

Sunday 012124

NFIHBC SP

John 15:1-17

Title: Surviving & Thriving: "Abide" and

"Joy"

**Good morning.**

Today's passage is **John 15:1-17** (SLIDE Title & passage) READ title:

If you need a bible raise hand.

While you're getting to the passage...

**Pastor announcement:** teaching notes and a few supplemental notes available on teaching tab of website.

**Pray:** (Long Pause – Israel - Children)

In today's passage we look at one of Jesus' metaphors for how he sustains his disciples as they continue the "works" Jesus started during his earthly ministry before he returned to the Father. This a metaphor of a vineyard: Jesus *himself* being the "true vine", The "Father" being the "gardener", and we as disciples being the "branches."

**READ 15:1-7**

But how does this fit into the context of where we are in the book of John?

We are in a five chapter section of John where Jesus is *preparing and equipping* the disciples for their life as disciples, carrying on Jesus' work, after Jesus' physical departure from them. In the next 5 weeks of our study thru the end of John 17 we'll see that Jesus teaches the disciples, including John the author, a plan that *is based on the gospel* – to not *just survive* but to *thrive* in living as "disciples/Christians", and this results in Jesus' disciples having love, hope, joy, peace, value, purpose, power, and oneness *in the face of evil and adversity --And producing fruit.*

And that plan is for you and I as well.

The context of our passage is that this is just hours before Jesus is betrayed by Judas in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had washed the disciples feet in the upper room where they shared the Passover meal. Then Jesus told them one of them would betray him. The betrayer left in **13:30**. Then Jesus told the disciples *he was leaving them* and returning to the Father. And then he gave "the commandment" to "Love each other"

**13:34**

We know from Jesus' observation of the disciples that in response to him telling them he was leaving, they were feeling, in Jesus' own words, **14:1 "troubled"**, **14:8 "abandoned"**, and **16:6** they were **"grieving."** (SLIDE – 3 verses, 3 words in blue)

Jesus then put a plan in play that would move the disciples beyond those feelings, and would prepare and equip them for the hardship of carrying on his Father's work on

earth as disciples. This plan was for them to not just survive, but to thrive.

So far we saw this plan to include: **(SLIDE – The Plan)** The gift of sacrificially “*loving each other*” 13:34 and the loving community that creates. The gift of “*hope*” that they would be together again, “*dwell together forever*” 14:3; the gift of “*access to God the Father*” 14:6 to request help in carrying out His plan: The gift of the “*Helper*” – who is the Holy Spirit who would never leave them, who would guide them in all truth, who would teach them Jesus words and who would give them supernatural peace as they face great hardship in a world whose ruler is the Devil. PAUSE That catches us up to our passage today.

To visualize where our passage for today physically occurs let me give you some details for you to paint the picture in your mind. We know that it is Passover week, and this conversation happens the day before Passover begins. Jerusalem is engorged with devout Jews who have made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the week long Passover celebration. The surrounding hills are filled with campsites – people everywhere. Think or what 3<sup>rd</sup> world street markets and vendors, animals - people all on the streets looks like- that’s prob close. And Jesus and the disciples were in a house with an upper room where they had the Passover meal.

In last verse of **John 14, v31** Jesus makes this statement “*come lets be going*”. Indicating that they were leaving the upper room. There is no other detail of their location till **18:1** when it says they “*crossed the Kidron valley.*” So it *appears* that Ch 15 -17 may have happened while they walked from Upper room, walked past or walked over the temple mount, and *down* into the Kidron Valley. That’s better than walking *uphill* after a holiday meal isn’t it? On the map this is *possibly* the route. **(SLIDE Map The Walk)** (btw coffee shop) This narrow city walking street that goes down to the Kidron Valley on the South side of temple mount is still visible today **(SLIDE Steps to Kidron)**. 2<sup>nd</sup> possible route is they took one of the stones bridge from Mount Zion over Central Valley – to the temple mount platform and then out one of the many gates, maybe even across the wood bridge then went to the mount of olives. We know from the context it’s after dinner, its dark , there are probably torches or lamps used, I imagine Jesus at the center, and then as they walk to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus starts to give them the metaphor of the True Vine, the Gardener and the branches.

**15:1** Jesus says.. **READ**

To begin the metaphor Jesus starts with an “*I AM*” statement. This is the 7<sup>th</sup> and final “*I AM*” statement that Jesus made that ends with a noun. **(SLIDE I AM statements)** There are 23 total I AM statements that Jesus makes elsewhere in the book of John – the other 16 don’t follow this format. They are significant yes, but different. We’ll see an example of the other sixteen in John 18.

The “I Am” statement Jesus makes in 15:1 is a claim that He is God – the Great I AM, it’s a reference to **(Ex 3:14)** we covered this two weeks ago. And this truth that Jesus is God is the *basis* by which Jesus can say “*I AM the true grapevine*”. Now for Jesus to say he is the “*true grapevine*” must mean that he is distinguishing himself from other “*grapevine metaphors*”.

The *vine* is one of the OT images used to illustrate the people of Israel. **(SLIDE GrapeVine)** God’s intent was that he would “*plant* the nation of Israel in the promised land and they as the people of the One True God would produce fruit of their lives that would reflect their God, and that fruit would bless the nations of the world.

The psalmist captures this imagery in **Ps 80:8-11 READ**. You and I know the history, did Israel become the *people of God* that he wanted, that produced the fruit from their lives God wanted? No!

**Isa 5:1-4, 7 (hi lite word “best vine”)** captures it this way with these song lyrics. **READ**

Sobering isn’t it? PAUSE.. If God planted them why couldn’t they produce the fruit he wanted from their lives? **(SLIDE Vineyard painting) (SLIDE Vineyard Today)** God provided the vineyard with seemingly *all that it needed* to produce the fruit *he wanted*. He “*planted it on a rich and fertile hill*”, He prepared the land by “*plowing it and removing the stones*”, “*he planted the best vines*”, “*He built a watchtower*” for protection, And “*carved a winepress*”. The vineyard seemingly had all that it needed... But it produced “*bitter fruit*”.

What happened? Look at what the gardener provided for the vines (the people of Israel) to produce good fruit. It’s all “*external*”.

If you transplant someone into an environment where they have all they *external* resources they need to produce the fruit of their lives that God wants, will that guarantee that the fruit will be good? No! Why? Because you have only provided *external* resources to promote change. Helpful? Yes. Heart and mind transforming? No.

The resource that has to be provided by “*the gardener*” to produce the desired fruit in the life of God’s people is not “*external*”, it is “*internal*”.

In last week’s passage John 14:15-31 the resource that Jesus requested the Father to send to the disciples was “*internal*”. What was the resource? The Advocate – the Helper – the Holy Spirit!

Look at these verses from last week that support that the resource of the Holy Spirit is internal, "*in you*".

**14:17b. (hilite "in you")** "...because He lives with you now and later will be *in you*".

Pretty clear right?

**14:20b (hilite "in you")** "...you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and *I am in you.*"

It's God living *in me*, His Spirit living *in me*, the *Helper* living in me that creates the potential for there to be the *desired fruit God wants*.

Well *what is* the fruit of our lives that God wants? The most general answer to that question is the "*fruits of the Spirit*" **(Gal 5:22)** "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...*" That is a general answer and that is true, and thus applicable. But in the context of our passage there is specific fruit that Jesus is referencing – two fruit to be more accurate. What is the fruit?

Jesus makes it easy for us and just states it clearly at the end of his metaphor and argument. Jump down to **V16b -17 says READ** "...I have appointed you...

And we know that from **(John 13:35)** when Jesus gave the commandment to love each other, that this sacrificial love for each other was to be the sign and proof to the world of being a disciple of Jesus.

So *now that we know* what the desired fruit *is* that the Father wants produced from the lives of Jesus' disciples- to *love each other* sacrificially- let's go back to the *beginning of the metaphor*.

Now biblical metaphors are tough to interpret at times so let me give you *a* perspective on this metaphor that helps *me* to "stay out of the weeds".

Generally the rule of interpretation of metaphors is that if you push every word and nuance in a metaphor for an interpretation and application, then the metaphor will break down at some point and result in confusion and misinterpretation. However, some words do need to be defined, as you'll see in a moment, especially coming from another language and culture. PAUSE Metaphors have a *main message* or two they are trying to make. We know what the main message of this metaphor is - "*Love each other*" - so hold on to that message as we go thru this and use it as *your filter* in interpreting the metaphor, and as an *anchor* to keep you from straying too far from what the passage tells us what the main message is.

Ok so we have the imagery of the vineyard from Isa 5 **(SLIDE Vineyard painting)...** and we know what the main message is.. "*Love each other*" - so lets **READ v2.**

Verse 2 tells us that gardener (God the Father) in the metaphor has two goals: First the gardener wants the branches to produce fruit, and 2<sup>nd</sup> gardener wants the branches to not just produce good fruit, but have a *higher yield* of fruit (more clusters, more grapes in a cluster, maybe larger clusters). That makes sense.

And to accomplish those two goals – the gardener does specific things. The first thing the gardener does is addressing the branch that is not bearing any fruit at all.

The NLT and NIV says “*he cuts off*”. This is where the metaphor interpretation can go a couple directions. The Greek here is “take away” or “take up” In contemporary Greek the verb was used two ways. Sailors would “take up” the anchor – as in “lift up the anchor” so they could sail away. Jesus used it this way in **John 5:8 NKJV (hi lite “take up”) READ**

The Greek word was also used to “take something away” as in Jesus telling them to “take away” the stone that covered Lazarus tomb **John 11:39 NKJV (hi lite “take away).**

Since it does mean “take up as in lift up” – this *could* apply. In vine dressing, branches that are touching the ground need *lifted up*. **(SLIDE Vine lifting)** There apparently can be grape branches that touch the ground and don’t produce grapes or produce poor grapes, thus they need *lifted up*, better air flow, better sunlight etc. Who does the “lifting up” that produces more fruit? The Gardener – God the Father.

Branches that don’t produce fruit are also “*taken away*”. I did *a lot* of reading this week on grape growing. Here’s an interesting fact. Grapes only grow on *new* shoots. If the shoot or branches are more than a year old, they are cut off. *And* if you don’t cut back enough, you may get lots of grapes but they will be bitter because *one vine* can only ripen a certain amount of grapes.

University of Minnesota extension webpage says this: **(SLIDE UMN)**  
In an average vineyard, 80-90% of the new growth is pruned off each winter. This is because grapes are produced on new shoots, not old branches.

<https://extension.umn.edu/fruit/growing-grapes-home-garden#pruning-986013>

It means that in grape growing *every branch* is eventually cut off and taken away.

So what do we do with *that* in interpreting the metaphor?

From *my perspective* this metaphor is intended for *true disciples* of Jesus, true believers, and it’s less or not about weeding out the ones that are not. **H**ere is what contributes to my perspective. 1. The audience Jesus was speaking to were the remaining eleven.

Judas the traitor had walked out into the dark night (Jn 13:30) just hours or less before this. 2. This metaphor immediately follows Jesus teaching on the Holy Spirit – the supernatural Helper within us – who is only in true believers.. 3. The metaphor is intended to build on and express the gift of “*indwelling*” of the Holy Spirit from Ch 14. There are no chapter breaks in the original. 4. The context of Ch13 -17 is Jesus preparing and equipping his real deal disciples to survive and thrive, he is preparing and equipping them *for a life time of fruitfulness*, in the face of evil & adversity. I know many theologians and pastors interpret this metaphor to include false disciples being “*pruned - thrown away - and burned*” - I’m not yet convinced this passage is that. There are other NT passages that deal with that, I’m just *not sure* this is one of them, and if it is, it is certainly *not the main message*. However I stand to be corrected.

So what *is* this about? It’s about the supernatural fruit of sacrificially loving each other made possible by “*abiding*” in Jesus.

In vine dressing the gardener prunes branches so that the whole plant produce the best fruit – high quality, high yield – but quality is more important. (SLIDE Vine Pruning) In v3 Jesus uses this idea of pruning to address the things in disciples that decrease the quality and quantity of the fruit in them. The Greek word for “prune” is also used for “cleanse” or “purify” so Jesus here is using a play on words. In context of the metaphor, and in the main message of loving each other, Jesus is stating that part of discipleship then means that God the Father the gardener does some pruning in our lives of what decreases quantity and quality of the fruit. So if you hear a “snip, snip”, or really loud “SNIPS” in your life PTL, that’s the Gardener at work! Amen? It means He is personally attending to you out of love.

And as disciples -be prepared and welcome this, in the context of pruning grapes branches, remember *heavy pruning*, 80-90%, is what results in quality and quantity of desired fruit. (SLIDE Heavy Pruning)

Before I was a pastor, when I was in my previous employment, there was a time where I was more full of myself, entitled, controlling, demotivating of others.. not loving my staff the way a disciple of Jesus should. God did some *heavy pruning* in my life, that hurt so bad, and with so much cut off, I felt so vulnerable and exposed, and humbled, no sense of identity...and then I began to feel alive inside me, and out of that God started growing the fruit of love for my staff and those around me - That was a long hard season.

Several years ago God again had to do some heavy pruning in my life because I wasn’t loving my wife and family they way I could have been. He pretty much humbled me and stripped me down to nothing, *again*. Why? To increase the fruit of love in my life for my wife, my children, my parents, my friends and you – to increase the quality and quantity of love. PAUSE

Jesus says in **v3** that it is his message that does the pruning and cleansing. The disciples had been with Jesus for close to three years at this point, his words have been pruning and cleansing them all along.

Guzik says this, “The word of God is a cleansing agent. It condemns sin, it inspires holiness, it promotes growth, and it reveals power for victory. Jesus continues to wash His people through the word.” Paul alludes to this in (**Eph 5:26**)

But is that it? Is it just “heavy pruning” and “cleansing” of the word that results in the fruit God wants? No, that’s only part of it.

In **v4a** Jesus goes back to the image of “*dwelling with God*” that we have talked about related to the tabernacle and temple where God could *dwell with*, or *live among*, the people he loves. Jesus referenced this in **(14:2-3)** when talking about “*his fathers house* and being together forever. Jesus also uses the imagery of “*dwelling together*” again in **(14:23)** when he says ... “*and we will come and make our home with each of them*” referencing Jesus and God the Father dwelling inside us in the person of the Holy Spirit.... And now in **15:4** he uses the same idea. **READ**

The NLT translates it as “*remain in*” – which doesn’t carry over the imagery. Other translations use the word “*abide*”. We will use “*Abide*” for our teaching today. “*Abide*” is not commonly used today but it communicates more clearly what Jesus is intending. The word “*Abide*” is the verb connected to the word “*abode*”. “*Abode*” meaning where you live, like “*welcome to my abode*”. In Greek the word for “*abide*” is the verb “*meno*” **(SLIDE meno)** *which is the verb form of word “dwelling place”*. So in context then of Jesus wanting his disciples to produce the desired fruit of love, he is saying to them – “*the only way that my fruit of sacrificial love is going to happen in you is if you the branch chose to “dwell in me”/ “abide” in me the vine, and I “dwell or abide with you.”*

And Jesus dwelling in us is internal. **14:20b (hilite “in you”)**. PAUSE

Note it takes both Jesus the vine and the disciple branches “*abiding/dwelling*” together. And when that mutual “*dwelling with*” happens then the outcome is “*much fruitfulness*” – and specifically the outcome is sacrificial love and lots of it.

In **V5** Jesus restates this clearly and then adds, “*for apart from me you can do nothing*”. So that tells us that the fruit of sacrificial love that Jesus wants coming from our lives is supernatural and thus only possible with us dwelling in him and he in us. Meaning you and I loving people that are hard for us to love is not going to happen without Jesus.

**Verse 6** then to me is not a statement focusing on the necessary actions of what the gardener *does* with branches that don’t produce fruit, rather it’s a statement of the



branches value to a gardener pursuing quality and quantity grapes. Caution here: for all you disciples of Jesus, don't let this verse create fear that you are may at some point get "cut off". Paul says in **Philp 1:6 READ** " He who began a good work in you will

And when our lives are producing the desired fruit of love, meaning we are continuing the works that Jesus started then **(v7)** we can ask and *it will be granted*. A person who is healed, filled and transformed by Jesus sacrificial love and producing fruit of sacrificial love will be praying for who? Others!

**(v8)** And the production of "much fruit" in our lives brings the Father great glory! "Glory" meaning to give God credit as the obvious source of where and how this transformation and love fruit comes from.

In **v9** we see we can trace back where the source of this love. **READ**. When we "abide" in Christ, the love He received from the Father is then in us. The sacrificial love that transforms us and then we give to others, comes to us from Jesus who received it from the Father.

And *how and why* Jesus received the love from the Father **v10** tells us is because Jesus abides in the Father's love. **READ**

If Jesus chose to abide in the Father's love, and we can choose to abide Jesus' love, it makes me wonder what the other options for "abiding" are? PAUSE Abide in fear? Abide in shame? Abide in condemnation? Abide in guilt? Abide in meaninglessness? Those are all real options, but as disciples who have Jesus in them we have an option available to us that is different: and that is to Abide in Jesus love. And that is where the "joy" comes from.. "Joy" being the second fruit.

**V11 READ.**

And not just "a little" joy in you but "filled with joy".

In the next two verses Jesus repeats his commandment for his disciples from John 13:34 and then *defines for them* what this fruit of love for each other looks like. **READ**

**v12 -13.**

*"in the same way I have loved you" or "as I have loved you"*. So the love of the disciples for each other has to look like the master's love for the disciples. Jesus sets the bar of what sacrificial love is.

The definition continues in **v13 READ**. That's a pretty high bar! Simply put, to love sacrificially "as he loved us" means it is going to cost us something: time, resources, pride, entitlements, maybe social status.. Sacrificial loves certainly requires great humility. And the only way this love happens is "abiding".



In the next verse (v14- 15) Jesus then tells his much loved disciples that they are the “friends” from vs 13 that he will *lay down his life for*. **READ**

Don’t get hung up on the word “slave” in the NLT – it may be better translated for our western ears as “servant”. What Jesus is referencing here to them would not have alarmed them at all, Jesus was speaking of the “master – servant” relationship and there certainly was expectation that “disciples” are not to just learn from their master, but to “serve the master as well”. So what Jesus is telling them is that he will demonstrate the disciples value to him by laying down his own life for them. Not “servants”, but “friends”. And thus “*There is not greater love than to lay...*”

### **V16-17 READ**

Here Jesus introduces their *commission or appointment* – to “*go and produce lasting fruit*”.

That’s not static that is active.. it;s an action. “*Love each other*” and this love produces lasting fruit. You may be thinking.. “that is so not me, I struggle to love”.

Loving other must come from a place of “abiding in Jesus love”. Abiding means we chose to slow down and sit and be with Jesus regularly in the silence and solitude like He did with the Father, and allow Jesus’ love to come into the pain and fear and worries, the brokenness and yuck of our lives, and to heal us, fill us and to transform our hearts and minds. And out of that “abiding” the “lasting fruit” of loving each other happens. The more we “abide”, the more we love. It’s a daily and life long “abiding”. The first choice is not to love it’s to “abide”.

Are you regularly abiding in Jesus love? And for the sake of others, do you welcome the “pruning”?

We have a prayer team in the back that would love to pray with you.

Pray.

## **Supplemental notes: John 15:1-17**

### **Additional context & setting:**

On the Pharisaic- Rabbinic calendar the events of this chapter happens on Nissan 14, our early April, and it’s after the rainy season is over.

Excavations reveal that the houses that had “upper rooms” were predominantly in “upper Jerusalem” – to the west of the Temple mount.

**V1.** Because the disciples come from agricultural communities, this metaphor of growing grapes is referencing something the disciples would have been as familiar with as a 15 year old today knowing how to use a smart phone.

**V2.** Quick aside to help your scripture reading: Jesus uses a rhetoric technique to clarify for the disciples what he is trying to persuade them to do..and that is simply to state clearly what he is trying to persuade them of at the end of the argument.

Paul uses this same rhetoric technique *a lot* – that is stating the main point at the end of his argument. It is particularly evident in the book of Romans – someone even wrote a book called “Reading Romans Backwards” – I haven’t read it yet, so don’t take that as an endorsement.

From *my perspective* this metaphor is intended for *true disciples* of Jesus, true believers, and it’s less or not about weeding out the ones that are not. Here is what contributes to my perspective. 1. The audience Jesus was speaking to were the remaining eleven. Judas the traitor had walked out into the dark night (**Jn 13:30**) just hours or less before this.

2. This metaphor immediately follows Jesus teaching on the Holy Spirit – the supernatural Helper within us – who is only in true believers..

3. The metaphor is intended to build on and express the gift of “*indwelling*” of the Holy Spirit from Ch 14. There are no chapter breaks in the original.

4. The context of Ch13 -17 is Jesus preparing and equipping his real deal disciples to survive and thrive, he is preparing and equipping them *for a life time of fruitfulness*, in the face of evil & adversity.

I know many theologians and pastors interpret this metaphor to include false disciples being “*pruned - thrown away - and burned*” - I’m not yet convinced this passage is that. There are other NT passages that deal with that, I’m just *not sure* this is one of them, and if it is, it is certainly *not the main message*. However, I stand to be corrected.

**V3.** In v3 – 10 NKJV you will see this word “abide” meaning “dwell in” *10 times* total.

Repeating words serve to inform the reader of the main message of the text.

**V6.** This verse may not be a message for true believers but it may be a message for Israel that in the OT was the first vine that God planted that didn’t produce fruit.

**V11.** The NLT does not translate the Greek verb “meno” meaning “Abide” in this verse. However it is clear in the Greek. “these things have I spoken to you that my joy may “abide/dwell” in you.”