sin merely as breaking a rule, we may feel guilt without much sorrow. But when we see it as betraying the One who rescued us and gave Himself to us, repentance deepens into genuine grief over a relationship wounded.

David understood this. After his great sin he cried, Against You, You only, have I sinned (Psalm 51:4). He felt his sin first as an offense against the God who loved him. That is the godly sorrow that leads to true repentance and not merely to regret over consequences (2 Corinthians 7:10).

So the personal work is to see our sin relationally. Behind every disobedience is a Person who has loved us faithfully and whom we have grieved. Letting that truth sink in turns cold confession into heartfelt return, and it is precisely the kind of repentance that draws us back into the arms of the One we have wronged.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin is a betrayal of a Person, not merely the breaking of a rule.
- Seeing sin relationally deepens guilt into godly sorrow.
- Godly sorrow leads to true repentance, not mere regret.
- Heartfelt repentance returns us to the God we have grieved.

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing sin as betrayal change the way you repent?
- What is the difference between regret and godly sorrow?
- How does relational repentance draw you back to God?

Question 9

Student Question:

In Ezekiel 16:59–63 God, after exposing the full extent of the betrayal, promises to remember His covenant and establish an everlasting covenant, atoning for all she has done so that she is ashamed and silenced. Drawing the whole chapter together, what does this astonishing promise reveal about the depth of God's grace, and how is it ultimately fulfilled in the new and everlasting covenant in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After laying bare the full extent of the betrayal, Ezekiel 16 ends with an astonishing turn of grace. God says, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant (16:60). The God who exposed the sin pledges to restore the sinner. Grace, not judgment, has the last word in the chapter.

The aim of this grace is a humbled, transformed heart. God says she will remember her ways and be ashamed, and that He will atone for all that she has done, so that she will never again open her mouth because of her shame (16:61–63). This is not cheap forgiveness that excuses sin; it is costly atonement that both forgives and humbles, leaving the forgiven silenced by mercy rather than self-justified.

This everlasting covenant points beyond Ezekiel's day to its fulfillment in Christ. The new covenant established in His blood is the everlasting covenant in which God remembers our sins no more (Hebrews 8:6–13; 10:16–17). What the prophet glimpsed, the gospel accomplishes: full atonement for the unfaithful and an unbreakable bond of grace for those who turn to Him.

Drawing the whole chapter together, we see the breathtaking depth of God's grace. He loves a people who began as helpless infants, who then betrayed Him as an unfaithful bride, and He responds not by abandoning them but by atoning for their sin and binding Himself to them forever. This is the love that meets us in Christ, and the only fitting response is a humble, grateful, lifelong faithfulness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace, not judgment, has the last word in the chapter.
- God promises to remember His covenant and establish an everlasting one.
- His atonement both forgives and humbles, silencing self-justification.
- The everlasting covenant is fulfilled in the new covenant in Christ.
- God's grace meets the unfaithful with atonement and an unbreakable bond.

Discussion Prompts

- What is astonishing about God's promise after such betrayal?
- How does God's atonement both forgive and humble the sinner?
- How is this everlasting covenant fulfilled in Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across these two chapters, name one specific way the God who calls His people to fruitfulness and faithfulness, and who atones for the unfaithful, is calling you to respond in repentance and renewed devotion this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Looking back across both chapters, two great truths stand together. The vine of chapter 15 calls us to fruitfulness; the bride of chapter 16 calls us to faithfulness. God chose His people for fruit and bound Himself to them in covenant love, and He grieves both barrenness and betrayal. The chapters together press us to be a people who bear fruit and keep faith.

Yet the final word is grace. The same God who set His face against the fruitless vine and exposed the unfaithful bride is the God who promises to atone and to establish an everlasting covenant. He does not leave us in our barrenness or our betrayal; in Christ He offers cleansing, restoration, and an unbreakable bond. The honest reckoning with our sin is meant to drive us not to despair but to this grace.

So the response this week is twofold. Let the memory of grace humble you, and let the call to faithfulness move you. Examine where you have been fruitless or where you have given to idols the love and gifts that belong to God, and return to Him in repentance. The God who said Live to a dying infant and remembers His covenant with the unfaithful stands ready to receive every heart that turns back to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The two chapters together call us to fruitfulness and faithfulness.
- God grieves both barrenness and covenant betrayal.
- Grace is the final word, offering atonement and an everlasting covenant.
- Honest reckoning with sin should drive us to grace, not despair.
- The fitting response is humble repentance and renewed devotion.

Discussion Prompts

- How do fruitfulness and faithfulness fit together in these chapters?
- Where do you need to return to God in repentance this week?
- How does God's grace move you to renewed devotion?