

I Am, part 4
I Am the True Vine
John 15:1-8
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We are finishing up our I AM series, looking at some of the I am statements made by Jesus Christ. Today, we finish the series with I am the True Vine. In chapters 13-17 of John, Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure. He is teaching them how they will get by without him. In this passage, Jesus describes what discipleship looks like when he is gone. Jesus does this by comparing discipleship with a grape vine. The metaphor is described in verses 1-3 then he explains it in verses 4-17, but we will focus on verses 4-8. The point of the passage is that living in dependence upon Jesus is necessary for a fruitful life or spiritual maturity.

In the metaphor God is the vinedresser, Jesus is the vine, and people are the branches. There are two types of branches, those that are unfruitful and those that are fruitful. The vinedresser cuts off the unfruitful branches and burns them up (2, 6). I believe that the unfruitful branches are those who are not genuine disciples for four reasons. First, verse six connects being unfruitful with not abiding in contrast to verses seven and eight which connects fruitfulness with abiding (see also Luk 3:7-9). Second, fruitfulness is evidence that you are a disciple (8). He is explaining what a disciple looks like, a person who abides and is therefore fruitful. Third, Judas is an example of an unfruitful branch who abandoned Jesus or was cut off even though he was part of Jesus' inner group (Jn 17:12). Last, verse three clarifies the distinction between Judas and the rest of the disciples. Imagine you are one of the disciples sitting there and Jesus warns that unfruitful branches are cut off, what goes through your mind? You are probably wondering if you are an unfruitful branch. So, to reassure the rest of the disciples, Jesus tells them that they are already clean because of the word spoken to them (see 13:8-10).

In contrast to unfruitful branches, those branches that are fruitful God the Father prunes so that they are more fruitful. God prunes us to make us more fruitful. Pruning wounds the branch but the wounding makes the branch more fruitful. So to recap, God does two things for the vine, who is Jesus. He cuts away the unfruitful branches and he prunes the fruitful branches. The clearest description of pruning is found in Hebrews, *"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees (Heb 12:6-12).* Pruning is God's discipline in our lives, the loving hand of your Father who prunes specifically for your needs to produce more fruit in your life.

Then Jesus explains how the disciples are to respond to God's pruning process (4-6). Jesus tells them to abide in him, that is, remain in dependent relationship upon him. Abiding is necessary because in the same way a branch cannot bear fruit without the vine neither can you bear fruit without living in dependence upon Jesus. Apart from Jesus you can do nothing. None of us have the necessary resources within us to bear fruit without Jesus. All of us need the life giving sap Jesus provides by his Spirit. Abiding is not optional, it is a necessity. Living in dependence upon Jesus is the only way to more fruit in our lives. Then he contrasts a negative example to a positive one to reinforce this truth (6-8). We already looked at the negative example so let's look at the positive one (7-8). He changes the metaphor up a bit to explain specifically what he means by abiding. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, then ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. The context for this bold prayer is pruning and fruitfulness. If you are depending on Jesus, that is, looking

to his word for strength in the midst of pruning, ask for help and Jesus will give it (see 15:16). That should give us great confidence to pray when God is pruning us. How do I know when I am being pruned? Anytime you face pressure that tests your faith, anytime you are tempted to sin (Gal 5:22-23). So what is his word abiding in you mean? He changes the wording from abide in me and I abide in you to abide in me and my words abide in you. I think he does this because words are the way we communicate and relate to another person, we are dependent upon words to maintain and cultivate relationships with other people. So, we depend upon Jesus' word for our relationship with Jesus, we are dependent upon his word to strengthen his life within us just like the branch gets the sap from the vine. We hear his voice in Scripture and respond to him in prayer.

What does his word abide in us look like? What actions or attitudes display that we are depending upon Jesus? First, is the daily discipline of bible meditation. I say discipline because we don't always desire to read our bibles. There are so many things that are sometimes more interesting, stimulating, exciting, and appealing. A daily discipline of bible reading and meditation keeps Jesus before as the means of renewing our minds and igniting our affections for him. Reading and meditating removes the numbing fog from our hearts so we see Jesus clearer and more appealing than the idols that tug at our hearts daily. Your flesh, the world, and the devil are all obscuring the reality of Jesus in your hearts to convince you that anything and everything is better than Jesus. And some of you are losing that battle and there are no alarms going off. You are drifting and you do not see it nor alarmed by it. If that is you, you are being seduced and you will ruin life unless God opens your eyes to see the danger you are in. I specifically said meditation, not bible reading because meditation is actively thinking on the meaning of the text. Think about what it means, then what it means in my life and pray that truth into you life. Second, thinking about how it fits into the larger framework of Scripture. Third, journal how God is speaking to you from the text. Fourth, think about it throughout the day as you have time, free space in my mind. Fourth, have people in your life ask you how is Jesus speaking to you from the word. That should be a question in every life group. That is a question in our discipleship groups. If you call CCC your home, let me encourage you to get in a Life group because you cannot follow Christ alone. If you want then talk to me about our discipleship groups. Groups are necessary for community and discipleship, the pathway to fruitfulness, love.

Questions for Life Groups:

1. What is the purpose of the metaphor described in John 15:1-17?
2. How does God the Father care for us externally? How does Jesus care for us internally?
3. What is pruning? Why does God prune us?
4. What is the fruit in the metaphor?
5. What does it mean to abide in Jesus? Abide in his word?
6. How are you doing at biding and depending on Jesus?
7. What are different ways his word can abide in us?
8. How is Jesus speaking to you from his word?
9. What is the purpose of community in helping us abide?

