

# The Vine of Life

John 15:1-17

## *The Vine & the Branches*

- ☐ On the night before Jesus' death, he told his disciples he was going away; but he would return and take them to the "Father's house" (14:1-3). In the meantime, God would send the Holy Spirit to be their Advocate and Teacher (14:16, 26). After telling his disciples these things, Jesus began to teach them using the vine to illustrate his teaching. Read John 15:1-17.
1. The vine illustration includes four parts: 1) the vine; 2) the branches; 3) the gardener; and 4) the fruit. What does each of these parts represent?



- ☛ Vine (15:1, 5):<sup>1</sup>
- ☛ Branches (15:5):<sup>2</sup>
- ☛ Gardener (15:1):
- ☛ Fruit (15:16): See below.

## *Bearing Fruit*

2. In John 15, "fruit" is what the branches are supposed to bear (15:5, 16). What is this "fruit?" What does the word "fruit" represent in the following verses?

- ☛ Matthew 7:15-20; 12:33
- ☛ Galatians 5:22-25<sup>3</sup>
- ☛ John 4:31-38 (in verse 36, "crop" is literally "fruit")<sup>4</sup>

- ☐ Christians are expected to bear "fruit." In the New Testament, "fruit" has different aspects. Fruit is the evidence of one's true identity (*Matthew 7:15-20; 12:33*). Fruit is the Christ-like character produced by the Holy Spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23*).<sup>5</sup> Fruit is the result of one's actions or labors (*Matthew 3:8; Philippians 1:22*) and includes people who respond to the gospel by believing in Jesus Christ, thus receiving eternal life (*John 4:31-38; 15:16*).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jesus says, 'I am the true vine' (15:1a). In the Old Testament (OT), the vine was a common symbol for God's people Israel (e.g., *Psalms 80:8-16; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:1-21; 19:10-14*). However, the OT typically used the vine to illustrate Israel's failure to produce fruit. In contrast to Israel's failure, Jesus is the 'true (*alēthinos*) vine.'

<sup>2</sup> The primary application is to believers – those who are *truly* 'in Jesus' (15:5). However, the metaphor might also apply to false believers, or to the smaller branches that are 'pruned' (cut off) from a main branch (15:2).

<sup>3</sup> The context includes verses 16-26, which contrasts living according to the flesh with living according to the Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> Jesus' 'food' (sustenance and satisfaction) is to do the Father's will and accomplish His work (4:34). A complete understanding of this passage is found in the context of Jesus' ministry among the Samaritans (4:1-42). However, our focus here is the use of the word *karpon* (fruit) in verse 36. The 'crop (fruit) of eternal life' refers to the result of 'sowing' (sharing, proclaiming) the gospel – that is, people trusting in Jesus as Savior, thus receiving eternal life.

<sup>5</sup> 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control' (*Galatians 5:22-23a*). 'Christian fruit' is 'Christ-like fruit' (that is, fruit consistent with the character of Christ).

<sup>6</sup> In John 15:16, 'bearing fruit' probably includes leading others to faith in Christ. This is actually God's work, but He uses believers in the process. In particular, believers are called to share the gospel. Fruit is the seed-bearing part of the plant. Fruit is designed to reproduce. Believers are to 'reproduce' fruitful believers so that the church grows.

3. In nature, what is necessary for a branch to bear fruit? In the Christian life, what is necessary for “bearing fruit?” (15:4-5) Why is this so?



- ❑ To bear fruit, branches must “remain in the vine” (15:4-5).<sup>7</sup> Jesus says, “Remain in me...” (15:4). What does that mean? How do we “remain in Jesus” and thus “bear fruit?”<sup>8</sup>
  - ❑ The following is involved in “remaining in the Vine (Jesus)” and “bearing fruit.”<sup>9</sup>
    - ✿ God’s Word – “If ... my words remain in you” (15:7)<sup>10</sup>
    - ✿ Prayer – “ask ... and it will be done for you” (15:7, 16)<sup>11</sup>
    - ✿ God’s Discipline – “my Father ... prunes” (15:1-2)<sup>12</sup>
    - ✿ Obedience – “If you keep my commands ...” (15:10, 14)<sup>13</sup>
    - ✿ Love – “Love each other” (15:12, 17)
    - ✿ Joy – “that your joy may be complete” (15:11)
    - ✿ Sharing Christ and the Gospel – “Go and bear fruit” (15:16)
    - ✿ Living by the Spirit – “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:16, 22-25)
4. Read John 15:8. What is the ultimate purpose of “bearing fruit?” (15:8)<sup>14</sup>



### *The Life & You*

- What “fruit” is evident in your life? What does your fruit indicate about you? Only in the Vine can we have life and fruit that will last. Do you need to be connected to the Vine through faith in Jesus Christ?
- Brothers & sisters, are you trying to bear Christian fruit on your own? It will not work! Memorize John 15:5 and make specific commitments to “remain in the Vine.”

<sup>7</sup> To ‘remain’ (*menō*) is to dwell or abide. In nature, the branch must be connected to the main plant, which provides the life and substance necessary to produce the fruit. Likewise the Christian must be united with Christ to have the life and substance needed to bear Christian fruit (15:5). We must be ‘in Christ.’ We are totally dependent on Christ.

<sup>8</sup> A person is ‘in Christ’ only by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Much of ‘remaining’ in Christ is simple trust, and is realized through awareness of his presence and our dependence on him. We are connected to the Vine by God’s grace through faith. However, faith is demonstrated, deepened and strengthened through certain activities.

<sup>9</sup> For a series of lesson on these components, see ‘The Fruitful Life’ on the ICF website.

<sup>10</sup> In verse 7, Jesus connects remaining in him with ‘his words remaining in’ us. His words are his teachings – life-giving truths that transform our thinking, attitudes, and actions. This means we must receive his words (through the Bible), internalize them, and act on them.

<sup>11</sup> The condition for answered prayer is conformance with God’s will, which is a result of truly remaining in Christ.

<sup>12</sup> God the Father (the Gardener) ‘prunes’ the branches to make them more fruitful (15:2). ‘Prune’ (*kathairō* – trim clean) means ‘to trim the branches of the plant to make it more healthy, productive and fruitful.’ Pruning’ may involve correction by the Holy Spirit through God’s word (the Bible) or through others. It may involve difficulties, trials, troubles, and suffering. See Hebrews 12:5-11.

<sup>13</sup> In verses 9-10, Jesus connects remaining in his love (which involves the continued enjoyment of his love) with obedience to God’s commands, especially Jesus’ command to ‘Love each other as I have loved you’ (15:12). Jesus offers himself as the ultimate example of obedience. Jesus showed his obedience and love by dying on the cross.

<sup>14</sup> Bearing fruit is for the Father’s glory. The Gardener should be honored and praised for his beautiful fruit!