

LESSON SIX THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

Jesus often taught using metaphors, allegories, and symbolism and everyday things that would have been familiar to the disciples. In John 15, He uses the ordinary grapevine, which was celebrated for its luxuriant growth and immense clusters of grapes.

Vines are unusual in that they adapt to their environment. They can acclimate and grow quickly in good surroundings alongside of homes, rocks and other structures. Grapevines have no use other than fruit bearing. They aren't ornamental, don't provide shade, aren't useful for building homes, or making furniture. They are not even valuable for firewood because they only burn for a short time.

In John 15:1-8, Jesus gives us a vital teaching regarding our relationship to Him. He uses the illustration of the vine to teach spiritual truths, truths which will reveal the real secret of the Christian life. Keep in mind that the theme within these verses is not salvation, but fruit bearing.

This lesson provides us with three very important principles. In Day One, we will take a general look at John 15:1-8, while in Days Two-Four, we will examine the three key principles that Jesus taught about of pruning, abiding and fruit bearing.

Day One – A Vital Union

Read John 15:1-8

It is likely that most of us have not grown grapes or any other fruit on a vine, so we may be unfamiliar with vineyards and what is necessary to grow them successfully. Let's look at what we can learn from the scriptures that will be helpful to better understand this teaching from Jesus.

1. How does Jesus refer to Himself and to God the Father in verse 1?

A vinedresser or husbandman is an agriculturist who is involved in the daily pruning and cultivation of grapevines. A good husbandman works the earth, cultivates his plants, and naturally expects them to produce fruit equal with the amount of effort he has invested in them. A vine must have a husbandman to plant it, watch over it and rejoice in its fruit.

a. As you reflect on God as the great Husbandman who lovingly cares and provides for you, how does this personally speak to you? What proof of His care do you see in your life?

b. In what way does Jesus refer to the disciples verse 5?

2. By nature, the vine is one plant with many branches. Though both are necessary, each have a different purpose. The vine stores the life, strength, and sap while the branch has nothing but that which the vine supplies it. Commentator and Bible teacher Andrew Murray said: “*A branch is simply a bit of wood, brought forth by the vine for the one purpose of serving it in bearing its fruit.*” Share your thoughts below about what this means to you.

3. In John 15, the phrase *in Me* appears in verses 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 and denotes a fixed position. Why is this important?

4. For a vine or any plant to be healthy and survive, it must have roots that support and nourish it. How does Colossians 2:7a relate to this teaching about the vine, the branches and us?

5. Read the quote below and write down your thoughts as it relates to Jesus and you.

“I’m only a little branch, I live by a life not mine, for the sap that flows through my tendrils small is the life-blood of the Vine.” From Only a Branch by Freda Hanbury.

Day Two – Pruning

Read John 15:1-8

A good vineyard is noted for the grapes it produces. But good grapes don't just happen. The vine must be cultivated in order to be healthy and fruit bearing. Interestingly, the vine is a plant that needs extensive pruning and is dependent on the cultivation and training by the husbandman to produce a rich harvest.

1. During the cultivation process, there are two things which are done to the branch. According to John 15:2, how are the branches dealt with?

When a word is translated from the Greek to the English, some of the meaning can be lost or misunderstood. In the Greek language, the phrase “*takes away*” means to lift up, to raise up from the ground. The Greek word *purge* means to cleanse.

2. New branches have the tendency to trail down and grow along the ground where they get covered in dirt and eventually can become sick, useless, and non-fruit bearing. The vinedresser *takes away* or lifts up the branches to promote better growth. The pruning of grapevines is done by cutting off every superficial branch and those that are sickly or feeble. Pruning also cuts away the heavy branches and those that have disease or are infected with insects so that sap might freely flow into healthy branches.

a. According to verse 2c, what is the reason both processes are done?

b. In what way does this describe God as your vinedresser?

c. What areas are there that might not be as healthy as they should be in your life? Journal your thoughts.

3. As the husbandman goes about the purging and pruning process on the branch, we need to understand what a pruning process might look like in our own lives. This process may seem painful and senseless, but God has a purpose and is very intentional in the pruning within our lives. Read the following verses and write **why** the Lord does this in our lives.

Deuteronomy 8:2-17

Hebrews 12:5-8

a. List the intended **results** of God's pruning in our lives found in Hebrews 12:9-11.

4. We can think of pruning as the process by which spiritual growth will be enhanced in our lives. What things might need pruning so that we can grow spiritually, as fruitful and useful branches?

Psalm 19:12b-13

2 Corinthians 7:1

1 John 2:15-17

a. What area(s) in your life do you see that God might need to prune for you to be more fruitful?

5. The pruning process is necessary in our lives but can be painful at times. And it is not always just “bad things” that God will prune in our lives. While we will appreciate the results that pruning brings, during the process our attitude may not always be what it should be. How do you or have you responded in the past to the pruning process?

a. According to the following verses, what is to be our attitude and response in pruning?

Job 5:17

Revelation 3:19

b. Write a prayer below asking the Lord to help you with your attitude whenever discipline or pruning is needed in your life.

“Expect to be pruned if you are abiding in Christ. This is the only way to bear more fruit and glorify the Father. The abiding Christian is not discouraged when the Father prunes his life and cuts away something he considers dear, because he knows he will receive something far more precious in return.”

Warren Wiersbe from 5 Secrets of Living

Day Three — Abiding

Read John 15:1-8

1. In Day One we learned about the key repeated words *in Me*. We have another key word repeated seven times in verses 4-7. What is it? (Notice that in most instances it precedes the key phrase *in Me*)

Abide means to continue in one place, to remain; to have one's abode, to dwell. Please take note that when Jesus says abide, it is a command. It is not a suggestion or a request and, as such, we must take action to implement it into our lives.

2. The branch will have no life without staying attached to the vine. Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. We understand from these verses in John 15:1-8 the necessity of abiding (remaining) in Him to have a full spiritual life and to be fruitful. Why do you think abiding is such a difficult thing for us?

a. What are some things that could keep you from abiding in Jesus?

b. What blessing or promise do you find in verse 7 that might motivate you to be more faithful to abide in Him?

c. On a practical level, what things can you do in order to be certain that you abide in Jesus?

3. Jesus says in John 15:5c “...for without Me you can do nothing.” What is the significance of this verse to you? (Keep in mind the text and subject of this lesson.) Refer to 2 Corinthians 3:5 for any additional insights.

4. The concept of abiding teaches us that we are to completely depend upon Christ. Look at the following verses to see how Jesus sets the example for us in the way that He depended upon His Father and write what you learn.

John 5:30, 6:38

John 10:37

John 12:49-50

John 14:31

a. How does Jesus’ example of abiding and obeying speak to you personally?

5. In John 15:6 we learn that if someone doesn't abide in Jesus as a branch, several things will result: he is cast out, is withered and is thrown into the fire. Cast out is indicative of loss of fellowship, withered indicates loss of vitality, while burned indicates loss of reward. If we don't abide in Christ, there are consequences. Share your thoughts on verse 6 as well as 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.

6. The Old Testament contains a seldom read book, *Song of Solomon*. We read in chapter 2:15, "*Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.*" Although this book speaks of the relationship of a couple, we can see the relevance of these words in our own lives as it relates to us as being the branches of the vine. The foxes were 'enemies' to the vineyard. What "little foxes" can you think of that would spoil the vine/branch relationship in our lives?

7. Abiding is essential for the disciple of Christ. In addition to the fruit bearing that results from this abiding in the Vine, what additional benefits do we have as we abide in the Vine?

John 8:31-32

1 John 2:28

8. When good vineyards are neglected or abandoned, the fruit will be poor or non-existent and the vine will become wild and uncultivated. God desires that we not live worthless and barren lives, but rather strong and vibrant ones. List some ways that you can develop the abiding relationship needed so that you are fruitful in your life.

9. As we end this day, what important truth is found in 1 John 2:28 that we need to remember?

“Abiding: it is the continuous act by which the Christian lays aside all he might draw from his own wisdom, strength and merit, to desire all from Christ by the inward aspiration of faith.”

Quote by Godet

Day Four – Fruitfulness

Evidence that we are abiding in the Vine will be that we are bearing fruit. The grapevine only bears a small amount of fruit the first few years after planting. As it matures it will produce more and more fruit. Likewise, Jesus, tells us in John 15 that there should be a progression of fruit bearing in our lives. (fruit, more fruit, much fruit)

1. Which area or stage of fruit bearing do you see yourself in? Explain.

2. One of the most familiar and beloved passages in scripture that speaks of fruit is found in Galatians 5:22-23. In the chart below, list the kind of fruit mentioned and then use a dictionary to give a specific description and meaning to each of these Spirit filled characteristics and record them.

Fruit	Definition

a. Which of these fruits would you like to see more evidence of in your life? List them below as you explain why.

b. Write a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to develop these in you.

3. As Jesus continues His discourse with the disciples in John 15, He gives several practical ways that bearing fruit can be seen. What are they?

John 15:9-10

John 15:11

John 15:12

4. Fruitfulness is not to be optional for us as disciples of Christ for it speaks of vitality in our spiritual lives. Examine the following scriptures and record what the fruit is and what it should look like in our lives. (Try to be specific.)

Romans 6:22

Philippians 1:11

Philippians 4:14-17

Colossians 1:10-12

Hebrews 13:15

2 Peter 1:5-7

“The one object of my being a branch, the one mark of my being a true branch, the one condition of my abiding and growing strong, is that I bear the fruit of the heavenly Vine for dying men to eat and live. With Christ as my Vine, and the Father as my Husbandman, I can indeed be a fruitful branch.”
Andrew Murray from The True Vine

5. We've seen how the branch is to be fruitful, but unfortunately, it can be unfruitful as well. What reasons are given in the following verses as to why we would be barren or unfruitful? Explain what they might mean in your life.

Mark 4:19

Ephesians 5:11a

Titus 3:14

1 John 2:9-11

a. Prayerfully and thoughtfully consider any changes that might need to be made in your life after reading the above verses and write a prayer below.

6. Even though Jesus was specifically teaching them about the vine and the branches, there are a number of Old Testament scriptures that speak to us about fruitfulness as well. Please read these scriptures and record the important principles found in them.

Psalms 1:1-3

Psalm 92:12-15

Jeremiah 17:7-8

7. Re-read John 15:8. What do you learn in about discipleship and what the result is to be of our fruit bearing?

a. According to the above verse, do you think others consider you to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

8. In closing, what truth, command and promise are given by the Lord in John 15:16?

“Our Father, Thou comest seeking fruit. Teach us, we pray Thee, to realize how truly this is the one object of our existence, and of our union to Christ. Make it the one desire of our hearts to be branches, so filled with the Spirit of the Vine, as to bring forth fruit abundantly.”

Andrew Murray from The True Vine

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