

Topic	The Key to a Fruitful Life
Reference	John 15:1-5
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In 2005, Steve Jobs at the Stamford University graduation service got up, took the podium and talked about how to live before you die. He said and I quote,

“you’ve got to find what you love. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work and the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking and do not settle as with all matters of the heart you will know when you find it and like any great relationship it gets better and better and better over time. So keep looking and do not settle”.

Steve Jobs was the CEO of Apple and he passed away on October 11, 2011. He throughout his lifetime has been called a Tech Titan. He has been called the visionary. He has been called the pioneer. Just in the same speech Steve Jobs shared a question that he asked of himself to make sure that he was living his life to the fullest. He asked this question, “if today is the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?”

How would you answer that question? Are you satisfied with your activities today. Do you have a great work to do today. Would you change anything in your schedule if this happen to be the last day of your life? Listen to what Jesus says about a truly fruitful life. In John chapter 15:1-5 we find the key to effective Christian living and what it means to live a truly fruit producing life and really it is not how much of the Bible you know, it is not how long you pray and even it is not what church you attend. It is none of those things. The key to being greatly used by God this morning or throughout your life is this principle that we will unpack later on in this sermon and it is called abiding in Christ. In fact, apostle John speaks of abiding in Christ a lot. The letter of 1-John is written entirely on the importance of abiding in Christ.

So, we come to John 15, Jesus knew that his time was short and so he gathered his disciples together and gave them his final teaching. It was sort of like the disciple’s graduation service. Jesus was the keynote speaker of that address. So he summarized everything he had taught them in his ministry with them. He told them what they must not forget. He told them what they must remember

and he reminded them of the most essential truths that they would remember and he warned them of the trials that would be coming. He told them to stay strong in the words that he had spoken to them. And as he so often does, Jesus uses a common everyday picture to portray the lesson that he is about to teach them. So in John 15 this image of a vine, vinedresser, branches and then the fruit that grows on the branches.

It is important to know what the last verse of the previous chapter speaks about. John 14:31 says, but I do as the father has commanded me so that the world may know that I love the father, rise let us go from here. So, Jesus and his disciples are just about to leave the upper room where they have just shared the Passover meal and so they are going to the garden to Gethsemane where Jesus would pray his great high priestly prayer before he is shortly arrested by the mob led by Judas.

Today we are removed roughly 2000 years removed from that night but the work of the Lord still continues. It is continued by his followers. That's how his purposes are being carried out in our communities today. So some of us maybe sitting here this morning, thinking how in the world am I accomplishing God's purposes or how in the world am I producing this type of fruit that Jesus is speaking about.

Today I want to share with you three simple take away from this passage

Jesus is the true vine
The father makes us productive by pruning
We bear fruit by abiding in Christ

JESUS IS THE TRUE VINE

1" I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

Now Jesus explains this image right from the start. Why did Jesus said this? Because he is distinguishing himself from the nation of Israel. Why? Because in the Old Testament the image of vine is used to represent the nation of Israel. What is really interesting is that every time this image of a vine is used in the Old Testament concerning the nation of Israel it is negative. It is because God planted Israel as a vine to bear fruit, but they failed, and they failed miserably because they were impatient and disobedient. They also ran after false gods. Historically, Israel was a very forgetful nation when it comes to the provision of God. Israel failed to be the vine that produce good fruits and God brought judgement on them.

Isaiah 5:1 Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 2He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

Israel was not the vine that God intended them to be. So why then is Jesus claiming to be the true vine? It is because Jesus is saying, wherever Israel fails I will overcome. Jesus is the true vine that means that wherever Israel wavered Jesus will holdfast. In all the places where Israel forsook God, Jesus will trust God the father all the way to the end to the cross. What a glorious truth.

In the second part of the verse we see the God the Father portrayed to us as a vinedresser. A vinedresser knows all about grapes. He knows how they grow, what they need and when they need it. So, a vinedresser's grapes will remain with him for decades, because it is intimately connected with his vines. He knows every aspect of the vine. That's what a vinedresser does. In this scenario there is only one vine that the vinedresser has to tend, it is Jesus. This particular vine has different branches coming off of him. However, the main part of tending this vine is to look after the branches, you and I. It is the branches that Jesus talks about in John chapter 15:2. The best word to describe the relationship between the branches and the vine is this little word that we know very well. It is called dependence. I as the branch am dependent on Jesus as the vine to have his life, to have his sustenance flow through him to me as his branch. So, the branch is just an extension of the vine. Today, very sadly some people reverse that picture. We put ourselves in the vine and Jesus is just an attachment, Jesus is just a branch. So, we have our plans, we have our goals, we have our jobs, we have our families, we have our problems, they are all branches in our lives and so Jesus is just another branch. Often times in the business of life we don't intentionally but subconsciously we tend to make ourselves the god of our own lives.

THE FATHER MAKES US PRODUCTIVE BY PRUNING:

2Every 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.

There are two kinds of branches, bearing fruit one and the ones that don't bear fruit. Jesus has a great way of making profound statements in the most simplest ways.

First type of branch, the ones that don't bear fruit. Who are they? To understand what is being said here we need to know what Jesus is trying to imply. In John 13, there are two types of disciples in that upper room.

John 13:1

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,

Jesus knew that Judas would betray him.

10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." **11** For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

Once a person is forgiven, he is clean and does not need the bathing or forgiveness again. All that is necessary is for him is to clean his feet, is to wash his feet. It signifies to confess and repent of your daily sins. You don't need to be saved again, you just need to consistently and continually repent and confess of your sin. Repentance also means to change your attitude towards your sin. You will realize that's not honoring God. So, you change your attitude towards sin. That's what repentance speaks about.

Judas appeared to be just like the other disciples, he was with Jesus for the same amount of time. In fact, Judas was given the responsibility of handling the money. So it is pretty obvious that Judas was not really kind of outcast, he was given a very prominent role in the discipleship group. That's where Judas was and interestingly it appeared that he was just a branch in the vine just like everyone else but he never bore real fruit. So God removes this particular branch from the vine and it is burnt. Interestingly, there was nothing obvious in the life and behavior and character of Judas that would make us kind of classify him as a false disciple. Look through the gospels, there was nothing extraordinary about him but he was not really one of Jesus's disciples. He was visibly attached and for all intents and purposes he looked like everybody else and also did what everyone else did. My friends, today there are people just like Judas in many churches. People that appear by human perception to be united with Christ, we do the Christian things, we take part in religious activities, we become church members, we take communion, but people are superficially attached to the vine, not really.

The second type of branch,

every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

So, God the father does some really hard work here. Pruning means to make clean. It could mean to clean out the weeds in the soil before you plant a seed. It could also mean anything that cleanses any plant so that it can bear more fruit. So, God goes to work with a pruning knife. If you are cut by knife it hurts, so the father cuts away sin. He cuts away useless wasteful behavior. He cuts away preoccupied things in our minds when we think of things that don't really matter but we just waste our time thinking of these things, preoccupied thoughts. He casts those away in many ways. He does it through sickness. He will do it through the loss of a job. He will do it through hardships. He will do it through the loss of a friend, the loss of family member. He may do it through the loss of material gain. That is his pruning work. That is how he does it. He does it through people that you love and people that you don't love. God has his own ways of doing pruning. So if you look at James chapter 1:2-4

2Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

That is the pruning knife. There are couple of different responses that we can have to this pruning. We could drown ourselves in self-pity, disappointment, complaining, anxiety or you can look heaven and say thank you God for using the pruning knife so that I can bear more fruit for your glory. That's what the pruning knife does for you. So, we could also reply with this response, why me God, why is this happening to me.

Another way to look at it is in Hebrew 12:7

7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

God the father disciplines you because you are His child. He disciplines those whom He loves. God the father has the knife and this knife is

3Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

A child of God is saved through the Word of God. Paul says faith comes by hearing the word. So, it is the Word of God that does its work in your life. That's

what John 15:3 says. It is not the afflictions that you are going through per se that is the knife. It is the Word of God that cuts into your life.

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

So here is the idea, God the father is the discipliner and the father is the one who in his providence and in his sovereignty brings the trial into your life. So, he brings the trial into your life and now what the Word of God becomes the actual cutting instrument. Because when the trial comes into our life and we react in the wrong way the Word of God convicts us. The father brings the trial and the Word of God cuts into your life, it convicts us. Charles Spurgeon says,

"It is the word that prunes a Christian. It is the truth that purges him."

The scripture is made powerful in our lives through the spirit of God, effectively cleansing us of our sin.

WE BEAR FRUIT BY ABIDING IN CHRIST:

4 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. 5 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.

A vine has one distinct purpose of bearing fruit. The vine itself doesn't bear the fruit, it delegates the fruit bearing to the branches. It is on the branches that the fruit is bore.

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

There are three basic fruits that the Lord will bear in your life when you are attached to the vine:

SANCTIFICATION:

It means that we become more like Jesus Christ. If we look at Colossians 1:10

10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Sanctification is like iceberg. Because 90% of the iceberg is below water and as the sun shines on the iceberg the exposed part melts away and so when it melts away it moves the lower part upward. In the same way, we are only aware of a small part of our sin at any given time and as the spirit of the Lord is at work in our lives we become aware of new areas that need the pruning work of God. So it is like you are done with one area and another part comes up. It happens for the rest of your life, but that is sanctification. It is a lifelong process.

SPIRITUALITY:

That's the second type of fruit that the father will bear in our lives. That is we behave more like him.

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Every person when they are born again of the spirit, when they have a regenerating experience, when they are converted by the spirit of God, they start life as a baby and then they grow as Paul says to maturity in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we are growing in our walk with the Lord, let us grow from a baby and keep growing in our maturity. That's the goal of spirituality that we become more like him.

SIMILARITY:

We are burdened like Him. We will share the same desires as our Lord Jesus Christ. In Romans chapter 1 Paul says it beautifully

13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Are we bringing people to a place where we have seen the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our role. Let us all hold our role in whatever places we are.

Christians are known for their fruits. This fruit is righteous attitudes, righteous desires, righteous longing, righteous affections, righteous virtues and righteous behaviors. That is what it means this fruit to be bearing in your life. It is a manifestation of life and in John chapter 10 Jesus says, I have come to give you life in abundance and so where the life of God exists there will also be fruit there. That is why Paul says in Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

That is why it says at the end of verse 8 in John 15, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. That's why it says in James 2:17, faith without works is dead. The only way that you know the faith is real, is by the evidence of it.

As we bearing fruit for the glory of your creator, are you growing in your fruit bearing.

What does it mean to abide in Christ?

4 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. 5 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.

The challenge for us to continually, not one time, not two times but continually throughout your life to be satisfied, immersed in and empowered by Lord Jesus Christ and his work in your life.

To abide in Christ is not a one-time deal, it is a lifelong extension of encountering Jesus in every aspect of your life. Whatever you are doing, you are abiding in Christ. It is a continual thing. We have to enveloped ourselves in Jesus Christ.

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 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.

What a challenge for us to abide in Christ. It is a challenge because it will demolish our idea of self-dependence. When you are lying in a hospital bed and you are struggling to do the most basic of things and you have to rely on the doctors and the nurses and your family members to help you with the most basic functions, wouldn't that destroy all your ideas of self-sufficiency. The father in his pruning would bring us to that place. If that's what it requires, so that we learn to depend on him in all areas of our life. That's the business that he is in and it makes our ideas of self-sufficiency truly foolish.

To abide means to cherish him, it means to esteem him above all other. Paul says it beautifully in Philippians chapter 3, to count everything as loss compared to knowing him. That's abiding.

Abiding means to obey his commandments.

10 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.

So, Jesus is saying we can't abide in him if we don't keep his commandments which is the first thing and we can't obey his commandments if we don't abide in him. What it means is that as we remain connected to Jesus, his life travels through the vine and to the branches and it causes us to bear fruit.

John Piper says,

"Jesus' demands are for a lifetime. He does not demand a single decision to repent or come or believe or love or listen. All these continue. The transformation of repentance continues. Coming to Jesus again and again continues. Believing in him hour by hour continues. Listening to his word as the daily source of spiritual life continues. Jesus demands the engagement of our minds and hearts everyday of our lives."

I think it is pretty clear here what abiding really is. We are much easier to cleanup when we are remaining, when we are dwelling, when we are staying in the right environment, we are easier to clean up. Religion says, get the strongest man and scrape the dirt off right now. A relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ says, soak. Stay in the right environment, dwell, keep remaining.

Are you grafted into the vine today? Have you been genuinely born again of the spirit of God? Can you pinpoint a time in your life when that relationship came to be in your life? If not, you can be grafted into the vine today. How? By coming to Jesus by faith and repenting of your sin, turning your attitude from your sin, changing your attitude from your sin to Jesus Christ and trusting him.

Secondly, is the vinedresser performing his pruning work in your life?

Finally, are you abiding in the vine? Are you drawing your strength from him so that he is able to produce his fruit in your life.

My friends these are questions that you need to ask yourselves.