

## **“The Vine...a life connected”**

- **John 15:1-17**

Part 2 – “the TRUE vine/the TRUE branch”

by **Pastor Tim Dodson**  
at **JF-Believers Church**  
in **Menomonie, Wisconsin**  
on **September 30, 2018**

**John 15:1-17** *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

*3 “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. 9 “As the Father loved Me, I also have 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. 11 “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. 14 “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. 15 “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. 17 “These things I command you, that you love one another.*

**1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”**

**2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away;  
and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”**

Jesus begins chapter 15 with a picture that should be clear, even to the youngest of believers. The fact that this area of the world *was* and *is* significant wine country, would have left the disciples clearly understanding what Jesus was driving at. Jesus was clearly saying that **He** was that vine which He spoke of. Not only that, but that He was the “true” one...the *true* vine. He was literally that which carries the nurturing life to the branches, which are all of us today that are a part of that vine. And God the Father/Creator is the caretaker in this picture...the vinedresser of it all. He cuts away the branches that do not bear good fruit, and He ‘prunes’ those that do.

This truth has great application to us today, both as individuals and to us as a church. Firstly, we must acknowledge that God “takes away” the branches that aren’t producing good fruit. Those who have hardened their hearts to the Holy Spirit, which He had just spent time in the last chapter describing. He cuts away those non-producing branches. He cuts away the Pharaohs. He cuts away the Saul’s, the Judas’, the Ananias and Sapphires, the Korahs, and all those who would harden their hearts to the voice and leading of the Holy Spirit. He has also certainly “cut away” those of our generation, and those from **our** world...those from our church that have hardened their hearts to His voice and ours.

The bottom line for us concerning this passage is simply this: “Are we producing fruit for God and kingdom?” The answer to this issue however, is not a matter of straining and struggling to produce that fruit. I have witnessed many folks get caught up in that trap...trying to produce kingdom fruit through their own efforts and



their own strength. But the branches of a tree do not strain and struggle to produce. The answer isn't to pull ourselves up by the spiritual bootstraps and "try a little harder." The answer is rather to simply remain firmly attached to the vine. To remain focused on that one thing: *being constantly connected to Jesus*. Believing, embracing, *and as He has emphasized in these last few chapters, obeying* all of His words, not just the ones that make us feel comfortable or satisfied with ourselves.

Because again, *if we love Him*, we will keep His commandments. Such will require no struggle or strain, but rather simple action motivated by our passion and commitment. Now please don't see this issue or hear me saying that perfection is mandated for His response. For we will never attain and certainly not *maintain* any such level. But the other side of this is a tendency to be dishonest with ourselves. Are we actually connected to the vine? Or are we connected to something else? Friends, a girl, a guy, a hobby, a worldly pursuit, a worldly passion, a career, a possession? Are you connected *truly* to **Him**? That's the big question! If we are, though we may stumble, we will ultimately and genuinely produce good fruit. Not by our efforts, but by the life that surges through the vine and into us the branches because we are truly connected!

In other words, it is **He** that produces the fruit within **us**! Yet we are connected not just for the fruit, but *for our very life*. Scripture tells us that "without Him, we can do *nothing*." We can privately tend to see such a connecting as certainly beneficial to *Him* in that there is production on His behalf. (As if He needs anything from us! Ps 50:12 tells us "*If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.*") But we fail so often to grasp that our connection to Him brings us life, *and life abundant*. 1Co 2:9 says "... *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*"

It all goes even further, for our connection is not just an optional "quality of life" thing. The branches are utterly dependent upon the vine for the sustenance of true life and living: Cut off, we die. Col 2:13 tells us such, saying "*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses...*" And in Ephesians 2:1 we read "*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...*" So it appears that "dead" is our default position without connection to the vine.

Have you ever pruned a house plant? The branch removed looks fine at first doesn't it? It's dismembered, yet its outward appearance...*however deceiving it might be*, is not the truth. That cut off branch is dead, no matter how it looks at that moment. But please note that the vine dresser does not murder the branches, any more than God sends people to hell. God has never hunted us down to hurt us! Rather we choose. We have free-will. When we reject the care and implicit mandatory life connection with the vine, we die. We die at our own hand. We die because we rejected the vine and hardened our hearts against Him. We die a "slow suicide."

James 2:26 *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

1Timothy 5:6 *But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.*

It is here that many of us want to argue. Saying that apparently if we don't produce for Christ and kingdom, we are thrown out of the club! So we are apt to feel like pawns on the great chessboard of earth and life. Yet even IF that was true, when the "white" side of the board wins in chess, do not the pawns win too? Or is the victory just for the king?

What does "being connected" to the vine really look like? What does such a picture mean to you and I in the practical realm? And what causes such a "disconnect" to occur? Well, we must realize that such a danger does not lurk around the corner waiting to jump out on the one that is genuinely passionate for the things of God...the individual that is desirous to be a part of whatever work God is doing, and desirous to be wherever He is doing it. Such is not a trap or a hidden landmine waiting to catch us naively off guard. The humble servant that places Christ first in his or her life is indeed connected to the vine! There is an essential, requisite absolute in a true redeemed life to be so connected! The love for Christ compels them...

However, on the other side of such, there is no greater threat in this matter to any individual than his or her pride. What the apostle John called the 'pride of life.' It's the thought that we can cut corners, cheat the vine-dresser, and sanction our sin. It's an attitude of self-leniency, selfish priorities, and marginal commitment. The idea that we can gossip, divide, be bitter and angry, hate our brothers, and slander our sisters and make a church appearance on Sunday and we're 'good to go.' Such all comes from pride, and prohibits and excludes the production of kingdom fruit because such behavior is clearly not that of the Holy Spirit, and thus cuts God out of the loop. (Note Isaiah chapter 5)

Again let us note that the text refers to Jesus as not only "the vine," but goes a step further placing that lost word "true" as an attribute of Christ. Truth? Is there anything left out there that is really truth? Is He really the truth? If so, then everything he said was truth? "I AM" ...the designation of deity, is TRUTH.

He goes so far as to refer to Himself not only as the vine but the "true vine." By this then are we to gather the apparent inference that there are other vines? Oh yes! In fact, that is the underlying message of this whole message. It's really what this whole chapter is about! Not only are there "other" vines but they are **many** other vines we can attach ourselves to today. But "attached" we shall be, one way or another, to one god or another. For no one stands alone. We all will attempt to get our life from something or someone. I wonder to what other vines we have attached ourselves today. Our bank accounts? Our careers? Our friends? Our family? Or maybe it's religion? Maybe it's your church? Maybe it's just you.

Our passage says that those who are failing to produce fruit for Him, He cuts off. Some of us are apt to stop there...brushing the sweat off our brow and believing we are eminently safe from testing, trial and discomfort because we belong to the King. However, Jesus pulls in to this passage even the best of disciples, even the most committed of followers. This because while some of you are producing fruit, you need some pruning! He has to cut off that stuff that is sucking the life out of you. Will you let Him?

If you have any experience around plants, you understand this passage a bit more than those who do not. Because if you have dealt with plants you know that sometimes you need to prune a plant for its own health and well-being. "Fine Gardening" says the following: "*Pruning is an essential gardening skill. When you prune correctly, you encourage healthy growth and flowering (in the case of flowering plants), as well as good looks. For most shrubs and trees, it helps to prune at the right time. Some are best pruned in winter; some right after flowering.*" Yes, and spiritually 'amen.'

God will "at the right time" prune a branch to 'encourage healthy growth and flowering' as well as to alter how we are viewed by those outside the family of God. God can and does prune early in a person's life...when they are just past "full bloom" and others when they are in the "winter" of their lives. But the bottom line is God will indeed come along and "prune" those branches of the areas that are not producing for the kingdom. Now if you believe that...and recognizing the reality of such a practice, and you were to just stop and think about past events in your life...past experiences in your journey through this world, doesn't that fact clarify a lot? Isn't such an 'epiphany of understanding' of much of what you have endured? Not every experience we have in life is such a pruning, but in hindsight I can sure see the hand of the gardener in many events in my life! Because the branches that bear no fruit, "He takes away." We all have seen it. Most of us have experienced it already. It's a reality.

So again we see Jesus is herein declaring that He is the vine to which we all must be connected. God the Father is the 'vinedresser,' the planter/cultivator, the caretaker, the harvester, the owner. Every branch connected to the vine must produce fruit or it is taken away, removed and disconnected. And every branch that IS connected will be pruned of aspects that suck the life out of us and keep us from producing righteous fruit. That's the deal. That's the arrangement we have with God as Christians. And yet how often do we squeal when He moves in such a way?

Now, the temptation is to look at God as if He is standing over us with a big stick ready to smack us if we don't serve enough or serve adequately. But please note that His role is not that of a glorified 'axe-man', running around with a chainsaw cutting people out of the kingdom because they didn't 'suck it up' and work hard enough. He is the loving *Care*-taker. He is there to take *care* of the vineyard! All of it. Not just *you* and *your family*, but the vine, and *all* of the branches! His love is for the vineyard as a whole, and His desire is that that vineyard produces and grows to be robustly healthy.

But branches are not going to produce because the caretaker is standing over them threatening. Fear will not ultimately work on us either. God doesn't deal with us in that manner and we as a church must not deal with people in such a manner. God offers us a choice to be a part of this vineyard, just as we do as a church. But once we *do* move to be a part of the vineyard, there are expectations and parameters that we are thus *choosing* to adhere to. We often tend to see those aspects of Christendom as optional, and we can belong to the family and be a part of the family and still produce nothing and just live to suck the life out of the rest of the vineyard. This passage says the Vinekeeper will not allow that to happen. Despite that which is often dished out today and called Christianity, the reality is that the Vinekeeper is and always has been calling all the shots, and there is a personal cost to being in that vineyard.

Please note that the Vinekeeper is a very patient caretaker! It can take years for a vineyard to begin producing. All the while our God, the caretaker, is attempting to nurture the vineyard to health and productivity. Such encompasses passion, love, care and time to see the vineyard through to a level of maturity where it will start producing a harvest. There are many who confuse legalism with God's discipline. But you can always just go find another church that will not be honest with you.

This is not an issue of legalism, a 'works oriented faith.' It is an issue of evaluating whether we are indeed in the faith at all. It's not action to make us into something, it is action that says whether we *are* actually something!

2 Cor 13:5 *"Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine. Test yourselves. If you cannot tell that Jesus Christ is among you, it means you have failed the test."*

There are several such personal "measurements" in God's Word, the "*word He has spoken to us.*" He has given us criteria for which to both qualify and quantify our standing, if we are willing to truly evaluate our position in Him. Many of us, frankly, will not look in there for fear of what we might find. But if we fail to do so, it changes nothing positionally. This is much of what He is saying in this passage of John 15. If we fail to self-analyze, then the Vinekeeper will handle it anyway. The result is only whether we are a participant in the process of such pruning, or whether we are found in a state of shock and awe over certain events as they transpire in our lives in light of God's oversight and control.

In the course of His duties as caretaker, God will 'prune,' *trim away*, unproductive runaway shoots that can suck the life energy out of a plant, holding back fruit production in exchange for size. Many of us fail in this area today because we are investing all of our life energy into longer shoots, getting bigger and bigger, instead of scaling back on the things of this world so as to have the time, money, and energy to actually do something for God, the kingdom, and the billions of people who have never heard the name Jesus. These things are not necessarily overt sins, but can rather be issues of "weights" in our lives, as Paul spoke of in Hebrews 12:1. Weights slow us down and keep us from making a difference in the world. (*Note: Tim's blackberry plants*)

We so actively avoid this 'pruning' whenever possible because it hurts. It's uncomfortable. It is an unpleasant activity when we look at it merely for what we are losing, instead of what we are gaining.

Heb 12:6-7 *"For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children. As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined?"*