

I AM the True Vine
John 15:1-16:4
sermon series: *Who Is Jesus?*, pt. 7
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Introduction.

Last words are lasting words. After the Last Supper, Jesus and his 11 disciples no doubt went through vineyards en route to Gethsemane. While walking past the Temple, perhaps Jesus pointed to the Temple Doors on which were embossed a vine and branches, the national symbol of Israel to make an important point. Through this study guide, ponder with others insights that you glean from the text.¹

1. Read carefully John 15:1-17. What do you learn about a grape vine and its branches? What does this say about the Christian life?
2. Do you think that Jesus has in mind the conversion of souls here or does he have in mind thinks like *the fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5)? Earl Palmer comments, “The fruit of the branches is not more branches (souls won) but fruit - the good results of being with Jesus Christ. Indeed, those good results do win others.” How are we to understand fruit-bearing?
3. Assume for the purposes of group discussion, that Palmer’s comment is correct. Share with your group the fruit in your life. How is this fruit a result of your abiding in Christ? Share with others what fruit you have observed in his/her life.
4. There are two images in John 15:2 which are frightening. The branches which bear no fruit are *cut off*, while fruit bearing branches are *cut back* (pruned). (Hebrews 12:11). What does Jesus have in mind here? How have you experienced God’s pruning in your life? What was it like at the present? How did you view it in hindsight?
5. Notice verse 4. Jesus never commands his disciples to *bear fruit*. What does he command? In his commentary, Milne writes, “Fruit-bearing for God is not a human possibility; it is Christ’s work through us. The alternatives are starkly expressed: separate from Christ ‘no fruit’; united to Christ, ‘much fruit.’” Thoughts?
6. What does it mean to *abide in Christ* (John 15:4)?
7. In John 15:15 Jesus calls his disciples “*friends*.” What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus? Is it possible to take this too far, thinking of Jesus simply as our “*buddy*”? How do we reconcile this *friendship* with John’s own reaction to his encounter with the glorified Jesus in Revelation 1:12-17 where John sees the radiant Lord and falls as though dead?

¹ I am indebted to a study guide of Santa Barbara Community Church for many of these thought questions.

Example from the life Hudson Taylor

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) is one of the most well-known missionaries of the modern era. Taylor's life-long burden for the people of China led to his 51 years of work in Asia and to the founding of the China Inland Missions (CIM).

In 1869 Hudson Taylor went through a spiritual crisis. His soul dried up even as he preached, practiced medicine, and ran the CIM. It was John 15 which led him out of the spiritual desert. Contemplating John 15:1, Hudson wrote,

He was rich, truly, but I was poor; he strong, but I weak. I knew full well that there was in the root, the stem, abundant fatness; but how to get it into my puny little branch was the question.

But after much thought and prayer, Taylor gained a deeper understanding of this text. He wrote in his journal,

As I thought of the vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in having wished to get the sap, the fulness out of Him. I saw not only that Jesus would never leave me, but that I was a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. The vine now I see, is not the root merely, but all - root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit: and Jesus is not only that: He is oil and sunshine, air and showers, and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished for or needed. Oh, the joy of seeing this truth!

Hudson Taylor soon found himself in conversation with another CIM missionary, Charles Judd.

Oh, Mr. Judd. God has made me a new man! God has made me a new man! I have not got to make myself a branch, the Lord Jesus tells me I am a branch. I am part of Him, and have just to believe it.... I am a member of Christ, and may take all I need of His fulness. I have seen it long enough in the Bible, but I believe it now as a living reality. ²

Notes from the Sermon:

Application:

What one response to this passage might you purpose to make this coming week?

² quotations from J. Hudson Taylor: A Man in Christ, by Roger Steer, 1990, pp. 233-237