

## JOHN CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### Jesus Is The Vine; We Are The Branches

#### **John 15:1-11 NAS:**

<sup>1</sup> "I am the **true vine**, and My Father is the **vinedresser**.

<sup>2</sup> "**Every branch** in Me that does not bear fruit, **He takes away**; and every branch that bears fruit, **He prunes** it so that it may bear more fruit.

<sup>3</sup> "You are already clean because of the **word** which I have spoken to you.

<sup>4</sup> "**Abide in Me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it **abides** in the vine, so neither can you unless you **abide** in Me.

<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides** in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

<sup>6</sup> "If anyone does not **abide** in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

<sup>7</sup> "If you **abide** in Me, and My words **abide** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

<sup>8</sup> "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

<sup>9</sup> "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

<sup>10</sup> "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.

<sup>11</sup> "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

#### **Joni Eareckson Tada** writes:

"Honesty is always the best policy, but especially when you're surrounded by a crowd of women in a restroom during a break at a Christian women's conference. One woman, putting on lipstick, said, 'Oh, Joni, you always look so together, so happy in your wheelchair. I wish that I had your joy!' Several women around her nodded. 'How do you do it?' she asked as she capped her lipstick.

"*I don't do it,*' I said. 'In fact, may I tell you honestly how I woke up this morning?'

'This is an average day,' I breathed deeply. 'After my husband, Ken, leaves for work at 6:00 A.M., I'm alone until I hear the front door open at 7:00 A.M. That's when a friend arrives to get me up.

"While I listen to her make coffee, I pray, 'Oh, Lord, my friend will soon give me a bath, get me dressed, sit me up in my chair, brush my hair and teeth, and send me out the door. I don't have the strength to face this routine one more time. I have no resources. I don't have a smile to take into the day. But you do. May I have yours? God, I need you desperately."

"So, what happens when your friend comes through the bedroom door?' one of them asked.

"I turn my head toward her and give her a smile sent straight from heaven. It's not mine. It's God's. And so," I said, gesturing to my paralyzed legs, 'whatever joy you see today was hard won this morning.'

"I have learned that the weaker we are, the more we need to lean on God; and the more we lean on God, the stronger we discover him to be."<sup>1</sup>

Have you found joy in your life? If not, would you be willing to try something every morning and every evening for a while? The moment you wake up in the morning **ask God to send you His joy**. And the last thing you should do as you fall asleep is to **ask God for His joy** as you sleep. If you are willing to try this, I would be very much interested in knowing the outcome.

As we look at the whole of chapter 15 we see that Jesus is now going to give His disciples three specific instructions having to do with relationships:

- 1) First a **parable** in verses 1-10; they are told to relate to Him in the way they had been designed by their Creator to relate to Him. They were to remain in the Word of God and be obedient to all that Jesus had taught them.
- 2) Then in verses 11-17 Jesus issues a **command**, instructing them as to how they should relate to one another.
- 3) And finally in verses 15:18-16:4, a **warning** regarding how they should relate and provide testimony to the world.

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<sup>1</sup> *Perfect Illustrations: For Every Topic and Occasion*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "J".

So today we will consider the parable in the opening verses.

**John 15:1 NAS**

*"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.*

This was an agricultural society so Jesus used illustrations they would immediately grasp. If you have houseplants or a garden of any kind you can still relate to this parable. Jesus begins by telling His disciples that He is the true vine. This is the last of the seven great "I am" statements in John. The symbolism of the Vine and branches is similar to that of the Head and the body (Colossians 1:18). We have a living relationship with Christ and belong to Him. If anyone is in any way detached from the source of life, Jesus Christ, they are just like dead wood and will be cast into the fire for eternity. Jesus point here is the importance of a personal relationship with Him. We are to continually remain in a state of submissiveness to the Holy Spirit.

The Jews were first chosen to be God's **vine** to the rest of the world to produce good fruit (those who trust in and are obedient to God). **Israel** was God's chosen vine but the vine (Israel) separated itself from the **vinedresser** (one who cultivates and prunes grapevines) and thus produced rotten fruit. So when Jesus says He is "*the true Vine,*" it means that He has become the vine that Israel was intended to be. God is portrayed here as the King of the vineyard, the Lord of the kingdom.

**John 15:2 NAS:**

<sup>2</sup>*"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.*

**God wants good fruit.** The fruit God desired from Israel was loving obedience, righteousness, and justice, Isaiah 5:1-4 NLT:

<sup>1</sup>*Now I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a rich and fertile hill.*

<sup>2</sup>*He plowed the land, cleared its stones, and planted it with the best vines. In the middle he built a watchtower and carved a winepress in the nearby rocks. Then he waited for a harvest of sweet grapes, but the grapes that grew were bitter.*

<sup>3</sup>*Now, you people of Jerusalem and Judah, you judge between me and my vineyard.*

<sup>4</sup>*What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not already done? When I expected sweet grapes, why did my vineyard give me bitter grapes?*

In an act of grace, God "*transplanted*" Israel from slavery in Egypt into the beautiful and plentiful land of Canaan and gave the nation every possible benefit. If ever a nation had

everything it needed to succeed, it was Israel. <sup>2</sup>

Now we are told in verse 2 of John 15 that every person who claims to be a disciple of Christ, that is a **branch**, is not necessarily a true follower and therefore is incapable of producing good fruit. Those dead branches are therefore cut off. The living branches, however, the true followers of Christ are pruned so that they are capable of producing even more fruit. Every year in Palestine gardeners prune their vines. They cut off the dead wood and trim the living branches so that their fruit (yield) will be even more plentiful. Jesus tells His disciples that they have been pruned and cleansed by the Gospel of truth which He taught them. To be a branch in the Vine means we are united to Christ and share His life. As we abide in Christ His life flows through us and produces fruit. We are an intact plant from vine to branch to fruit.

John 15:3, 4 NAS

<sup>3</sup> *"You are already clean because of the **word** which I have spoken to you.*

<sup>4</sup> *"**Abide in Me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.*

Then in verses 3 and 4 Jesus reminds them that good fruit is the result of a new birth and lifestyle that is patterned after the life of Jesus. In effect the person and Jesus become one under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is this new branch that is capable of producing good fruit. The disciple's responsibility is to **abide** (remain) under the control of the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to **remain**? It means to be obedient and trust completely in the Word of God. Without God and Jesus there can be no good fruit produced. Fruit can only come from a branch that remains connected to the Vine, and the Vine here is of course Jesus Christ.

The believer who abides in Christ experiences a deepening love for Christ as well as for other believers. He or she also experiences joy.

The vinedresser prunes the branches in two ways:

- 1) He cuts away dead wood that can breed disease and insects, and
- 2) He cuts away living tissue so that the life of the vine will not be so weakened that the quality of the crop will be jeopardized.

In fact, the vinedresser will even cut away whole bunches of grapes so that the rest of the crop will be of higher quality. God wants both quantity and quality.<sup>3</sup> "This pruning process is the most important part of the whole enterprise, and the people who do it must be carefully trained or they can destroy an entire crop. Some vineyards invest two or three years in training the 'pruners' so they know where to cut, how much to cut, and even at what angle to make the cut."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 15:1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

You may have to think about the statement we are about to make, but a little thinking can often be good for us. One of the harshest judgments God could send your way if you are a believer would be to ignore you and allow you to go merrily on your way. However, because He loves us, He “prunes” us so that we can bear more fruit for His glory. If the branches could talk they would tell you that **being pruned hurts**. But they would also tell you that at the harvest the pain was worth it because of the crop they were able to produce. Are you feeling the pain of what you consider to be too much pruning? If you are just stop and realize what a great harvest God is going to produce through you and the reward that you are going to receive in Heaven forever. Consider the truth in this old saying:

*“Don’t be one of those who give up just before the miracle happens.”*

Warren Wiersbe reminds us that, “Your Heavenly Father is never nearer to you than when He is pruning you. Sometimes He cuts away the dead wood that might cause trouble; but often He cuts off living tissue that is preventing you from generating a bumper crop. Pruning does not only refer to removing what is bad. It can also mean cutting away the good and the better so that we might enjoy the best. Yes, pruning hurts, but it also helps. We may not enjoy it, but we need it.”<sup>5</sup>

You might be asking the question, *“How does God prune us?”* Sometimes He simply uses the Word, Scripture, to convict and cleanse us. 1 Peter 1:22 NAS

*Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.*

Psalm 119:9 NAS

*How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.* Sometimes He has to chasten or discipline us, according to Hebrews 12:1–11 NLT:

<sup>1</sup> *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.*

<sup>2</sup> *We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.*

<sup>3</sup> *Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up.*

<sup>4</sup> *After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin.*

<sup>5</sup> *And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, “My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline,*

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

and don't give up when he corrects you.

<sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."

<sup>7</sup> As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father?

<sup>8</sup> If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all.

<sup>9</sup> Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?

<sup>10</sup> For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness.

<sup>11</sup> No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. (NLT)

**At the time, it hurts!** But when we see what happens in our lives two or perhaps three years or even ten years down the road, it becomes evident that God knew what He was doing. The more we abide in Christ, the more fruit we produce. The more fruit we produce, the more pruning might be necessary to insure the quality of that bumper crop that we are to continue producing.

### **John 15:5-8 NAS:**

<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

<sup>6</sup> "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

<sup>7</sup> "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

<sup>8</sup> "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Now hidden in verse 5 is a very essential statement that we need to pay close attention to: "without Me [Christ] you can do nothing." Does it say that without Christ you can accomplish small things? Or that without Christ you can do some things? NO. It says that without Christ we can do nothing that counts or that means a hill of beans. Yet how many times do we tackle a project or try to develop an inner quality on our own strength? That's about as many times as we fail. Without Christ we can accomplish nothing. We don't like that, we who are trained to be independent and self-sufficient. Often the pruning God has to do in

the life of a Christian is to prune out that self-sufficiency and bring us to the point where we have to turn to Him because there is nowhere else to turn. Mother Theresa once said, “*You will never know that Christ is all you need until you are in a place where Christ is all you have.*” How true.

What is it that God wants us to do? We should have the answer on the tip of our tongues by this time. He wants us to produce fruit of course. And do you know what? It takes time, hard work, and dedication to produce fruit; a good crop does not come overnight. And what is the purpose of producing this fruit? We produce fruit in order to serve others, and we serve others by what we do and what we say.

Proverbs 10:17,20,21,23,32 NLT:

<sup>17</sup> *People **who accept** discipline are on the pathway to life, but those who ignore correction will go astray.*

<sup>20</sup> ***The words** of the godly are like sterling silver; the heart of a fool is worthless.*

<sup>21</sup> ***The words** of the godly encourage many, but fools are destroyed by their lack of common sense.*

<sup>23</sup> ***Doing wrong** is fun for a fool, but **living wisely** brings pleasure to the sensible.*

<sup>32</sup> ***The lips** of the godly speak helpful words, but the mouth of the wicked speaks perverse words.*

What would we consider to be some examples of spiritual fruit?

- 1) Bringing others to faith in Christ (Romans 1:13).
- 2) Participating in the harvest (John 4:35-38).
- 3) Giving (financial resources; Romans 15:28).

To some degree each of these things is fruit, especially if they are in line with our spiritual gifts. But the most important fruit, the fruit that we are all capable of, are the next two:

- 4) Growing in obedience (Romans 6:22).
- 5) The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Obedience and those inner qualities listed in Galatians that are referred to as the fruit of the Spirit are what God wants to develop in each one of us. After that comes the ministry He wants to do through us as He works through the spiritual gifts He has given us. So you see, it is all His work; His work inside us and His work through the gifts He has given us. Without Him we can do nothing.

John 15:9-11 NAS:



<sup>9</sup> *"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; **abide (remain)**<sup>6</sup> in My love.*

<sup>10</sup> *"If you keep My commandments, you will **abide (remain)**<sup>7</sup> in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and **abide (remain)**<sup>8</sup> in His love.*

<sup>11</sup> *"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and **that your joy may be made full.***

So there, Christ is telling us the secret to having joy: Abide in Christ. Lean back and rest on Him. Let His Words run through your mind constantly. Obey those Words and put them into practice. See His hand in every aspect of your life. That is abiding in Him.

Believers must remain in Jesus (John 15:4), remain in His Words (15:7), and remain in His love. For Jesus to love us in the same way that His Father loves Him means we receive a love that is so complete, unselfish, and so intense that we could never begin to understand it by worldly standards.

We should respond to that kind of love by giving Jesus our complete dedication, commitment, and obedience. How do we remain in Jesus' love? By obeying His commands as He obeyed His Father's commands. If we do that, we will experience a joy in our daily lives that comes only with the knowledge of obedience that we have given Him. Jesus Himself modeled **two important behaviors** for true disciples:

(1) Since He obeyed his Father's commands, we should be able to obey His, especially since a true disciple has the power of the Holy Spirit living within them;

(2) Because He loved them, they should be capable of loving one another through the power of that same Holy Spirit.

The love of God for His only-begotten Son is the highest affection of which we can conceive (Matthew 3:17, 17:5). It is the love of God toward His coequal Son, who is like Him in all things, who always pleased Him, and who was willing to endure the greatest sacrifices and suffering to accomplish God's will. And it is this same kind of love that Jesus has for believers; deep, tender, unchanging, and willing to sacrifice Himself for our welfare. If you want to feel that kind of love and also be able to offer that kind of love, all you need do is **abide (remain) in Jesus** and it will flow through Him into you and from you to others. We have no source of permanent joy but in such love.<sup>9</sup>

If you love Jesus you do what He wants you to do. Recall what we learned from John 14.

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<sup>6</sup> Parentheses added.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical*, WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "John 15".



John 14:21,23,24 NAS:

<sup>21</sup> *"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."*

23 *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."*

<sup>24</sup> *"He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."*

1 John 2:3-5 NAS:

<sup>3</sup> *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.*

<sup>4</sup> *The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;*

<sup>5</sup> *but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:*

Jesus not only tells us what to do; He demonstrates it by the way He lives His life. Jesus does not call Christians to a dull existence of being hated by the world, obeying commands, and waiting to get to Heaven. Instead, He offers us the Kingdom of God right here on earth for the balance of the time we have left. He offers the fullness of joy. He came to give us an abundant life (John 10:10).

Nothing else in all the world can bring the **joy** that we find in serving, **abiding (remaining)**<sup>10</sup> in, and obeying Christ.<sup>11</sup>

When Jesus used the term, "My joy," He probably was expressing the happiness that He feels when His followers are obedient, loving, and faithful. Their obedience was and is a source of joy to Him. That is what He desired. So if you want to give joy to Jesus, obey Him.

He was now explaining to His apostles what would be expected of them, and He encouraged them to hang in there. When praying to His Father, Jesus said this in

John 17:13 NAS:

<sup>13</sup> *"But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves."*

"That your joy might be full." Jesus wants to provide His followers with the ability to overcome depression, grief, trials, and hard times through the power of His Holy Spirit.

<sup>10</sup> Parentheses added.

<sup>11</sup> Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 440.

1 John 1:1-4 NLT:

<sup>1</sup> *We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life.*

<sup>2</sup> *This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us.*

<sup>3</sup> *We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*

<sup>4</sup> *We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.*

2 John 1:12 NLT:

<sup>12</sup> *I have much more to say to you, but I don't want to do it with paper and ink. For I hope to visit you soon and talk with you face to face. Then our joy will be complete.*

This promise of Jesus was fulfilled, as are all His promises. The apostles speak of the fullness of their joy, joy produced in just the way Jesus said it could be, by the presence of the Holy Spirit and by abiding in Christ.<sup>12</sup> It also showed His great love for them and us that He promised such joy.<sup>13</sup>

If you want to experience this kind of joy, you must make a conscious decision to abide in Jesus. Make it your commitment to renew that decision each and every day for the rest of your life. You will not regret it.

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<sup>12</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical*, WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "John 15".

<sup>13</sup> Acts 13:52; Revelation 14:17, 2 Corinthians 2:3, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2:19, 20, 3:9, 1 Peter 1:8, Romans 5:11 2 Corinthians 7:4.