

Abide * John 15:1-8

March 24, 2024 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Turn with me in your Bibles to John 15, John 15:1-8. Jesus weaves together a number of themes in this passage that we're going to untangle together, but I want you to see the whole picture before we get into it. So join me in John 15:1-8.

Just to set the scene - it's still the Last Supper. Jesus knows that He will soon die and rise and go back into Heaven and so He is teaching His disciples how to be His disciples even when He's not physically present with them. He's preparing them for life after the Cross and here's what He says:

NIV John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.ⁱ

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7 If you remain in me [if anyone DOES remain in Me] and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:1-8 NIV).

Having spent this week with this passage, there is one thought that has crystallized in my heart. Jesus is saying to me, Jesus is saying to you, Jesus is saying to us:

Abide in me and you will abound in fruit.

Abide in Jesus and abound in fruit.

Let me explain why I say that, one piece at a time, starting with 'Abide in Jesus.'

It's pretty clear that Jesus wants us to 'abide' in Him, isn't it? Verse 4 He says 'remain in Me;' verse 5 He says 'remain in Me;' verse 6 He says 'here's what happens when you don't remain in Me;' verse 7 He says 'Here's what happens when you do.' Jesus clearly wants us to remain in Him, to abide in Him.

Now here's the question – what does that mean? What does it mean to remain in someone? What does it mean to abide in someone?

I think that there are probably lots of ways to answer that question, but I think the most obvious one and the most helpful one is to think about the metaphor that Jesus gives us to illustrate 'abiding' and 'remaining' – the vine and the branches.

As He often does, Jesus uses agricultural images to describe spiritual realities and in this case, He says to His disciples – ‘I am the Vine, you are the branches; remain in Me the way the branches remain in the vine.’

Think about that relationship for a minute. I’m sure you’ve seen vines and branches before; we’ve got one growing wild in our backyard.

First, you’ve got the vine. It’s rooted in the ground. It supports the branches. It gives life to the branches by means of the nutrients that it pulls up from the ground.

The branches, for their part, they depend upon the vine; they draw life from the vine and strength from the vine and using the resources that the vine provides, they bear fruit for the vine.

That, I think, is a picture of what Jesus means when He says ‘Abide in Me.’ ‘Remain in Me.’ ‘Stay connected to Me the way that a branch is connected to a vine.’ ‘Maintain such a close and vital relationship with Me that you draw your life and strength and purpose from Me, everyday, that you bear the fruit that I enable you to bear.’

How do we do that, practically speaking? How do we remain connected to Jesus on a daily basis?

Well, first, I think we intentionally set aside time to spend time with Him in worship and Bible reading and prayer. If you look at verse 7, Jesus says ‘If you remain in me and MY WORDS REMAIN IN YOU;’ the implication here is that we will spend time everyday putting Jesus’ words into our hearts, intentionally listening to Him, to hear what He says to says, to be strengthened by Him and His promises to us. So first, take time to remain in Jesus through His Word.

But, second, the more I thought about this this week, the more I realized that ‘abiding in Jesus’ is not just what you do when you open your Bible and pray first thing in the morning (or whenever you do it). The connection between the vine and the branches is much more constant, much more consistent than that.

So what I would say is – cultivate an intentional, ongoing awareness of Jesus’ presence with you, all through the dayⁱⁱ. Train yourself to pause every so often and realize that the Saviour of all, who holds all things together, is right there, eager to connect with you.

Did you ever think about that? The LORD OF ALL! Wants to connect with you, moment by moment, every day. He’s never too busy for you; frankly, He probably wishes that you were never too busy for Him! This passage really challenged me to pause - in the middle of my work, driving kids around, making supper, to pause and draw strength and wisdom from the Vine who is always there for me.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches and He invites us to stay connected to Him the way the branches remain in the vine.

Now why, why do we stay connected? Why do we abide in Jesus? I’ll be honest – this has always been to me the ‘abide’ passage. Remain in Jesus. Abide in Jesus. That’s what it is. But it really hit me this week that there’s a purpose to the abiding. And that purpose is abounding.

Jesus invites us to abide in Him so that we will abound in fruit.

Verse 4 - Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine...

Verse 5 - "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit...

Verse 8 - 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit [abundant fruit, abounding fruit, not just a little but overflowing fruit!], showing yourselves to be my disciples (Joh 15:8 NIV).

In this metaphor, Jesus just assumes that the branches will bear fruit. Jesus anticipates that we will bear fruit which glorifies God and shows that we truly are His disciples.

And that's why we abide in Him – so that we will abound in fruit.

And actually, Jesus is telling us here that it's only BY abiding in Him that we will abound in fruit. Here's a branch from the vine in our backyard. Is it going to bear fruit? No. It's disconnected from the source of its life.

Same with us. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing – verse 4 - No branch can bear fruit by itself; verse 5 - apart from me you can do nothing. Sure, we can probably do some good things in our own strength, but fruit that lasts? Fruit that has eternal potential? We need Jesus for that.

Apart from Jesus we can do nothing but with Jesus we can do some pretty spectacular things.

Now that kind of begs the question – what kind of fruit are we talking about here? It's not pomegranates and pineapples that we're called to bear. Or tomatoes or cucumbers for that matter. When we abide in Jesus, what kind of fruit do we bear?

Well, on one hand, I think that Jesus is talking about who we are, our character. Verse 8 says that our fruit will show that we are Jesus' followers. In that case, we should probably look like Him. Grapevines produce grapes, melon vines produce melons, the Jesus-vine produces 'Jesus's' – Christians. Which means that we will bear the fruit of the Spirit at work in us – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...

On the other hand, I think that Jesus is talking about what we do – the fruit of our labour for His glory. Sharing the good news about Jesus with others is fruit. Taking a meal to someone in need is fruit. Standing up for someone who can't stand up for themselves is fruit.

Really, I think that 'what we do' is 'who we are, applied' - because if we are bearing the fruit of love, it follows that we would want to share the hope of eternal life with others. If we are bearing the fruit of kindness, we will want to share our blessings. If we are bearing the fruit of peace and patience and self-control, then we will want to work for justice.

Jesus anticipates that when we abide in Him, we will abound in fruit, and that fruit – who we are and what we do – will look like Him.

So, abide in Jesus and abound in fruit.

One final thought, and that comes from verse 2. Abiding in Jesus and abounding in fruit isn't really optional for us as believers.

2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful (Joh 15:2 NIV).

That's just good gardening, but applied to the church, it's a solemn warning. Jesus anticipates that a healthy believer will bear fruit in season but if there isn't fruit when you'd expect there to be, you're gonna start wondering 'what's going on here?' I suspect that Jesus here is talking about the kind of people who hang around the church but don't really have any commitment to it, people who like the nostalgia and the social part but don't really let Jesus have any say in their lives. Jesus says 'they get cut off.'

But, Jesus says, believers who DO bear fruit, who DO listen to Him and submit their lives to Him, the Father cuts back, to bear more fruit. And just to work out the implications of that: if you are abiding in Jesus and abounding in fruit, don't be surprised if you run into trouble which seems to prune you back and keep you from doing all you expected to do. Jesus tells us here that the Father prunes back faithful branches to make them even more productive. To mix metaphors, when life throws you into the fire, God may just use that time to refine and strengthen you.

And I'll tell you, just to close, that I think that that happened to us as a church over COVID. Four years ago, I spoke on this passage too – we were actually wrapping up a series in John at that point as well – and I said – “I wonder if this, COVID, lockdowns and the disruption of the way we've always done church, is God cutting us back, freeing us up to grow and thrive and be the church that He intends us to be in the next twenty years.”

I think it was. Looking back, I think that we are a different church than we were in 2020. I think that we are more flexible, more focused on the Gospel and better prepared to extend the grace of God to each other and to those around us. It's never fun being pruned, but it's always productive in the hands of a Master Gardener and I'm frankly excited about what comes next.

So - abide in Jesus – stay connected to Him, receive life through Him – and abound in fruit that looks like Him.

ⁱ There's a connection between 'pruning' and 'cleansing' in Greek that's hard to see in English. Here's a quick rendering following the ESV - ESV John 15:2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away [*airo*], and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes [*kath-airo*], that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean [*kath-aro*] because of the word that I have spoken to you (Joh 15:3 ESV). It's a pun connecting pruned and cleansed which implies that those who are cleansed (Jesus' followers) are those who will be pruned for greater fruitfulness.

ⁱⁱ If you're interested in exploring this idea further, look into 'Practicing the presence of God' by Brother Lawrence. He was a 17th century monk who wrote about the value of worshiping God through everyday activity. (Here's a brief into to him: <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/lawrence-a-medieval-mystic-untimely-born>).

ⁱⁱⁱ “But the disciples themselves must make an effort to remain. Remaining is not simply believing in him, though that is crucial, but includes being in union with him, sharing his thoughts, emotions, intentions and power. In a relationship both parties must be engaged. The divine must take the initiative and provide the means and the ability for the union to take place, but it cannot happen without the response of the disciple.” Rodney Whitacre, *John*, IVPNT, (Olive Tree digital) John 15:1-6.