

Bible Study John 15:1-17

The Text: READ John 15:1-17

In her little booklet, *How to Live on Christ*, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote, “How does the branch bear fruit? Not by incessant effort for sunshine and air; not by vain struggles...It simply abides in the vine, in silent and undisturbed union, and blossoms and fruit appear as of spontaneous growth.”

The work is done by the vine, the branches simply abide and allow the work of the vine to bear fruit. The Greek word here for “abide” means exactly what the English word means: “to stay; to remain in a place, with the implication of continuing to rest there.” In verse 4 Jesus says, “Abide in me as I abide in you, for 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.” The branches receive the life of the vine ONLY as long as the branches are abiding on the vine. The branches cannot receive that life, that energy, those nutrients that bring vibrancy and fruitfulness unless they abide in the vine.

Abiding is the key to fruitfulness, but this does not mean that life suddenly becomes convenient or easy when we “abide” or “remain.” Jesus’ promise for those who abide in him is that **they will bear fruit** and when they bear fruit **they will be pruned back** so that they will bear more fruit.

There is a play on words here that we miss in the English. The Greek word used in verse 3 and translated as ‘clean’ is *katharos*. The word used in verse 2 for the pruning that the Father does is *kathairo*. Both words can be translated to convey the idea that something has been cleaned away — cleansed of all that once defiled it — stripped of that which doesn’t belong. But in this context, while Jesus is speaking of the Father as the vine-dresser, what he means by his word making us ‘clean’ is that his word has brought us into a condition fit to bear fruit.

So, verse 3 can be read, “Already because of the word that I have spoken to you, you are in a condition fit to bear fruit.” These disciples of his have heard the gospel preached by Jesus, they have seen the gospel lived out in his life, they have accepted that life as the only true life. They have all they need to bear fruit. That is, they have all they need to share with others the nature and meaning of life lived in Christ.

And the pruning is the process by which the vinedresser shapes us into the very character — heart, mind, and soul — of the Vine. No branch on a grapevine produces apples, and no branch abiding in Jesus, the true vine, produces fruit that is contrary to Jesus. So, the task of the vinedresser is to produce the best and richest fruit, representing the entire character of that vine, out of each and every branch. And to do this He prunes us.

One of the processes of pruning in the wine industry is called girdling. **Girdling** is the scarring in the form of rings at the base of the vine. Vines are cut each year in a circle around the base of the vine. This convinces the vine to pull more nutrients from the soil and produce a higher quality of fruit. If the vine is cut too deeply it will die. If it is cut just right, it will produce twice as many grapes.

The Father is also the owner of the vineyard, the manager of the vineyard, and vintner of the vineyard; but the title that Jesus gives to him is ‘vinedresser.’ The vinedresser is the one who prunes and sculpts the vine.

This relationship between vine and vinedresser is a **long-term commitment**. From first planting to first bottle of wine it takes about eight years. In year three there may be fruit, but it is allowed to fall to the ground. In year four, the first grapes are harvested for bottling and kept under the watchful eye of the vintner for at least two years, but most usually more than that. It takes 15-20 years before there’s even a profit.

When Jesus called the Father our vinedresser, he was focusing not only on the fact that it is God who brings about the abundant life and harvest within our own lives, but that God desires a relationship with us in order to do so. And in that relationship he knows us personally. He gets down in the dirt with us. Pruning in this or that area so that I can receive more of His life.

Author Margaret Feinberg writes, “The vine is the source of everything for the branch — every nutrient, every life-giving drop of water, every hint of growth. The branch is completely dependent on the vine. But even in those moments when I grow wild or unbalanced, God is faithful as a vinedresser to perform all the small cuts I need to remain fruitful. So in that place where I am abiding in Christ under the watchful eye of the Father, I can trust that the Father will be pruning those areas and desires in my life that don’t line up with where he wants me to go” (*Scouting the Divine*, p. 191).

Among the effects of this abiding and pruning are bearing much fruit that remains (vv. 2, 4-8, 16), effectual prayer (vv. 7, 16), glorification of the father (v. 8), and fullness of joy (v. 11).

So the question for those of us who claim to follow Jesus is “where do you abide?” Or, as some of my grade-school friends used to say, “where do you stay?” Where do you stay? What have you stayed your mind and goals and desires and actions on lately? If we are not in the vine — the true source and giver of life that is real — then there will be no fruit in our lives. Worse still, we will miss that intimate relationship with the Vinedresser, our Father, who wants only to our His life into us. Therefore, “**Remain in me as I remain in you**” (v. 4).

John 15:1-17 **Questions for Further Reflection**

After reading John 15:1-17, what would you say is God’s purpose for you (vv. 2, 5-8, 16)? What is the only way to accomplish this purpose (vv. 1-9)? What does it mean to “bear fruit” (v. 2)? “Remain in me”, “love one another”, and “bear fruit” are phrases that Jesus repeats. How are these related? What does it look like to ‘remain’ or ‘abide’ in Jesus? What type of fruit is that which “will last”? As a branch on Jesus’ vine, how would you describe the fruit in your life?

What does Jesus mean when he says, “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” (v. 3)? As branches on the vine, what types of pain might be experienced during a time of ‘pruning’? What tools might the Father use? What fruit might begin to grow? Have you ever experienced a time when you were ‘pruned’ or ‘cleaned’ by the Father (vv. 1-3)?

What is the link between abiding and obedience? What is the link between obedience and prayer? What is implied about the nature of receiving “whatever you ask in my name” (vv. 7, 16; *see also 14:13-15*)? If we are obedient to Jesus and abide in Him, for what things are we likely ask of the Father?

Compare John 15:1-8 to what Paul says about the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. What do these word pictures (the vine and the body) tell you about our relationships with other Christians? What do they teach about our relationship to Jesus? Do you feel more like Jesus’ servant or His friend (*see vv. 13-15*)? What can be done to develop the friendship (vv. 4, 10)? In what ways can you abide more deeply in Jesus and His words this week?