

The following series of daily readings and questions has been designed by Pastor Tom Cullen to lead up to the sermon for the coming week. There are five daily studies for each week. Allow about 20 minutes a day to complete each daily devotional.

The weekly sermons can be listened too at sbc.com

Each week's daily devotional guide is also available online at sbc.com under the small group tab.

Ask the Lord to supply what is lacking.

Pray: *Lord Jesus: The relationship between the vine and the branches is a great mystery. I ask that Your life would hold and fill me as the vine holds and fills its branches.*

Endnotes

1. Andrew Murray, *The True Vine*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 9
2. Bo Stephens, *Abide In Christ*, (Nashville, Tennessee: LifeWay Press, 2007), 8-9.
3. *Ibid.*, 13.
4. *Ibid.*, 13.
5. *Ibid.*, 13.
6. *Ibid.*, 15.

Sermon Series Devotional Guide

Living the Fruitful Life

– A Study of John 15

5. Read Galatians 5:22. These are qualities of Christ's character. Which one(s) do you lack in your life? Ask the Lord to supply the need.

6. From where does the branch get its life?

7. Where do you think the Christian is to get his/her life?

Reflection and Prayer

Reflect on Philippians 4:13. How does this describe the relationship between the vine and the branches? How does it describe the relationship between you and Christ?

Today's lesson emphasized four lessons from the vine and the branches.

1. Entire devotion to the purposes of Christ.
2. Perfect conformity to the person of Christ.
3. Absolute dependence on the power of Christ.
4. Undoubting confidence in the plans of Christ.

Are you having difficulty with one of four listed above? Which one?

Welcome to the *Living the Fruitful Life* study. It is exciting to be on this journey with you as we examine the words of our Lord in John 15:1-17. As we think about this passage during this eight week study I hope you will discover that each verse is packed with meaning and spiritual truth that will help us be "conformed to the likeness of His Son." (Romans 8:29)

I can't think of another passage of Scripture that has helped me more in understanding what the Christian life is all about and how it is to be lived. The call of this passage is not to do, but to be.

And it is an important word to us in our day as so much value is placed on doing. Jesus assures us in this text that as we practice the discipline of abiding, we will grow in our relationship with Him and bear much spiritual fruit.

It is interesting to discover how many object lessons God has given to us in creation. There is much in nature that mirrors heavenly realities.

The vine is one such object lesson. Jesus taught His disciples about the vine on the night of His arrest. Clearly Jesus is thinking about the future, His death and His resurrection.

And He wanted His followers to have a clear picture about their relationship with Him after His resurrection. So He chooses the vine, abundantly grown throughout Israel, as His object lesson.

I pray that as we think of the earthly vine, we will discover the heavenly truth about our place in the Kingdom. But more, I pray that we will not just *learn* about our relationship with Christ, but will *experience* a deeper more trusting relationship with our Lord.

This is an eight-week series. Each of the daily readings and questions have been designed to prepare us to hear the preached word on Sunday morning. Small group questions will be supplied for those groups who wish to go deeper with this study. There are five studies for each week. Allow about 20 minutes a day to complete each one.

Throughout this series I will be quoting extensively from a book by Andrew Murray entitled *The True Vine*. It is a classic and if you want to go deeper still, I would recommend that you purchase it and use it alongside your daily devotions.

Andrew Murray wrote this little book in 1897 while he was a pastor in South Africa. As you read it you will soon see why it has stood the test of time and has been republished for each new generation.

Murray was certain that John 15:1-17 holds such great truth about the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus and the fruitfulness of a life of faith that we could say with confidence, “Let the parable enter into the heart, and all will be right.”¹

May that be a reality for each one of us as we embark on this exciting journey.

Pray: *Dear God: I want to trust You and live in dependence upon You but there is much in my life that pulls me away. Grant me the discipline to continue to live in dependence upon You no matter what the circumstances. Teach me to know that the same interest and care You give to the vine extends to me a branch on the vine.*

Friday January 13

The branch

Pray: *Dear Lord: Thank you that by faith you live in me and enable me to more and more like Your Son. Teach me today how I can bear fruit for You.*

Read: John 15:1-5

1. What is the purpose of the branches on a vine?

2. What is the purpose of a Christian in relation to Christ?

3. Are the vine and branch different from one another or the same? How?

4. According to Romans 8:29 what is God’s purpose for each of us?

3. In what ways is the vine dependent on the “vinedresser”/ ”gardener”?

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____

Reflection and Prayer

Reflect on these words by Andrew Murray:

“Christ is about to teach His disciples about their being branches. Before He ever uses the word, or speaks at all of abiding in Him or bearing fruit, He turns their eyes heavenward to the Father watching over them and working all in them.

At the very root of all Christian life lies the thought that God is to do all, that our one work is leave ourselves in His hands, in the confession of utter helplessness and dependence, in the assured confidence that He gives us all we need. The great lack of the Christian life is that, even where we trust Christ, we leave God out of the count. Christ came to bring us to God. Christ lived the life of a man exactly as we have to live it. Christ the Vine points to God the Gardener. As He trusted God, let us trust God, that everything we ought to be and have, as those who belong to the Vine, will be given to us from above.”⁶

Clearly, our relationship with the Father should be same as the one that exists between the Son and the Father. What words would you use to describe your dependence upon God?

- ___ spotty ___ consistent ___ selfish
- ___ wholehearted ___ passionate ___ logical
- ___ intermittent ___ circumstantial ___ cloudy
- ___ other: _____

Bearing Much Fruit – A Study of John 15

Week 1: Life on the Vine

Monday January 9

Getting the big picture

Pray: *Dear God: As I begin this study I give you my heart, transform it. I give you my mind, renew it. I give you my soul, awaken it. I give you the whole of me asking that you will lead me into a new and vibrant relationship with you through Jesus Christ my Lord.*

Read: John 15:1-17

Before we take a microscope and examine the individual parts of this passage, take some time to think about what it says as a whole. Some scholars believe that Jesus is speaking these words as He and His disciples leave the upper room to go to the Garden of Gethsemane. If this is true, then they would have passed by the temple. Over the gateway of the temple, carved in white marble, was a vine - one of the symbols of Israel. It would have been stunning as its six-foot-long gilded clusters glistened in the moonlight. I can see in my mind’s eye – Jesus stopping and looking at the carved vine and saying to His disciples, “You know, I am the true vine.”

1. As you read these verses try to discover the main point. What would you say is the primary idea that Jesus is emphasizing here? Put it in your own words.

2. How does Jesus describe Himself and His work?
Verse 1 _____
Verse 15 _____
Verse 16 _____
3. How does Jesus describe the Father and His work?
Verse 1 _____

Verse 2 _____

4. How does Jesus describe the disciple and his/her purpose?

Verse 5 _____

Verse 4 _____

Verse 8 _____

Verse 9 _____

Verse 12 _____

Verse 16 _____

Verse 17 _____

5. The NIV speaks of how we are to “remain” in Christ (*verses 4-7*). Some older versions will use the word “abide” in Christ. What do you think this means?

6. How do the vine and the branches depict the relationship that is supposed to exist between Jesus Christ and His disciples?

Himself, as He whispers secretly day by day: “I am the true Vine! All that the Vine can ever be to its branch, I will be to you.”⁴

Pray: *“Holy Lord Jesus, the heavenly Vine of God’s own planting, I ask you, reveal yourself to my soul. Let the Holy Spirit, not only in thought but in experience, give me to know all that You, the Son of God are to me as the true Vine.”⁵*

Thursday January 12

The Gardener

Pray: *Dear God: You are the source of all life. I realize that if You were to stop breathing, the world would cease to exist. Help me to learn full dependence on You today.*

Read: John 15:1

Focus: *“... and my Father is the gardener”*

1. The NIV calls the Father a “gardener”. Other versions will speak of the Father as a “vinedresser”. Look up the following verses and describe the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son:

John 5:19 _____

John 10:30 _____

John 10:38 _____

John 14:10 _____

2. What one word would you use to describe the relationship between the Son and the Father?

2. Jesus says, "I am the true vine" Does this mean that there are other "vines"? Name one.

3. Jesus says, "I am the true vine". Does this mean that there are false vines? Name them.

4. How do you think we can experience Jesus as the true vine?

- A. Read lots of theological books.
- B. Listen to many sermons.
- C. _____ Ask the Holy Spirit to help me experience Jesus as the true vine.
- D. Spend time with other Christians.
- E. Other _____

5. Check one or more points from the list below describing what you could commit to doing to make yourself available to Christ so that He can reveal Himself to you as the true vine.

- _____ Spend time daily with God in prayer
- _____ Spend time praying with other believers
- _____ Worship God regularly with His people
- _____ Take time to study God's Word in dependence upon the Holy Spirit
- _____ Practice the discipline of listening for Jesus so that I may learn His voice and respond to Him in obedience.

Reflection and Prayer

Reflect on these words by Andrew Murray:

"I am the true vine. He who speaks (these words) is God, in His infinite power able to enter into us. He is man, one with us. He is the crucified One, who won a perfect righteousness and a divine life for us through His death. He is the glorified One, who from the throne gives His Spirit to make His presence real and true. He speaks – oh, listen, not to His words only, but to

7. Bo Stevens suggests that there are nine ways that we can respond to Christ as we seek to abide in Him.

1. Receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord.
2. Surrender your life to Him and His purpose.
3. Live united with Christ as one.
4. Know Christ.
5. Be transformed into His image.
6. Love Him and love others as He loves them.
7. Know His commands and obey Him.
8. Relate to Him through prayer and His word.
9. Bear much lasting fruit.²

He goes on to ask which action is the most challenging for you? #_____

8. Believing that Jesus is the one who is working in you to bring these to pass, which action would you most like to experience fully and why?³

Reflection and Prayer

Jesus did not give us this parable so that we could say we know more about Him. He is trying to bring us into a living, vibrant relationship with Himself. Review today's passage and write out the verse that God seemed to emphasize to you today. In a spirit of prayer respond to God in light of what he has said to you. Write out your prayer.

Tuesday January 10

Understanding the image of the vine

Pray: *Dear God: My soul pants for you. Come and fill me with Your word and Your Spirit today so that I may be more like Your Son and glorify Your name.*

Today's Scripture passages are long but important. Read slowly and carefully, don't rush.

Read: Psalm 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7

1. Who is the vine according to these passages?

2. From where does Psalm 80 say God took the vine? Where did He plant it?

3. What did God look for from His vine? (Isaiah 5:2,7)

4. What did God find instead? (Isaiah 5:2,7)

Keep in mind that when Jesus said, "I am the true vine" to the disciples they would have had these Old Testament Scriptures in mind. They would have known about the imagery. With the coming of Jesus the image now changes a bit. One thing remains the same, God still looks for fruit from his vine.

Reflection and Prayer

Think of the passages that you read today. What verse struck you in particular? Write it out in your own words. Why did it affect you?

Pray: *Dear God: I know You are looking for fruitful lives. Help me to depend on Jesus, the true vine to grow good fruit in me. May my life be fruitful for You. Amen.*

Wednesday January 11

The vine

Pray: *Lord, help me to understand that You are the true vine. Help me to see the truth about our relationship ever more clearly.*

Read: John 15:1

Focus: "I am the true vine ..."

1. What do you think Jesus means when he says, "I am the true vine?" How is Jesus different from the vine that is spoken about in the Old Testament that we studied yesterday? (See Isaiah 5:7)
