

Jesus, the True Vine

John 15:1-17 (ESV)

Key Verse: 15:5, "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."

Hello everyone! I want to thank God for this opportunity to deliver today's message. It's been a great privilege to wrestle with God's word and internalize it before presenting to you. I'd like to take a moment to thank my beautiful wife, she worked so hard the past 3 weeks. She encouraged me to start early and gave me all the time I needed to really labor on this message. She took care of the 2 kids so gracefully without any resentment. I'd like to thank my mother-in-law for her faithful service every day: breakfast, lunch, & dinner. Thank you to my 2 children, Matthew & Hope. They sacrificed a lot to give me time to work on this message. They also prayed for me as I worked. I want to thank Pastor Won, who helped me prepare this message. Dennie for preparing the slides, and you all for praying for me throughout the week. Rightly handing God's word is not easy and having your prayers along the way was crucial.

The title of today's message is "Jesus, the True Vine" & the key verse is verse 5. Let's read together: "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"

Let me open us with a word of prayer...

Introduction: What Are You Connected To?

How are you these days? Are you walking around lifeless and tired? As if the life has been drained out of you? Or are you full of the spirit? Living in power and God's grace?

Every single day, whether you realize it or not, our soul is drawing its life and identity from something. Human beings do not have the ability to generate this life from within themselves. Just like a plant draws nutrients deep from the soil below it, so your heart draws fulfillment and value from something. We all long for a life that is meaningful and fruitful, yet we frequently connect our hearts to sources that often leave us dry and weak.

Here are some sources that I've been drawing my life energy from: Financial Influencers, Standup Comedy, Global News, Work, and Youtube. Do you know what fruits I bore after seeking life from these sources?

Anxiety: that the AI bubble might pop and my investments will go negative. Do I buy or do I sell?

Worry: the news makes me feel uneasy that the world is getting wrong and a massive global nuclear war will break out.

Stress: Because there's a never ending list of responsibilities at work to accomplish so I can keep my job.

Unholiness: I feel spiritually dirty after laughing at standup comedy that say the wrong & inappropriate parts out loud.

Tired: I feel physically tired after wasting away good sleep by doom-scrolling Youtube Short videos until 2am in the morning.

I know these things are not good, yet I feel so helpless... I need something more. I need something better. I can't sustain myself by continuing to connect to these "life" sources.

Today we will study a simple parable about a vine that has supernatural life-giving power. A vinedresser or a gardener who can clean my filthy soul with life-cleansing words, and a branch that clung onto the true life source that it bore so much fruit that lasted into eternal life. Are you ready for this?

Part 1: True Vine

It was evening, Jesus and his disciples had finished their Last Supper and were leaving for the Garden of Gethsemane. Like a branch that was never truly connected, Judas Iscariot slipped away to do the devil's bidding. As they crossed the Kidron Valley, there were numerous vineyards along the fertile hillside. Winter had passed and many gardeners/vinedressers were preparing the vineyard for Spring. They cut all the dead branches that didn't survive the winter and put them to one side to use as firewood. The branches that were still alive, they aggressively pruned so it could produce a bountiful harvest of choice grapes at Fall.

Jesus and his 11 disciples kept walking and saw the large Temple Herod had reconstructed. It was larger than the Temple King Solomon had made. At the entrance hung a massive sculpture of a grapevine made of pure gold. It glimmered in the last rays of the setting sun and was a symbol of national pride for the Jewish people. They knew in their hearts they were God's chosen vine, the chosen people.

It was in this moment, Jesus turned to his disciples and revealed his last "I am" statement. Let's read verse 1, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." Wow, what a statement? What could that mean?

In a vineyard, the vine is the most important part the plant: the central trunk and the root system. The vine's roots dig deep into the earth to draw up water and rich minerals to provide life giving nutrients to every branch. In other words, the vine is a branch's absolute life source. But why did Jesus say True Vine?

In Isaiah 5:1-7, Isaiah wrote a song called, "The Song of the Vineyard". It describes an owner who built a wonderful vineyard on a fertile hillside. He cleared out all the stones. Found the choicest vines and planted it. He built a watch tower to guard it and cut out a winepress to make fine wine from the best grapes. Yet when the season came, he did not find any quality fruit, he only saw bad grapes. The owner was greatly disappointed and asked, "what more could I have done for my vineyard that I already haven't done?" He then pronounces judgement over the vineyard and leaves the vineyard desecrated, unpruned, and filled with weeds and thorns.

In this story, God is the owner and Israel was his beloved vineyard. Through His miraculous power, he performed the 10 plagues to punish Egypt and to rescue His people. He provided manna from heaven, water from a rock, and gave them a covenant that God would bless the nation of Israel if they were to obey all His laws & commands. According to Exodus 19:6, God chose Israel to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. After establishing Israel as a powerful nation, God desired to see fruits of justice & righteousness but instead found bloodshed, injustice, and idol worship. This greatly broke God's heart and Israel's failure to produce godly fruit resulted in divine judgement.

Jesus picks up the story from here and contrasts himself as the true vine. He is saying he is the ultimate source of spiritual life for His followers, replacing the Old Testament symbol of Israel as God's failing vine.

God chose Jesus to be the true vine all believers must abide in. Jews are not saved by their lineage or strict adherence to the law and neither are we saved by our good works. Only Jesus has the power to bring life into our souls and cleanse us with his words so we can bear spiritual fruit.

Counterfeit Vines

So what kind of false vines do we lean on for life?

In the introduction, I shared some fake vines that I was connected to. Here are a few false vines that people may be connecting to. See which ones you might find yourself in.

- The vine of career & achievement. It promises that hitting a certain job title or salary means your successful. I'm a _____ title, it means I'm really important and my life has value because my company/paycheck says so. Instead, you become a slave to work performance, working long nights to finish your projects in hopes of getting to the next position, eventually leading to burnout & disappointment.
- The vine of validation & social media. It promises affirmation through likes and public views that you're valued. Your digital life looks so flawless. Your posts are so entertaining. But in reality, it drains your enjoyment of life by endless posting, trying to be perfect picture, and relying on fleeting applause that doesn't really satisfy your soul. We sell an image to the outside world to show we have value on the inside.
- The vine of wealth - It promises security through the accumulation of wealth. My bank account is X, I can weather through any storm. Instead, it creates a delusion of self-sufficiency and a hunger for more wealth but cannot truly shield you against grief, loneliness, health issues, or even death.
- The vine of relationships - Promises completeness through finding the right person. Your soul will finally be satisfied. You will be in paradise. But, it actually places an heavy

burden on people, causing relationships to buckle under the pressure of our idolatrous expectations.

These vines demand that you feed them, sucking the life out of you to maintain an illusion but Jesus, the True Vine, does the opposite. He give you his life. He pours out his blood for you on the cross and infuses an imperishable resurrection life in you. What an amazing God.

Part 2: The Branch

What is the purpose of a branch?

Let's read v5: "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."

The branches sole purpose is to remain firmly attached to the vine so that the life-giving sap can flow through it and yield fruit. The moment the branch detaches, stops taking the life-giving nourishment, and says, "I am the vine", it's dead. It'll completely dry up and only be good to be thrown into the fire.

Let me share an example of why it's so important to remain in Christ.

What good would your smart phone be if you only plug it into an outlet for 2hrs a week on Sundays? Not 2 hours a day, 2 hours a week. It'll last you the whole Sunday maybe Monday morning. After that, your phone is completely useless. Good for nothing. Can't pickup a call, check the weather, send a text until you came back again on Sunday and plug it in for another 1-2 hours.

That's what it's like when you're only plugging into Jesus 1-2 hours a week. You're good for the rest of the day but when Monday rolls around you feel all of life's stresses crawling back into your life and your spiritually depleted. You become that smart phone that can't do anything because you're detached from your life source. "For apart from me you can do nothing".

Now what if you kept the phone plugged into a power source all week? Well then, you could do an infinite amount of things! You can call, text, send emails, watch videos, use GPS to navigate you to a new restaurant, attend Sunday service online, play games, read articles, send money half-way around the world, do a virtual doctors appointment, order something an Amazon, book a hotel, place your next Starbucks order, take pictures of your children. I mean, the options are endless!

Imagine if that was your life? Constantly plugged into the true life-giving source: Jesus Christ. All the things you could do in Him? V7 "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." That's what happened to the disciples after Jesus left. They remained in Jesus after ascension to heaven, and the Holy Spirit fell on them. Plugged into the life-source of Jesus Christ, the disciples healed the sick. Open the eyes of the blind. Helped the lame walk. Bring the dead to life. Stand before kings and governors and preached the Good News. They traveled the world and won thousands of souls for Jesus and saw visions of the future: God seated on the throne and Jesus at his right hand.

How to Abide

What are some practical ways we can abide in Jesus?

Verse 3 reads, "Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you." Verse 7 reads, "if you abide in me, and my words abide in you..." Abiding starts with God's word. Not by just occasionally reading it but actually letting it live in you. You reflect on God's word on your way to school. You remember His word and allow it to shape your thoughts and behaviors at work. Psalm 119:11 reads, "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Having God's word in our hearts connects us to God and keeps us away from sin. Instead of reacting emotionally to a situation, we can pause and remember God's grace in our lives and respond calmly. When you hear lies in your mind, we replace them with scripture. Instead of believing you're alone & abandoned, recite Psalm 34:18 "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." When you feel anxious about your salvation because you think you need to do more works, replace it with Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Another way we abide in Jesus is by obeying his commands. Verse 10 reads, "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." We connect with Jesus when we obey his word. Read verse 12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Jesus repeats this command 5 times in John 13 & 15. In the last moments with his disciples, Jesus wanted them to truly love one another. In this way, the world would know they are Jesus' followers. By their deep supernatural sacrificial love. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one that this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." Soon Jesus would commit the greatest act of love by dying on the cross for his disciples and for all mankind. Later on in verse 14 & 15, Jesus calls the disciples his friends, and they too will eventually make the ultimate sacrifice of love by dying for their friend & savior, Jesus Christ... I pray we all can have a relationship with Jesus like this.

We do not love others to plug into the Vine. We plug into the Vine so that we have the supernatural capacity to love others. When you harbor bitterness or treat people as obstacles, you kink the vein and block the sap. But when you step out in obedience to love others, you actively abide in His love. Amen

Dangers of Not Abiding

What are the dangerous of not abiding in Jesus? Of not letting God's word live in you? Failing to love and forgive our fellow brothers & sisters?

If you disconnect yourself from Jesus or never truly accepted Him as your savior, then you risk being a dead branch that is thrown in to the fire. So abiding in Jesus not a nice suggestion, it's essential.

Part 3: Fruit

Fruit is delicious! It is one of nature's most wonderful treat. When you take a fresh apple, a juicy strawberry, a ripe mango, oh man.... That's a little heaven in your mouth, you know?

That's what happens when you get a good fruit. It's so delightful. It's so enjoyable! That's what God desires to see from us.

When a branch remains connected to the True Vine, fruit happens naturally. Fruit is never the condition for abiding but it is always the natural consequence of connecting to Jesus. We do not manufacture it but Christ produces it through our lives.

So what exactly is this spiritual fruit? There are two ways to think about it: internal character and external impact.

Internal Character is the natural fruit when we are connected to Christ and His life flows in us. As we continually have fellowship with Jesus, we begin to look like him. The bible describes some of these fruits in Galatians 5:22-23. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Hallelujah!

External Impact is the growth of internal character that leads to external spiritual impact when we interact with the world. Jesus gave the great commission to his disciples before He ascended into Heaven. His command was to make disciples of all nations. Bearing spiritual fruit is not only inward but also outward. When we bear true spiritual fruit, we make an impact in this world. We fulfill Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply". We obey the great commission: to make disciples of all nations.

Both types of fruit only appear as a natural result of abiding in Jesus. It is God's Spirit, living in us, that makes us bear holy fruit.

Pruning

But growing spiritual fruit, is not easy. It requires deep pruning. I saw a post on Facebook where someone mentioned they were not getting much fruit on their branches. The community group commented one advice over and over again. "You need to be savage and prune your vines to the bone." One person said. Another said, "When pruning if you think you thinned it too much, cut off some more." Vinedressers do this to force the branch to grow new fruit bearing shoots. It may seem so extreme, but the vinedresser does this to help the branch bear fruit. God, the vinedresser, may see you are not producing fruit and out of His deep love will prune you to the bone. To remove all the sin & deep self-reliance from your heart. He uses his word to prune and cleanse you, and when you repent, you begin to grow new fruit-bearing shoots in your life.

Ask God to prune you. Repent of your sins. God desires to see spiritual fruit in your life. He wants to save you. He is working for your good. Don't fight God but surrender to his loving pruning. It may hurt but it will bring true spiritual life. When you open Scripture with a surrendered heart, the Word acts as a loving scalpel and cuts through bitterness, callousness,

and pride. The process is painful but the result is life giving and God does this because He loves us and wants to see us bear fruit that lasts.

The Purpose of Fruit

Why does God want us to bear fruit?

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

It demonstrates to an unbelieving world the Jesus is the True Vine. Only Christians who are connected to Jesus can bear these types of fruit.

Verse 16: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide...

God desires us to bear fruit because 1) It brings glory to God. 2) To reflect Christ-like character. 3) To show the world God's love.

Writing this message has been extremely challenging for me. I spent hours drafting and trying to find the words to speak to explain this simple passage. But nothing came to me. I took 2 days off work and neglected my family everyday so I could write a wonderful message but it felt so hopeless...

I was like that phone that had been disconnected from the energy source: completely useless.

The only strength I had was my willpower and human effort. Even that drained quickly. Jesus said, I am the vine, you are the branches. Apart from me, you can do nothing. I really experienced that this week. It was only until I apologized to God for my self-reliant and wicked heart, while driving to work this past Thursday morning, that I started to feel His spiritual life-giving power flowing through me again. It was only by God's divine inspiration that I was able to write this message today. It was so tough. There were a lot of spiritual attacks leading up to today but your prayers and God's Spirit protected me and my family and allowed me to bear this message. God taught me an invaluable lesson: Jesus indeed is the True Vine. Apart from him, I am utterly weak and spiritually useless.

I think this passage was more for me and anyone else.

Conclusion: Choose the True Vine Today

I pray that you may be encourage by this message to stop relying on yourself. You are weak. You are not the vine, you are the branch. You cannot do anything spiritually significant without Christ. Instead, I encourage you to plug into the True Vine: Jesus Christ. Plug into His word. Ask God to prune you. Confess your pride of self-reliance and come back to Jesus. Without Jesus' power living in you, you are like that phone without any battery. Stay connected to Jesus and let Him change your life this school semester. Let Him transform you in your current season of life and help you to bear spiritual fruit that pleases God.

Let's read the key verse again.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." — John 15:5