

Remain in Me
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Allen Power

John 15:1-15

Do you use your mobile device so much that you are constantly looking for a place to plug in? Do you carry a battery pack in your bag?

We live in a “cordless” society unlike any time in modern history. It’s a great convenience, but going “cordless” only works as long as the battery stays charged. Sooner or later you have to plug in. Life in Christ isn’t “cordless.” Oh, we sometimes illustrate time in God’s word as recharging our spiritual batteries to face another day, but living “in Christ” requires a constant connection. The Holy Spirit allows us to be in Christ’s presence at all times.

Hours from the cross, Jesus illustrated this to His eleven remaining disciples using a metaphor that couldn’t miss: a grape vine, branches, and fruit. These men were surrounded by grape growing so they easily got the illustration, but Jesus knew they (and we) would need more explanation of his key points: What is “taking away” a branch? What is “pruning?” What are dead branches? What does fruit look like? What is “abiding” and how do we do it?

The point: The fruitful life in Christ requires constant connection to Him. In John 15 Jesus explains how that connection and fruit bearing work for His followers.

Jesus began this lecture in a simple, elegant way:

1 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

- “[M]y Father is the vinedresser.” What is the theological truth?
- Growing grapes is high maintenance farming requiring a skilled farmer.
- Our Heavenly Father planted this “vineyard” called salvation and He tends each individual branch with care. It only grows by His loving attention.
- In the vineyard of salvation how is Jesus the “true vine?” (See John 14:6)
- Jesus said the branches are “in” Him. Only those who have trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord are “in Christ.” Saved followers of Christ are branches.

2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

- What is fruit? Jesus didn’t say. Most think it is sharing our faith but scripture indicates it is more than that. How would you define it? How does 15:8 give us a clue about what fruit is? Here’s a concise definition: “*The result of spiritual fruitfulness is that God is glorified, we grow, and others come to know Christ—this is the ultimate fruitfulness for a child of God.*”⁴

- God taking away a branch that bears no fruit is typically interpreted as the removal of someone who claims faith in Christ but their faith is false.
- Bruce Wilkinson in his book “Secrets of the Vine” differs with that view because the word for “taking” can also mean lifting up. He cites how grape vines drop to the ground, get muddy, mildewed and sick. The vinedresser lifts them out of the dirt, washes them and ties them up so they produce.ⁱⁱ
- His theory: This is God disciplining a follower of Christ to reveal unconfessed sin, then cleaning and lifting us up so we can be fruitful.
- *“Every branch (saved followers) that does produce fruit”* gets pruned.
- Pruning seems like a bad idea. (Crepe Murder?)ⁱⁱⁱ Why is it necessary?
- Pruning is about removing anything that hinders fruit bearing.
- Often God uses a season of trial or difficulty to do some pruning.
- Wilkinson says in a season of spiritual unrest we should ask God:
 - Is there a sin in my life I’ve missed? If so, repent (turn around).
 - If He doesn’t reveal unconfessed sin, ask Him to show you clearly what He wants you to release.
- One commentator states: *“He may limit or remove achievements, objects, and abilities. These may not be wrong in themselves, but God knows they will detract from our fruitfulness. We must not resent God’s pruning.”^{iv}*

3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

- These eleven (minus Judas) were true followers of Christ.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. **5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

- Those two verses sum up the concept. A branch can’t bear fruit by itself.
- Apart from Christ, His followers can do nothing fruitful that glorifies God.

6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

- This is NOT about losing our salvation. Salvation is a gift of God not by my efforts. If I can’t save myself, I also can’t UNSAVE myself.
- This verse refers to the unsaved who pretend to be Christ-followers.
- For an example, look at Judas who had just left to betray Jesus. He claimed to be a follower, looked like one, but had no connection.
- How can we see the evidence of connection to the true vine?

8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

- Connection to the vine will result in fruit. We are connected by abiding.
- What is abiding and how do we do it?

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

- Love God with heart, soul, and mind and enjoy HIS love.
- We get down and sometimes forget: *“Jesus loves me this I know!”*
- If we are followers of Christ, nothing can separate us from His love.

10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. **11** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

- Abiding means keeping His commandments.
- Obedience to the commands of Christ leads to FULL JOY!

12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

- Abiding in the vine will allow us to love others as Jesus has loved us. It’s a fact that some people are unlovable. *“We don’t need to feel love for everyone...but we are to act lovingly...”* with the love of Christ.
- Then Jesus pointed to what would happen in a few hours --- what we will focus on again later this week:

13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Back to verse **7**: If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

- Abiding in Christ and letting his words abide in us means answered prayer. We won’t get every request, because some of them would be bad for us, He will answer in a way that glorifies the father (verse 8).
- So HOW do we abide in Christ? What are the methods we might think of?
- Methods are helpful but abiding in Christ is less about methods and more about the Master. It’s less about a process and more about a Person.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. **15** No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

- Back to Bruce Wilkinson, *“Abiding is all about the most important friendship of your life. Abiding doesn’t measure how much you know about your faith or your Bible. In abiding, you seek, long for, thirst for, wait for, se, know, love, hear, and respond to...a person...in our...rush to do and*

*perform for God, we often falter at the task of simply enjoying His company.*ⁱ

- Truly abiding in Christ is about relating to Him as a Person.
- Yes, we need to revere Him as Savior, but in those verses He told us to relate to Him as our ever-present friend.
- A quiet time is important, Bible study is necessary, but are we checking boxes instead of enjoying Jesus as a person? Are we focused on the process and not the Person, on the method and not the Master?
- In his little book “The Practice of the Presence of God” Brother Lawrence wrote: *“The most holy and necessary practice in our spiritual life is the presence of God. That means finding constant pleasure in His divine company, speaking humbly and lovingly with him in all seasons, at every moment, without limiting the conversation in any way.”*^{vii}
- Put simply, if we are followers of Christ do we related to Him as a person in our presence. Do I related to Jesus as a Friend as He invited us to do?
- Quite awhile back I wrote down these reminders on the prayer list I keep. Lord, help me to...
 - Feel Your presence
 - To remember You are for me
 - You are working for my good
 - You have complete power over every situation
 - And based on John 15, I would add: You are my ultimate Friend.
- If we think of Jesus as our always present, ultimate best Friend we will experience a breakthrough in abiding in Him.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- The goal of being a branch connected to the true Vine is to bear fruit that glorifies God the Father and Vinedresser.
- Bearing fruit requires discipline and pruning. Though it can be painful, we shouldn’t resent it because it’s evidence that He’s preparing us for fruit.
- The way we can experience full joy as a branch is to abide in Christ.
- Abiding involves loving Him and others, and obeying His commands.
- Methods like a quiet time, Bible study and prayer are important but truly abiding in Him means we relate to Him as our ultimate best Friend.
- This week, let’s don’t live like we left Jesus at home after our quiet time. Let’s related to Him for who He is, our ever-present ultimate best Friend.

ⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/fruitful-Christian.html>

ⁱⁱ Secrets of the Vine – Bruce Wilkinson – Multnomah - 2001

ⁱⁱⁱ ~~Secrets of the Vine – Bruce Wilkinson – Multnomah - 2001~~

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.southernliving.com/garden/crepe-murder>

^{iv} Life Application Commentary on John – Livingstone Corp. 1993

^v ibid

^{vi} Secrets of the Vine – Bruce Wilkinson – Multnomah – 2001 P. 103

^{vii} <https://quotefancy.com/quote/1526170/Brother-Lawrence-The-most-holy-and-necessary-practice-in-our-spiritual-life-is-the>