

Focus Scripture:

I am the true vine (text: John 15:1; context: John 15:1-11).

Theme: Christians believe our connection to Christ empowers us for fruitful and joyous living.

“Connected to Christ”

Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser” (15:1). His qualification of Himself as the true vine is intended to distinguish Him from others; and the distinguishing feature is immediately clear. He is the vine grown and cultivated by the Father. Since God is the creator of all things, Jesus must mean that only He is the vine grown and cultivated for a specific purpose, namely, to connect human beings to the Father.

Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine to express the idea of spiritual connection. When His disciples are connected to Him they are connected to the Father. However, Jesus further qualifies the connection. It can either be fruitful or unfruitful. Jesus says that the Father removes every branch in Him that bears no fruit, and prunes every branch that bears fruit to make it even more fruitful.

The branches of course are human beings, those who would or should be disciples of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches” (15:5). It raises the question of how is it possible to be connected to Jesus, but yet fruitless. Jesus must be referring to those whose connection to Him is superficial or nominal, like those who followed Him only because of the fish and the loaves He provided. Jesus also described these as the ones who do not abide in Him. He describes their fate in very graphic, severe terms (15:6).

On the other hand, those who bear fruit are those committed to His instruction. They learn what it means to abide in Him. They must be pruned of everything contrary to a Christ-centered, spiritual focus. To shift the metaphor, they must be cleansed. Jesus says to His disciples, “You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you” (15:3).

No one is made perfect overnight. Whether we refer to it as pruning or cleansing, it is a process. Notably, even in this process, it is still God who is doing the work. It is not we perfecting ourselves, it is God. Our calling is only to abide in Him.

Obedience seems to be the term that would explain “abiding” in this passage (15:10-11). Communion would seem to be another term. For as we abide in Jesus, He also abides in us. For Jesus to abide in us is a blessing that translates into empowerment. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing. We especially cannot bear fruit. At the very least, the fruit that Jesus refers to means the transformed lives that are brought about by our obedience. It also means the transformed environment in which people live. We have seen the theme of prayer empowerment before (14:13-14). We see it again here. “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (15:7). In this way, the Father is glorified.

We are left then with a choice. We can either respond to the invitation of Jesus to abide in Him or we can simply brush Him off. He promises so much. It sounds so wonderful. The problem is that we can only experience His promises if we make a full commitment to Him. There is no discovery at a distance. There is no trial run while we hold back. It is this full, upfront commitment that gives many of us pause. To make a commitment such as this, we would have to say goodbye to many fond attachments and never look back. Is it worth the sacrifice? Jesus says that it is.

His promise of joy and empowerment, love and companionship, healing and life, blessing and answered prayer, would make the commitment to Him worthwhile and right.

If only we can believe enough to make it....Herein lies the essential choice, whether to believe or not. It is well attested that those who have made the choice to believe, and have made full commitment to life in Christ, have never regretted the choice.

FOCUS QUESTIONS - John 15:1

1. What occurs to you as you read this? What questions arise for you?
2. What areas/activities/relationships/habits in your life need to be "pruned"?
3. Within your life, what are the factors that have assisted you in bearing fruit? Conversely, when you have gone through seasons where no fruit is evident, what factors may have contributed to that?
4. Is all fruit visible to us? Or, is the absence of fruit not a factor for us to worry about?
5. Within the scope of your job, how can you help others bear more fruit?
6. What does full commitment to Christ mean to you?
7. As one of His "branches," what type of pruning may occur in your life?
8. Sometimes our unwillingness to commit ourselves to Jesus as the Way, or to let go of something in our lives to follow Jesus "disconnects" us from the vine. At other times, it may be external situations or events that leave us feeling withered, shriveled, or damaged so that our viability and connection to the vine seems threatened. In extreme situations, it can feel we are so hurt we will never bear good fruit again. God reminds us that nothing can separate us from His love. Jesus has the power to heal so that even the withered branch can again bear fruit abundantly. What areas of your life need to be "healed" and restored to a full connection to the vine? What areas need to be pruned or removed to direct energy into bearing good fruit? Praise God that He can sort out the difficulties in our lives and keep us in relationship with Him in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

Life/Discipline Application:

What does this passage mean in your school or department - consider the implications of the passage to your day-to-day lives.

Personal Reflection:

What does this mean to you - examine the implications of the passage to your own day to day life.

Additional Print Resources:

- Fuquay, Rob. *The God We Can Know: Exploring the "I AM" Sayings of Jesus*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2014.
- Harris, W. Hall III. *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. <https://bible.org>. 2009.
- Marrow, Tim. *Before Abraham "I AM!" The Claims of Christ from the Gospel of John*. Bloomington, IN., CrossBooks/Lifeway, 2010.
- Okorie, A.M. "The Self-Revelation of Jesus in the "I AM" Sayings of John's Gospels." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28/5 (2001): 486-490.
- Simmons, Billy. "A Christology of the "I Am" Sayings in the Gospel of John." *The Theological Educator* 38/1 (1988): 94-103.
- Whitacre, Rodney A. *Commentaries for the Book of John (IVP New Testament Commentaries)*. www.biblegateway.com. 2010.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *Jesus in the Present Tense: The I AM Statements of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co., David C. Cook, Publisher, 2011.