

Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church
January – March 2012

Daily Devotional
for Sermon Series

**“I am
the true vine ...”**



Living the Fruitful Life
a study of John 15

Week 2: January 16-22

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.

Sermons can be heard online at scbc.com

Each week's daily devotional guide is also available online at scbc.com under the small group tab – “resources”.

Living the Fruitful Life

– A Study of John 15

Week 2: Where does He cut? Being pruned

I'm convinced that Jesus was a gardener. Sure, we know that He was probably a carpenter, but outside the shop I can tell you that Jesus had a garden He tended. I say that because His teaching is filled with gardening illustrations. He spoke of the lilies of the field (Matthew 5:28), of sowing seed (Matthew 13), of fertilizer (Luke 13:8), fig trees (Luke 13:1-9), vineyards (John 15) and in our text this week, pruning.

Jesus knew that pruning is essential to most plants, and especially to vines. My pruning handbook says, "You can't let a grape vine run wild. A badly trained, badly pruned vine will tangle, tend to get mildew, always bear disappointing crops of fruit – and never grow into anything that's much to look at."¹ Jesus knew this and as a master gardener He is concerned that we, His disciples, bear much fruit. This can only come about through the process of being pruned.

Most novice gardeners I know hate pruning. They don't know where to start and they don't want to cut off seemingly good branches. It's like thinning carrots out of a row in your vegetable garden. Why would you pull out seemingly good carrots? The answer is because we want better carrots. If we leave all the carrots in the ground they will crowd one another and rob each other of nutrients and space to grow. Thin the carrots out and you get large healthy specimens that any rabbit would love. So with pruning. When we prune our fruit trees and our vines, we are helping the plant to produce bigger, richer more plentiful fruit. It takes a confident gardener to know that pruning is a good thing. One need not be timid. It takes an experienced gardener to know where to cut and when to cut.

Jesus is a confident gardener and He is an experienced gardener. This week, as we think of being pruned in order to bear much fruit, we can be sure that He knows what He is doing. He knows where to cut and when to cut. He knows what habits need to go, He knows what characteristics need to stay, He knows us completely and is seeking to enable us to bear much fruit for His glory.

Monday January 16

The fruit

Pray: Dear God, I want to be a fruitful branch for you. Keep me from being one who professes with my mouth, "Jesus is

Lord," but denies it in my life. May the fruit of my life glorify You and truly be good.

Read: Matthew 7:15-23; John 15:1-2

Focus: "He cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit ..."

1. According to John 15:1-2 what is the reason the branch exists?

2. What does the gardener do with every branch that does not bear fruit? Why?

3. How can you tell a true disciple of Jesus Christ from a false disciple of Jesus Christ? (Matthew 7:20)

4. What do you think it means to bear good fruit? Think of some practical examples. (Matthew 7:21)

5. We will never know fully what Jesus meant by bearing fruit. But Jesus did make two things abundantly clear in regards to our bearing fruit:
 - A. Fruit is impossible apart from an _____ relationship with Him. (see John 15:4)

B. Fruit is an absolute certainty if we live in an _____ relationship with Him. If we focus on our relationship with Him, the fruit will come, just as He desires. (see John 15:4)

and the Father as my Gardener, I can indeed be a fruitful branch”³

Reflection and Prayer:

Andrew Murray wrote:

“And what is fruit? Something that the branch bears, not for itself, but for its owner; something that is to be gathered and taken away. The branch does indeed receive from the vine sap for its own life, by which it grows thicker and stronger. But this supply for its own maintenance is entirely subordinate to its fulfillment of the purpose of its existence – bearing fruit. It is because Christians do not understand or accept this truth that they so fail in their efforts and prayers to live the branch life. They often desire it earnestly; they read and meditate and pray, and yet they fail, and they wonder why. The reason is very simple: They do not know that fruit bearing is the one thing they have been saved for.”²

How would you describe your life in Christ?

- It’s all about me.
- It’s about Christ when it’s convenient.
- I live for Christ alone each and every moment of my life.
- Other _____

How would you ideally like your life to be in Christ?

Once again, Andrew Murray:

“Let us begin to think as God thinks. Let us accept Christ’s teaching and respond to it. The one object of my being a branch, the one mark of my being a true branch, the one condition of my abiding and growing strong, is that I bear the fruit of the heavenly Vine for dying [people] to eat and live. And the one thing of which I can have the most perfect assurance is that, with Christ as my Vine,

Was there a statement or a verse that struck you in this study?
What was it?

Write out a prayer in response to God.

Pray: Dear God, I thank you for the truth that Jesus is the Vine and I am a branch. Thank you that everything I need is in Christ. Thank you that You not only call me to Christ-likeness but supply the means. Help me to rest in Christ that I may bear much fruit.

Read: Revelation 3:14-22; John 15:1-2

Focus: "...every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

1. When the gardener discovers a branch that bears fruit he prunes it so that it will do what?

2. My pruning book advises: "Much of pruning consists of removing some or all flowers or fruits before the plant's reproductive cycle comes to its end – that is, before ripe seeds can go forth to make new plants. Typically, this forces the plant to produce more flowers or fruits, or bigger flowers or fruits, than it would if it were left alone."⁴

How has Jesus taken this practical truth from gardening and applied to our spiritual lives?

3. What is the quality of the fruit of your life? Is it full and ever bearing? Or is it inadequate and small? Ask God to reveal the quality of the fruit of your life.

4. Clearly God wants good fruit and abundant fruit from our lives. How is this achieved?

- Yield myself to Him and allow Him to work in me.
- Admit that His desire for more fruit is fair and right.
- Accept His offer to produce more fruit through me.
- Trust Him to do His work in and through me.⁵

5. What was the problem with the church in Laodicea? (Revelation 3:17)

- jealousy
- pride
- greed
- lust
- self-satisfied
- bitterness

6. There are many dangers in the spiritual life. There is the danger of self-contentment. That's the feeling that we have arrived and have need of nothing. Then, there is the danger of other's contentment. That's the feeling that if others are satisfied with us, then we are satisfied. What does this passage say is the only person's contentment we should be concerned about?

Reflection and Prayer:

Jesus says, "Bear more fruit." Andrew Murray states that this is a most encouraging word. God not only gives us the demand, He gives us the means to meet the demand. He comes to us not as a taskmaster or a lawgiver but as a loving heavenly Father who asks and then does what He commands. He comes to us and offers to produce more fruit in us if we would simply yield ourselves to Him. Shouldn't we admit that we can't do it on our own, accept His offer and then look to Him to bring about the fruit?

We need to believe that our God is able to bring about fruit in our lives that is rich and large. He is the divine Gardner and will do all that is needed for us to bear more fruit. All He asks is that we

desire it with our whole heart and joyfully trust Him to fulfill His promise.⁶

Write out a prayer to God.

Wednesday January 18

Being pruned

Pray: Dear God, teach me the discipline of being pruned. Keep me from holding on to that which You want to cut out. May I trust You completely as You seek to shape me into the image of Your Son.

Read: Hebrews 12:7-11; John 15:1-2

Focus: "...while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes ..."

1. What is the chief work of the Gardener on the branches?

2. A gardener's tip: "To be sure of large, good-flavoured grapes, you have to thin out some of the crop each year. Until the vine matures, never let more than half a dozen bunches develop; cut off the rest as soon as fruit forms. After maturity, let about half the bunches develop."⁷

Is there an area of your life that you feel God needs to prune back so that you can produce more fruit?

3. What does the Gardener cut off in the process of pruning?

- weeds?
- thorns?
- healthy wood and excess growth from the past?

4. We may consider the act of pruning harsh, but how does Scripture view it? (Hebrews 12:7-11)

Reflection and Prayer:

As we think about pruning a vine we have to realize that it is the longest, most vigorous growth that gets pruned. The reason is that the energy of the plant needs to go to produce fruit, not sustaining the branches. So a branch that is really long gets cut back right to the stem with only two or three inches remaining. This allows abundant fruit to be produced.

The spiritual truth in this illustration is this: Our heavenly father does not just prune us to remove sin. He also focuses on our strengths, our natural abilities that we bring into the kingdom. He prunes these too. Why? Because we are often in danger of trusting in these abilities and not in him. Frequently when we have done something wonderful in the kingdom, God will bring us low, so low to make us feel that we are nothing. At such a time we are made to look to God and depend on him for life, energy and ability. And this is exactly what God wants! In the words of Andrew Murray "All that is inconsistent with the most entire devotion of Christ's service must be removed."⁸

How would you describe your approach to the Father's pruning?

- I have never thought about the Father's need to prune my life.
- I resist Him when He comes to my life to prune away certain things.
- I accept the Father's pruning because I know it will lead to a deeper, more fruitful life in Christ.
- other _____⁹

Pray: Dear God, You are the perfect gardener. Cleanse and cut away all there is in me that would cause me to boast in myself. Keep me from boasting of anything I have accomplished in my own strength. Keep me from boasting

of the things of this world. Keep me low. May I boast only of You, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Thursday January 19

The pruning knife

Pray: Lord, as I open your word today, teach me. As I read your Word, correct me. As I think about your Word, encourage me. As I meditate over your Word, let Christ be ever more real to me and dwell in me.

Read: John 15:2-3; Hebrews 4:12-13

Focus: "...while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes ..."

1. What do you think is the pruning knife God uses on us? (Some would say adversity, but what about a life that has little adversity?)

2. What has made the disciples "clean"? (John 15:3) How do you think this works?

3. How can the word of God be compared to a good set of pruners?

4. How would you describe your approach to the Word of God?

- I reach for the TV guide more often.
- God's Word is a good source of wisdom and information.
- You can't trust everything that is written in it.

- As I study God's Word, He meets me, convicts me, and cleanses my soul.
- Other _____

5. Would you like your attitude toward God's Word to be different? How can you make it happen?

Reflection and Prayer:

"It is as the soul gives up its own thoughts and the world's thoughts of what is religious and yields itself heartily, humbly, patiently to the teaching of the Word by the Spirit, that the Father will do His blessed work of pruning and cleansing away all of nature and self that mixes with our work and hinders His Spirit."¹⁰

Pray: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)

Friday January 20

Abiding

Pray: Lord: I want to become like Christ as You commanded. I need You to fill me with Yourself by Your Holy Spirit. Father, form the image of Christ in me.

Read: John 15:4-10: 1 John 3:24

Focus: "Remain in me ..."

1. Grafting is a really neat science. A branch is taken and grafted into a living vine. When this happens the graft shoots its miniature roots and fibres down into the stem. In turn, the stem envelopes the graft and the two become one. When this

is complete the sap of the vine enters the new branch thus enabling it to produce young shoots, leaves and fruit.

When Jesus said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you," He was thinking of this grafting process. What would our part be in the process? What would His part be in the process? Have you done these things?

2. List the things that you yet need to do to strengthen your "abiding" relationship with Jesus Christ?

3. What does verse 10 say is a vital part of the abiding relationship?

4. Many people want the Spirit to fill them, but it doesn't happen. Before that happens, we must be prepared. It is as we obey Christ, deny self, and turn our back on the world, that He is able to fill us. How important is our remaining in Christ?
- A. It is very important
 - B. It is not so important.
 - C. It is not important at all. Jesus loves me so I will experience Him whatever I do.

Reflection and Prayer:

Take some time to think of this wonder – You are in Christ and Christ is in you. Think of it - the infinite, divine, omnipotent Vine is loving us, holding us and working in us. What effect does that have on you?

Pray: Write out a prayer.
