

30. Jesus The True Vine John 15:1-17

Warm-up Question: Do you have an instance that you can share when God answered a prayer? What was the prayer and how was it answered?

Alternative Question: Share about a time when you felt most connected to a group of people? To what do you attribute that feeling of belonging?

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He 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. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain 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. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other (John 15:1-17).

I Am The True Vine

We come now to the seventh and final “I Am” statement of Jesus, “I am the true vine.” When the Lord brought His people out of Egypt, the person He chose, Moses, was given a message for the children of Israel. When they asked Moses who had sent him, he was to reply with the answer God gave him: **“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). The expression ‘I Am’ is the translation of the Hebrew word *YHVH*, vocalized as “Yahveh” and translated into English as LORD. It was the personal name by which God revealed Himself and occurs over 6000 times in the Old Testament. The meaning of *YHVH* is not completely clear to biblical scholars, but many believe that the name means, “I am who I am or I will be who I will be.” The Lord was saying to His disciples, and us, that He would be everything to us that we need Him to be. The six other I Am statements are, “I am the Bread of Life” (John

6:35), “I am the Light of the World” (John 8:12), “I am the Gate” (John 10:9), “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11), “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11:25), “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). This vocalizing of the ‘I Am’ statements by Jesus angered the Pharisees to the point of stoning Him for blasphemy (John 8:58-59). They understood, correctly, that Jesus was saying that He is the same YHVH that delivered the Jewish people from slavery. Now here in this passage Jesus is telling them that He is the True Vine. What did He mean? This is what we will consider in this study.

We are told that after Jesus had talked to them about the coming of the Holy Spirit, He got up and began to leave (John 14:31). The traditional site of the Upper Room, where Jesus ate His last supper with them was to the west of the Temple Mount. To get to the Garden of Gethsemane they had to walk past the Temple area itself. Jesus, like any Rabbi at the time, talked with His disciples as they walked. It is likely that as they walked they could see the golden grapevine that was draped across the four columns at the entrance to the Temple. Each of the clusters of the grapes was the size of a man.¹ The Mishnah, a book embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law, says that people would make a freewill offering to God by purchasing a golden leaf, berry, or cluster which the priests would then attach to the vine. Jewish people who gave generously to the Temple had their names inscribed on the golden leaves. The idea of a vine or vineyard was a well-known symbol in the scriptures of the nation of Israel. We see it used as a common theme, often as an analogy:

¹I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ²He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but **it yielded only bad fruit.** ³“Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? ⁵Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. ⁶I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.” ⁷The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And **he looked for justice**, but saw bloodshed; **for righteousness**, but heard cries of distress (Isaiah 5:1-7 Emphasis mine).

When inspecting His vineyard, the people of Israel and Judah, what kind of fruit was He looking for? What kind of fruit from our lives is He looking for today?

The Lord was saying through this prophetic word by Isaiah, that He was and is the Gardener, and that He had planted His covenant people into the land to bear a strong testimony to His Name. After all that He had done, He looked for a crop of good grapes that were exhibiting justice and righteousness (Isaiah 5:7), but it yielded only bad fruit (Isaiah 5:2). When Jesus depicted Himself as the True Vine, He was undoubtedly

¹ Josephus, Antiquities 15. 395.

contrasting Himself with this artificial vine hanging on the temple, suggesting that if the disciples would offer themselves to Him to the degree that people offered their substance to this golden symbol, the result would be abundant spiritual fruit. Jesus had come to establish the prophesied New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31), and they would soon come to understand this. He had come to be the source of eternal life to all who would come to Him and become one with Him, as branches are connected to a life source such as the trunk of the vine. He Himself would be the True Vine. The time was coming and has now come for the Gentiles to be grafted into the true Vine. Jesus wanted to show them what true covenant life was, and the kind of fruit it would produce. Just as He was “One with the Father,” He knew that the only way that the people of God would produce fruit was to be one with God, to partake of His life.

Father is the Gardener

Imagine you are working as a laborer in a vineyard during the growing season of a vineyard, what would the gardener be doing? How would these thoughts be illustrative of God at work in our lives?

Working in a vineyard during the growing season would be hard work. Unlike other fruit and vegetable plants, there was much to do if you wanted to see clusters of grapes at harvest time. Jesus says that the Father was at work in cutting off some branches and yet pruning others (John 15:2). The Greek verb *airō* is translated as “cuts off” by the New International Version but in the King James Version it is translated as “takes away.” Some people wonder if they can lose their salvation if they are not good enough. Jesus said that the branches, which the Father is giving His attention to, are both “in Him”. **He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit (John 15:2)**. It is possible that the taking away is a reference to Judas, but Judas never was a believer (John 6:64), in fact he was a devil (John 6:70). He was never in Christ whereas the branches that the Father is training are in Christ. The Greek word *airō* has the primary definition of “to lift from the ground.” Charles Swindoll in his commentary, Swindoll’s New Testament Insights on John, says:

The Greek verb *airō*, translated “takes away,” has the primary definition of “to lift from the ground,” although the term can and often does mean “to lift with a view to carrying, to carry off or put away,” John uses *airō* in both senses: “to take away” (John 11:39; 11:48; 16:22; 17:15;) and “to lift up” (5:8-12; 8:59). Therefore a strong case for either definition can be made. I favor the definition “to lift up” for a couple of reasons. First these two verses introduce the illustration in summary fashion, describing the general care of a vinedresser nurturing a vine. Vinedressers are rarely seen cutting off branches during the growing season. Instead, they carry a bundle of strings and a pair of pruning shears as they work their way down a row. They carefully lift sagging branches and tie them to the trellis—a procedure called “training.” They also strategically snip smaller shoots from branches in order to maximize their yield of fruit, which is called pruning. Second, a combination of “takes away” and “prunes” places too great an emphasis on cutting the vine when Jesus appears to be highlighting the Father’s care during the growing season. The image of carrying off dead branches is a detail that will

appear later as He refines His illustration.²

Clusters of grapes that are lying on the ground are open to all kinds of insects and, of course, the mud when it rained. If we agree with Charles Swindoll, this seems to speak of the Father's care and training of us while we are growing in Christ. There have been many times in my life where I have received the Father's nurturing care amidst the troubles that I, and many of you, have gone through.

Thinking about this analogy, can you recall a time when God had to pick you up off the ground and restore you to your position so that you could grow?

There are other branches in Christ that purpose in their heart of hearts, to bring forth much fruit by laying down their lives in sacrificial ways for the purposes of Christ. Jesus talks about this in the Parable of the Sower:

Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown (Matthew 13:8).

There is a difference in the life of an individual who is devoted to the Lord to the degree that he or she brings forth a crop that is a hundred times what is sown. You should be careful what you pray! If you have ever prayed that God will use you to work in His fields with Him, He will require a greater commitment, and a greater consecration to the work of the Vineyard. I remember reading of the great evangelist, D.L. Moody, that he laid down his life for the cause of Christ to be used of Him. He was at a meeting where the preacher spoke these words; "The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him." The words impacted Moody, "He said 'a man,'" thought Moody; "he did not say a great man, nor a learned man, nor a rich man, nor a wise man, nor an eloquent man, nor a 'smart' man, but simply 'a man.' I am a man, and it lies with the man himself whether he will or will not make that entire and full consecration. I will try my utmost to be that man."³ D.L. Moody desired to make a big difference with his life as he purposed to give himself to God in utter consecration and dedication to the work of winning the lost for Christ. We should not enter lightly with our words of devotion to Christ because there is usually a cost to such a dedication. Moody did experience hardship in his life. His church building burned down in the great Chicago fire of 1871, but it launched him into an evangelistic ministry to many countries. When we commit to discipleship, difficulties will come our way but great fruit will be the reward if we will consecrate ourselves to the work of saving lives for Christ's sake.

²⁸Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!" ²⁹"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life (Mark

² Charles R. Swindoll, Swindoll's New Testament Insights, Insights on John, Published by Zondervan. Page 257.

³ The Life of D.L. Moody, From the Official Authorized Edition. By his son, William R. Moody.
<http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Life%20of%20Moody.pdf>

10:28-30).

There will be a reward for our consecration as we follow Christ, however, be aware that it will entail going through persecutions as foretold by Jesus in the above passage. He starts this statement by saying; “Truly I tell you”...This was a way of adding emphasis to the statement. Jesus really wanted to point out that this was a sure statement, a promise. God is no man’s debtor. Just as He promises that we will receive a hundred times as much in this life when we follow Him, He also promises that this will come WITH persecutions. We can take comfort in the fact that it will be the Father at work in us, bringing pruning to our lives in order to bring forth more fruit. One more thought about what God adds to our lives is that the more we put God first, the more He is able to add to our lives. I think about all the people in my life that I have met in the Body of Christ. We really are like family in the Lord. When difficulties come, it is a good thing to think about the blessings that God gives to us, especially our friends, and the family that we belong to in the Body of Christ. The Lord allows us to go through difficulties because only such things brings forth the changes that are necessary to bear the fruit that God is looking for. He is making us together to be the Body of Christ, His Bride.

What is the Fruit that God is Pruning For?

[When Jesus speaks of fruit in verses 5, 8, and 16 of John chapter 15, what do you think He is talking about?](#)

If you are a believer in Christ there will be fruit in your life. No fruit, no root! If you, at the deepest level of your being, are rooted and grounded in love with the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:17), there cannot fail to be fruit from your life. Why? Because the life giving sap of the Vine, the Lord Jesus Christ, is flowing into your spiritual being, and the eternal Father, the Gardener, is at work in you and through you to produce fruit from your union with Christ.

There are two kinds of fruit that God wants to bring forth from your life. First, there is the fruit of the Spirit:

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).

This is the very kind of fruit that Isaiah the prophet said that God was looking for in His vineyard, the nation of Israel, the justice and righteousness that springs from the lives of believers in the God of Israel. These are inner qualities that God Himself brings forth from our lives as we cooperate with His Spirit. Often we cannot see Him at work in our circumstances, it is only later that we look back to see that God was at work in us to bring forth enduring qualities of humility, righteousness, love, joy, peace, etc. It is only then that we see the pruning knife at work in our lives. Gratefulness will be your experience in eternity for the work of the Gardener with His pruning knife.

Then there is the fruit of other lives that we influence for Christ—lives that because of your work and words, and the fruit of the Spirit in your life, are forever changed by your relationship with them.

I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that **I might have a harvest among you**, just as I have had among the other Gentiles (Romans 1:13).

In the years 1991-1998, I had entered into a work of Church planting in England. I had the privilege of seeing lives changed as a result of God at work in that city. Towards the end of that time there was great hardship as the church went through growing pains. When I look back at this time, I see now that we were going through a time of spiritual warfare. There was a struggle in the church, which I felt I had little control over. I wish I knew and understood then what I know now, but that is part of how God trains us. Nothing I could do at that time could turn the situation, neither fasting, prayer, nor support from other church leaders. The stress on my family was so great that my wife went through some stress related health issues as a result. I felt, after much prayer and counsel with good Christian leaders, that I needed to lay down the pastor role of that church that I had planted, for the sake of my wife, but also because it was the leading of the Lord. I felt that God showed me that He would use me elsewhere and I was to resign as Pastor. It was a very hard thing for me to do. He was at work in my life to bring forth more fruit with His pruning knife. Looking back, if I would have held on and not let the painful experience of being pruned back happen, I might not be as fruitful in my writing ministry as I now am. Written words can influence and train many more than I possibly could ever speak to in a church setting. At the time of my trials, I would not have been able to see any blessing in that situation. Sometimes we just have to trust the pruning knife of the Father.

The way the Father works with His pruning knife can seem harsh to us, especially when we are the ones that are under His knife. I have found that God will meet our consecration with His faithfulness. If you are willing to labor with Him in the Vineyard, you will partake of the life giving sap of life that comes from being a part of the True Vine. You will bear much fruit as a testimony to Jesus. The Lord will transform us from the inside out as we obey Him. Even when we go through trials and tests, we will experience the closeness to the Father that helps us overcome. We know that we are agents and ambassadors of His blessing, being used of Him, and safe within His hands.

When American Airlines trains their pilots they first seek to prove them by using a simulator. The simulator is designed to present the pilot with a variety of potential problems so that he will be able handle any emergency he may be presented with in the future. First, the pilot is tested with simple challenges, which eventually build up to catastrophic situations. The pilots are given more difficult problems only after they have mastered the previous ones. The result is that when the pilots have completed their courses, they are prepared to handle any problems that come their way. This is similar to God's method of working with us. God teaches us how to handle the problems of life but never gives us more than we can

handle. He teaches us through each situation, so that we can be fully prepared and mature people, ready to handle the challenge in life that come our way.⁴

Remain In Me

What does the Lord mean when He says again and again through verses 4-7 about remaining in the Vine?

If you remain in me and **my words remain in you**, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (John 15:7).

¹⁰**If you keep my commands**, you will **remain** in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and **remain** in his love (John 15:10).

It is only as we develop intimacy with the Lord and learn to listen and obey His Word that continual abiding or remaining in Christ will the life sap of the life of Christ flow through us and bear fruit. Developing intimacy must be intentional, just as it is with any of our relationships. You would not expect to be close to someone by just knowing facts about him or her. Intimacy with another develops as you are sincere and transparent with others and you are able to listen, as they, in turn, are able to share their hearts in a similar way with you. You need to be intentional about spending time with them. In a similar way, we need to intentionally develop intimacy with the Lord Jesus, as He demonstrated to us here on earth. He took time out to be with His Father. Even when people were clamoring for him, and the needs of the people were great, He knew that it was important to maintain a close link and sought times of intimacy with His Father.

Jesus said, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love" (John 15:10). In order to keep His commandments, we need to lay up His words in our hearts. Jesus also told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would bring to mind the words that He had spoken. We have His spoken Word written down and available to us. The more that we meditate on His words, the more we give the Holy Spirit room to illuminate more of His Word to us.

Do you have regular disciplines and habits you have found helpful in developing intimacy and oneness with Christ? Do you have regular times to read, meditate and pray? Share any helpful and encouraging tips with one another that have enhanced your devotional life.

Romans 10:17 states: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." What Paul is saying in this statement is that the key to developing intimacy with God is listening to the Holy Spirit, which speaks to our hearts through the word of God.

To allow the Holy Spirit to have a greater reign and influence in your life:

1. Plant the Word of God deep in your heart through reading and meditation. This requires effort on our part.

⁴ 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching, Edited by Michael P. Green. Published by Baker Book House, Page 375.

2. Be open to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to illuminate His Word to us. This illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit. Combine your meditation with prayer.
3. Be obedient to the promptings and impressions that come to you from the Holy Spirit and be obedient to the clear teachings of scripture.
4. God will glorify His name through us as we consecrate ourselves to Him and His kingdom and delight in His love. He will work in you and through you. He is the Creator, and He is performing His creative work through you as you cooperate with Him. This is His part! He will glorify Himself through you.

Prayer: Father, our prayer is that the life sap of the Lord Jesus as the True Vine will flow in us and through us to glorify Your Name. Grant us sensitivity to hear and obey Your voice. Amen!

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