

# Belonging that Bears Fruit

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[ 0 : 00 ] And thank you, Emily, for serving us this morning. John chapter 15. Emily will read from verse number one down through verse number 17.

! And 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. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers.

And the branches are gathered and thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so have I 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.

[ 1 : 19 ] These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends. For all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you. And appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another. Thank you. Father, again, we come before you and ask that you would be with us in this time of preaching and sitting under the preaching of your word.

Lord, guard my heart, guide my mouth, help me to say those things that will be most beneficial, most helpful, most meaningful, most important for your people to hear this morning.

[ 2 : 27 ] We do want to hear from you. We do want to see our Savior, the Lord Jesus. Holy Spirit, please help. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Yesterday was Valentine's Day, and maybe some of you poured a box of those candy hearts onto the table and immediately began sorting those hearts.

You know the ones I'm talking about, those tiny, pastel, chalky little tablets with messages stamped on them. Love you. Be mine.

Forever. Kiss me. They are not good candy. I'm just telling you. They're not. There's much better candy if you're going to waste calories. Much better candy to have.

I doubt anyone eats them because they taste good. We buy them and we eat them because it's Valentine's Day. Even when we are still young enough to exchange Valentine's, we are drawn into the idea of belonging.

[ 3 : 37 ] We want to hear someone say to us, you are wanted. You are chosen. You matter. You belong. You belong.

You are mine. And as we grow up, we keep chasing this desire for belonging. It's just that the stakes get so much higher.

We look for belonging in romance. We look for belonging in marriages and friendship and reputation and success and power and admiration in importance.

We desperately want to belong. But every earthly belonging is fragile. Spouses die.

Families fracture. Friends drift away. Bodies age. Teams quit. Careers end. Churches close. People that we love leave us.

[ 4 : 40 ] Jesus offers something infinitely more secure. Something more steady than romance.

More stable than family. Stronger, in fact, than any human bond. Followers of Jesus can say, I am his and he is mine.

We sang that together this morning. Tucked into that song. I am his and he is mine.

In John 15, Jesus explains what this belonging to him looks like. It is the night before the crucifixion. Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples. He takes a towel. He kneels and washes their feet. He dismisses Judas Iscariot.

[ 5 : 49 ] He predicts Peter's denial. He steadies their emotions with these words of comfort. Let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God. Believe also in me. Jesus tells them that he is leaving soon. But he will return. And in the meantime, he won't abandon them. He promises the helper, the comforter, the Holy Spirit. And yet, I suspect that the air in the room is heavy.

You can feel it when you read or listen to chapters 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. You can feel the weightiness in the air.

I suspect that the disciples feel the weight of this unknown future without Jesus immediately present with them.

[ 6 : 53 ] And so, as they leave the upper room, Jesus reassures them with this word picture. Verse 1. Verse 1.

Verse 1. Verse 1. I am the true vine. And my Father is the vine dresser. 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. Already, you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

There are no formal parables in John's gospel. But he does record seven word pictures.

Seven metaphors that Jesus uses to describe himself. See if you recall these. I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world.

[ 7 : 58 ] I am the gate. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. That day when he raised his friend Lazarus from the dead.

I am the way and the truth and the life. And then here, I am the true vine.

That word true matters. When Jesus calls himself the true vine, he is not saying that he's telling the truth.

Of course he's telling the truth. He's saying, I am the real vine. The genuine vine. The vine. The vine.

The vine. That the other vine pointed toward. So, who or what is this other vine?

[ 8 : 54 ] Mike already brought us into this in Psalm 80. It's a description of Israel. In the Old Testament, Israel is called God's vine.

In Isaiah chapter 5, there's a beautiful little story of a vineyard. A vineyard that's been carefully planted and protected and lovingly tended to by God.

But instead of producing sweet grapes, this vineyard produces wild, sour, inedible grapes.

I am the true vine means I am the substance to Israel's shadow. I am the reality that Israel pointed toward.

I am accomplishing what Israel failed to accomplish. The path to God then is no longer through union with the nation of Israel.

[ 10 : 01 ] The path toward God is now through union, through belonging to the true vine. To Jesus.

In this word picture, those who belong to Jesus are branches.

On Valentine's Day, of course, especially, but on other special occasions as well, people will give bouquets of flowers to express their affection.

The point is beauty, right? You look at those red roses and you're supposed to think about love. But a vineyard is different.

A vineyard does not exist for decoration. A vineyard exists for one reason. Fruit. Branches that bear no fruit, Jesus says, are cut off.

[ 11 : 11 ] And branches that bear fruit are pruned so that they bear more fruit. Unlike a bouquet of roses, a vineyard's purpose is not beauty for the sake of feelings.

A vineyard exists to maximize fruit. So where does the fruit come from? Well, fruit comes from the branch's connection to the vine.

A branch cannot produce fruit on its own. And Jesus makes this implication explicit starting in verse number four.

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. I am the vine. You are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

[12:24] For apart from me, you can do nothing. 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. But if you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

Where does fruit come from? Fruit comes from connection. The branch has no life in itself.

It is completely dependent upon the vine. Cut off from the vine. It dries out. It withers. It cannot recover.

A branch cannot improvise the life-sustaining power of the vine. Jesus applies this image directly to his followers.

[13:31] Abide in me and I in you. Apart from me, you can do nothing. This is not an exaggeration for the sake of making a point.

This is a diagnosis. You and I have no spiritual life in ourselves. We are completely dependent on Jesus for anything that counts as fruit.

A person may look like a Christian. Talk like a Christian. Move around in Christian circles.

You might even adopt Christian habits. Perhaps you are pursuing a so-called Christian nation. But if you are not connected to Jesus, you will not bear fruit.

Activity is not life. Appearance, looking like a well-connected branch, is not union with Jesus.

[14:50] Branches that produce no fruit are cut off, gathered, and burned. Jesus is not trying to frighten fragile believers. He is exposing false security.

The question that we should ask is not, do I look like I'm attached to the vine? The question is, am I connected to the vine?

Can I really say, I am his, and he is mine? What does it mean to abide?

A branch receives everything from the vine. Every drop of nourishment comes from the vine to the branch.

And in the same way, followers of Jesus receive spiritual life through our union with Christ by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

[16:03] Abiding is a continuous dependence. Abiding is a constant reliance. A settled staying.

You don't just visit with Jesus occasionally. You don't just consult with him in a time of crisis. To abide is to remain in him.

And Jesus promises the result in verse number 5. If you abide in me, you will bear much fruit.

Fruit is not the condition of your union with Jesus. You don't produce fruit so that you belong to Jesus.

Fruit proves that a branch is alive and connected to the vine. And fruit in the life of a follower of Jesus proves that that person really, truly is connected to Jesus.

[17:14] And more fruit means more glory for the Father. Look in verse 8.

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

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love. Now, at this point, it would be possible to misunderstand Jesus.

It would be possible to arrive at a place of believing that, well, if I just stay connected to Jesus, whatever that means, whatever that looks like, then fruit will automatically, inevitably, magically appear in my life.

Jesus immediately corrects this notion. Verse 10. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

[18:39] Just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

Abiding is not passivity.

Abiding includes active obedience. Jesus says, Just as I obey my Father and abide in His love, you obey my commandments and you will abide in my love.

This is not cold, legalistic rule-keeping. This is love. God's love. Expressed in action.

Notice that the command that Jesus highlights is not complicated. Love one another as I have loved you.

[ 19 : 53 ] The love that has eternally flowed between the Father and the Son and the Spirit now flows by the Spirit from the Son into His people.

When we love one another, we are conduits of divine love. Like water hoses connected to the source.

And the hose is getting the water where it needs to go. That's followers of Jesus. Plugged in. Connected to Jesus the source.

His love coming to us. And we are getting His love out to where it needs to go. Abiding is not some kind of abstract, ethereal spirituality.

Abiding produces visible love. We are branches. Branches. Not bouquets.

[ 20 : 57 ] Bouquets look pretty. They look pretty. But branches produce fruit. Jesus adds something I think that surprises our hearts that may tend toward legalism.

It's in verse 11. I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. In other words, obedience to Jesus' commands does not suffocate our joy.

Instead, obedience to Jesus' commands completes our joy. And then Jesus sets the standard.

And it is a high standard. But notice how He also gives a spoiler for what is going to happen in just a few hours.

Verse 13. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down His life for His friends.

[ 22 : 11 ] You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing.

But I have called you friends. For all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you. These things I command you so that you will love one another. Obedience doesn't make someone Jesus' friend.

Obedience characterizes those who are Jesus' friends. A servant ought to obey without explanation, but a friend is brought into an understanding of what the master is doing.

Jesus reveals Himself to His friends. He shares the Father's purposes. He has done that with His disciples here in the upper room, explaining the Holy Spirit, letting them know that He's going to go away, but that He's going to come back, that He's going to prepare a place, but that they will go one day to be with Him.

[ 23 : 54 ] He invites His friends into intimacy, not just instruction. And I think it's so vital to notice that this friendship did not begin with your initiative.

It began when He chose you. Before you reached out for Jesus, Jesus was already reaching for you.

Jesus' friends are not decorative. Did you notice that? they are commissioned to go and bear fruit. His friends make Him known by obeying His Word, loving one another, following His example, and proclaiming His gospel.

Are you Jesus' friend? Are you Jesus' friend? If your honest answer is, I think so, or I hope so, or I don't know, this passage gives you a more specific way of diagnosing your own heart.

[ 25 : 10 ] Here's the question you can ask. Am I bearing fruit? fruit? Dead branches can hang on a vine for a while.

They can look convincing. You might even clip some of those dead branches and bring them into your house as a way of decorating. They're like Valentine's bouquets.

Beautiful, special, because they remind us of someone who loves us, but like Valentine's bouquets, they are fruitless. There is no neutral ground here.

You are either producing fruit for God's glory or you are drifting towards decorative self-deception. But please hear the good news of the gospel.

No one has ever loved like Jesus. While we were sinners, Christ died for us.

[ 26 : 20 ] He laid down his life, not when we were acting, behaving like his friends. No, Jesus laid down his life for those who were living in active rebellion against him.

If you are not Jesus' friend, his arms are not crossed in anger towards you. His arms are open, welcoming, inviting, beckoning, calling, come, come to me.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. if you are a branch in the true vine, then abide in Jesus' love.

You don't have to manufacture spiritual life. You are supplied with it. One of my favorite verses in 2 Peter is so helpful here. 2 Peter 1 and verse 3.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you.

[ 27 : 44 ] Ephesians chapter 1. His spirit lives in you. Christ lives in you. And you can sing with full-throated celebration.

I am his and he is mine. And with Paul you can say it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.

Abiding is not first striving but staying. It is not first doing but receiving all that the vine has to give. you cannot bear fruit unless you abide in him but if you will abide in him you will keep his commandments you will remain in his love you will love others and you will maximize God's glory. So abide in Jesus' love. Second if you are a branch in the true vine expect to be pruned.

[ 28 : 56 ] Jesus is the true vine the father is the vine dresser and it is his responsibility to prune branches not because they have failed but because they're fruitful.

Did you notice that in verse two? Pruning is not discipline for not bearing fruit. Pruning is preparation for greater fruit.

That's hard. It's hard. But the father never wastes a cut.

what he removes is always for your good and his glory. So ask honestly what is choking my spiritual growth?

What is crowding out prayer and time in the word quiet in God's presence? What makes me hesitant to love those that I encounter?

[ 30 : 10 ] what am I afraid of losing? What quenches the spirit's work in my life? Confess it, release it, grieve it, but give it to the gardener.

He knows what he's doing. Expect to be pruned. Finally, go and bear fruit.

Belonging to Jesus is fuel for mission. We are not spectators. Isn't that wonderful? We are not spectators.

We're not bench warmers. We're not standing around on the sidelines. We are active participants in the advance of the gospel.

Fruit won't look identical in all of our lives. fruit is going to look different in your life than in my life, in your spouse's life than in your life, in your children's life than in your life, in your friends.

[ 31 : 20 ] Fruit is going to look different. But it may look like forgiving when holding a grudge and being bitter feels justified.

justified. It may look like giving sacrificially. It may look like laying down your rights and your privileges following Jesus' example.

It may look like speaking when silence would be so much safer. It may look like kindness when rejection feels likely.

gently. It may look like gentleness when grasping for power is all the rage. It may look like persevering when quitting feels reasonable.

Branches that remain in the vine will bear fruit. You may not always see that fruit. You may never hear about the fruit from your life, but your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

[ 32 : 39 ] If you're a branch, go, go and bear fruit. If those candy hearts told the truth, they wouldn't say, call me yours.

they would say, I am his. They wouldn't say, be mine. They would say, he is mine.

As Jesus' friend, you are known. You are not merely tolerated. You are loved, not merely accepted. You belong to him.

belonging to Jesus is more secure than romance, more stable than family, more satisfying than any human relationship, because Jesus is the true vine.

And we are branches, not bouquets, than we can say without pretense or presumption, I am his, and he is mine.

[ 33 : 53 ] Let's pray. Let's pray.