

Series Title: ENOUGH
Sermon Title: I Am the True Vine - *Purpose*
Text: John 15:1-8
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John 15:1-8 NIV

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Jesus loved to convey the deepest spiritual truths with simple, earthy examples. He used ordinary, everyday bread to proclaim that He was the Bread of Life. He pointed to a shepherd tending his flock, and then declared that He was the Great Shepherd. He used two small coins to teach a profound lesson about giving and serving and pouring out your life for the sake of the Kingdom.

And here, in John 15, Jesus uses a metaphor about a vineyard to testify, once again, that he is Enough! He announced, "I am the true vine."

This is actually his last major communiqué before his death, and used it to help us understand why we're here – what our purpose is – what He wants us to accomplish with our lives. And it has everything to do with fruit.

The overriding emphasis in this passage is bearing fruit.

Let me show you:

John 15:2

"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

John 15:4

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

John 15:8

"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Not only is fruit-bearing the main emphasis, but Jesus makes it the identifying mark of a true believer. *Bona fide* believers in Christ bear fruit.

So, as this passage opens up before us, let's begin by looking for fruit.

1. LOOKING FOR FRUIT

John 15:1-2

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

We all need to make a careful examination of our own lives from time to time to evaluate the fruitfulness or effectiveness of our time on the planet. Many Christians think this has to do with winning people to Christ. And that's part of it – to be sure. Leading people to faith in Jesus can be considered fruit – important fruit – *essential* fruit! But I think John 15 is speaking simply about the reproduction of the life of the vine in the branch. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. He is the source of life for every branch.

Jesus Christ is looking for the fruit of his life in us!

And in Galatians 5 the Bible says...

Galatians 5:22-23 NIV

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

I read about a woman who has this dream where she wanders into a shop at the mall and finds Jesus behind a counter. Jesus says, "You can have anything your heart desires."

And she is amazed! She asks for peace, joy, happiness, wisdom, and freedom from fear. Then she adds, "Not just for me, but for the whole earth."

Jesus smiles and says, "I think you misunderstand me. We don't sell fruits, only seeds."

Bruce McNicol and Bill Thrall,
The Ascent of a Leader (Jossey Bass, 1999)
<http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/weekly/00-10-02/12648.html>

God will plant the seeds to the fruit of the Spirit in our hearts, but then it's up to us to nurture them and fertilize them so they grow and bear fruit that will last.

2. PRUNING FOR FRUIT

John 15:2-3

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

The gardener, or the vinedresser's task is simple – to coax from his branches the largest crop of grapes possible.

A healthy vineyard means a higher yield. So the vinedresser has to know how and when to prune and fertilize the vine so that it produces the maximum crop. And a grapevine will never produce anywhere near its potential unless it's pruned regularly.

In pruning a vine two principles are important. First, all dead wood must be removed; and second, the live wood must be cut back drastically. Dead wood harbours insects and disease and may cause the vine to rot.

Live wood must be trimmed back in order to prevent such heavy growth that the life of the vine goes into the wood rather than into the fruit.

That's what the Father does. Jesus said the heavenly Father is the gardener. He cuts off the dead branches, and prunes every branch that does bear fruit so that it will be even more fruitful.

Some days the plate runs over, doesn't it? God keeps bringing out more food and we keep loosening our belt. A promotion. A privilege. A friendship. A gift. A lifetime of grace. An eternity of joy. There are times when we literally push ourselves back from the table, amazed at God's kindness. "Lord, You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies and You fill my cup with blessing" (Ps. 23:5 MSG).

But then...then there are those seasons in the journey when we feel the pruning knife slice deep.

But see – here's the deal: *The branches that are doing well, those that best convey the life of the vine, get the knife!* Yes, sometimes the pruning is on account of our disobedience to God. Absolutely. Pruning can be a form of discipline. But other times pruning happens simply because we are bearing fruit and God wants us to bear *much more* fruit.

James confirms that for us.

James 1:2-4 NLT

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

One last thing about pruning: God's hand is never closer to the branches than when he is pruning them.

And when the gardener does his pruning well, the branches are always a little closer to the vine.

3. ABIDING FOR FRUIT

I'm reading now from John 15:4-5 in the New American Standard Bible:

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

The word *abide* or *remain*, depending on your translation, occurs ten times in John 15. In other words, God is saying, *This is important! Pay attention!* Continued production of fruit depends on constant, nourishing union with the source of fruitfulness. The effectiveness of every believer in Christ depends on his or her receiving the steady flow of life from Jesus.

The branches can't produce fruit unless they are connected to the vine!

So how does a true believer remain in Christ, or abide in Christ?

Negatively speaking: Those who follow Jesus should avoid anything and everything that can lead them away from the vine, away from the source of life, and away from the joy of obedience.

The writer of Hebrews put it like this:

Hebrews 12:1 NIV Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Same verse – different translation (NLT) Let us strip off every weight that slows us down...

And...Colossians 3:8-9 NIV ... rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other...

Let off everything that hinders. And stay away from all the stuff that damages your walk with God!

On the positive side, abiding in Christ means that disciples of Christ engage in the disciplines that nurture spiritual development and the ripening of much fruit!

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Bible engagement. Fellowship with godly people. Authentic Christian community. The breaking of bread. And prayer. These things help us grow and bear fruit.

Years ago a young woman attended language school to prepare for missionary service. The very first day of class the teacher entered the room and, without saying a word, walked down every row of students. Finally, still without saying a word, she walked out of the room again. Then she came back and addressed the class. "Did you notice anything special about me?" she asked.

Nobody could think of anything in particular. They thought it was a trick question! One student finally raised her hand. "I noticed that you had on a very lovely perfume," she said, and the class giggled.

But the teacher said, "That was exactly the point. [It] will be a long time before any of you will be able to speak Chinese or Spanish or Arabic well enough to share the gospel of Christ with anyone. But even before you are able to do that, you can minister the sweet fragrance of Jesus to these people by the quality of your lives."

Jesus is the true vine, we are the branches, and the Father is the Gardener.

The Lord Jesus used his last major message before his death to help us understand why we're here – what our purpose is, and what He wants us to accomplish with our lives. And it has everything to do with fruit.

And you don't even have to speak the language in order to bear fruit. But you must remain in the vine. Allow the energy, the life, the power of God to flow through you everyday so you can bear fruit...more fruit...much fruit...to the glory of God!