

Session 6: Grown in Grace

Adopted, indwelt, and being changed from glory to glory

PART 1 · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what God is actually after: not merely acquitted defendants but adopted children, "partakers of the divine nature," branches alive on a vine, being changed into Christ's likeness "from one degree of glory to another." Sanctification is salvation's present tense doing its work.

Catholic Touchstone. "Grace is a participation in the life of God" (CCC 1997). Sanctifying grace makes us really and truly sons and daughters in the Son, and that life is meant to grow (CCC 1999-2000 on the gift itself; CCC 2010 on growth in grace). Holiness is not the honors track for religious overachievers; it is the ordinary trajectory of baptismal life, and "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (cf. Heb 12:14).

What You Need to Know

This is the study's warmest night, and it is placed here on purpose: it is the last session before the warnings of Session 7, and everything tonight builds the room the warnings will land in. The group has learned that salvation is a rescue (S2), applied in Baptism (S3), constituting a real interior justification (S4), alive as faith working through love (S5). Tonight asks: toward *what*? And Scripture's answer is staggering: "he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may... become **partakers of the divine nature**" (2 Pet 1:4). Not fans of God, not clients of God: sharers in God's own life. The Christian East has said this out loud, long and prominently (they call it *theosis*, deification); the West says the same thing in the vocabulary of sanctifying grace and divine adoption. It is one Gospel.

Make adoption concrete. Romans 8:14-17 gives it a voice ("Abba! Father!"), a witness (the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit), and an inheritance (heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ). And note Paul's quiet conditional in 8:17, "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him"; read it as written, without stress, and move on. First John 3:1-2 adds the astonished tone the doctrine deserves: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; **and so we are.**" John heads off the deflation in four words: this is not a courtesy title.

The vine (John 15:1-11) is tonight's central image, and one verse in it is a landmine you must know about in advance. You will read the whole passage, because cutting Scripture mid-image is not how this study operates. Verse 6, the branch that does not abide, withers, and is thrown into the fire, belongs to Session 7, and tonight you will not develop it, comment on it, or linger on it. Read the passage whole; aim every question at abiding, fruit, and pruning; and if a participant's eyes snag on verse 6, the Thread Watch tells you exactly what to do. The dread that verse quietly plants tonight is doing its intended work.

On growth: 2 Corinthians 3:18 ("changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another") and 2 Peter 3:18 ("grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord") give sanctification its verbs. This is St. Gregory of Nyssa's territory from Session 1 (The Life of Moses), and tonight his voice gets its payoff: the perpetual pressing forward is the saved life. Growth is also ordinary: watering cans, not lightning bolts. St. Francis de Sales built a whole spirituality on devotion fitted to daily life, and your group's grocery-run holiness needs his blessing tonight.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Jesus's vine is not a fresh metaphor; it is a loaded one. **Psalm 80** sings Israel's story as a transplanted vine: "You brought a vine **out of Egypt**; you drove out the nations and planted it" (Ps 80:8), and then begs God to have regard

again for a vine burned and cut down. **Isaiah 5:1-7** is the dark verse of the same song: the beloved's vineyard, tended with total care, yielded wild grapes, "and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed." So when Jesus says "**I am the true vine**" (Jn 15:1), the Church has long heard him claiming to be, in himself, the faithful Israel that finally bears the fruit the Owner planted for; and his branches abide in him or bear nothing. Notice the Exodus map has quietly gained a station: the vine itself came out of Egypt. Israel's rescue, journey, and fruitfulness are all inside tonight's image.

For adoption's Old Testament root, **Hosea 11:1-4**: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son... it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms." God as the parent of a toddler, teaching steps, healing scrapes, leading "with cords of compassion, with the bands of love." Sanctification in one picture: a Father teaching a rescued child to walk.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Athanasius of Alexandria

On the Incarnation, ch. 54 (4th century)

"For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." The Catechism quotes this sentence in its teaching on why the Word became flesh (CCC 460).

The champion of Nicaea is not blurring the Creator-creature line he spent his life defending; he means what 2 Peter 1:4 means: by grace we are given a real share in the divine life, adopted into the Son's own relationship to the Father. The East calls it *theosis*. It is the ceiling of tonight's session, and it is load-bearing.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Francis de Sales

Introduction to the Devout Life (1609)

Writing for laypeople busy with families, trades, and obligations, St. Francis teaches, in substance, that devotion is genuine holiness fitted to every state of life: the soldier, the tradesman, the married woman are called to a devotion proper to their calling, and holiness practiced only in flight from ordinary duties is a counterfeit.

Sanctification, in other words, is not a second vocation competing with your life; it is your life, turned toward God. The vine grows where it is planted.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Carlo Acutis

Attributed sayings (d. 2006; canonized 2025)

The teenage computer programmer who built a website cataloguing Eucharistic miracles, canonized in 2025 as the Church's first millennial saint, is widely remembered for the saying attributed to him: "All of us are born originals, but many of us die as photocopies."

It is Session 6 in a teenager's idiom: God is not mass-producing acquittals; he is growing originals, each one conformed to Christ in a way no other soul will repeat. Sanctity is the least generic thing that can happen to you.

Catechism Connection

CCC 460. Quotes 2 Peter 1:4 and then the Fathers on its meaning, including Athanasius's sentence above and St. Thomas's echo of it. The Catechism plants deification in the heart of its Christology.

CCC 1997. "Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life": by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ as an adopted son.

CCC 1999. Sanctifying grace: the gratuitous gift of God's own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it.

CCC 2000. The Church's working vocabulary: sanctifying (habitual) grace, the permanent disposition to live with God, versus actual graces, God's interventions and helps along the way. The Dig Deeper unpacks this; it answers more practical questions than any other distinction tonight.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH · leader only, never read aloud

John 15:6 (the landmine, handled). You will read it and not discuss it. If someone raises it: neutral face, warm voice: "You have just spotted next session's text. Bring that exact question back in one week." Write it on the parking lot list labeled SESSION 7 where everyone can see it. Under no circumstances resolve, soften, or explain the verse tonight. If no one raises it, perfect; it is still in the room.

St. Gregory of Nyssa payoff. When 2 Corinthians 3:18 is read ("from one degree of glory to another"), remind the group of Session 1's voice: the perpetual pressing forward. The study's threads should be felt paying off; say it in one sentence, not five.

Exodus map, bonus station. Psalm 80's vine came out of Egypt. Let the group find the word "Egypt" themselves in the psalm; the map thread strengthens every time they catch it without you.

Romans 8:17's "provided." Read as written; do not stress it, do not skip it. If someone asks, say suffering-with-Christ is the family resemblance of heirs, and the study returns to endurance in Session 10.

Sealed guesses. Still sealed, and next week the study finally walks toward its question. Tell the group plainly: Session 7 is the hard one; come.

Session Goals

1. The group can say what sanctifying grace is: a real participation in God's own life, making us actual children of God.
2. Participants discover the vine's Old Testament backstory (Ps 80, Isa 5) and what "I am the true vine" therefore claims.
3. The group answers the "sanctification is optional extra credit" objection from Heb 12:14, 1 Thess 4:3, and John 15.
4. Participants can distinguish sanctifying grace from actual grace and say why the distinction matters on a Tuesday.
5. Each participant names where their branch is currently being pruned, and reframes it as tending rather than punishment.

Time Note

Plan for 85 minutes. Win 10, Build 50, Send 12, prayer 6. If running long, cut **Build question 2** (Hosea can live in your one-sentence summary of adoption) and compress the **Dig Deeper**. Never cut the vine reading or its Old Testament discovery, and never rush the closing prayer tonight; the group needs the warmth banked before Session 7 spends it.

PART 2 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

PRAY TOGETHER

Father, you did not rescue us to leave us in the parking lot of your house. You brought us inside, gave us your name, and set about making us like your Son. Tonight, show us what we are and what we are becoming, and make us patient with the growing. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · Opening Questions

- Who in your life have you slowly become like, without ever deciding to? How did it happen?
- If God's only goal were to get you legally off the hook, how would you expect the Christian life to feel? How is that different from what the saints describe?

BUILD · Into the Text

Leader: have someone read 2 Peter 1:3-4 aloud, twice. Tell the group: "Listen for the four most shocking words in the New Testament."

1. What has God's divine power granted us, and what do the promises make us? Say the four words, and then try to say what they can and cannot mean.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

"Partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). God's power "has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness," and the goal of the "precious and very great promises" is a real share in God's own life. It cannot mean we become God by nature, additional members of the Trinity; the Creator-creature line holds. It means what adoption at this altitude means: by grace we are taken into the Son's own life and relationship to the Father, alive with a life that is not natively ours. The Fathers called it *deification*; the Catechism calls sanctifying grace "a participation in the life of God" (CCC 1997) and quotes St. Athanasius without blushing: "the Son of God became man so that we might become God" (CCC 460).

If the room goes quiet here, let it. This is the ceiling of the whole study.

2. Read Romans 8:14-17 and 1 John 3:1-2, and Hosea 11:1-4 for the picture behind them. What do these texts say we are now, and what is still ahead? And catch John's four-word insistence.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Now: led by the Spirit, sons of God, crying "Abba! Father!" with the Spirit himself bearing witness; "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17). John: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; **and so we are**" (1 Jn 3:1). The four words head off every deflation: not a courtesy title, not a legal alias; so we are. Still ahead: "it does not yet appear what we shall be, but... we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2), and the heirs' road runs with Christ, "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:17).

Hosea gives the family photo: a Father who called his son out of Egypt, taught him to walk, took him up in his arms, led him with cords of compassion. Sanctification is God teaching rescued children to walk.

Live discovery. Say: "Jesus's biggest image for the growing life is a vine. But he did not invent it; he inherited it, loaded. First the backstory: read Psalm 80:8-16, and find where the vine came from. Then Isaiah 5:1-4 and 7, and find what went wrong with the vineyard." Let them work both texts. Then read John 15:1-11 whole, unhurried.

3. Where did Psalm 80's vine come from, and what happened to it? What did Isaiah's vineyard produce, and what was the owner looking for? So when Jesus says "I am the **true** vine," what is he claiming?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Psalm 80: "You brought a vine **out of Egypt**": the vine is Israel, transplanted by the Exodus, and by the psalm's end it lies burned and cut down, with Israel begging God to regard it again. Isaiah 5: the beloved's vineyard, given every care, yielded wild grapes; "he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed." Israel-the-vine was rescued and tended, and did not bear.

So "I am the true vine" (Jn 15:1) is an enormous claim: Jesus is, in his own person, the Israel that finally bears the fruit the Owner planted for. And the branches' whole job is stated with a farmer's bluntness: "Abide in me... As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me... apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:4-5), Session 2's verse, now wearing bark. Even the group's own map gains a station: the vine itself came out of Egypt.

4. Stay in John 15:1-11. What does the Father do to branches that ARE bearing fruit, and why? And what, according to verses 9-11, is abiding actually made of?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

He **prunes** them: every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, "that it may bear more fruit" (15:2). Pruning here is not rejection; it is what a vinedresser does to branches he is pleased with. Invite the group, gently, to consider whether a current trial might be received as the Father's tending, without presuming to name the meaning of every suffering, and without denying that God also corrects his children (Heb 12:5-11). And abiding, per Jesus himself, is not a mood: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love" (15:10), kept inside "abide in my love" (15:9) and aimed at "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (15:11). Commandments, love, joy: one motion. Session 5's faith-working-through-love, drawn as agriculture.

Leader: if anyone raises verse 6, follow the Thread Watch: park it, visibly, for Session 7. Do not discuss it tonight.

Build, Then Press

Leader: present at full strength. This one usually lives inside our own heads.

The comfortable voice says: "**Justification is what saves; sanctification is extra credit. God accepts me as I am, so growth is optional gratitude, wonderful if it happens, but nothing hangs on it. Pushing holiness as necessary just smuggles works back in and steals assurance. Relax: the vine metaphor is encouragement, not requirement.**"

5. Answer the comfortable voice from tonight's texts and last week's.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Grant its grain of truth: God does receive sinners as they are; Session 2 is not revoked, and growth is indeed grace, not a bill. But Scripture will not sign the rest. "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess 4:3), will, not suggestion. "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness **without which no one will see the Lord**" (Heb 12:14), a purpose clause with eternity in it. And tonight's vine: branches exist to bear fruit; the Father prunes so there will be *more*; abiding is keeping his commandments in his love. Nothing in the image is decorative.

The deep error in the comfortable voice is its picture of salvation as a status you hold rather than a life you live. But we learned in Session 1 that salvation has a present tense, and in Session 4 that justification plants a real new life, and life is made to grow. No one calls a child's growing "extra credit for being born"; sanctification is not optional, though its progress is not always visible or uninterrupted. Holiness is not the price of the Father's love; it is what the Father's love does to you if you stay in the sun.

DIG DEEPER · The Church's Grace Vocabulary

Two terms unlock most practical questions about grace (CCC 2000). **Sanctifying grace** (also called habitual grace) is the stable gift: God's own life infused in the soul, making you his child and pleasing in his sight; it is a stable state rather than a feeling, the "state of grace" Catholics speak of; forfeited by mortal sin, restored in the sacrament of Reconciliation. **Actual graces** are God's moment-to-moment helps: the nudge toward the confessional, the strength in the temptation, the sudden clarity in prayer; interventions, not a state.

Why it matters on a Tuesday: when you feel nothing, you have not necessarily lost anything; sanctifying grace is not a feeling. And when you receive a good impulse out of nowhere, that is not nowhere. Name the helps as they come; gratitude sharpens the eye for them.

SEND • Taking It Out

- Where is the Vinedresser currently pruning you? What would change this week if you treated that circumstance as tending rather than as abandonment?
- St. Carlo Acutis: originals, not photocopies. What is one concrete way the version of holiness God is growing in you does not look like anyone else's?

Live It This Week

Abide on schedule. Ten minutes daily in Jesus's company, John 15 open, no agenda. Branches do their growing attached.

Name the pruning. Write down the one you identified tonight, and pray for the grace to stop fighting the shears.

Watch for actual graces. Each evening, name one help God supplied that day. You are training your eye for Session 10.

Closing Prayer

PRAY TOGETHER

Father, you have made us your children, and so we are. Keep us on the vine. Prune what you must, feed what you have planted, and change us, degree by degree, into the likeness of your Son, until the day we see him as he is and find your joy in us made full. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

1 John 3:1a (RSV2CE)

PART 3 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in this session, in order.

Passage	Where it is used in this session
2 Peter 1:3-4	Opening reading: partakers of the divine nature (Build Q1)
Romans 8:14-17	Adoption: Abba, heirs, the Spirit's witness (Build Q2)
1 John 3:1-2	"And so we are"; we shall be like him (Build Q2, memory verse)
Hosea 11:1-4	The Father teaching Ephraim to walk (Build Q2)
Psalms 80:8-16	Live discovery: the vine out of Egypt (Build Q3)
Isaiah 5:1-4, 7	Live discovery: the vineyard's wild grapes (Build Q3)
John 15:1-11	The true vine, read whole (Build Q3-4); v. 6 parked for Session 7
1 Thessalonians 4:3	God's will: your sanctification (steelman answer)
Hebrews 12:14	The holiness without which no one will see the Lord (steelman answer)
2 Corinthians 3:18	From one degree of glory to another (leader background, St. Gregory payoff)
2 Peter 3:18	Grow in grace (leader background)