



"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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I 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 be in you, and that your joy may be full.

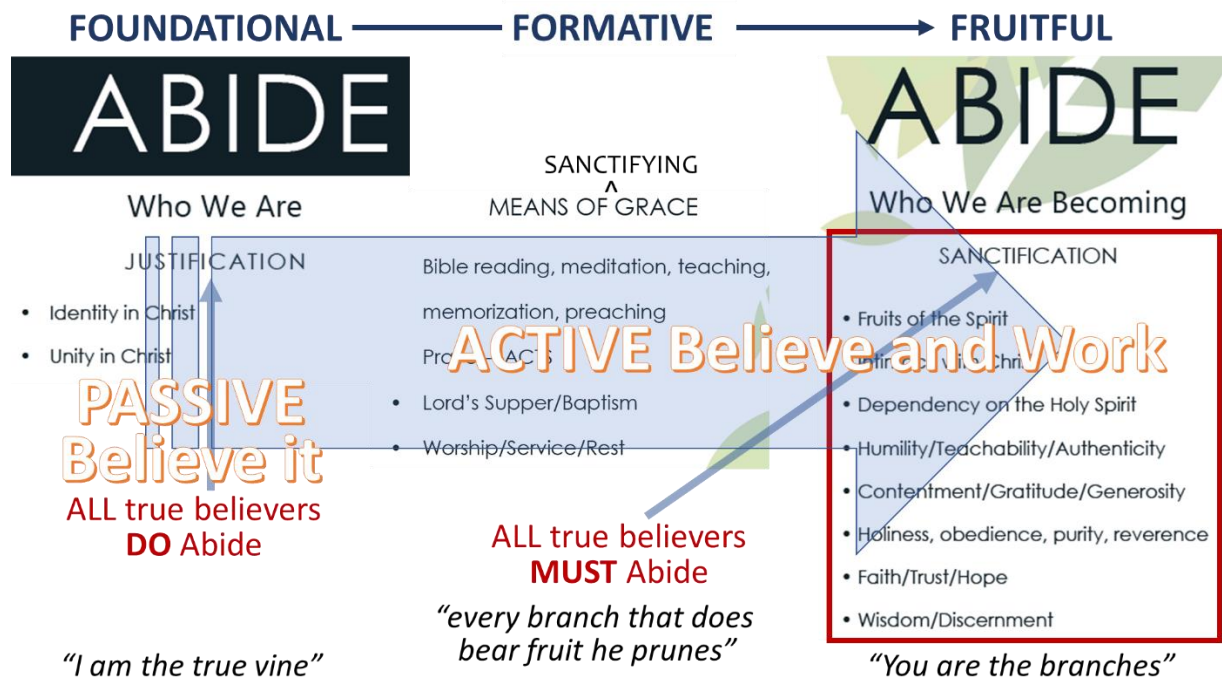
Time for a review from last Sunday before we jump further into this passage. This passage is all about abiding. Some versions have the word "remain" but I tend to prefer the word abide. It seems more of a relational word to me.

Remember, there are two types of abiding. First, all true believers do abide by virtue of being saved. Jesus said that if you don't abide, if you don't bear fruit, you are cut off and thrown into the fire. That cannot be describing a genuine believer, therefore all true believers abide. This is true because of Jesus' justifying work. Those who trust in Christ alone for salvation are justified by his blood. And that's just one of the wonders of salvation. There's a booklet in the literature rack called "33 Things that Happen at the Moment of Salvation." This is a great list of the various dimensions of our salvation. This abiding is foundational to our Christian lives. The more we believe it, trust it and see it as our actual reality, the more we will be able to work toward the deeper abiding.

Then there is the active side of abiding. Abiding in the vine, which is Jesus, is a command. We do abide but we also must abide. It is an active work that we do to deepen our level of abiding in Christ and to bear much fruit. This could be called the fruitful abiding. The foundational abiding does not change but the fruitful abiding is hopefully constantly growing.

Then I showed you the process for producing fruit, which are the means of sanctifying grace. All of these are not an end in themselves but rather a means to a greater end of producing spiritual fruit. This is the formative part of abiding. If you do not regularly engage in these “good works” then you will not produce spiritual fruit.

We don’t do anything with foundational abiding other than believe it. There is not work that can be done. Justification is a passive state of being. You are justified. You are not becoming justified or will be justified. For those who have trusted Christ, it is a past action done by Christ. Now we do have to actively believe that it is true. If you do not believe that you are a new creation in Christ, you will tend to see yourself as a miserable sinner. We do sin, but sin is not our identity. Jesus is our identity. If you do not actively believe that you are accepted, approved, and significant in Christ, then you will either work for approval from God and turn into a legalist or else you will give up and maybe even walk away from the faith.



In order to be fruitful you must make use of the formative work of the sanctifying means of grace. Last Sunday I told you about 3 Foundation Campers who really stretched themselves this week. I can report that not only did they stretch themselves, but they did an amazing job in their ministry roles, as did all of the FC’ers. And it all happened due to a simple service opportunity provided through Foundation camp and VBS. The service opportunity opened up an even greater opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work. They ministered to the kids at VBS in a multitude of ways but they also took some giant leaps forward in trusting the Lord in the process.

Here’s a simple reminder for parents, leaders and everyone for that matter. Do your best to catch people doing things well. Especially as parents, we are quick to correct our kids. We remind them what a horrible job they did cleaning their rooms or washing the dishes. We give them

sideways glances when their report cards do not meet our expectations. For some reason, it's much easier for us to correct others than it is to encourage them. Catch your kids doing things well and tell them. Give them a quick word of encouragement. Now obviously, if they were just plain lazy about cleaning their rooms, you don't compliment their laziness. But if they gave a good effort, you can encourage the good you do see and gently instruct in areas of improvement.

OK, that's the summary. It's important enough to have spent that much time reviewing the key parts. Let's move forward in what Jesus said about abiding in him.

3. Pruning for more fruit.

So we have the foundational abiding, the formative process which produces fruitful abiding. You would think that would be sufficient to produce much fruit in us but Jesus taught about another vital process that his Father uses all the time—pruning. Verse 2—*every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

If you want to know about pruning a vine, don't talk to me. I'm no expert but I did learn one vital fact. A proper pruning of a vine requires you to prune away 80-90% of the prior year's growth. So you are taking something that was previously fruitful and cutting that part off. You cut off what had produced fruit the prior season. If you were ignorant of the benefits of pruning, logic would tell us to leave it alone. If it looks healthy, chances are, it will remain healthy. This is the way living organisms work after all. You don't prune oak trees except to shape it somewhat. Whatever pruning you do, it is very minimal. You are still watching out for the overall health of the tree but nothing else.

But a vine is so very different. If the vine could talk, what would it say about the pruning process? Ouch! From the vine's perspective, it doesn't make any sense. It hurts. Sharp instruments cut into your flesh and remove large chunks from you. They not only remove large chunks of your flesh but large chunks of living flesh—a part of you that was already good and fruitful. It's not like debreeding a burn wound. When Ryan was about three years old he got a burn on his face. I had to hold him down while Karen debreeded the dead skin from his wound. That was a process that we did not ever want to repeat again. Thankfully, Ryan was too young to remember it. Debreeding a burn is a painful process that has a positive result. You are removing organic material that is no longer living. It is dead skin that needs to be removed for healthy, new skin to replace it. But it's different with pruning because you are removing living flesh from the vine. It's not like chopping off dead branches. That makes more sense, but in many ways, cutting off living shoots from the branches seems counterintuitive, at least until you realize the necessity of doing so.

As the Divine Vinedresser, this is what the Father does for us. He is not satisfied with a small amount of fruit so he prunes us for more fruitfulness. He is willing to cause us a little pain and difficulty for our greater good. He knows that without the sovereign work of the vinedresser, the branches will bear very little fruit.

It's one thing to know about pruning but how do you know if you are actually being pruned? If I run into a difficult issue, is that the Father pruning me? Is every hard thing I experience an instance of divine pruning? I liken it to Dave Hart's teaching on triggers. Here is his definition.

Trigger—God uses relationships and circumstances to catch us off-guard being ourselves.

Being triggered by a relationship happens when you are around a person who triggers you, which means he or she causes some sort of reaction within you. Their presence causes you to be angry or annoyed or some other emotion. Circumstances do the same thing. We can become frustrated, fearful, anxious, angry, etc by something we experience. Maybe were stuck behind a slow moving car. A plugged toilet might trigger you. All day long we have circumstances that cause us to react in a certain way. One of the important things to understand is that this is happening all of the time. God is not interested in letting us wallow in our sin and remain unfruitful. He will allow or cause people and circumstances to cross our path that trigger emotions and actions within us. Some of these will be sinful responses to the people and circumstances in our path.

As Dave always points out, the trigger is not causing the sinful response but merely revealing it. Whatever comes out of you was already there waiting, crouching at the door waiting for the right opportunity to be released. The person or the circumstances was the trigger that opened the door to your emotions and actions. I believe that this is part of God's pruning process.

There are other types of experiences that could fit under the larger category of pruning by the Father. Natural consequences is a type of pruning. For example, if you smoke for forty years and then get lung cancer, that is a natural consequence of your decisions. I believe that would fit within the scope of divine pruning. Our response to such terrible news is what can lead to more fruitfulness. Last month I met a physician who spent five years in prison. His time there was absolutely transforming. He learned from his fellow believers who taught him great faith in the midst of great pain. He hates the sin that put him in prison but he is extremely grateful for those five years. God pruned, not 80-90% of him away but almost 100%. It was painful in every possible way but it bore fruit and is still bearing fruit. Unfortunately, he will always bear the natural consequences of what he did. He will never work as a physician again, but that too is more pruning.

Persecution of all types is a form of pruning. Terrorists are not blowing up churches like they are in other nations but persecution is still all around us. The workplace is becoming an increasingly hostile place for the genuine believer. If you stand up for your faith it could lead to you losing your job. That's pruning.

Hebrews 12 teaches us about another kind of pruning. *It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons* (Hebrews 12:7-8). The Father disciplines those whom he loves. In other words, he is willing to cause you some pain to bring about more maturity, more growth and more fruit in your lives.

Now some of you might be thinking that you'd rather be left well alone. If pruning is painful then you'd rather not be pruned at all. I can understand such a sentiment. It kind of feels like exercise. If you are pretty healthy right now, why would you put yourself through the pain of

exercising. What is the perceived benefit to you? Let me list of the amazing benefits of the Father's work as the vinedresser.

1. We need to remember that if the Father did not prune us, it would mean that we are not attached to the vine. Just as loving discipline means that we are being treated as sons and daughters, so pruning means that we are attached to the vine. If you are not attached to the vine, you are cut off and thrown into the fire.

We need to realize that if we were not pruned, we would experience far more pain than the pain of pruning. Even unbelievers experience the pain of natural consequences. If God were to leave you alone, your life would deteriorate very quickly. To ask for less pruning is asking for less Jesus, and that would be a disaster. Ultimately, we need to trust the wisdom and experience of the vinedresser! He knows exactly where to prune, when to prune and how much to prune. How we respond to pruning is an indication of how much we trust the vinedresser. If we believe that he has our best interests in mind, we will be more ready to receive each cut of the knife. But if we don't believe that he is the divine vinedresser, that he not only has the right to prune us but the sovereign responsibility to prune us, then we won't respond accordingly.

And that's where real fruit is born—in our response to his pruning. We get that, don't we? If we don't learn the lesson we will repeat the lesson until we do begin to learn it. God is gentle and kind with us but he will keep at it until we begin to learn. Verse 8 says that when we bear fruit, "prove to be his disciples." Bearing fruit is evidence of our following after him. You don't just know a disciple by his love but by all of his fruit.

2. Prepares us for greater service. Not all pruning is pruning away sin but is mean to prepare you for greater service down the road. Remember, pruning is done to make you more fruitful. The Lord may have something he wants you to do but he also knows you are not ready. He is always preparing us for greater service for him.
3. Answered prayer—⁷*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* There are two ways of looking at this verse. The name it/claim it crowd says, "Well alright. Here we go. I told you God will answer all of our prayers. It says so right here. Just claim it in faith and God will make you well. Tell God you want that new car and it will happen. Go ahead and clean out the garage cause you're gonna need a spot for that new Mercedes." Of course we think that's a bunch of garbage so we swing too far the other way and explain away verses like this. And there are a lot of them. We say, "Well when Jesus said 'Ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you' he did not mean 'ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.' If he actually meant that it would mean that God is like a divine vending machine. Put in your fifty cents and our pops your answered prayer. By the time we are done overreacting to the hyper-charismatic, prosperity gospel interpretation of this verse,

We overreact and end up doing just as much damage to this verse and those like it. We should be very careful but we don't want to gut this verse of its truth and its power. The key to the verse is the first half—the conditional phrase. "If you abide in me and my

words abide in you...” If that condition is fulfilled, then you can “ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” I believe that this verse has the same meaning as Psalm 37:4. “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” If you delight yourself in the Lord—if you abide in Christ and his words abide in you—then your prayers will be answered because everything you pray will be according to the will of God. Do you see the simplicity and power of that principle. If you have the mind of Christ and delight in him, his desires will be your desires. His commandments will be your commandments. Of course we will never be fully aligned with God’s will but to the degree that we are aligned and abide and delight in him, we can ask according to his will and the prayer will be granted.

4. Bearing fruit brings glory to God. ⁸ *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit.*
5. Perfect love—⁹ *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.* Here’s the description of the longing of our hearts—to be perfectly loved by Jesus. When we feel alone, this is what our heart is longing for. When we seek after idols of our hearts, this is what our hearts truly want. It’s what we want but we just don’t realize it.

Understand that this is part of the active abiding. This is a command—abide in my love. Remain in my love. Rest in my love. This is not passive abiding, this is active abiding. This is what we do. The more we develop habits of sanctifying grace, the more fruit we will produce. Now understand also that God does not love us more if we actively abide or less if we don’t. If you are attached to the vine, Jesus’ love is always the same. What differs is our experience of his love. If you have more of the attributes of fruitful abiding, I guarantee you that you will have a greater experience of Jesus’ love.

Remember what the fruit looks like—the right side of our diagram. If you grow in these spiritual fruits, do you think your experience of Jesus’ love will also grow?

6. The joy of Jesus—¹¹ *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* Many Christians lack joy. Not happiness, joy. Deep, abiding joy that transcends circumstances.
7. Bearing fruit in our old age. For this we turn to Psalm 92.

Psalm 92

¹² The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

¹³ They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.

¹⁴ They still bear fruit in old age;

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