

The Gospel of John

Lesson 20: The True Vine -- John 15:1-27

They may have been walking now, out of the upper room and through the night toward the garden, perhaps past the great golden vine that decorated the temple, the symbol of Israel. And Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." Israel had been God's vine, planted to bear fruit, and had so often failed. Now Jesus says He is the true vine, the real and faithful one, and His followers are the branches. Everything that follows hangs on one word, a word Jesus repeats again and again until it lodges in the heart: abide. "Abide in me, and I in you."

The picture is simple and searching. A branch produces nothing on its own. Cut it off from the vine and it withers, no matter how strong it looks. All its life, all its fruit, flows from its connection to the vine. "Apart from me," Jesus says, "you can do nothing." Not a little; nothing. We were never meant to generate our own spiritual life by effort and willpower. We were meant to stay connected to Christ, to draw our life from Him, the way a branch draws sap from the vine. The whole secret of fruitfulness is not trying harder but abiding deeper.

And Jesus is honest about the Vinedresser's work, which includes the knife. The Father prunes the fruitful branches so they will bear more, and that pruning is rarely comfortable. He also warns that a branch which does not abide is cut off, thrown away, and burned. This is no idle picture. To stay attached to Christ is life and fruit; to fall away from Him is to wither and be lost. But the dominant note is not fear; it is invitation, a loving call to make our home in Christ, to remain where the life is, and to let His words remain in us until His joy fills us and overflows.

Out of this abiding flows everything Jesus most wants for His people: fruit that lasts, answered prayer, a love for one another that mirrors His own love, and a joy that is full. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." And then He tells them something staggering: "No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends." The Lord of glory calls us His friends. The chapter ends with a sober reminder that a world which hated Him will hate them too, but even that is folded into the call to bear witness. Read this chapter and let its one great word sink in: abide. Stay connected to the Vine, and you will bear fruit you could never produce on your own.

Group Discussion: Jesus said, "apart from me you can do nothing" (v. 5). Why do we so persistently try to live the Christian life by our own effort, and what would change in our discipleship if we truly believed fruit comes from abiding rather than striving?

Personal Reflection: Jesus repeats the word "abide" again and again (vv. 4-10). Honestly, how connected to Christ does your daily life feel right now, and what would it look like to abide in Him more deeply this season?

Read John 15:1-27

Study Questions

1. Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser" (v. 1), and "apart from me you can do nothing" (v. 5). What does the image of the vine and branches teach about the source of all spiritual life and fruit?
2. Jesus said the Father prunes every fruitful branch "that it may bear more fruit" (v. 2). Where has God used painful pruning in your life, and how have you seen it produce growth, or how are you struggling to trust it now?
3. Jesus commands, "Abide in me, and I in you" (v. 4), and ties abiding to fruitfulness and answered prayer (vv. 5, 7). What does it actually mean to abide in Christ, and how is abiding different from mere busyness or activity for Him?
4. Jesus said, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love" (v. 10). Where is obedience the doorway into a deeper experience of Christ's love for you, and where is that being tested right now?
5. Jesus warned that a branch which does not abide in Him "is thrown away... and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (v. 6). What does this sober warning teach about the necessity of continuing in Christ, and how does it fit with the call to remain faithful?
6. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (v. 11). How is the joy Jesus gives connected to abiding and obedience, and where do you most need that fullness of joy?
7. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends," and "No longer do I call you servants... but... friends" (vv. 13, 15). What does it mean that Christ calls us friends, and how does His laying down His life define the love we are to have for one another?
8. Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit" (v. 16). How does it humble and strengthen you to know that your relationship with Christ rests on His initiative and His purpose for your life?
9. Jesus said the world would hate His disciples as it hated Him, yet they were to bear witness, and He promised the Spirit of truth who "will bear witness about me" (vv. 18-27). What does this teach about the cost of following Christ in a hostile world, and how does the promise of the Spirit, given first to the apostles who had been with Him "from the beginning" (v. 27), relate to the witness preserved for us in the New Testament?
10. Look back over this chapter and its one great command to abide. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to abide in Him more deeply and to bear fruit that lasts?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Galatians 5:22–23, the fruit of the Spirit; Psalm 1:1–3, the one planted by streams of water who yields fruit in season; Colossians 1:9–10, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God; Hebrews 12:5–11, the Father’s loving discipline yielding the fruit of righteousness; John 17:20, the apostolic word through which others would believe.