



“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.” John 15:4

Jesus Is the True Vine

JOHN 15:1–8 ¹*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

Jesus draws on an everyday sight in the ancient world in order to teach his listeners about the relationship he desires between himself and believers. Grapevines covered the hillsides of Jesus’ world, and the Hebrew Scriptures frequently called Israel the vineyard of God. Isaiah depicts God as spading, clearing, planting, and taking care of the vineyard. Though God hoed, planted, and nurtured the vineyard, he is rewarded with only wild and

sour grapes (Isa 5:1–7). “In the days to come,” the prophet proclaims, “Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit” (Isa 27:6). Jesus announces that he is “the true vine,” bringing forth the fruit that Israel failed to produce. He is the channel through whom God’s blessings flow. He embodies God’s fullest intentions, fulfilling Israel’s destiny as God’s true vine.

“I am the true vine” is the last of Jesus’ seven “I am” sayings in John’s gospel. Notice that Jesus does not say he is the trunk; he is, rather, the whole vine. We are the branches that make up the vine. We receive life from him not by being merely connected to him; we share in his life by becoming part of him. Jesus not only gives us life; he lives his life in us, so that we are fully united with him and live in him. When we are united with Jesus in faith, we actually live with his life and love with his love. This mystical union between Jesus and believers is expressed by the word “abide”: “Abide in me as I abide in you” (verse 4). It suggests a deeply personal and lasting union of lives. The branches abide in the vine so that they can bear fruit; the believer abides in Jesus to produce the lasting fruit of unselfish love.

The source of this life and love is the Father, “the vine-grower.” He “planted” Jesus in our world for the purpose of enabling us to live in his life and to produce the fruits of love. He “tends” the vine by guiding Jesus toward his final loving sacrifice. The wise vine-grower knows that there are two requirements for ensuring maximum fruit production: he removes the branches that bear no fruit (verse 2), and he prunes the branches that bear fruit so that they produce more fruit (verse 3). Perhaps Judas is an example of the first action, as he is cut off for the sake of the vine, and Peter is an example of the second action, as he is disciplined in order to become a more effective disciple. Although some branches must be cut off in order to protect the wellbeing of the vine, it is only the Father who performs such judgment. Vines allowed to grow without pruning will produce smaller and smaller grapes as the vines gradually return to their wild state. The pruning represents the trials and discipline required of those who unite their lives with the loving and total sacrifice of Jesus.

Bearing fruit is the essential purpose of the vine. Bearing much fruit brings glory to the Father and provides evidence of discipleship (verse 8). A fruitful life is sustained by union with Jesus Christ. The “fruit” borne by disciples includes all the manifestations of growth in Christ: love of others, humility, self-giving, faithfulness, and service to others. This is the fruit that will last.

Reflection and discussion

- How does the image of the vine illustrate the mutual indwelling of Jesus and his disciples which he had spoken about earlier, “you in me, and I in you” (14:20)?
- In what ways have I experienced pruning in order to grow and bear more fruit?
- What fruit am I bearing because my life is united with Jesus? In what way does my fruitfulness give glory to God?

Prayer

Fruitful Vine, thank you for uniting your life to mine and for the love you showed in giving your life in sacrifice. Help me to accept the necessary pruning, and help me bear the fruit of loving service for your people.