

“SECRETS OF THE VINE: BREAKING THROUGH TO ABUNDANCE”

A study of John 15

Background to John 15

Jesus was with His disciples, hours before his arrest and crucifixion. After the “upper room” evening meal, Jesus watches their feet and tells them of His betrayal. He then leads them towards a garden on the Mount of Olives. They pass through vineyards, where Jesus stops and teaches them using the metaphor of the vineyard (including grapes, vines & branches and the vinedresser). These were some of the very last words of Jesus, and were extremely important to His follower’s back then and to His followers today!

God wants us to bear a fruitful harvest for Him. In John 15 we will find out how to make that happen.

What God Wants

What did Jesus hold in His hand to make His point in the vineyard? Money? A map for a human or angelic invasion of Jerusalem? A strategic plan complete with yearly goals and strategies? Answer is ... **grapes!**

... Read John 15:1-8) ...

Jesus uses the metaphor of the vineyard to picture for us our role in bearing fruit for God:

- 1) **Jesus is the V_____.**
- 2) **God the Father is the V_____.**
- 3) **We are the B_____.**

What is Fruit?

Fruit = good works (Titus 3:14; Psalms 1:3)

Inner Fruit = when you allow God to nurture Christ-like qualities into you, such as the fruit of the Spirit from Gal 5:22.

Outer Fruit = when you allow God to work through you to bring Him glory. Includes all acts where your motive is to glorify God.

How important is Fruit?

- Fruit is your only permanent deposit in heaven! (John 15:16)
- Fruit is the main earthly reason we were saved! (Eph 2:10)
- It is God's desire for us to bring Him glory through a remarkably abundant (fruitful) life!

Are there different levels of fruitfulness?

Yes, from John 15 we can derive four general levels (represented with baskets):

- Basket 1 – “no fruit”
- Basket 2 – “fruit”
- Basket 3 – “more fruit”
- Basket 4 – “much fruit”

God's desire is for all of us to move into the Basket 4 level!

BASKET #1 – No Fruit, the “barren branch”

Definition: *A Christian who bears no fruit for a period of time*

John 15:2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He *takes away*”

Airo = “take up” or lift up”. Branches fall into the dust, get dirty and they can't bear fruit. God doesn't throw away or abandon. He lifts them, cleans them off, and helps them flourish again.

Dirt = sin

First Secret of the Vine:

“If your life consistently bears no fruit, God will intervene to discipline you”

The God Hurt

Discipline:

Duet 8:5

Heb 12:5-11

Principles:

- 1) G___ is the source of the discipline.
- 2) He disciplines all B_____.
- 3) He always acts out of L_____.

It's All Up to You

The discipline doesn't have to continue! It's all up to me. I will only experience pain as long as I hang on to my sin.

God doesn't expect you to seek or enjoy His correction. If you're being disciplined, He wants you to get out of it even more than you want to.

Remember that God still loves you, cares for you, and wants relationship with you

Three Degrees of Intervention by God (from Hebrews 12)

Degree 1: Rebuke (v. 5)

Rebuke = verbal warning

How does God rebuke us?

- Prick of our conscience
- Timely word from another person
- A scripture
- Preaching/teaching of God's Word
- Conviction by the Holy Spirit

Degree 2: Chasten (v. 5)

Chastening = something you feel as emotional anxiety, frustration or distress

Degree 3: Scourge (v. 6)

Scourge = to whip, to inflict punishment (cause excruciating pain)

C.S. Lewis: "God whispers through pleasure but shouts through pain"

Unconfessed and unrepentant sin can lead to severe consequences (I Cor 11:30)

What stops good people from cleaning up their acts?

Misguided voices:

- The pain/negativity in my life are not connected to my choices.
- If God does discipline me, it'll just be a one-time thing. He's much too forgiving to keep disciplining me.
- The enjoyment I get from sinning outweighs any spiritual benefit I'd get from stopping. Besides, my sins are not hurting anybody else.

- I can't help myself. This problem goes back to my childhood.
- Just because I sin doesn't mean I can't do something for God.
- It's not a sin, it just a weakness, a part of my personality.
- Hey, everybody else is doing it – why not me?

What are we really saying?

The Joyful Turning

Repentance = turning away from the sin that ails you to the bounty that God provides you

Not a one-time act, but a lifestyle, and on-going commitment to keep putting aside our rebellion and receive God's forgiveness

Second Secret of the Vine:

If your life bears some fruit, God will intervene to prune you.

PRUNING

Why is pruning necessary to be more fruitful?

Pruning vs. Disciplining

Disciplining is about SIN, pruning is about SELF

Is there something you should say to God?

“The most fruitful and the most joy-filled Christians are the most pruned Christians!”

Mature Pruning

The testing of your faith (Jam 1:3-4; Ps 66:10)

When your faith feels pressed to the limit, remember some important pruning truths:

- 1) God doesn't apply pain when a more pleasant method would do just as well
- 2) Not every painful experience is the result of pruning (Rom 8:28)
- 3) The pain of pruning comes now, but the fruit comes later
- 4) Even though the duration, depth, and breadth of pruning seasons will vary, no season lasts indefinitely (e.g. Paul)

Where Does it Hurt?

God uses pain to get our attention and signal His urgency (e.g. David in I Sam 25; refer to Psalms 54, 57, 63)

Prime Points of Pruning

- Mature pruning is God's way of helping you put into practice His command to “seek first the Kingdom of God”
- God's goal: not to harm us, but to liberate us so that we can pursue our true desire – His kingdom.

Potential pruning areas:

- 1) The people you love most
- 2) Your right to know why God does what He does

- 3) Your love for money and possessions
- 4) The sources of your significance

Grape Expectations

Paul: Phil 3:5-8, 11, 13

Goal of mature pruning: have one passion and goal: to bear more fruit for God!

After discipline to remove sin, after pruning to change priorities, then comes 'Abiding in Me'

Third Secret of the Vine:

"If your life bears a lot of fruit, God will invite you to abide more deeply with Him"

To be extremely fruitful and have a great eternal impact, we must abide closely with Christ!

Mysteries of Abiding

- Abiding is a command
- We can not bear fruit ourselves
- If we don't abide, we wither and die and become of no spiritual use

"Unless your friendship with God becomes our first priority, we will never fulfil our true destiny as a Christian"

Living in His Presence

Dr. Wilkinson's commitments to get close to God:

- Get up everyday at 5 am to read his bible

- Write a full page in a daily spiritual journey
- Learn to pray and seek Him until he found Him

The Person of Abiding

In abiding – you seek, long for, thirst for, wait for, see, know, love, hear and respond to ... a PERSON. More abiding means more of God in your life, more of Him in your activities, thoughts and desires (see Ps 42:1).

Why do so few Christians fervently pursue a deep relationship with God?

- We don't really believe God likes us (God is judgmental, busy, impatient, and reluctant to spend time with us)
- We need to remember that when God looks at us, he sees a beloved child, a worthy heir. God – your Friend – wants to abide with you even more than you want to abide with Him.

Principles of Abiding

Abiding begins with spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading and prayer ... but we can do these things for years without abiding.

- Reading a book about a person is not the same thing as knowing the person who wrote the book

The challenge in abiding is always to break through from dutiful activities to a living, flourishing relationship with God.

Principle #1: *To break through to abiding, I must deepen the quality of my devoted time with God (Ps 27:4).*

- Set apart the kind of time that will build relationship.
- Savor God's words to you (Col 3:16 "let the word of God dwell in you richly")
- Talk and listen to a person
- Keep a daily written record of what God is doing in your life

Principle #2: To break through to abiding, I must broaden my devoted time – taking it from a morning appointment to an all-day attentiveness to His presence

Overcoming Barriers to Abiding

Misconception #1: *Abiding is based on feelings*

- Communion with God is a relationship, not a sensation
- Abiding is an act of faith

Misconception #2: *We can abide in Jesus without obeying Him* (John 15:10).

Benefits of Abiding

- 1) Abiding helps us sense the leading of the Lord
 - Learn to recognize God's "still small voice" (I Ki 19:12) and become familiar with His ways
- 2) Abiding helps us to tap into all of God's spiritual riches (Acts 4:13)
- 3) Abiding gives us the "rest" we need to bear a much greater yield
- 4) Abiding carries with it a promise of answered prayer (John 15: 7-8)