

DEVOTIONAL **10**



CHRIST
CHURCH

JOHN 15:1-8

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.

DAY 1

JOHN 15:1

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

This week we will spend time thinking about Jesus’s final “I Am” statement in the book of John: I am the true vine. Today we get additional insight into the Trinity right after that I am statement. In his book *John: An Expositional Commentary*, R.C. Sproul says, “This is the only one of the ‘I am’ sayings that has a second aspect to it. Jesus said, ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser’ (v. 1). With these words, Jesus distinguished between His role and the role of His Father.”

So let’s first think about what a vinedresser does. In *Job Description of a Vinedresser*, Stephanie Reid says, “A vinedresser is an agriculturalist involved in the daily pruning and cultivation of grapevines...to ensure the vineyard has a successful crop from which to create wine, juices and other items. Pruning is one of the preeminent tasks of a vinedresser. ...[It] is an essential task as it removes dead, diseased or stunted fruits to make room for new growth, ultimately leading to a healthy and productive vine.”

So we’re the ones being pruned. We’re the branches and the fruit is like our lives. We can go into each day and embrace whatever we face, knowing that our Father is pruning us. He is shaping us through the circumstances of each day, difficult or sublime. And it’s all somehow for our good. But we need to remember that we’re not branches floating in the air. We’re connected to the vine, and the vine is Jesus.

In talking about justification in his *Systematic Theology*, Charles Hodge gives wonderful insight into the nature of our union with Christ, and how it’s much more than securing a place for us in heaven: “The theory which reduces justification to pardon and its consequences, is inconsistent with what is revealed concerning our union with Christ. That union is mystical, supernatural, representative, and vital. We were in Him before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4); we are in Him as we were in Adam (Romans 5:12, 21; 1 Corinthians 15:22); we are in Him as the members of the body are in the head (Ephesians 1:23, 4:16; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27); we are in Him as the branches are in the vine (John 15:1–12). We are in Him in such a sense that his death is our death, we were crucified with Him (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:1–8); we are so united with Him that we rose with Him, and sit with Him in heavenly places. (Ephesians 2:1–6) In virtue of this union we are (in our measure) what He is. We are the sons of God in Him. And what He did, we did. His righteousness is our righteousness. His life is our life. His exaltation is our exaltation. Such is the pervading representation of the Scriptures. All this is overlooked by the advocates of the opposite theory. According to that view, Christ is no more united to his people, except in sentiment, than to other men...Christ

is not in them the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27) He is not of God made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30) They are not so in Him that, in virtue of that union, they are filled with all the fullness of God. (Colossians 2:10; and Ephesians 3:19) ...If we are so united to Christ as to be made partakers of his life, we are also partakers of his righteousness. What He did in obeying and suffering He did for his people. One essential element of his redeeming work was to satisfy the demands of justice in their behalf, so that in Him and for his sake they are entitled to pardon and eternal life.

PRAYER

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. We have so much that needs to be pruned in our lives. But because we are united to Christ, our true vine, we can have courage to face each day. Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. Amen.

DAY 2

JOHN 15:2b, 5

^{2b} . . . and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. . . .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.

What is your favorite fruit? I haven't met anyone who enjoys *all* fruit. There is usually a particular fruit that just doesn't cut it. When someone asks if we like fruit, typically we answer yes. No need to nuance which fruits fall into which category—the ones we like and the ones we don't like. Obviously, this happens in other areas of life as well. We give general answers or ascend to general categories without worrying about the specifics and nuances. The fruit that Jesus talks about here in John 15, however, is not general. We must seek to understand the specifics of the fruit we are to bear in our life with Jesus.

Generally speaking, fruit imagery in the Bible points to the good results from the life of someone following Jesus. We talk about this colloquially in our church culture in terms of “seeing fruit,” meaning we are looking for results, progress, or change in someone's life. So, the question is, What is that fruit? What is Christian fruit? Paul gives us some direction in Galatians 5:22-23.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

This fruit is singular. There are not multiple fruits, but rather one cohesive fruit. The growth is simultaneous. When growth occurs, our love increases along with our kindness. Goodness along with self-control. Faithfulness with patience. Joy with peace. This Christian fruit equips Jesus-followers to fight against sin through this work of the Spirit. “*The Spirit fights against sin not merely in defense but also in attack by producing in Christians the positive attributes of godly character, all of which are evident in Jesus in the Gospels.*” (Simon Gathercole)

Blessedly, this fruit gets its source, or has its roots, in Jesus. It's the fruit of the Spirit, which is good for Christians in their fight against sin and their desire to glorify God (John 15:8). Yet it is a fruit that comes in abundance through a resting relationship in Jesus—abiding in him, remaining in him, trusting in him for that growth. Verse 5 says, “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit”—*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. A life in Jesus is a life that will result in fruit. Jesus produces the growth of Christian fruit.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, we pray that our fruit would be visible in our lives as we live for, with, and in Jesus. May our fruit be such that it glorifies you and acknowledges its source. May it be a sweet taste to those who benefit from it. And may we have complete trust in Jesus to continue to produce fruit in our lives. It's in the blessed name of the Son we pray. Amen.

DAY 3

JOHN 15:3-4

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.

Every good grower knows that to get good fruit one has to tend to the vine or the tree regularly. In some places in Grand Rapids, one can find apple trees that bear small fruit every fall. Some of these trees are mistaken for crab-apple trees, but, in truth, many of them could produce full-size, delicious, useful fruit if the owner would only take the time to prune the tree, thin out the fruit, and keep up this routine every year. The same principle is true for grapevines. After the harvest, once the vines have gone dormant, the workers cut away the excess growth produced the previous year to prevent it from sapping the energy from the vine during the next growing season and thus reducing the quality of the fruit. If a vine is left to grow on its own year after year, it will trail along further and further, and its fruit will grow smaller and rarer over the whole of the vine. Without regular pruning, cleaning, and upkeep, the vine becomes unfruitful.

The Jews in Jesus's time depended on their ancestor Abraham to be the vine in whom they remained. But we know that this grew in them a false pride and a false sense of security. John the Baptist reminded them to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8). The Jews sought to be holy on the basis of the old covenant, under the law. But this was impossible to fulfill, for only by God's grace is anyone made holy.

What vines of works do you still hold on to as you seek to live a holy life? We too often make the mistake of trying to live by the righteousness of our own works. If only we could be more spiritually disciplined. If only we prayed more, read the Bible more, loved our neighbors better. Little do we realize that we are already made clean—holy—in God's eyes because of the work that Christ has done for us. We do not produce fruit as a means to measure up to God's standards but out of the resulting joy we have in the salvation gift that God has so graciously given us. These things are good, but they are the *fruit* of our faith, not the goal of our faith. Even on our most perfect day, we still fall short of the glory of God.

Jesus' word cuts away at our efforts to be clean before God. He strips away all pretense that we can do anything to earn our justification before him or that we could do anything in our power to escape his wrath. As we abide in God, we are sanctified. We bear fruit in keeping with repentance that is only possible through Christ and the Spirit. Being cleansed by Christ's word is not necessarily an easy process. As God cleans us to bear fruit for him, we may find worldly things cut away—things we had placed in priority above God. And this may pain us in some ways. Where have you found your priorities not matching up with God's priorities?

Thankfully, we have been grafted into Christ. We have already been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are being made holy, and one day we will be glorified. The fruit we bear is the result of our union with Christ, not the condition of it.

PRAYER

*Almighty God, abide in us that we may bear the fruit of your vine. Clean us and make us grow in the light that only comes from you. We know that our fruit is as nothing without you, Lord. Thank you for the Holy Spirit who gives us the strength and endurance to live for you.
Amen*

DAY 4

JOHN 15:7

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

I'd like to start with a quiz. Don't take any longer than five seconds on each question. Ready, go!

What did you have for dinner last Friday?

What color was the shirt you wore yesterday?

What was that thing you were worrying about on Monday? Was it resolved?

What was your take-away from your last time in the Word?

How did you do? Were you able to answer all of the questions? I certainly couldn't, especially given the five second time constraint. The purpose of this exercise was not to remember what you had for dinner last Friday, though I did enjoy reminiscing on that scrumptious brisket burger. The purpose was the get thinking about our memory. Scholars say that most adults can store between 5 and 9 items for for 15 to 30 seconds in their short-term memory. This information can be encoded by rehearsing the information to yourself. This improves recall.

If we need to exercise our brains in order to remember these mundane aspects of life, how much more so does that apply to matters of faith? I don't mean to create a false dichotomy between the mundane and the sacred. For the Christian, the sacred is the lens by which she sees all things. Paul puts it this way in Colossians 3, *"if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."* We are called to actively exercise our God-given mind to remember God's truth and to reorient our lives around it.

In today's passage, Jesus, as the true vine, clarifies the invitation to abide by tying it to his words. Jesus "emphasizes remaining in [his] words, the revelation that he brought."¹ In his commentary on the Gospel of John, J. Ramsey Michaels puts it this way, "With this, [Jesus] begins to clarify one or two points that have so far been obscure. First, he offers a definition, or at least an illustration, of what *'I in you'* (v. 4) or *'I in him'* (v. 5), which by itself sounds very mystical, means concretely. One thing it can mean is that Jesus's spoken 'words' take root, or 'come to dwell,' in the disciples' minds and hearts so as to govern their attitudes and actions."²

In other words, letting nuggets of truth sit in your short-term memory only to be sifted away after 15-30 seconds, leading to no lasting impact in your life, is not the pattern of Christian living that Jesus elucidates. Rather he says abide. In Colossians 3, Paul goes on to say, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."*

Abiding in Jesus is certainly very relational—intimately tied to our union with Christ as we saw on Monday. It is also very practical—put to action by meditating on the words of Jesus, and by extension, the words of God.

By doing so, our hearts and minds are conformed to the heart and mind of Christ. Our Heavenly Father delights to answer the prayers of Jesus (see John 17). So too, in our union with Christ and in our abiding in his words, the Father delights to answer us (see Matthew 7:7-11).

How are you doing abiding in the word of God? Reflect on the blessings and challenges of your devotional life.

Is it hard for you to believe that God delights to hear your prayers? If so, why might that be?

Let this passage invite you to make your dwelling in Jesus and his words today. Bring all your wishes before God, knowing that in Christ, He welcomes your very heart.

George Murray. *John*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 36

J. Ramsey Michaels. *The Gospel of John*, NICNT

PRAYER

Father, thank you for revealing your truth to us by the Word. By the power of your Spirit, guard our hearts and minds in Jesus. Conform us more and more to him. Break our hearts, O Lord, for what breaks yours. May our personal and corporate “missions” reflect your Kingdom Mission. May we know the delight and security of crying out to you as our Abba, Father. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

DAY 5

JOHN 15:8

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

When a sports team wins a championship, it is not uncommon to see a father and son or daughter connect with each other visually from the playing field or court to the spectator stands. That moment of connection acknowledges the time and work that went into the son’s or daughter’s achievement. Parents often sacrifice enormously to see their child achieve on the athletic landscape. They build practice facilities in their houses or driveways. They drive distances for practices and games. They buy all the equipment that is needed to maximize the successes of their young athletes. They orient their lives around their children’s competitive schedules. The same kind of thing happens in the academic realm. At graduation times, many children recognize the enormous role their parents played in helping them achieve their academic success.

We rejoice when we see this dynamic playing out. It is as it should be. Parents are doing what they can to maximize the potential of their child. A child is taking full advantage of his or her parents’ love and sacrifice. The parents teach and support. The children buy into their parents’ instruction and grow in skill, aptitude, and accomplishment. The children make their parents look good. The children’s success reflects the parents’ role and work.

There is more than a little similarity here in what happens as we glorify our heavenly father by obedient, godly living. As followers of Jesus, we glorify the Father as we obey and stay in sync with God’s plan. By following his plan, we shine light on that plan and the way that it upholds the design he made for all of life. We reflect the glory of God by making the beauty, truth, and goodness of his way our way.

And the implications are more than contemporary and temporal. They are eternal. In a sense, we participate in the restoration of what was intended for God and man before the fall. We work and live as stewards of God’s creation, helping to make it conform to his design. In a sense, we recreate that walk with God and the conversation that took place before the temptation. What better words are there to hear in that conversation than “Well done thou good and faithful servant”?

PRAYER

Father, give us a greater vision of what it means to obey you in all of life. Help us to see the full implication of following and obeying you. May our lives and the way we live them be reflective of the glory of your work and person on earth and in our lives. Amen.