

The Word Made Flesh 2026

Vine and Branches

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: John 15

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We're going to be continuing in the book of John today, and we will be in John chapter 15, starting in verse 1. So if you have your Bibles, I encourage you to go ahead and open up to John chapter 15: 1 as we continue in our series through the Book of John. If you've not been here for the last couple of weeks, I just want to share with you the setting of where the story is taking place. Jesus is in an upper room in Jerusalem, in Israel with His disciples, getting ready to celebrate the Passover.

Any good or faithful Jewish man was commanded if they were able and willing to go to Jerusalem to celebrate these feasts. And the Passover, of course, was remembering and celebrating when God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, and during the final plague, when the angel of death would kill the firstborn of every Egyptian person, but pass over the doors of the Israelites if they had the blood of the lamb around the door.

And so as they were getting ready to celebrate the Passover, they were remembering God's deliverance from the Egyptians. Now, the disciples don't know it yet, but this will be Jesus' final night with them before He is crucified. And as we look at this speech or message that Jesus gives here in John 15, it is part of the longest recorded message that we have from Jesus in the entire Scriptures, and it is known as the Farewell Discourse.

He has been talking since chapter 13, and we will continue today in 15, and it goes all the way through chapter 17. These will be the final words that the disciples will hear from Jesus until the resurrection, which they also don't know is coming. They are oblivious to what the next few days are going to hold in their lives, and when we get to this point in the story, it is almost as if John hits the slow-mo button on the remote.

Up to this point, he's been sharing highlights of their time together and the stories of what are taking place. But here in chapters 13 through 17, John seems to share every word in every detail instead of maybe just the highlights.

And in chapter 15 today, Jesus is going to share with us another analogy to help us understand what he was talking about in chapter 14 concerning this, "I am in the Father, you are in me, and I am in you, business." That can all be a little confusing, and so he's going to share an analogy with us to help us understand what He is talking about.

Now, you and I need to remember here in John chapter 15, the disciples have not been given the Holy Spirit yet. That will come in roughly fifty days on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit will be poured upon them, and will have the beginning of the church. And so, at this point, as the disciples are listening to Jesus, they really don't have any idea what He is talking about. And so Jesus has to use some analogies to help them make sense.

And so, of course, He is going to use things that they would be familiar with that would help them understand these deeper spiritual truths. And so today, Jesus is going to talk about what it means to love. What does that look like? How do we do it? He's going to talk about the upcoming struggles that the disciples are going to experience, but again, they don't have any idea what is coming, but He's trying to prepare them for it, and He is

also going to take some time to share a little more about this Holy Spirit that is going to be coming, this comforter, this advocate, as some translations say.

And so we're going to pray and we're going to get to it in John 15:1 so that we can make it through that entire chapter today. So let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we come before You today, I thank You for Your goodness. I thank You for Your truth. Father, I'm grateful for Your Word that we have here, what we call the Scriptures or the Bible, that we can relive this night that Jesus had with the disciples and the truths that He was revealing to them.

Father, it is my desire that as we read through this, that we would gain a closeness with you, that we would take that next step towards you as we understand what You have called us to, as well as we get a better grasp of Your grace and Your mercy and Your forgiveness in our lives. Lord, would You receive the praise? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

We're going to start in John 15:1, and if you have been a part of a church for any time in your life, you will certainly recognize these words of Jesus. He says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean or you are already pruned because of the Word that I have spoken to you. So remain in me as I also remain in you, for no branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. Now, I'm not a gardener per se. I mean, I have plants around my house, and my wife does plant some vegetables and some fruits that we try to grow, just a very small amount.

So, I have a limited understanding of farming and gardening and doing this type of thing. Of course, as he's talking about vine and branches, he's probably speaking about grapes, and they were raised to make wine and other things, and so they would have understood this analogy that he is using, and it really does help me as well, even though I am not a gardener by nature. And so, as he is sharing this analogy, these are the parts that he is saying.

First, he says, "Jesus is the vine." He is claiming to be the vine in this analogy. He says that his father is the gardener, the one that takes care of the vine and the branches, and that you and I are the branches in the story. So, just to help us understand this and the analogy that he is using, it is obvious that Jesus is saying He is the source of life. As the branch or as the root of that plant, He is the source of life, and all life flows through Him.

Without Him, without this vine, there is no life because the branch, you and I, those little branches that come off of the vine, cannot survive if the vine is not in the soil. The reason that we are attached to the vine, as Jesus is sharing this analogy, is so that we can produce fruit. We don't reside in the vine just for life itself. We have a purpose.

Just as when you plant a fruit or a vegetable plant in the ground, the goal is that it will give you fruit, not just that it will live. And so Jesus says, "If you are taking energy from the vine, but not producing fruit, the Father will come and cut you away." Now this is a little harsh to think about.

If you and I are the branches and he's saying, "Listen, if you don't produce any fruit, I'm going to cut you from the vine." And so theologians have interpreted this multiple ways throughout the years as we try to understand what does that really mean, that God would cut off the branches from the vine of Jesus. And so, I will share with you a couple of the interpretations, and then I will share with you how I like to look at this, and I don't know if I am right or not, and so we'll just go with it, okay? And you guys can have a different feeling, and that's fine.

Some people interpret this as if God can cut off the branches that they have at one time been a part of the vine, then that means you can lose your salvation. You can be cut off from the vine. That's what some people would interpret that as, okay? Other people would view it as, "No, everybody, from the point of birth, because we are created in the image of God, and because we are all God's people, we begin in the vine, and so when somebody

is cut off, it's because they have chosen not to follow Jesus or not to follow the vine, and so they are being cut off." You guys get that, all right?

And so they would say, "No, once you are in the vine, "you cannot lose that, "you cannot get rid of that, "you're only cut off because you made the choice to do so." Now, I like to believe, I like to interpret this analogy, as well as later in Scripture when we read about this book of life. You guys have heard of this, right, where your name can be blotted out from the book of life. I like to believe that everybody's name originally begins in the book of life, and it is only blotted out after they have made the decision not to want to be a part of it, right?

This is because of God's grace and because of His mercy. Now, we can talk about this, we can argue about this. Theologians have been arguing about it for 2,000 years, all right? So we're probably not going to come to a conclusion, but I do enjoy the conversation, and I will tell you that the conclusion of the matter is about once saved, always saved, or whatever else, is I am never going to encourage somebody to just pray a prayer and then do whatever they want, right? Because that branch is not producing fruit anyway, and so we're going to see that it really is based on this idea of producing fruit.

That's when they get cut off when they're not producing fruit. The opposite, though, is true. If we are producing fruit, Jesus says that the Father, the gardener, comes and prunes us and works with us so that we can produce more fruit. But in order to do that, we have to allow the gardener to prune us. And let me just tell you from personal experience as a side note, being pruned is not always fun, right?

It is not fun when God is pruning things away from us, when we allow Him to prune those things away, but in so doing, Jesus says it allows us to produce more fruit. Jesus is going to go on and basically say the same thing again here in the next few verses, but the truth is, once the branch is cut off from the vine, it can do nothing else but die. That is the only thing that the branch can do. So let's go on in verse 5. Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches.

If you remain in me and I in you, then you will bear much fruit. But apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up and they are thrown into the fire and burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. How do we show ourselves to be His disciples? It's by bearing fruit. That's what Jesus is saying. If you are connected to the vine, you will naturally produce fruit. The emphasis seems obvious here that there are no true disciples who do not remain connected to the vine. It's not possible.

Those who are disconnected from the vine have no life and therefore have no lasting good. Theologian Tenney says it this way, "Deadwood is worse than fruitlessness. For deadwood can harbor disease and decay, and so God removes the deadwood from His church and He disciplines the life of the believer so that it is directed into fruitful activity. What does this mean?

This means that God, the Father, being the gardener, will continue to prune and work with those branches that are showing the possibility of life, but those branches that are simply dead because they carry decay, because they can carry disease, of course the Father is going to cut them off and completely separate them so that they cannot cause disease within the vine. We think about this in light of the church, and certainly the church is made up of sinful people, right?

Even though many of us would believe we are a branch that is in the vine and we are doing our best to produce fruit, there is certainly not a single one of us that is perfect, and so we need that pruning to exist. But there are also people that are here that God would say are kind of like dead wood, and they can bring disease, they can bring something negative to this body, and so sometimes God separates them.

We've all been a part of church conflict and the dysfunction that can exist, and sometimes God does have to do the work that only He can do. You see, the very purpose of producing fruit is not for the glory of the branch. We don't produce fruit so that we can stand up or stand out on the vine and say, "Look at all the fruit I'm producing," right? The whole goal of that branch that produces fruit is so that the glory can go to the Father, so that God receives the glory, the gardener receives the glory.

He is the one that is taking care of us. I also find it interesting in this analogy of producing fruit and continuing to produce fruit, that real fruitfulness is not only decided by a one-time prayer, but by fruitfulness over a lifetime. Isn't that interesting? As we look at this analogy that Jesus is using, he's not saying, well, if the branch can produce one piece of fruit, then it's good forever, right?

No, that branch needs to continue to produce fruit, because if it is in the vine, that's naturally what it's going to do. And so, as we think about this in terms of salvation in our lives, and you can only carry analogies so far, but you know, if you're living your life and you're not producing fruit, I think at the very least, Jesus should say, or would say, you should at least be asking the question, why? Why am I no longer producing fruit? Because fruit is the proof of the branch being in the vine.

Jesus goes on in verse nine, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. For if you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, but to lay down one's life for one's friends, and if you are my friends, you will do what I command. When Jesus spoke of His joy to His disciples and on multiple times He speaks about His joy, I find it interesting that nobody ever asked Him what He meant. They did not look at each other in perplexity.

To them, it seemed entirely natural that the Master should make reference of His gladness. From this, you and I can gather the truth that the joy of Christ was something that they were perfectly familiar with. The disciples understood the joy of Jesus. This was not surprising that Jesus would have gladness or joy in his life. They saw His joy. All too often, the world looks at the church or looks at Jesus and says, "Oh, that's boring. They don't have any fun. They're not happy.

They're just sad. They're just prudes." People use that word, right? I don't even know what that exactly means. But here in Scripture, we find that they were not surprised or uncertain of what Jesus meant when He talked about His joy.

Jesus had true joy, and Jesus says, "If you are going to walk with me, He calls for His disciples for the branches that are part of the vine to have active obedience." He said, "You are my friends if you do what I command or ask of you." Charles Spurgeon says this, "Some think that it is quite sufficient if they simply avoid what God forbids.

But abstinence from evil, although is a great part of righteousness, it is not enough for friendship." Think about that for a moment. Let that sink in. Aren't these wise words? God calls our faith to be an active faith, not a passive faith. Friendship with Jesus cannot be disconnected from obedience to His commands. It can't be disconnected. The two go together.

If you are going to have a friendship, it's not just doing things that are going to hurt him and not doing those things, but you are doing the things that he has asked you to do. Think about your own personal friendships. You don't simply become friends with somebody because they don't hurt you, right? You become friends with somebody because they're a blessing to you, and because you enjoy their company, you enjoy who they are, you enjoy their personality.

And so when we think about the relationship that Jesus wants to have with us, it's not just about not doing the things that He doesn't want us to do, it's about doing the things that He wants us to do because it brings joy to Him and it brings a blessing to that friendship. Friendship with Jesus cannot be disconnected from obedience to His commands. He goes on in verse 15, "Therefore, I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business.

Instead, I have called you friends. For everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and I appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, and so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you. And so this is my command. Love each other. So after all of that, he says, what is my command?

What am I asking you to do? Is he asking you to go out and do something crazy and go out? No, no, he's saying simply, "I want you to love others." So what does that love look like? I love how theologian Tenny describes this type of love. He says, "It is unity instead of rivalry. It is trust instead of suspicion. And it is obedience. Instead of the self-assertion, this must rule the disciples' common labors." What is love?

Love is putting others above yourselves. It is following the example that Jesus has given to us, following in his footsteps. He has just said, "Greater love has no man than this than your willingness to lay down your life for one's friends." If you want a further definition of this love that Jesus is talking about, I think Paul does a great job in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

And if you've ever been to a Christian wedding, you have probably heard some of 1 Corinthians chapter 13, where Paul says, "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast." This is the type of love that Jesus is talking about when He tells us to love one another and loving others is hard. It is hard because it goes against our natural instincts of self-preservation.

And so you and I need to be reminded that God is the great provider, that He chose us and that He will not let us down, and so we can love in this sacrificial way that He has called us to. Going on in verse 18, Jesus says, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. For if you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own, but as it is, you do not belong to the world.

But I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. And if they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

We all have experiences in our lives when we have felt the world's hate because of our faith in Jesus Christ. There's probably not a person in here that's been a believer for any longer than a week that hasn't experienced some type of personal attack simply because we have put our faith in Jesus. It can be discouraging. It can be hard. Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for this.

He tried to prepare us for this to say, "Listen, the world hates you because it hated me. "You are being connected to me, "and because you're connected to me "and they hate me, "they are also going to hate you." Now, we live in a very blessed time as believers here in the United States of America. You and I don't often, if ever, have to be worried about our lives being taken because of our faith in Jesus Christ, but you and I need to be reminded that every single day in this world, somebody's life is taken because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

There are martyrs every single day. And so theologian Dodd says this, "The hatred of the world, instead of being depressing to us because we can get in our own, you know, little huddles and be all worried and talk about how evil the world is." But he says, "The hatred of the world, instead of being depressing, should be exhilarating as being evidence and guarantee that they have been chosen by Christ." Scripture says that you and I should rejoice in our sufferings, we should rejoice in our persecution, that you and I would even be considered connected to who Jesus is.

How amazing should it be that we are counted worthy to be persecuted for bearing the name of Jesus? And why are we considered worthy? It is because we have been chosen out of the world. And this is truly great news that you and I have been chosen and pulled out of this world because you know what Scripture says is in store for this world? Destruction and burning. Aren't you glad that we are not part of that?

We have been chosen out of the world, and so Jesus wants to prepare His disciples, He wants to prepare us and say, "Listen, persecution is going to happen, but pray for the Lord's strength that you would survive it." He goes on in verse 22. He says, "If I had not come and spoken to them, speaking of the world, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. For whoever hates me hates my Father as well."

If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but as it is, they have seen and yet they have hated both me and my Father, but this is to fulfill what is written in their law. They hated me without reason. Jesus is sharing here the irony that those who were supposed to know the law the best, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the religious teachers of the law, those that were supposed to recognize the Messiah when He comes.

They were the ones that were supposed to know what to look for. Those were the very ones that were fulfilling this prophecy in Psalm 35:19, and they were the ones that were hating Jesus for no reason, even though He had performed these signs, even though He had performed these miracles. They were the ones that were walking away. And so, one of the warnings that I take from this part of Jesus' speech to us, as those of us that are religious, that we would be cautious to somehow believe that we know exactly what everything is going to look like in the end.

I sometimes am concerned that we have it so well spelled out that when Jesus actually comes, we're going to miss him. Because that's what happened the first time he came. It was the religious leaders that missed him, and so you and I need to stay humble and do our best to interpret the signs and look at the world in which we live, but to keep our focus on Jesus in the midst of that.

He wraps up in verses 26 and 27, "When the advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me, and you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." Jesus speaks once again about this helper, the Holy Spirit that is going to come, this advocate, this comforter.

And again, the disciples had no idea what this was going to look like, but I love that you and I can look back, and as we read this, we can see the fulfillment of what Jesus said. Again, the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, when God pours out His Holy Spirit on the disciples, as they are waiting in the upper room, as they are terrified, not sure what life is going to look like, because the person that they thought was the Messiah has been crucified. Yes, they've seen the resurrection, but what does that mean, and what are they supposed to do?

And God pours the Spirit upon them. And so there in Acts chapter two, we have the beginning of the church and the church age. And here you and I sit 2,000 years later in that church age. And so Jesus speaks of this helper who was to come. Jesus knew that His disciples were going to need the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit to face the opposition that the world would bring. And we're going to talk about this next week in chapter 16, but Jesus even makes this crazy statement that it is better for you and I that He left so that He could send the Spirit.

We'll talk about that next week. I'm going to begin by asking the question, "How many of you would love to just sit down with Jesus for a day?" Wouldn't we love that? And I'm ruining the beginning of my message next week, but that's okay. Jesus is saying, "It's better that you have the Spirit with you all the time than that you would have Jesus here in the flesh." Crazy thought, okay, but that's for next week. Jesus knew that we would need Him. He did not leave us. He did not forsake us.

And so He says the branch, you and I, as part of that vine, are to speak of the goodness of the vine and the gardener. Jesus' whole point here to the disciples and to you and I, 2,000 years later, He is telling us to stay connected to the source. Don't be disconnected from the source of life because there is no other option. It is the only way that you are going to produce fruit. It doesn't matter if you're 10 years old, 40 years old, or 80 years old. You and I were never intended to live separate from the vine.

Therefore, our best life is in Him. And so here's the question that you and I need to ask of ourselves today. Are we producing fruit? Are we producing fruit? And you say, "Well, Pastor, what do you mean by fruit? What does that look like?" Well, again, Paul talks about this in his letter to the Church of Galatia, and he says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

These are the fruits that you and I as the branch attached to the vine are to produce." Now, please don't hear me saying that as a branch, even though we might have a lot of green leaves, that you and I don't have this nasty little dead leaf over here, right? We're still human beings, we're going to struggle, and so the question that you and I, as we are asking, are we producing fruit is, are we producing those things that God has called us to produce? Love and joy and peace in this world?

Is that what we are producing? And when we have this little nasty dead leaf over here, are we willing and will we allow God to prune that from us so that we can produce even more fruit? Again, I told you, I don't know a lot about gardening or plants or flowers, but it was a couple of years ago we have this lilac tree that's in our front yard and it was getting way too big and the inside was dying. You know how that happens? Like the outside gets all the green leaves and the inside, there was nothing there. And so my wife said, well, I've done some research.

I think if I cut off all of the outside and shape it to what I want it to look like, it will come back. And so she did that and I came home and there was not one green leaf left on that lilac tree. And I thought, what did you do? You know It's just now a stick, it's just a dead tree sitting in our front yard. Amazing enough, next year, as it was blooming, it all bloomed and it all came back and it looked beautiful again. And think about that in our own lives.

Sometimes God has to prune us back and it's not fun, but sometimes we have to allow Him to take some of that from us, to take some of the growth from us even, so that we can produce more and better fruit. Even as I think about some of the flowers that we have around our house, they produce these beautiful things, but then if you go and you begin to cut off something that was once beautiful and now has died, you cut that off, new growth comes.

And as we think about that in our own lives, sometimes there's something in our life that's producing good fruit or in our church that's producing good fruit, but there comes a time where that's not producing as good a fruit anymore and you can cut it off and God can grow something better. I think that's the difficulty of being a leader of a church as you're trying to determine, is that ministry? Is that class? Is that thing dead? Do we need to prune it and start something new? That's hard, isn't it? Because we don't like to be pruned.

But as you look at your own personal life, are you producing fruit? And if you truly can say, I don't see that fruit in my life, the question to ask is why? And it's okay if you look at those fruits of the Spirit and say, "I'm good at some of these, but other of these I still need to work on." That's very normal for us. Fruit comes in various forms. But if today, as you are thinking about producing fruit, you come to the conclusion, you recognize that as you look at your life, it's not just one little dead spot, but the whole thing is dead.

I want to encourage you. Paul continues this analogy in Romans chapter 11, as he is talking about Israel and as he is talking about Jesus, and Israel were God's chosen people, and so Paul says they were kind of naturally grafted into the vine, those branches. They were naturally there, but as he begins to speak to the Gentiles, you and I that are not Jewish, he says, "But don't worry, I have hope for you. God can graft you into that branch." Even though we've been separated, God can bring us back into the fold, per se.

And so today, if you look at yourself and as you look in the mirror, you say there is no fruit, it's just a dead branch with dead leaves. Can I just encourage you that God can graft you in? What does that look like? That means confessing your sins. It means coming to Him, proclaiming Him as Lord and Savior. If you want to be grafted in, you are saying, "You are my master, you are my Lord," but even more than that, it's recognizing that He wants to be your friend.

He says, "I no longer call you a servant, for a servant doesn't know the master's business, but you and I do know what his life is." I can't help but think about this section of Scripture every time I go out into my yard and pick up sticks. After a storm, you guys know what it looks like. You go after a storm and sometimes there's little clumps of branches that have been taken off of trees and so you pick them up and when you pick them up right away, if it's the day after or a couple hours after, you pick up this branch, it looks alive, the leaves are still green, everything looks great on it, but my family and I like to have campfires and so I will make a pile of those.

Isn't it amazing when you go back like a week later and you look at that, all the leaves are shriveled and they're dead and you look at that stick and you think it's good for nothing except to be fire burned. It makes good kindling, right? This is what happens when you and I get disconnected from the vine. We are good for nothing. That's what Jesus is trying to say here, and so when I pick up those sticks and I do that, I am just reminded life is provided in the source of Jesus Christ. Whether we realize it or not.

And so I encourage you, look at your life, look for the fruit. If you're not producing, be willing to be pruned. If you want a dangerous prayer, say, "God, I'm willing to be pruned." But I'm telling you, it's the best thing that will ever happen to you because you'll produce more fruit. The altar is always open. There'll be people that love to pray with you. If there's anybody here that would say, "Man, I don't know if I'm even connected to the vine anymore. My life doesn't resemble any of these things of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness." None of that's in my life. Can I encourage you?

You can be grafted in. You come before Him. The Apostle Paul says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. You can be grafted in. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank you for the vine of Jesus. Thank you that you are the one that gives life, and you are the one that allows us to produce fruit.

It is only through you. And so, Lord, I pray that individually we all would produce the fruit that is testifying of Your goodness. But Lord, even as a church, we would be producing fruit that shares of Your goodness. That we would testify to who You are and that we would point others towards You. Father, that we would see the good fruit that is produced so that You would receive the praise.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.