



John 15:1-8
I Am
The Vine

Rev. Brian North
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Today, we're continuing our series on the “I am” statements of Jesus Christ. In each of these metaphorical statements Jesus shares who He is, but each statement is like looking at him through a different set of lenses, giving us a slightly different perspective on Him.

Since “fatherhood” in a general sense...and our own dads...or our own role as dads (for those of us who are), is on the minds of many of us today, this passage is particularly relevant. The Father/child relationship is an important one. There’s a connection between the two, where the child is like the branch, and the father is like the vine. The same could be said for mothers, of course, too. Literally, in the case of biological children, there is a physical connection between the parents and their child/children because of the genes that are passed on.

Additionally, and maybe this is actually the strongest connection between a parent and child, is the modeling and influence in a family as they live together in the home. The time that they spend together talking, being together, kids observing, mimicking, and so forth: the modeling of the parent about what it means to be human and how to interact with people, how we handle situations, the likes and dislikes we have that our kids pick up on – this is all a huge factor in the connection between a parent and child, in much the same way as a branch is connected to a vine.

So my kids, for example: as they grow up as an extension of the “vine” in our family, they have taken on many of Gwen’s and my characteristics – both good and bad – as well as our likes, and dislikes. So they root for the Huskies, the Mariners, the Seahawks; they have all learned to ski and enjoy it very much. Of course, all of those ones we pretty much told them they had to like those things if they wanted to continue to live rent-free in the home. Additionally, they’ve all gravitated toward other athletic endeavors, as well as developing musical talent; we’ve instilled in them that pursuing further education after High School is an important value and expectation; and they’ve learned from us what it means to live in relationship with Jesus and

live for Him.

Of course, not everything they pick up from us is positive...though I couldn't begin to tell you what those negative things might be because my kids are perfect. ☺ But, there's a vine and branch kind of analogy in our families, and hopefully we're all bearing good fruit.

But there's a deeper vine and branch analogy that we would do well to help our kids understand, and to live and model in our own lives as well. Jesus says to his disciples that he is the true vine and we are the branches. And the question I'd pose for us to consider is this: **How connected to the vine are each of us, and what's the fruit we're bearing – in our families, our church, our neighborhoods, and elsewhere?**

In numerous places in the Old Testament, *the Israelite community of faith* is referred to as a vine, or a vineyard, and always it's in a negative light, with the vine portrayed as producing no fruit. For instance, Isaiah 5:4, 7 says, "What more could have been done for my (God's) vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?...The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel." Jeremiah 2:21 says, "I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?"

We have to remember: **A grape vine has one purpose: To bear good fruit.** But the nation of Israel didn't always do that, as we see in these verses and others like them. So Jesus comes along and says that *he* is the true vine, and his heavenly Father is the vine grower, or the gardener. His Father tends to the vine, cutting off the branches that don't bear fruit, and prunes those that do so they'll bear more fruit than they already are. And so in Jesus' use of this metaphor, there's a refinement and expansion of it, as Jesus says he is the true vine. In other words, he is the vine that won't grow bad fruit.

He continues on, saying, **"You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me (John 15:3-4).**

Here Jesus shows us how the community of faith is connected to the vine, as the branches. The disciples, who as men of Jewish faith were a part of that old vine that the Old Testament passages referred to, are included now in this new metaphor through faith in Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus means by saying they have been cleansed by the word he has spoken to them. They are not cut off, but rather grafted onto the vine that Jesus Christ is, and are part of what he is doing and growing. And so they're encouraged to abide in Jesus as Jesus abides in them. **This is how the branch bears fruit, by being connected to and a part of, the vine – Jesus. The branches can't bear fruit on their own.**

Jesus goes on, making the metaphor even more clear. The vine and its branches abide in one another; that is, they're deeply connected together. A branch that is not well-connected to the vine cannot bear fruit. Jesus says they're thrown into the fire. Literally, this is what they did with branches that were cut off from their grape vines because of lack of productivity. The wood from these branches was useless, because it was too soft and flexible to be used for anything else. So when a branch stopped producing fruit, it would be cut off and laid to the side. When enough of these had gathered and dried out, they'd pile them together, burn them up, gather around the fire, roast hot dogs and marshmallows, and sing “kum-by-yah” and “little bunny foo-foo.” ☺ So those are branches that aren't bearing any fruit.

This is different than pruning a branch that is bearing fruit, which Jesus earlier said would also happen. **In pruning, the branch is healthy and generally doing what it's supposed to do, but its energies are spread too thin, and the fruit is not what it could be.** So it's pruned in order to do a more effective job and bear better fruit.

And sometimes we need some pruning too in our own lives, and collectively in our churches. **Maybe there's some pruning in your life that needs to happen so that you'll be more fruitful for God.** Cutting off fruitless stuff is fairly obvious usually, though it can still be hard to do. Pruning is even harder because in the short run we're letting go of things that are bearing some fruit. But in order to bear greater fruit and bring greater glory to God as Jesus says our fruit bearing does, sometimes we need to be pruned. What is God pruning in your life, or here at Rose Hill, or in your family, or in any

other collection of branches you might be a part of?

So, as I said earlier, the first question is: **How well are you and I connected to the vine?** Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, and apart from him we can do nothing. We branches are useless if we aren't connected to the vine in a healthy way. Notice in the metaphor that the branch doesn't become fruitless because it's cut off from the vine. Rather, it's cut off because it's already not bearing fruit. A branch can be physically connected to the vine but not doing its job of bearing fruit, because something is blocking the nutrients from getting into the branch from the vine. Maybe it's only partly connected to the vine, maybe the branch got corrupted somehow and even though it's connected, there's something else that's causing the branch not to bear fruit.

So it's not just a matter of being connected to Jesus Christ. It's a matter of being *well* connected, and connected in a healthy way, so that the branch is sustained by its connection to the vine. Everything it needs to bear fruit comes from the vine, and that happens when it's connected in a healthy way. Oftentimes I find myself in conversations with people about their faith. Imagine that! 😊 And one question I'll often ask people when I first get to know them, if they are Christians, is, "How long have you been a Christian?" And often times the response begins or focuses on how long the person has been going to church. That's showing a connection to the church, which is fine, but how long we've "gone to church" doesn't define our relationship with Jesus Christ. **The Church is not our source of life; Jesus Christ is.** Jesus is the vine. That's not to say that the church has no role to play. Jesus says elsewhere that it is *his* church that he's growing. The Church belongs to Him. But the church is really all the branches connected to the vine. The point is: **The branches – you and I – have to be healthfully connected to Jesus first and foremost.**

So how do we do that? How do we remain connected to and abiding in Christ? Through various spiritual disciplines, such as spending time reading and knowing our Bibles. Spending time in prayer. Seeking God's will for our lives through Scripture and Christian friends and mentors. Practicing the presence of God with us all the time. Letting God cut out the stuff from our

lives that isn't bearing fruit...or is inhibiting our connection to the vine, to Jesus.

These are all ways that we remain connected to Jesus Christ. We can do it on our own, but that's a hard row to hoe. This is where fellowship and spiritual growth together with other Christians through the Church is so important. Other people who are seeking God in their lives can have such a huge, positive influence on our own walk with Jesus Christ. Being in worship on Sunday mornings is a basic, elemental place to start. From there, being involved in some kind of a small group where you can share more personally with people, and support one another in faith is a huge help in being a healthy branch connected to the vine. Financial support of the church is another part of it. That's a way of staying connected to Jesus, our vine. When we give to Jesus through the church, we remind ourselves that our bank account is not our vine and we're not financial branches that bear fruit for it. Same with our time and our talents as we open ourselves to God working through us. These are all opportunities to stay connected, in a healthy way, to the vine, so that we would bear fruit.

So: How well are you and I connected to the vine? That's the first question. It's important to be well-connected to Jesus. The next question that arises out of this passage is this: **Are we bearing good fruit for Jesus?** There are at least a couple different ways to determine whether or not we're bearing good fruit in our lives.

One type of fruit we bear is the Fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹ And so if we sit down and take an honest look at our lives – and it may help to do that with someone you trust, because we all see ourselves with rose-colored lenses...and maybe you realize, “I'm missing some of the fruit of the spirit” then ask God to give you that fruit. Jesus said in this morning's passage that if we remain in him and his words remain in us, we may ask for whatever we wish and it will be granted. This isn't a license to control God. **Rather, when Christ's words are abiding in us, our prayers will be governed by His words and in line with his will.** So ask God for a greater abundance of the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Be persistent in your asking, and be honest

about your own role in bearing that fruit. But Jesus wants you to have that fruit. So: Are you lacking joy? Ask God for it. Are you lacking peace? Ask God for it. Are you lacking patience? Ask God for it. I know, that last one is always dangerous to ask for...but don't let that scare you off! Ask God for patience – with your kids, your co-workers,

Besides the fruit of the Spirit: **Another fruit that we bear as branches connected to the vine is helping people to know Jesus Christ so that they would also become a branch grafted onto the vine.** Now, if you take the vine-branch-fruit analogy completely literally, it's impossible for fruit to become branches on a vine, so the vine/branch/fruit metaphor breaks down a bit. But as you look at the teachings of Jesus, this is clearly a kind of fruit for us to bear. We're called to be disciples who help shape other disciples – beginning with helping people to take the very first step of following Him. That certainly starts in the home. For dads...and moms too...the family is the first place to begin bearing this kind of fruit. We want our kids to be branches connected to the vine of Jesus. I want to show you a short video clip that you may have seen this week on social media, of a kid who is bearing the love, kindness, and faithfulness, as he strikes out one of his good buddies to end a baseball game that sends his own team on to the state championship, and ends the season for his friend and his friend's team:

<https://youtu.be/xtVMSIMhQGM>

His parents have clearly instilled some good values in him like, that friendship is more important than a baseball game – and I would not be surprised if they're connected to Jesus the vine. So let's start with our own lives and make sure we're well-connected, and then from there we help our kids become connected to the vine. And from there we reach out and help others, too.

In Acts, one of the most prominent features and greatest emphases of the church after Jesus' death and resurrection was its growth. Repeatedly, we're told how people came to faith in Jesus Christ. There was abundant fruit, and abundant new branches grafted onto the vine of Jesus Christ. **And still today, Jesus-followers invite others to find out about the Good News of**

forgiveness and the love of God in Jesus Christ. That is fruit that God wants us to bear still today.

So let's abide in Christ. If you aren't abiding in him...if you aren't connected to this vine, you can become connected to Him today. A simple prayer confessing your faith in Jesus and need for his work on the cross for you is the beginning. It's what gets you initially connected. And then from there we all can make sure his word abides in us, that we're well-connected to the vine through worship, small groups, and serving, and out of that will be good fruit that comes to bear in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit will be more and more evident, we'll help others get connected to Jesus getting grafted onto the vine, and then they'll begin to bear their own fruit, too. And in the end, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will get all the glory – which is how it should be. So let's remain in Him, let His Word abide in us, and let's bear some great fruit for God's Kingdom. Let's pray...Amen.

i This is what Paul lists as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.