

I Am The True Vine
John 15:1-11
Pastor John Miller

I'm going to do what I normally do, that is, read all eleven verses before we go back and unpack them. As we unpack and look at them tonight, I'm going to be jumping around. I won't be looking at the verses in all chronological order, so it's going to take your undivided attention to follow me very closely with the passage. Jesus says in John 15:1, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman," or the gardener, the vinedresser. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away," that phrase literally means He lifts up or takes away, in the King James Bible, "and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it," or prunes it, "that it may bring forth more fruit. 3 Now ye are clean," says our Lord, "through the word which I have spoken unto you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing," a great phrase, by the way, to underline in your Bible and remember that without Him you can do nothing.

Verse 6, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. 8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit," this is the theme or the topic of this allegory, "so shall ye be my disciples. 9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. 10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

In John 15:1, we come to the seventh, and the last, of the great "I Am" statements of Christ found in the gospel of John. You remember, as we've gone through the gospel, I pointed out there are seven miracles called signs that point to the deity of Christ, and there are seven "I Am" statements that Jesus makes throughout this gospel. Well, we come to the last "I Am," verse 1, "the true vine," or I am the genuine or authentic vine, or some translations have, "I am the vine, the true one." What was the occasion for Jesus' statement? In John 14, He had just introduced the doctrine of the coming Comforter, the parakletos, and said, "I will not leave you comfortless." I actually forgot to mention it, I realized it when I got home after the study last week, and I go home and re-study what I just taught because I want to make sure I really said the right things or understood them. Sometimes I'm plagued by things I didn't say, so pray for me.

When Jesus said, "I will not leave you comfortless," He used a Greek word I didn't point out. It's the word orphanos. "I will not leave you orphans, so I'm going to send the parakletos. He is the One who will come alongside you to comfort, strengthen, and to help you. He's the Holy Spirit, but I'm not going to leave you comfortless." It's a different Greek word. It's orphanos where we

get our word orphans from. Jesus had actually encouraged them, "I'm going to not leave you orphans. I'm going to come to you," and He would come to them through the agency of the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. Now, He moves into this allegory of the vine and the branches and the vinedresser to show them that as we abide in Christ and the Holy Spirit abides in us, the Father will work in our lives pruning us so that our lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can bear fruit for the glory of God. He's going to be leaving them very soon, but He wants them to know, "You're going to have the Holy Spirit. He's going to comfort you, and I'm not going to leave you orphans. I'll come to you, and the Holy Spirit is going to work in your life, guide and direct you, and if you're truly My disciples, you're going to bear much fruit." Jesus gives them an allegory, some say a parable or a metaphor. I think allegory is probably the best term to use of the vine and the branches.

There are three images that I want to look at. Normally, I start in verse 1 and will go through systematically and outline the section, but tonight I want to do it kind of topically, where we take the images in the allegory and just cover what they mean and how they apply. If you're taking notes, the first of the three images is the vine. Notice it in verse 1, "I am the true vine," and then notice it again in verse 5, "I am the vine." Jesus is speaking, right? Some of you have red-letter Bibles, and it's in red letters. My question is: Who is the vine? Jesus. It's very easy to determine who the vine is.

There are three different vines found in the Scriptures. There's, in the sense of the past nation of Israel, was likened unto a vine. Let me give you the references: Psalm 80:8, Isaiah 5:1-7, and then there's Jeremiah 2:21. There are other references, but Israel is likened unto a vine or a vineyard. It could be that Jesus was alluding to this when He said, "I'm the true vine," that He was putting Himself in contrast to the nation of Israel, that didn't remain faithful to the Lord and were unfaithful, and He's saying, "I'm the genuine," or "I'm the authentic," or "I'm the real." As you look at that passage in Isaiah, it talks about God actually setting up a vineyard, putting a hedge around it and a watchtower and all these things. He tills the soil and took care of it and then went to get grapes from the vineyard, and it brought forth wild grapes. It's a picture of the nation of Israel.

Jesus also told a parable about a man who had a vineyard and lent it out to his servants. He sent his messengers to collect his portion from the vineyard, and they despised and persecuted them. Last of all, he sent his son, and they killed and murdered his son. Israel is likened unto a vineyard throughout the Scripture, but here the vineyard is a reference to Jesus Christ. In verse 7, I just want to read the one verse of Isaiah 5, it says, "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, be behold a cry." Israel did not perform or stay faithful to God; but Jesus, actually in contrast to unfaithful Israel, said, "I am the authentic, I am the true, I am the genuine."

There's a future reference to the vineyard; that is, when the Lord comes back in His Second Coming that He's coming to trample the grapes of wrath. It's a picture of His judgment in the Second Coming on the vineyard. There's also our Lord, Himself, who is this picture of the true

or genuine vine.

The word “true” can be translated real, or I like the word genuine, authentic. He’s the original. He’s the One who fulfills all of God’s promises and God’s prophecies, and He’s the One who is taking us to heaven to the Father’s house. As Christians, we don’t live by substitutes, we live as we are attached to the genuine, the original, the real Messiah, Jesus Christ; and we have authentic relationship with God through Jesus.

Secondly, I want to move quickly to the branches where the focus is more in the text. The branches, notice it in verse 5, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Jesus makes it pretty clear in this allegory that first, “I am the vine,” and secondly, “ye are the branches.” He gives us a picture of a vineyard. Vineyards were very, very common in Israel at this time. Some feel that as it says at the end of John 14, “Arise, let us go hence,” that Jesus was maybe, in chapters 15-17, teaching in progress. Remember I talked about that in closing last week, that He said, “Arise, let us go,” and that it could be that He’s moving toward the Garden of Gethsemane as He taught. If so, they might have seen the firewood from the vineyards burning. They might have seen the vine carved in the temple door as they went past that. They might have seen just vines growing on the walls. It doesn’t really say, but Jesus is making it clear that in this analogy He’s the vine, we’re the branches, and that one of the keys to this parable is that we’re to be abiding in Christ, we’re to be connected to Christ. We’re going to talk about what that is, how we do it, and as we do, our lives will bear much fruit.

Believers are branches. It pictures our union and our communion with Christ. Note these three things. It means that we have a living union and communion so that we can bear fruit. A dead branch cannot bear fruit, but if we’re born again and united to Christ, our lives can bear fruit. Secondly, we have a loving union and communion with Him so that we can enjoy our relationship to God. It’s a love relationship. Thirdly, and lastly, we have a lasting relationship with Him. We do not need to fear, we are united to Him, the vine; and His life will flow through us and produce fruit. If we’re united to Him and we have His life in us, we’ll have the fruit flowing through us.

I want to address an issue that is pretty common when you come to this analogy, that is, the issue of what about the fruitless branches because there’s two categories of branches here. There are branches that bear fruit that are pruned and bear more fruit; there are branches that bear no fruit, and they are lifted or taken away. In verse 6, we’ll get to it in just a second, they are burned. The problem and the controversy that arises, and I don’t deal with this controversy because I like to do that or I go out of my way to do that, but I think it’s important, and you can agree or disagree with my views. It’s something that I’ve grappled with and studied for many, many years; that is, the interpretation that the branches that are lifted up in verse 2, “taketh away,” and the branches in verse 6 that “...that abide not in me,” Jesus says, “he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” What this position holds, and it’s pretty common, is that these are believers who backslide, fail to abide in Christ, and they lose their salvation. There are Christians who believe

that, and I accept it. You can hold that position, that's fine. It's not a basis of fellowship or that we split company over, but I do not hold that view. I don't believe that is what Jesus is saying. I don't believe that's what He's conveying,

Let me give you a couple foundational things. I could go into a lot of just arguments, pro and con, on this issue. First, always take a text in context. That's a foundational issue. The context of John 15 is not salvation, it's fruit bearing, which is service. He's not really talking about, "You can lose your salvation if you don't abide in Me, that you'll be broken off and you'll be burned and you're going to go to hell and lose your salvation." I don't think it's really the context or topic here of what's going on.

Let me give you another foundational way to approach this passage, too. Whenever you're studying Scripture and it seems to be that a Scripture over here might contradict a Scripture over there, you always take the clear for the unclear. If you have very clear teaching, and I believe you do, in what are called the didactic epistles, the doctrine epistles, where Paul and Peter and James delete doctrinal issues, and they're very clear, Romans 8, "There is...no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," and nothing "...shall be able to separate us from the love of God." In the very gospel we're in, John 10, Jesus said that we're in His hand and no one can pluck us out of the Father's hands, that, "I give unto them eternal life: and...neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," so why would Jesus turn around in just a couple chapters later in the same book of the Bible, and contradict Himself? Going back to my principle, you always stand on the clear doctrinal teaching from the unclear.

Another thing that's sometimes very dangerous is to take what is an allegory or a metaphor or a parable and read into it in details what was not intended in the original setting. It's like reading into the text as opposed to pulling out of the meaning of the text. Because it's an allegory, we need to be careful that we don't read into the allegory different aspects of what wasn't intended by the Lord. It's foundational to me that a true born again believer who has been regenerated, cannot be lost. I preached an entire series in Romans 8 called, "Blessed Assurance," to argue that position biblically. I think it would be wrong to take one passage here in the gospels and to read this doctrine into it when it's not even consistent with the context or the book of John or with other teaching in the Scriptures. When you have a majority of clear doctrinal passages that teach something, don't take a story or even a historical narrative and have it overturn what is clearly taught doctrinally in other passages.

One of the problems is in verse 2, the phrase, "in me." "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away," and the argument might be: How can you be in Christ and then be a branch that is taken away and burned? Again, I think you're reading into it something that's not intended to be there. You're reading into it the doctrine of Paul's teaching of being in Christ. The church is not born yet. That happens on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, and the church was formed and placed in Christ. The Pauline concept of being "in Christ," is not at all what Jesus is trying to convey in this passage. You say, "Well, then, what does it mean?" That's a good question. I think it's one of two things, and they're both consistent with the text. It means that the branch is a genuine believer, which is not my preference, but this believer is actually

losing rewards or opportunity for service.

In the analogy, these branches...you know, grape wood is not good for building. It's not good for anything but bearing fruit or burning in the fire. It makes good kindling, you can burn it in the fire. Basically, He's saying that there are Christians that are going to lose their rewards. I think a better view is the concept that they are professing. The branches are both professing, but you have two categories of branches: genuine possessing believers and false professing Christians. They profess, but one possesses and one does not. Remember, in the parables given in Matthew 13 called the Kingdom parables, Jesus talked about the wheat and the tares. We looked at that on Sunday morning when we talked about the churches of Asia and that there will be false believers who will be in the church but not in Christ, so they might become church members but aren't genuinely born again or saved. They're the ones that say, "Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name? Didn't we do many wonderful works in Your name?" Jesus said, "Depart from Me. I never knew you." They weren't genuine, authentic, true believers. You say, "Well, what other reason would you have to believe that?" They bore no fruit. If there's life, there will be fruit.

There's different degrees of fruit, and I want to point that out. I won't wait until the end of my message, which I planned to do, but notice in verse 2 you have a statement of no fruit. Then, notice you also have a statement, "beareth fruit," and a third time, "more fruit." In verse 5, you have the fourth statement, "much fruit." You see the progression? There's no fruit, there's fruit, more fruit, and then much fruit. We want to be genuine, authentic believers who not only bear fruit, not only bear more fruit, but we want to bear much fruit. Amen? We want our lives to overflow with fruit for the glory of God, so I believe that those branches that are lifted up or taken away, some say that they're branches that are on the ground and the vinedresser just lifts them up because they can't grow in the dirt, but the indication in verse 6 is that they're actually sent to a fire and burned. These are people who are not real believers, they're professors. That concept, by the way, is perfectly and totally consistent with the gospel of John.

There's a time in John's gospel that says, "Many that believed in Him turned around and went the other way and would follow Him no more." The gospel of John's main theme is the gospel of belief, and it's showing true belief with false belief. Earlier in John 13, Jesus had just warned, "...one of you shall betray me," and He actually said to Peter and the other guys, "...and ye are clean, but not all," and then John says, "He spake of Judas Iscariot." In the context, they had just dismissed a false believer out of the room, Judas, who would be like that branch who would be gathered and burned who would not be saved because he never really had a relationship with Jesus Christ as indicated because there was no life flowing through him. That's my little spiel on that subject. You do have brothers and sisters in Christ that hold the view. I think that they're reading into the text something that is not there. It is not talking about salvation and its loss, it's talking about fruit bearing as evidence of genuine, authentic salvation.

I think the abiding in Christ is much more simple than we make it to be. If you have to abide in Christ (I'm actually saying more than I thought I would say) to maintain your salvation, here's a very, very good question that you would have to answer: How deeply does one abide? How

deeply do you have to abide? What does abiding mean? Read the Bible for one hour or two hours every day? If you don't read the Bible for a whole hour every day, then you're not abiding. Go to church four times a week? Go to church three times a week? Pray tell me, who can answer the question of whether I'm abiding enough because I want to make sure that I don't go to hell? You open up a big can of worms in that you think you're saved by grace through faith but now you have to keep yourself saved by your abiding. Yes, we should abide in Christ, but I believe that abiding in Christ is a synonym for believing in Christ, which is a synonym for being born again, which is a synonym for being a child of God. That's why I think it's simpler than what we make it to be.

I'm going to break down what it means to abide, what the evidence of abiding is, but you basically open up a Pandora's box on how do I know I'm abiding enough, and can you really define abiding for me? If you can't really define abiding, that I'm abiding enough, am I a super saint? Am I doing everything I need? If there's any possibility that I can lose it, then I never know if I'm keeping myself saved or if I'm trusting in the grace of God. In Jude it says, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." The Bible says that you're sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption—not as long as you abide, but until the day of redemption. I don't believe that this is a true believer who lost salvation.

True believers bring forth fruit, notice it in verse 5. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." Notice, first of all, lest I forget, Jesus doesn't say, "You can't do much." We would translate it that way, "You know, without Me, you can't do a lot," but we try, we work, we labor. Jesus said, "Look, without Me, you're a big zero. I just thought I'd encourage you." You can't really do anything without Jesus. You can't save yourself. You can't sanctify yourself. You can't serve the Lord without His Spirit's power in your life, so I love the fact that in verse 5 He says, "...for without me ye can do nothing."

What does it mean to abide in Christ? It means you're living in union with Christ, and it has two parts. It means that I abide in Him, that's my salvation; it means He abides in me, that's my sanctification. Every Christian is in Christ, and Christ is in every Christian. I'm in Christ declared righteous, Christ is in me to make me righteous. I think, again, when people get confused about this doctrine of salvation, they fail to keep these categories clear that the moment you were born again, you were placed into Christ. It wasn't just that you believed Jesus to save you and you accepted salvation and now, "I don't want it anymore," and I can just give it back, something happened to you. You were regenerated, so you'd have to unregenerate yourself; and there's no where in Scripture that teaches that you can do that or how you do that.

The second thing you 'd have to do is get yourself out of Christ and back into Adam because before your salvation you were in Adam the first, and his sin, death, and condemnation was yours. The moment you got saved, you were translated (which is going to be in my sermon this Sunday morning in Colossians when we give thanks to God who hath redeemed us and

translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son) from Satan's kingdom in Adam to God's Kingdom in Christ. For you to lose your salvation, you have to get out of Christ back into Adam, you have to un-regenerate yourself, and I don't know how you do that because the Bible doesn't teach that you can do that or how you do that. It's not just some little gift in a box literally that you can hand back. Something actually happened to you when you were born again—you were indwelt by the Holy Spirit and placed into Christ. I believe that once you're in Christ, you're always in Christ. You can have a saved soul, this is consistent with this allegory, but a wasted life and get to heaven and be ashamed.

There are those times that are so painful for me when my life flashes before me and I realize how quick life has passed and how little time I have left and to think I'm going to see Jesus. I don't want to think, I could've done more. I could've been more faithful. I should've been more committed. I should've spent more time in prayer. I should've spent more time preaching. I should've tried to evangelize more. I should've told my friends, family, and neighbors more about Jesus. We don't want to have saved souls and wasted lives. We're not working for salvation, we're working because we're saved; and He's working in us as we abide and His life flows through us. I abide in Him, and He abides in me.

The word "abide" literally means to remain, to dwell, and I like the connotation in the word of connection. It means union or connection or abiding or dwelling. How do I abide in Christ? Let me give you some verses before I break it down. In 1 John 4:15, and this is something very rarely do people do, is look at John, the same author of this gospel, at his epistle, his doctrinal epistle, and understand what it means to abide. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth," abides, "in him, and he in God." That's almost like the same picture of the vine and the branches.

Secondly, in 1 John 3:23-24, "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. 24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth," abides, "in him, and he in him," so you are in Him, and He is in you. Thirdly, 1 John 2:24, "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." Three times in John's epistles he makes it clear that believing in Jesus, we abide in Him and He abides in us.

Let's look at the text of John 15. I believe that we abide in Christ through His Word. Look at verse 3. He says, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you," so you are clean through the Word. This is a marvelous verse. I want you to take note of it. It makes it very clear that God sanctifies us through, by His Word. There are volumes that I could say about that, but I'm always saying that it's the Spirit of God using the Word of God to transform the child of God into the image of the Son of God. I know I've mentioned it before, but I can't resist. Good ol' Dr. J. Vernon McGee years ago said that the Holy Spirit is like a train, and a train rides on a track. If the train gets off the track, it doesn't work. It doesn't function. Trains are limited to a track to run on. The Holy Spirit has a track, like a train, and the track the Holy Spirit runs on is the Bible. He doesn't just float around and work in a void. As the Word of God

goes out, the Spirit of God uses God's Word to convict, convince of sin, to regenerate and to sanctify the believer. Do you know that you cannot be saved without the Bible? Because it's the Word of God, "...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," a message preached about Christ. The Spirit of God and the Word of God bring the life of God into your soul.

It's the Word of God that God uses to sanctify you. If you read any book on the doctrine of sanctification, and one of the chapters (if it doesn't have it, then you got gypped when you bought your book) is going to be on sanctification through the Word of God. God uses trials, as we'll see He prunes us, but He uses His Word to prune, shape, mold, and sanctify us. He says, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." Notice verse 7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." I'm going to get to that second half in just a moment. You can't be an abiding Christian that bears fruit without the Bible, without the Word of God. Read Psalm 1, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law doth he meditate," not meditates, "day and night." Amen? Which means to just study over and over, meditating on God's Word. "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water...his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." There you go, God's Word producing fruit in our lives; and if that's the case, then we need to have habit.

We need to make a daily habit of spending time in God's Word, and we need to have system. Don't just get up in the morning and flip the Bible and say, "Where shall I read today?" BOOM! and you look at the verse that says Judas went out and hung himself. "No, that's not going to work right now," and BOOM! It says, go and do likewise. "No, that's not good." You can't just jump around the Bible. Pick a book of the Bible, study the introduction/background of the book, read it several times. Read it from chapter 1:1 all the way through systematically, and meditate on God's Word. The Bible was written book by book, read it book by book. It's so important that you, if you're going to abide in Christ and bear fruit, spend time in God's Word.

The second way we abide is through prayer. These, by the way, are not only how you abide but they are evidence of fruit. Fruit is abiding in His Word. Fruit is praying, so we abide through prayer, and we just read it in verse 7, "... ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." In order for that to happen, you have to be abiding in God's Word. You can't be neglecting the Word and expect God to answer any prayer that you want Him to answer.

Here's the third, through obedience to God, verse 10. Notice it, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." The three ways that we abide are through His Word, through prayer, and through obedience. The result is fruit. The fruit is actually evidenced by love, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." Notice, backing up into verse 9, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love." We get in the Word of God, we pray, and God answers prayer; and we obey and then we show love. Love is the mark of a true believer. Jesus actually

said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Let me just rip off these verses. I can't take the time to talk about them. They give you five places in the New Testament where it tells us what fruit is. The first one, Romans 1:13, it is winning others to Christ. It's evangelism. The second one is in Romans 6:22, it's actually living a holy life. The third one is Philippians 4:14, it's sharing what we possess, fruit giving. Paul talks about the fruit of the Philippians' gift, so when you give to the church—God's work, to missions, ministry, to people in need—that's fruit. The fourth is Hebrews 13:15, and that's worship, the fruit of our lips. When you come to church, you can sing in the car, you can sing in the shower, you can sing in the kitchen, you can sing wherever you're at, that's fruit. That's the fruit of your lips, worshiping God. The fifth is Galatians 5:22, where it speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, and it starts with love, joy, and peace. How interesting. The fruit of the Spirit is love, and it's manifested by joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, and meekness—all of the fruit of the Spirit.

It's interesting. Notice in our text in verse 9, we have a reference to love. In verse 11, we have a reference to joy, and back in John 14:27, we have a reference to peace, "...my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you," and that we have His peace. We have His love, His joy, and we have His peace, that's the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

There's one third, and last, image in this allegory, the gardener in verse 1. Back up there with me. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman." We have three images—the vine, Jesus; the branches, the believer; and the farmer, God the Father. So, here's God the Father with overalls on. In some translations, perhaps better, vinedresser or husbandman is the way that is rendered, which means that He cares for the vine. Now, I've never grown grapes, and I don't have a vineyard, but it's a lot of work and takes a lot of care and attention to grow good grapes or a good vineyard. The vinedresser is God the Father, and He gives all His love, all His care, and all His attention to growing these grapes, which just a little quick thought popped into my brain. I want to go back to: Are the branches broken off, believers who lose their salvation? The whole picture here is of a loving, caring Father God who takes care of the vineyard. The focus isn't that He rips branches off because they didn't produce enough fruit and throw them in the fire. These were dead branches that have no life. They weren't one with Him.

The vinedresser is a reference to God the Father. The literal rendering of that is a cultivator or worker of the ground. Now, the Father is the One who cares for the vineyard, for the vines, and for the grapes or the fruit. What does He do? Notice it, verse 2, He prunes it. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away," but notice the second half of verse 2, "and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it," prunes it. It means to wash or to cleanse, but He cleans it by cutting back or pruning. What a beautiful picture of God's loving care of our lives in that He prunes away that which is hindering us from producing fruit. Now, I'm not much of a gardener, and you don't want me to prune your trees or your vines or your flowers because I'll just wipe them out. Aren't you glad that when God gets the sheers and comes to prune us, He knows what He's doing—how to prune us, when to prune us—because certain vines have to be pruned at the right time, in the right way, or they'll be destroyed. God prunes us or makes clean to purify us. It's the Father's work of removing everything that would be detrimental to spiritual

fruit in our lives.

In Hebrews 12:11, it says, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” Can you imagine for a moment if the vine could talk when the vinedresser comes with the sheers to prune it? It’s like, “What are you doing? Ouch! Why did you lop off that branch?” I can imagine that sometimes they would almost start to shiver like, “Haaha, here comes the guy with the...” sometimes we don’t know what God is doing in our lives, and sometimes we’re freaking out like, “Why did you take that away?” and “Why did you take that away? Why did you cut that out of my life?” It’s because He loves you. He’s pruning you and wants you to bear more fruit. If the vine was left to itself, it wouldn’t produce as much fruit. He wants to prune us back so that we can bring more fruit.

God sanctifies us through His Word, but you know another thing He sanctifies us through? Trials, suffering, bereavement, loss, disappointments, and heartache. It weans us from the world and makes us long for heaven. It gives us a hunger for more of God in our lives. He prunes off bad things, sinful habits, maybe sometimes friends or possessions or things that are hindering us. In Hebrews 12 it says, “...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,” so remember, the pruning may be painful, but it’s God’s means for more fruit (verse 2) and for much fruit (verse 5). I don’t know about you, but I found it to be so true in my life that God’s pruning process has always brought more fruit—that as God prunes us, more fruit is produced. F.B. Meyer said, “Yield thyself to those loving hands. They may lead thee afar from thy original purpose—twisting thee in and out with many a contortion; fixing thee with nail and fastening; trailing thee over the wall, to droop thy clusters to the hands of strangers. Nevertheless, be sure to let Him have his way with thee; this is necessary for the accomplishment of his purpose.” Let God prune you. Let God cleanse you so that you can bear more fruit.

It was the saintly Samuel Rutherford that said, “Why should I tremble that the plough of my Lord, that maketh deep furrows on my soul? I know He is no idle husbandman, He purposeth a crop.” When God lets pain come into your life, it’s for His loving purpose—for our good, and for His glory. Remember, He knows when and how to prune us. His hand is never nearer than when He’s pruning you. I’ve always loved John Bunyan’s statement, “In times of affliction we most commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God.” If you value God’s presence and fruit in your life for His glory, then you’ll say, “Lord, have Your way.” Instead of resisting and fighting, you’ll yield to Him and let Him produce that fruit in your life manifested by love (verse 9), by keeping His commandments as well (verse 10), and also the joy of the Lord (verse 11). “These things have I spoken unto you,” what things? The allegory of the parable of the vine and the vinedresser and the branches, “that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”

By way of summary, abiding brings fruit. Fruit is prayer (verse 7), it’s love (verse 9) for God and others, it’s obedience (verse 10), and it brings joy (verse 11). Jesus said in Matthew 7:16, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” Amen?