

Jesus, on Discipleship

Abide in Christ

John 15:1-11

January 4, 2026

HDBC

76-year-old **Bill Baker** married **Edna Harvey**. She happened to be his granddaughter's husband's mother. That's where the confusion began, according to Baker's granddaughter, Lynn. Ray Steven's wrote *I'm My Own Grandpa*. But this is real! Quoting Bill: ***My mother-in-law is now my step-grandmother. My grandfather is now my stepfather-in-law. My mom is my sister-in-law and my brother is my nephew. But even crazier is that I'm now married to my uncle and my own children are my cousins.***

And you think some of the relationships you have are confusing. Relationships can indeed be complicated, but they are essential parts of the human experience. *We come into the world with certain relationships that are automatic. We don't choose them. Mom and dad. Brothers and sisters. Aunts and uncles.*

Others we choose. Romantic relationships, friendships, working relationships. Relationships are a critical part of our lives. How we manage them will impact every part of our lives. **Relationships** are particularly important when it comes to our effectiveness as disciples of Jesus.

Starting a three-part series this morning called ***Jesus, on Discipleship***. Our text will be John 15. In this chapter Jesus highlighted the importance of three relationships that every believer has: with Christ, with other believers, and with the world. It is so important to understand the nature of each one.

Jesus spoke of those relationships while teaching his disciples just before his arrest and crucifixion. **It is the night before Calvary.** Prelude to the most important event in human history. In a matter of hours Jesus will be on a cross with the sins of the world compacted into his body paying the penalty for our sins.

And now, only hours before, He spent time with his disciples and spoke of their changing relationships. In doing so, He once more used an **illustration from nature** to reveal divine truth. **John 15:1-11**. **Read text**. Let's consider the passage under **3 headings**.

1. The Key Characters *There are three.*

1) True Vine

Vine had been a symbol for Israel for generations. They understood the picture. **Vine is the base** of the plant. Like the trunk of the tree. It reaches into the earth carrying life-giving nutritious to the branches. Israel was to be that for the world, but failed. **Jesus would not**. He would bring life to the world.

2) Vinedresser (farmer)

This is the farmer, the one who oversees the entire operation. Gen manager. He is responsible for it all. The vinedresser is God, the Father. He has a watchful eye, looking primarily for fruit.

3) Branches

Branches attached to the vine. Through that attachment they receive life. They are tender, fragile, totally dependent. Cut off a branch and it will die, but vine will live. Life is in the vine. In this illustration, the branches represent believers, disciples of Jesus.

God is the farmer, overseeing the entire operation, looking for fruit.
Jesus is the vine, the source of life and nourishment.
We are the branches, connected to Jesus, intended to bear fruit.

2. The Desired Outcomes *There are five mentioned by Jesus.*

1) Bear fruit (2-6)

New Testament has much to say about fruit. Fruit is reflection of the plant. Good fruit reflects positively on the plant. Bad fruit, the opposite. Listen to some other verses.

Romans 7:4 - Therefore my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might **bear fruit** for God.

Col. 1:10 . . . so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, **bearing fruit in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God. What is the fruit that a disciple is to bear? I'll share two, but there are certainly others.

a. Life of Christ reflected in me (Romans 8:29)

His life is reproduced in me. That's what happens in a plant. **Life of the plant is reproduced in the fruit.** When you were saved, the Holy Spirit came to live in you. He began a process of changing you, maturing you. His goal is to make you like Jesus. How you act, what you think, what drives you, your worldview. When people see you they will see in you the same things they see in Jesus.

Galatians 5:22-23 offers examples. *Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

b. Making disciples of others (John 4:35)

Look to the fields, that they are white for harvest.

Leading others to come to know Jesus. Fruit of evangelism.

2) Pray effectively (7)

The effectiveness of our praying will be greatly dependent upon our relationship with Christ. That just makes sense. You are more effective in getting what you need from someone you have an intimate relationship with than with a stranger.

3) Glorify God (8)

Our chief purpose in life is not to be happy. Not to live a fulfilled life. It is to honor and glorify the one who made us. This sounds strange and prideful to unbelievers. But it is a precious reminder that we did

not create ourselves. We are the product of a master designer who created us for his glory and pleasure.

4) **Prove discipleship (8)**

This makes sense. **Branch of a grape vine proves it is a grape branch by bearing grapes.** The fruit proves the nature of the branch. Same is true of discipleship. If we produce godly fruit it will prove we are godly and intimately attached to the vine.

5) **Joyful life (11)**

Our joy comes from a right relationship with Christ.

3. **The Individual Roles** *Each character has a role to play.*

Understanding the unique roles played by each is important.

1) **The branch abides and obeys** ***This is us.** This is what we do.*

Abide (4)

Remain, sojourn, tarry. In this picture it refers to the branch staying in close, intimate contact with the vine. **Jesus used** other illustrations to describe his relationship to his disciples, but none so intimate as this one. He referred to himself as the **shepherd and us as his sheep**. This is a close relationship, but the sheep and the shepherd do not share the same essence. They are different beings. **The relationship** between the vine and the branches is much closer. **Share same nature. Hard to tell where one ends and the other begins.** The branch is dependent on the vine for it's very life. A branch without the vine can do only one thing and that is die. Constantly being aware of His presence. Dependence on Him.

This is an imperative. Our salvation is a gift from God. He provides it for us. He is the one who grafts us into the branch, into Jesus. But once He does, we have a responsibility to **abide in Him**. In other words we have a role to play. What is our role?

He mentions three key things that are involved in our *abiding relationship* with Him. **His Word, love and joy.** To abide in Christ means I am going to submit to His word, receive and reflect His love, and live in the joy what comes from Him.

In a nutshell, abiding in Christ means allowing His Word to fill our minds, direct our wills, and transform our affections.

So, first we are to abide. But second we are to . . .

Obey (8)

Jesus said we abide in his love **by obeying Him**. Am I doing His will? Obeying His word? This will determine if I am abiding in Him. Not some mystical thing. Get up in the morning and acknowledge His presence and purpose to listen to His voice. To obey Him regardless of the cost or the consequences. There are things His Word has clearly spelled out. I want to give you just a few that people in the church in our culture are ignoring at alarming rates.

Unwillingness to forgive other believers. Forgiveness is not based on your emotions but on a commitment to obey Christ. It is something you choose to do.

Unwillingness to stay sexually pure. If you are single you need to refrain from sex. Period. If you are married, your sex life is to be restricted to your husband or wife.

Unwillingness to make church attendance & participation a priority. Sports, activities, hobbies should not keep you from being actively involved in your church.

So, the branch abides and obeys. This is our responsibility.

What about the vine, which represents Jesus. What is His responsibility? What does Jesus do in this relationship with us?

2) The vine produces fruit (4-5) *Remember that this is Jesus.*

Whatever kingdom good comes out of my life comes from Jesus. I can't create the fruit, I simply abide and obey, then watch what He does. Producing fruit is His responsibility. **But know this. If there is no fruit in your life it is not because there is a problem with Jesus, it reflects a problem with us.**

It is similar with the church. Jesus said He would build His church. Any good thing that comes through this church is because Jesus has produced it. And if the church is not producing kingdom fruit, the problem is not with Jesus, but with us. If an individual believer abides & obeys, fruit will be produced. The same is true of churches.

3) The vinedresser prunes or purges *This is God the Father.*

He has the responsibility for dealing with the branches. Doesn't deal with them all in the same way. One thing determines it. FRUIT!!

a. Branches that bear fruit (2)

He prunes them. Opposite of what I would have written. I would prune the ones that bear no fruit. Cutting off of those things that hinder productivity. When you begin to bear fruit for God, you can expect some pruning. It hurts. **Keep in mind, *where He prunes now, He will produce fruit later.***

b. Branches that bear no fruit (2,6)

They are not allowed to remain in the vineyard. They are taken out and thrown away. Why does he do it? Not bearing fruit. Why not bearing fruit? Not abiding in vine. What does that mean? Three schools of thought about the branches that bear no fruit.

One, is that they are true believers who lose their salvation because they have produced not fruit. They were saved but failed to abide in Christ and therefore were cut off and lost. We can discount this because the Bible teaches that those who are truly saved can never lose their salvation.

Two, these are true believers who are simply not abiding in Christ and are bearing no fruit. Because they are not bearing fruit they are set aside, removed from the service of the Lord. They are saved, but are not honoring God. They are the ones who are described at the judgment seat of Christ, whose works are burned up. They are saved but have little or no rewards. There are some who believe this is what Jesus means.

Three, these are unbelievers who have simply associated with the church, claiming to be disciples of Christ, but are not. Therefore, in the end, they are cutoff from the association with true believers and exempted from the field.

I believe the text would lead us to conclude that the third is most likely what Jesus had in mind. The language that Jesus uses is much more associated with what we know of the punishment of Hell than to the discipline of the Father. Read verse 6 again.

Keep the context in mind. Jesus was teaching in the upper room. Remember what has just happened. As they gathered in that upper room we find an important contrast. In 13:1 it says that Jesus loved His own who were in this world to the end. Following that statement of His love for His own, we read of the beautiful example of that love as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples.

But before that, we find this verse; *During the supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him.*

Right there we see a stark contrast between eleven of the disciples and one. All twelve are not the same. After washing their feet Jesus declared *you are clean, but not all of you.* He was clearly speaking of Judas, whose feet He had also washed.

Jesus said that because He knew who it was who was going to betray Him. Later He would say to the betrayer, *what you do, do quickly*. Judas left soon after that.

After he left, Jesus continued to talk with the other eleven. But as He did, we can assume the betrayal of Judas were running through His mind. Judas had associated with them. He looked the part. He said the right things. He was effective in ministry. **But he was lost.** It was in this context that Jesus spoke of branches that bear fruit and branches that do not. He was presenting a contrast between true and false disciples. And that contrast was easily seen between Judas and the other eleven.

In contrasting branches that produce fruit with those who do not, I believe Jesus is describing those who are truly saved with those who are not. Some are like the eleven, not perfect, but genuine. Others are like Judas, looking the part for a season, but fake. To the former, God provide healthy pruning. The latter will be cut off and banished to a place of torment and judgment.

True disciples abide in Jesus, bear fruit & are lovingly pruned by the Father.

False disciples may appear to be genuine for a season, but will ultimately be exposed and separated from those who are genuine.

In his book, *Identity Matters*, Terry Wardle shared a story from his childhood. He had an old hand-me-down girls bicycle that he used to roam his neighborhood. The day came when his parents allowed him to ride beyond his neighborhood. Listen to his words.

I had broken free of the constraints of my little neighborhood, and now I was on my own to experience a grand adventure. I felt like a somebody, even on a big, blue, girl's Schwinn bike. With saddlebags! As I crossed the railroad tracks and then rumbled over a small creek on a single-lane bridge. The bridge, made of wood and steel, was no big deal. But on that day long

ago it became a bridge too far. As I began to cross, four teenage boys stepped onto the far side of the bridge. I intended to pass on by.

They had other things in mind. One of the boys grabbed my handlebars and spun my bike to an abrupt stop. "Hey, where do you think you're goin'?" he snarled, as another boy chimed in, "Yeah, kid, where ya goin'?" Instantly I knew they intended to beat me up. I was petrified. I couldn't fight or break free to run, so I stood there frozen. Suddenly one of the bullies asked, "What's your name?" I answered him in a high-pitched preadolescent, quivering voice, "Terry Wardle."

The three remaining teenagers got a bit silent and looked at one another nervously. "Are you related to Tom Wardle?" Tom was a much older cousin, who happened to play defensive end on the high school football team. But I lied and told them Tom was my brother. They immediately backed off. One of the boys straightened out my shirt, and started saying, "Hey, we were just funning you. No harm. You're a great kid, and ... if anyone ever gives you any trouble, you tell us and we'll take care of you."

The point of the story is not that he lied about his cousin being his brother. The point of the story is that our identity with one who is greater than us, matters. If being the cousin or brother of a great defensive end could protect a young boy, how much greater is our protection when we are identified with the Son of God.

Make sure you are abiding in Christ. How will you know? The fruit you bear.