

*"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."*

—John 20:30–31

**John 15:1–11** - *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 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. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 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. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."*

Jesus is the vine. God is the gardener/farmer. We are the branches, and there are two types of branches—fruit bearing and dead. In John 13 John recorded the extraordinary events of Judas being exposed as a traitor, a dead branch. The number of disciples has gone from twelve to eleven. The gardener has cut away a dead branch. It is a simple analogy to explain what they saw with a man in their midst named Judas. It is possible Jesus is also drawing a distinction that perhaps the remaining disciples would not yet recognize—a distinction between Judas who was a dead branch, and Peter, whom Jesus said would betray Him, a fruitful branch that was to be pruned.

#### JUDAS

Jesus had identified Judas as a treacherous and traitorous man early in His ministry.

**John 6:70–71** - *"Jesus answered them, 'Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?' Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him."*

Judas had a role in the ministry of Jesus and among the Twelve. He maintained and controlled the money box. He was the treasurer—the money man. He was also a thief—the ultimate white-collar criminal. He embezzled money.

**John 12:4–6** - *"But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?' Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it."*

This guy was a classic embezzler. Yes, the poor might have benefitted from his nefarious activity a little bit, but the primary beneficiary was himself—and that's all he cared about.

Like many fraudsters, Judas was good at his craft. He was so skilled that nobody knew he was doing it. Judas was not the obvious choice for who Jesus was referring to when He said in John 6 that *"one of you is a devil"* or in John 13 when He said, *"one of you is going to betray me."*

#### PETER

Peter was a fisherman who left everything to follow Jesus. Leading up to the Upper Room Discourse, Peter made several bold statements professing his faith and devotion in Jesus Christ. He was a spokesman for the disciples, usually giving voice to what they all likely thought but were too reserved—or intimidated—to say out loud. He was bold and outspoken.

Yet, he was about to take quite a fall.

**John 13:37–38** – *“Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.’ Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.’”*

### WHAT SEPARATES JUDAS FROM PETER?

In the metaphor used by Jesus in John 15, the difference between Judas and Peter—who were both to fail terribly and publicly—was *fruit*. Specifically, the difference was about bearing fruit *versus* not bearing fruit. The other difference was that one abided (remained) in Christ and the other did not. There are *five references* to fruit in this passage, all drawing the distinction between those who are saved and those who are not. The proof of a profession of faith is whether that translates to life in a sustained way.

**Matthew 7:20** – *“So then, you will know them by their fruits.”*

Is the branch alive? If so, it bears fruit. If not, it is dead. **Those without fruit are cut away, discarded, and burned (Judas).**

One of the first questions that this passage raises is, “Can I lose my salvation?” Every “branch in me” may sound like Jesus is referring to believers. But these are those who attach themselves to the vine yet have no life. These are people who participate, do the right things, say the right things, and make sure that appearances suggest their attachment. They attend church, Bible study, and MotW; they socialize only with Christians; they walk and talk the acceptable way, etc. But, inwardly they are as dead as can be.

**Hebrews 6:4–8** – *“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.”*

- **“Enlightened”** – They know the truth and can even teach it. They are well-taught and know all the answers.
- **“Tasted”** – They have enjoyed the benefits of the church and fellowship with believers. Believers are given gifts from the Holy Spirit to serve and benefit the church, and they have been there for it, receiving all the benefits of hospitality, teaching, service, administration, etc.
- **“Partakers”** – They are associated with the ministry and with ministers.

What does **“fallen away”** mean? That is described in the metaphor Jesus is conveying in John 15. God is the vinedresser. He “takes” the dead branches away. He “throws them away.” He gathers them up and throws them into the fire. They are dead, and their “falling away” shows this. So they are removed.

**Those with fruit are pruned (Peter).**

Pruning in this metaphor is something the disciples understood well. Jesus teaches that true believers are pruned so that they would bear even more fruit (John 15:2). And, because true believers abide in the vine, the very source of life, they can claim no credit for their fruit. They cannot claim credit for bearing more fruit because they abide in the life-giving vine of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself states, *“Apart from Me you can do nothing”* (v. 5). And the Father—the gardener—prunes believers *to make them more productive*. Those who bear fruit prove their salvation *“prove to be”* the disciples of Jesus Christ (v. 8). Why does the Father do all this? Because *“I have also loved you”* (v. 9).

*“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.”*

—Matthew 7:15–20

Pruning can take many forms. It can be sickness, difficulties, loss of a job, loss of material possessions, slander and defamation by others, false accusations, death of a family member, etc. To be sure, Job's story and his interaction with his friends make clear that circumstances are at the direction and for the purposes of God. From our standpoint, Job's circumstances are an example of a refining fire and a "pruning" that the Father accomplishes in those He has redeemed.

**James 1:2–4** – *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."*

**Pruning:** Trials and testing

**Fruit:** Endurance, perfect, complete (mature), lacking in nothing

**1 Peter 5:10** – *"After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."*

**Pruning:** Suffering

**Fruit:** Perfect, confirm, strengthen, establish

**Hebrews 12:4–13** – *"You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."*

**Pruning:**

- The Lord disciplines (scourges) those He loves.
- The pruning process is needed and normal. We shouldn't take it lightly nor should we overreact.
- It is personal. We are reprov'd (pruned) by Him—as sons!
- If you aren't being pruned, you might still be dead.
- Pruning is for our good (bearing fruit) and God's glory.
- A wise man is eager to be pruned!

**Fruit**

- Sharing in His holiness.
- Peaceful fruit of righteousness.
- Straight paths for your feet.
- Strengthened hands, and knees. Healed bones.

#### **ACTION ITEMS IN RESPONSE TO JOHN 15**

##### **1. Examine Your Faith**

**2 Corinthians 13:5** – *"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?"*

##### **2. Examine Your Fruit**

About 30 years after denying Christ, Peter wrote this...

**1 Peter 1:2–8** – “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This passage is particularly profound knowing the personal experiences of Peter. This is his summation of everything after experiencing life with Jesus, the lowest lows of sin, the difficulties of ministry and persecution, and the hope of glory as he approached his own death. Here is the checklist Peter provides for examining your fruit:

- Diligence
- Moral excellence
- Knowledge – of God and His word
- Self-control
- Perseverance
- Godliness
- Brotherly kindness
- Love

Peter’s list sounds a lot like Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23a).

### **3. Abide in Him**

This phrase (“abide” or “remain”) is used ten times in John 15:1–11. It is vitally important:

- You need the vine (v. 4).
- You will bear much fruit (v. 5).
- It is the proof and assurance of your salvation (v. 6).
- You are dependent on the vine (v. 7).
- It is a love relationship (v. 10).

#### **FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

#### **Questions to Consider:**

1. In what ways have you been “pruned” by God? How has that pruning produced growth in your life?
2. What is the significance of Jesus Christ as “the vine”? When He says He will supply all your needs, what does that mean? How does He do that?
3. With all the advantages of abiding in Christ, why is it so hard?

#### **Additional Resources:**

1. Listen to the sermon, “I Am the True Vine,” preached by John MacArthur, June 19, 2015, and available here: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/43-79/i-am-the-true-vine>
2. Listen to the sermon, “If You Abide in Me,” preached by John MacArthur, April 6, 1975, and available here: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1305/if-you-abide-in-me>

**Audio, video, and handouts for this session:** [www.gracechurch.org/motw](http://www.gracechurch.org/motw)

**Next meeting:** May 28, Spring Fellowship Meal, 6:00pm