

Finishing Well

Lesson #12

Life As A Branch

March 22, 2023

John 15:1-8 God's Vineyard

To understand the meaning of this passage, we must consider:

the context, the theme, the setting & the purpose.

The setting: This is part of Jesus' last words of instruction to His disciples prior to the cross. Jesus spoke these words right after the Passover meal and right before His betrayal would take place, followed by His suffering on the cross.

He was speaking to His disciples, minus Judas who had already left to go and betray Him.

In John 14, Jesus has told them He is going to prepare a place for them. The Father will send The Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who will abide with them and teach them.

At the close of John 14 Jesus said to His disciples, "Rise, let us go from here." From this point on we properly should no longer call John 15 as part of the Upper Room Discourse.

John 15-17 occurred as they were walking on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

The purpose: Prepare His disciples for their need to be spiritually mature so they could go forth after He left them, bear the most fruit and complete their mission of taking the Gospel to the world.

The theme: Spiritual maturity & how to bear fruit for Christ.

This story is not about salvation; its theme is discipleship and fruit bearing.

John 15:1-8 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

² Every branch in me that bears not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that bears fruit, He purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

³ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

⁵ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.

⁶ If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

⁷ If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. ⁸Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.

Remember the Goal of the True Vine: Produce the right fruit of the desired quality.

Get rid of ANYTHING that impedes the fruitfulness of His branches. Produce more good fruit.

Key Principle: Fruit grows naturally by a living connection to its source.

Vital fellowship between Christ and His people is what makes the difference in bearing fruit.

The phrase "abiding in Christ" pictures an intimate relationship.

Two Kinds Of People & Their Responses

Note: Lesson #11, bottom of p. 5, ~~CROSS OUT~~ John 15:6 The Unsav'd & put 2 Kinds of People
John 15:2a Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away...

Key Principle: It is possible to function mechanically in the Christian life, very much like a branch that does not produce fruit.

A. Identify the Subject Unfruitful Christian is called a branch

B. Relationship Branch In Me = abiding, saving relationship exists

There is no indication that the branch ever stops abiding because there is no fruit.

❖ We abide in Christ because we believe, not because of fruit.

❖ Fruit is not what establishes an abiding connection with Jesus.

C. Outcome He takes away the person. Raises up, bears with;

Worst outcome = physical death

➤ He first raises or lifts up by encouragement or teaching from His Word.

➤ He bears with them, meaning He chastens and disciplines.

➤ If none of that works, He may remove the believer, physically putting them to death, although salvation will not be lost.

D. Possession

Consider: If I "take away" an object, who has the object? I do.

Key Concepts: You can be fruitless at times, but not for long. The Lord stops by and starts "lifting you up" out of whatever sin has soiled you and stopped your fruit bearing.

Then as you get back into production He continues until you grow even more!

WOW, what a delight to know we are so vital to God's plan He personally is working on us!

John 15:2b-5 Saved Believers Who Do Bear Fruit

John 15:2b-3 and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

³ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

Note: Prune & clean are the same word in Greek.

Prune = kathairo verb to cleanse, of filth impurity

Clean = kathairos adjective clean, pure, those cleansed

Profiles In Pruning In the vineyard, an expert pruner applies his skills in 4 specific ways:

➤ To remove growth that is dead or dying

➤ To make sure sunlight can get to all fruit-bearing branches

➤ To increase the size and quality of the fruit

➤ To encourage new fruit to develop.

In the agrarian world of the Bible, pruning was a crucial process in tending vineyards and produce-bearing trees.

Pruning embodies a paradox of life: growth and productivity require deprivation and stress.

If left to grow unattended, a vine or fruit tree will produce lush foliage but little fruit.

Jesus pictures the nature of Christian growth. An important part is:

- God prunes every branch that bears fruit, "that it may bear more fruit" [John 15:2]. Far from being an image of punishment, pruning signifies nurture, growth and fruitfulness.
- Key Principle: Fruit grows naturally by a living connection to its source.

The usual practice of Viticulture, the care of vines, is to prune the branches back each year to cleanse them.

- A vine produces certain shoots, "sucker" shoots, which start to grow where the branch joins the stem. If allowed to continue to grow, they would dissipate the life of the vine through so many branches that the vine would produce little or no fruit but would produce leaves instead.
- It is important to prune away these little sucker shoots so the vine may produce more fruit. Since they grow right where the branch joins the stem, creating a tight cluster where dirt, leaves, and other debris collect. Pruning is a cleansing process.
- He cuts away dead wood that could breed disease and insects.
- He cuts away living tissue so the life of the vine will not be dissipated and the quality of the crop jeopardized.
- He may cut away whole bunches of grapes so the rest of the crop will be higher quality.

Consider: The Vinedresser is never nearer the vine than when He is pruning it.

The Father's Work: Find a branch which is beginning to bear fruit, beginning to produce the likeness of Christ.

- Cut it back, trim off the sucker shoots, so it may bear more fruit.
- Trim off the unfruitful branches. These arise out of our sin nature which produces in us characteristics which are not the fruit of the Spirit.
 - ❖ Resentment, anger, bitterness, selfishness, pride, love of praise

Why does it take so much effort on God's part to prune us constantly? [Secrets of The Vine]
Grape vines have a mischievous nature and tend to grow vigorously in every direction.

Consider The biggest enemy of the grape is itself.

- Grapes love to grow and expand their territory.
- They love to do everything but bear fruit; they must be pruned to bear fruit.
- They have a lot of non-fruitful wood that must be cut away each year.
- We like the grapevines can become so dense in all our external leaf productions (ministry, work, family, athletics, amusements, investments, busyness, stress, anxieties, sins, etc.) that the sun [like the Son of God] cannot reach into the area where fruit should form.
- Left to ourselves, we are just like a grape plant.
- We will always favor new expansion of our territory over more grapes.
The spiritual result? From a distance our lives look like incredibly green and healthy branches full of luxurious growth, and of impressive achievements.
- But to the Lord who stands up close, we have an under -whelming harvest.

Pruning season: Is God using the sharp knife of circumstances to cut off the "sucker shoot" of an old habit or attitude in your life? Is He confronting you with that Word Of Truth which corrects and cleanses, causing you to see it, feel it, hear it and give heed to it? This is the work of the Father so you might bear more fruit, be more like Jesus in your reactions -- in your home, in your shop, in your recreation, wherever you may be with people.

Key: God prunes through His Word.

- The Word Cleanses: Involves removal of unhealthy growth in our lives to allow fruitful growth Ps. 19:12-13; Ps. 119:9-11
- Difficult to cut some things out of our lives Ps. 119:65-68; Prov. 20:30

You don't fix repetitive sin by promising God to do better and trying harder.

You fix it by transforming your mind with the Word of God > The cure for repetitive sin Rom. 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

God Prunes To Produce:

- Gal. 5:22-26 Produce the fruit of the Spirit
- II Tim. 3:14-17 Produce proper behavior
- Heb. 4:12-13 Produce godly attitudes
- II Tim. 2:2 Produce more disciples

Key: Spiritual fruit is an outworking of the life and energy of the Lord Jesus in your life.

God's Pruning Reminds Me

- Don't rest on past successes.
- Be thankful for His care and His desire to see us grow.

Col. 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share [to be a partaker] in the inheritance of the saints in light.

- Examine my faithfulness: Am I abiding in Jesus Christ?
- Is there something in my life God needs to prune? Prune me now...Why?

Key: Pruning is FUTURE ORIENTED. It involves cutting now to produce gains later.

All fruitful Christians will be rewarded for faithful service, for bearing fruit.

I Cor. 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

Key: However, if the branch does not yield fruit, the purpose of the branch becomes defiled.

Key: The True Vine provides tender care for each branch.

The branch does not perform the care; the branch only needs to yield itself and receive.

This truth leads to the blessed rest of faith and the true secret of growth and strength.

Key: The branch [soul] that expects to be fruitful must be prepared to submit to pruning. This means sorrow, heartbreak and heartache.

Key: Pruning seems to destroy the vine. But the vinedresser makes his cut with a sharp knife because he sees the future. He knows the final outcome will bring a greater harvest.

I Cor. 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

Key: There are blessings we will never have unless we are ready to pay the price of pruning, pain. There is no way to reach them except by suffering.

All fruitful Christians will be rewarded for faithful service, for bearing fruit.

This should encourage us to not settle for just being saved, but to bear fruit and earn rewards.

The greatest judgment God could bring to a believer would be to let him alone, let him have his own way. Because God loves us, He "prunes" us and encourages us to bear more fruit for His glory. If the branches could speak, they would confess that the pruning process hurts, but they would also rejoice that there will be more and better fruit on their branch.

An Abiding Branch: A place of Fruitfulness

John 15:4-5, 7-8 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, neither can you, except you abide in Me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you will, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be My disciples.

Life As A Branch

Ezekiel 15: The branch is weak and useless.

The branch is for either bearing or burning, but not for building.

I Cor. 3:10b-12 But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

¹² Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

Characteristics of "The Branch Life"

1. Absolute Dependence

a. The branch has nothing; it depends on the vine for everything.

Problem: When I begin "to do the work," I am not depending on the vine.

Truth: The work [trying to bear fruit] separates me from Him when I am not humble and yielded. I can get so busy I don't have time for the relationship.

b. I am promised the Spirit-filled Life if I depend absolutely on God in ALL things.

Consider: The vine has to do the work. The branch enjoys the fruit of the vine.

Question: What does the Vine do?

- The vine sends its roots out into the soil and hunts under the ground for nourishment and drinks in the moisture.
- Add fertilizer to the soil. The roots turn the moisture and fertilizer into that special sap which makes the fruit that is borne.
- The Branch just has to receive the sap from the Vine. The sap will turn into fruit.

A vine at Hampton Court, London, planted in 1769, averages 600 lbs. of grapes per harvest.

In 2001, 895 lbs. of grapes were harvested from this vine.

Thames river flowed nearby. The vine stretched its roots hundreds of yards under the ground to reach the riverside. In the rich slime of the riverbed, it found nourishment & moisture. The roots had drawn the sap all that distance up & into the vine. The vine did all the work. The branches just depended on the vine and received what the vine gave.

Truth: When I have to teach, visit the sick, etc., the responsibility of the work is on Christ. He fulfills the trust of my dependence by the power of the Holy Spirit to work in me and through me.

If I am something, then God is not everything. When I become nothing, God can become ALL. The fullness of Jesus Christ can be revealed fully in me.

Concluding Thought: Absolute dependence on God is the SECRET of all power in our life.

2. Deep Rest In God

Thoughts of a Branch: Since I have been in the vine, all I have done is rest in the vine.

In the spring, the vine began to pour its sap into me and to give the bud and leaf. When summer came, I had no care. In the terrible heat, I trusted the vine to bring moisture to keep me fresh. In the time of harvest, when the owner came to pluck the grapes, I didn't fret. If there was anything in the grapes that was not good, the owner never blamed the branch. The blame was on the vine.

Secret: A true branch of Christ will rest in Him and let Him bear the responsibility.

Question: Won't I become lazy and slothful? NO! The closer your relationship with Christ, the more of the spirit of His zeal and love will be made manifest in you.

Result: He will impart His love in your heart with which you can love people.

"Christ can give you a "fountain of love" so that you cannot help loving the most wretched, most ungrateful, and those who weary you."

3. Much Fruitfulness John 15:8 Herein is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit.

Truth: Unless I am abiding in Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, I cannot bear much fruit.

Consider: There is a great deal of preaching, teaching, visiting, and a great deal of earnest effort. But there is not much manifestation of the power of God in it.

Question: What is lacking? Close connection with Jesus Christ

Warning: DO NOT confuse work and fruit.

There is a great deal of "work" for Christ that is not His fruit.

Col. 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,

being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- Works is what I do, fruit is who I am. Works is conduct, fruit is character.
- In John 15 there is 'fruit' [v.2], 'more fruit' [v.2] and 'much fruit' [v.5].
- Is there some Christ, more Christ or much Christ in evidence in my life?

Fruit-bearing is the very life, power, spirit and love within the heart of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want nothing less than the sap that flows through You and nothing less than the Spirit of Your divine life. Let Your Spirit flow through me in all my work for you.

Question: Who is the Sap? The Holy Spirit - The life of the branch is a life of much fruit.

4. Close Communion What is the branch to do? ABIDE

Close, personal communion with Christ is an absolute necessity for daily life.

A great HINDRANCE to the Christian life is the lack of an abiding, growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Truth: I must be willing to sacrifice time for the relationship.

I need to give Him time to work in me and keep up the connection between Him and me.

My responsibility: Draw close to Christ & He will produce the fruit.

I can stop all my striving trying to please Him.

- Fruit bearing is impossible without abiding; but it is inevitable with abiding.

Tozer: It is our communion with Christ through the Spirit that makes possible the bearing of the fruit. This abiding relationship is natural to the branch and the vine, but it must be cultivated in the Christian life. It is not automatic. Abiding in Christ demands worship, meditation on God's Word, prayer, sacrifice, and service—but what a joyful experience it is.

5. Absolute Surrender

Listen to the branch: Have you anything to do except bear grapes? No, nothing.

What is your relationship to the vine? I am utterly given up to the vine; at its disposal

Question: Is this Spirit-filled Life truly possible in me?

John 10:10 I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Col. 2:9-10 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and in Him you are made full, who is the head of all principality and power.

Tozer: Whoever has Christ's life in any measure may have it in its fullness.

When you have the Holy Spirit, you have all that is needed to be all God desires you to be.

John 15:8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Matt. 16:24 Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

- In Christ's day, the cross meant one thing and one thing only: death by crucifixion.
- Self-abasement; self-sacrifice
- Dying to self is an absolute surrender to God.

Matt. 16:27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works.

John 15: Listen to & Watch the Vinedresser [*Secrets Of The Vine*]

Walk down the rows of vines where He takes listless, sometimes empty branches and brings them back to full spiritual vigor.

Follow His eyes as He examines each branch to see where it is headed, how it is doing, and what needs to be done to improve its fruit-bearing.

Trace His hands as He skillfully and lovingly lifts up branches that have begun to grow along the ground far from the Light of His Presence.

Watch as He inspects the leaves caked with the soil of earth and clips, cuts, and disposes of whatever has been paralyzed; cleanses what is salvageable; and weaves back up again into fruitfulness, the restored and pruned branch.