

Abide and Bear Fruit – John 15:1-8

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John 15:1-8. After a long break, we're back to our study of the book of John. It was good to get away, and I'm thankful for those who preached in my place, but it's good to be back. Because John awaits.

And we've covered a lot. From the prologue in chapter 1 where Jesus is God in the flesh, to miracles and great "I Am" statements that prove it. Including the last one here in v1.

[1] *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."* (ESV) Another metaphor to say that he's the ultimate fulfillment of God's work, to establish his kingdom and sustain his people. It's all there in one of the most loaded statements in all the Bible.

Instead of ethnic Jews being the vine, like they had been since the time of Abraham, Jesus changed everything and said *he's* the vine. *He's* the source and sustenance of life in God's vineyard. And he's the means by which his followers bear *fruit* in the Kingdom.

All of which is overseen by God the Father. [1] *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser."* The caretaker. The gardener. The founder and perfecter of the kingdom. That was v1.

Outline

Then, in v2-8, Jesus tells us what God *does* as the vinedresser. Applying this massive concept of God's Kingdom to each and every one of our lives. Let's read it in full.

[1] *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. [2] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. [3] Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.*

[4] Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. [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. [6] If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

[7] If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Abide and bear fruit. That's the point. Abide for the *purpose* of bearing fruit. Abide in *order* to bear fruit. Emphasized no less than five times in eight verses. Like two sides of a big bass drum. Abide, and bear fruit. Abide, and bear fruit. That much is clear.

What's not so clear, is what those two things mean. Because neither come naturally, and one is another metaphor. So let's start there. Bearing fruit.

To "bear fruit" means to do things that advance the Kingdom

As in do things that cause the vineyard to grow. That's the context here.

Do things that cause the Kingdom of God to expand. His rule and reign in the church and eventually the world. Do things that advance *that* Jesus says.

Which is what? Everything we find in the Bible. From the work of ministry to our spiritual maturity. Keeping the faith to sharing the Gospel. Loving others and loving God. Bearing fruit is doing everything God wants us to do, to advance his Kingdom.

But that's not the end of it. As if God plants us and forgets us. Saves us and ignores us.

Rather, he prunes us. He plants us to bear fruit, and . . .

• Every person who does, God prunes (v2b)

Look at v2 again. [2] *Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away* [I'll come back to that], *and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

Prunes, as in trims. Cleans up. Removes what's out of control or out of balance, like we do with shrubs, and conforms us to his image. Shapes us to his liking. Sanctifies us.

And not just once, but over and over. *Prunes* is present tense. Active and ongoing. Making us ever more holy, ever more healthy, and ever more fruitful.

Like when God changes our desires or narrows our focus. Convicts us of sin and humbles our heart. Shows us our error and calls for repentance. Sometimes even stripping us of good things – like house and home, job and career, friends and family – to focus on the best things. Like worship and witness. Missions and ministry. Growth and discipleship.

That's pruning. Fruitfulness by a thousand sovereign cuts from a careful, loving God. The *perfect* vinedresser.

And nobody's exempt. Praise God. *Every branch that* [bears] *fruit*, v2 – a little fruit, a lot of fruit, any fruit – *he prunes*. So that we can bear more fruit. More good for the Kingdom.

But . . .

• Every person who doesn't, God condemns (v2a, 5-6)

Every person who advances the kingdom, God prunes; but very person who doesn't, God condemns. That's the *first* part of v2 – *Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away*. Removes. Gets rid of.

And he says it even stronger in v6. Recalling Ezekiel 15. [6] *If anyone does not abide in me* [and therefore *doesn't* bear fruit; because abiding is the *key* to bearing fruit], *he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned*. Obviously speaking of hell. The condemnation of eternal punishment.

I used to have a large **picture** in my office with a basketball going through a hoop, and a caption that read, "You're either in or you're out. There's no such thing as life in between." And though it wasn't meant as a biblical saying, it fits.

Every person who bears fruit, God prunes, God grows, God uses. Every person who doesn't, God condemns, God removes.

It’s a stark reality and stark reminder that God is serious about his kingdom.

Now, that’s *not* to say that you can lose your salvation. Some people *think* such a thing based on the words “in me” in v2 – *Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away* – but that stretches the metaphor too far. Especially in light of other Scriptures.

He’s using the illustration of dead branches that often linger on a grape vine to highlight *fruitlessness*, not true connection.

Plus, to say that v2 implies we can lose our salvation flies in the face of v6. Where speaking of the same people, Jesus says those who don’t *abide* in me are taken away and thrown into the fire. Clearly referring to those who aren’t saved.

So when Jesus says in v2 – *Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away*; and in v6 – *If anyone does not abide in me* he’s thrown into the fire; he’s speaking of those who are unsaved. Not those who somehow lose their salvation.

But the fact remains, God condemns the unsaved fruitless and prunes the rest. To be even more fruitful.

And the more *that* happens, the more God is glorified and the more we’re assured. V8 – *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

In other words, we’re not saved to coast. We’re not planted to look good. We’re not branches like he says in v5, to bear fruit for ourselves. Glorify ourselves.

We’re saved to bear fruit for God. We’re saved to bless others. We’re saved to spread the Word. We’re saved to minister. We’re saved to influence. We’re saved to raise godly offspring. We’re saved to make disciples. We’re saved to build the church. We’re saved to glorify the one who connected us to Jesus in the first place, and show beyond a shadow of doubt that we love him and follow him.

And every person who does, God prunes. But everyone who doesn’t, God condemns. That’s the second part of this drumbeat. Bear fruit.

The first part is abide. *Abide* and bear fruit.
Abide means stay connected to, remain in fellowship with, and draw near to
Three parts. The first, stay connected to, comes from the metaphor itself. V4b – *As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine*, [unless it stays connected to the vine; think grapes] *neither can you* [bear fruit], *unless you abide in me*. Unless you stay connected to me, Jesus said. So at a minimum, abide means “stay connected to.”

The second part, remain in fellowship with, comes from the use of the word in other contexts. Like when Jesus said in **Matthew 26:38**, speaking to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, “*Remain here, and watch with me.*” Remain, or *abide* here. Same word in the original Greek. So abide also means remain in fellowship with.

And the last part of the definition, draw near to, comes by implication. Because entering a relationship with Jesus, or as the Bible says, being “in Christ,” is never meant to be a stagnant situation. Where you get *this* close, but no closer.

When Hebrews 10:22 says – *Let us draw near with a true heart*, it’s never meant to be a one-time act. Just like God’s pruning, it’s present tense and ongoing. Let us *continuously* draw near. Let us abide. Different words, same concept. Three parts.

But far better than a definition, is experiencing it. Feeling it. Like experiencing the abiding nature of a good marriage. You can read about it all you want. You can talk about it ‘til the cows come home. And newly engaged couples do.

But until you *experience* the closeness and nearness, until you *experience* the one-flesh fellowship, it’s just words. An abstract concept. Undervalued and unappreciated.

And the same is true of abiding in Christ. Until you do, until you experience it, it’s just words. And just as many are missing out in salvation as they are in marriage.

It’s one thing to be connected to Christ, it’s another thing to abide. One thing to be *saved* by faith, another to draw *near* in faith. To actually fellowship with Jesus. Talk with him and walk with him. Love him and serve him.

When Jesus says in v4, “*Abide in me, and I in you.*” he’s not saying get saved; get connected. He’s saying once you are, abide. Because he’s talking to his closest disciples. Men who *already* believed. Already saved. Telling them to stay close. Draw near. Never wander. Because there’s nothing better, and nothing more fruitful.

• **The question is how**
How do we abide? And the answer is evident. You know. We talk about it all the time.

Read your Bible and pray every day	Love him with all your heart
Fear God and keep his commandments	Walk in his ways
Study to show yourself approved	Trust his sovereignty
Deny yourself and take up your cross	Serve him with everything you have
Pray without ceasing	Do what he says

10 ways to abide in Christ. 10 ways to do what Jesus tells us to do. Because make no mistake, v4 is a command. A command that blesses us, but a command no less.

[4] *Abide in me, and I in you.* Abide in him, and make sure you allow him to abide in you. Make sure you welcome him and include him; in *every* aspect of your life. Make sure you open your heart so he can draw near to *you*. Remain in fellowship with *you*. Stay connected to you.

After all . . .
• **The benefits are glorious (v3-4, 7-8)**
With no less than six right here.

The first is **bearing fruit**. Like we saw in v4-5. [4] *As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.* [5] *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit* [a statement of fact; he it is], *for apart from me you can do nothing.*

The first glorious benefit of abiding in Christ is bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God. Much fruit. Exceeding what we could ever ask or imagine. But we have to abide.

The second is **glorifying God**. Like we saw in v8 – *By this my Father is glorified*. Exalted, praised, magnified. Accomplishing the very purpose for which we are created. It’s a benefit.

Third, also in v8, is **blessed assurance**. [8] *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples*. When we abide, we bear fruit. And when we bear fruit, we prove we’re true followers. To others *and* ourselves.

And how about v7? [7] *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*. It’s the benefit of **answered prayer**. When we *abide* in Christ, we have the *mind* of Christ. And the more we have his mind – the more we think his thoughts and adopt his perspective – the more we pray his will. And the more we pray his will, the more he answers. Glorious.

And don’t leave out **personal pruning** like we saw. V2b again. *Every branch that bears fruit, every one*, he prunes. Personally. Which may seem painful, but in the end it’s glorious. Because *it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness*. (Hebrews 12:11)

And last, is **spiritual cleansing**. Being washed with the word. The truth. Look at v3 – *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you*. Clean, as in cleansed and prepared, by the truth he has spoken and the truth we believe. Ready and able to bear fruit. Because God always enables what God commands. Another glorious benefit of abiding.

But that’s not so clear in verse *three* unless you catch the play on words. Which we can’t see in English.

It starts in v2 where the Greek word for *takes away* is “airei”. “**airei**” = **takes away**. And the Greek word for *prunes* in v2 is “kathairei”. “**kathairei**” = **prunes**. And in v3, the Greek word for *clean* is “katharoi.” “**katharoi**” = **clean**.

So Jesus says in v2 – “*Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he* [“airei’s”], *and every branch that does bear fruit he* [“kathairei’s”]. . . [3] *Already* [v3] *you are* [“katharoi”] *because of the word that I have spoken to you*. Who says Jesus wasn’t a preacher!

Not only does abiding in Christ bear fruit for the Kingdom, glorify God, prove we’re disciples, inform our prayers, and bring about pruning; but it cleanses and prepares us for even *more* pruning and *more* fruit.

The benefits are glorious.

But . . .

- **The consequences are terrible**

The consequences of *not* abiding. Of never being connected in the first place. Consequences like being removed, v2. Cast into hell, v6. And fruitless. V4. Did you see it?

[4] *As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me*. No abiding, no fruit. No fruit, no use. It’s a terrible consequence.

Same for 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*. Nothing kingdom-advancing, that is. Don’t forget the context. Nothing God-glorifying. Nothing church-building. Nothing ministry-fulfilling. Nothing Jesus-exalting.

No abiding, no nothing. Just the futility of a life with no divine purpose, no heavenly approval, and no hope.

So let me bottom line it like this:

To abide and bear fruit is the blessing of our life and the necessity of our walk

If all of these things are true, then that’s true. And I’m not only convinced of it because of this text, but because of my life. The times I abide and the times I don’t. And I bet you are too.

So why do we wander? Why do we rebel? Why do we settle for so much less?

I’ll tell you why. Because we don’t really *value* the benefits. I know *I* don’t sometimes. We don’t really *fear* the consequences. We don’t really *appreciate* the closeness. Not to mention the fact that the world is a siren song and our heart is evil. The devil is deceitful and we’re prone to wander.

If you hear nothing else, hear this. Abide and bear fruit! Draw near and lean in! Return and remain! Settle for no less and drift no more. I guarantee you’ll never regret it, and always cherish it.

And lest you think there’s no way; lest you think you’ve failed to abide far too much for far too long, think again.

He loves you. He cherishes you. He died for you. He lives for you. He waits for you. He forgives you. With grace upon grace and mercy anew. Only abide.

Do you want to break the grip of sin in your life? Abide and bear fruit! Do you want a desire for righteousness? Abide and bear fruit! Do you want to persevere to the end? Abide and bear fruit!

I know of no other way to defeat sin on a consistent basis, and live for God with all my heart, than to abide in Christ.

So for the joy of your soul, abide and bear fruit. For the peace of your heart, abide and bear fruit. For the blessing of blessings, abide and bear fruit.

Prayer – Oh God, forgive us for wandering. And rebelling. Undervaluing all the glorious blessings of being near to your heart. We confess that we don’t even *want* to abide sometimes. Let alone bear fruit. Forgive us, Lord. And cleanse us. Prepare us and prune us. Use us to bear more and more fruit, and make it the joy of our life.

You Are Loved