

The Vine of Life

John 15:1-17

The Vine & the Branches

□ On the night before Jesus' death, he told his disciples he was going away; but he would return and take them to the "Father's house" (14:1-3). In the meantime, God would send the Holy Spirit to be their Counselor and Teacher (14:16, 26). After telling his disciples these things, Jesus began to teach them using the vine to illustrate his teaching. Read John 15:1-17.

1. The vine illustration includes four parts: 1) the vine; 2) the branches; 3) the gardener; and 4) the fruit. What does each of these parts represent?



- ✿ Vine (15:1, 5):¹
- ✿ Branches (15:5):²
- ✿ Gardener (15:1):
- ✿ Fruit (15:16): See below.

2. "Fruit" is what the branches are supposed to bear. What is this "fruit?" (Consider John 15:16, Matthew 7:15-20, and Galatians 5:22-23.)
3. In nature, what is necessary for a branch to bear fruit? In the Christian life, what is necessary for "bearing fruit?" (15:4-5) Why is this so?
4. Jesus says, "[The gardener] cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes³ so that it will become even more fruitful" (15:1-2). How does God the Father "prune" in the Christian life? (Also consider Hebrews 12:5-11.)
5. What is the ultimate purpose of "bearing fruit?" (15:8)⁴



Personal Reflection

- Think about the difficulties in your life. How have these difficulties affected your attitude toward God? If you are a child of God (through faith), remember God's special love for you. Consider how God may be "pruning" you, to make you more fruitful.

¹ Jesus says, "I am the true vine" (15:1a). In the Old Testament (OT), the vine was a common symbol for God's people Israel (e.g., Psalm 80:8-16; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:1-21; 19:10-14). However, the OT typically used the vine to illustrate Israel's failure to produce fruit. In contrast to Israel's failure, Jesus is the "true (*alēthinos*) vine".

² The primary application is to believers – those who are *truly* "in Jesus" (15:5). However, the metaphor might also apply to false believers, or to the smaller branches that are "pruned" (cut off) from a main branch (15:2).

³ "prune" (*kathairō* – trim clean) – to trim the branches of the plant to make it more healthy, productive and fruitful.

⁴ Bearing fruit is for the Father's glory. The Gardener should be honored and praised for his beautiful fruit!

Bearing Fruit

- ❑ Christians are expected to bear “fruit”. In the Bible, “fruit” has different aspects. Fruit is the result of one’s labor (15:16).⁵ Fruit is the evidence of one’s true identity (Matthew 7:15-20). In the Christian’s life, fruit is the Christ-like character produced by the Holy Spirit.⁶
- ❑ To bear fruit, branches must “remain in the vine” (15:4-5).⁷ Jesus says, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” (15:4). Jesus also says, “Remain in my love” (15:9). What does it mean to “remain in Jesus Christ?” How do we “remain in him” and “remain in his love?”⁸
 - ✿ In 15:7, Jesus connects remaining in him with “his words remaining in” us. His words are his teachings – life-giving truths that transform our thinking, attitudes, and actions. This means we must receive his words (through the Bible), internalize them, and act on them.
 - ✿ In 15:9-10, Jesus connects remaining in his love (which involves the continued enjoyment of his love) with obedience to God’s commands, especially Jesus’ command to “Love each other as I have loved you” (15:12). Jesus offers himself as the ultimate example of obedience. Jesus showed his obedience and love by dying on the cross.
- ❑ To bear much fruit, pruning is needed (15:2). God the Father “prunes” his children. This pruning includes cutting out wrong attitudes and behaviors, so that we can become more productive and fruitful.⁹
 - ✿ God disciplines his children (Hebrews 12:5-12). “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (12:11).
- ❑ Those who “remain in the Vine” experience the blessings of being in union with Christ.
 - ✿ Answered prayer, based on knowledge of God’s will (15:7)¹⁰
 - ✿ Relationship (15:15) – Jesus’ followers are called “friends” instead of “servants”.¹¹
 - ✿ Joy (15:11) – This joy is not based on earthly circumstances. It is the joy of the Lord.



The Life & You

- What “fruit” is evident in your life? What does your fruit indicate about you? Only in the Vine can we have life and fruit that will last. Do you need to be connected to the Vine?
- As a believer, are you struggling to live the Christian life? Are you trying to bear Christian fruit on your own? It will not work! Make specific commitments to “remain in the Vine”.

⁵ In verse 16, “bearing fruit” probably includes leading others to faith in Christ. This is actually God’s work, but He uses believers in the process. In particular, believers are called to share the gospel. Fruit is the seed-bearing part of the plant. Fruit is designed to reproduce. Believers are to “reproduce” fruitful believers so that the church grows.

⁶ “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23a). “Christian fruit” is “Christ-like fruit” (that is, fruit consistent with the character of Christ).

⁷ To “remain” (*menō*) is to dwell. In nature, the branch must be connected to the main plant, which provides the life and substance necessary to produce the fruit. Likewise the Christian must be united with Christ to have the life and substance needed to bear Christian fruit (15:5). We must be “in Christ”. We are totally dependent on Christ.

⁸ A person is “in Christ” only by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Much of “remaining” in Christ is simple trust, and is realized through awareness of his presence and our dependence on him. We are connected to the Vine by God’s grace through faith. However, faith is demonstrated, deepened and strengthened through certain activities.

⁹ “Pruning” may involve correction by the Holy Spirit through God’s word (the Bible) or through others. It may involve difficulties, trials, troubles, and suffering.

¹⁰ This is not an unconditional guarantee that God will give us everything we ask. The condition for answered prayer is conformance with the will of God, which is the result of truly remaining in Christ.

¹¹ A servant is told what to do with no questions asked. A friend is informed of his master’s thinking. Today, we are informed of God’s thinking through the Bible; and believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who enables us to understand the Bible and experience the relationship we have with God