

All of us encounter storms in our lives; death, disease, divorce, dismissal from a job. There are days here on terra firma when the terra just doesn't seem so firma. We all know that life is unpredictable but that knowledge doesn't take the sting out of catastrophic events. So, what do we do about it? Is there anything we can do to prepare for the next storm that is sure to come? In John 15, Jesus offers some timely advice that will help stormproof your life...John 15.

We come to the seventh and final "I Am" statement by Jesus. "I am the true vine." The disciples have been shaken by the news that Jesus is leaving them. (13:33; 14:27). Adding to their uncertainty, one of the disciples is MIA, missing in action. (13:21, 30) Jesus is betrayed by one of his closest friends. They left the upper room (14:31) and went out into the night. It is spring time in Jerusalem and as they make their way from the city to the Mt. of Olives they may well have walked past terraced vineyards. Jesus, the master teacher, takes advantage of the natural world to express supernatural realities. Knowing the mindset of His disciples, Jesus uses grape vines to explain how, if we stay connected to Him, we can lead a fruitful, purposeful life even in the storm. If we are attached to the vine, we will bear fruit.

**All Christians produce some fruit...**15:1-2a. A "fruitless" Christian is a contradiction in terms. The Holy Spirit fills us with life, abundant life, so that we bear fruit. But what exactly did Jesus mean by "bearing fruit?" The evidence of God's work in our lives can be observed in our **internal character** - love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Fruit could also be defined as **people we lead to Christ**. A new Christian could be referred to as the fruit of our labor. God expects us to reproduce Christ-followers. Fruit is also **the promise of a future generation**. Every piece of fruit contains seeds. Every seed is a life-container. Under the proper conditions a seed will produce more fruit. "Any fool can count the seeds in the apple. Only God can count the apples in the seed!" God gave us life so that we can scatter it everywhere we go and guarantee future generations of Christ-followers.

Maybe the simplest definition of fruit is this one...**Fruit is excess life**. All living plants have enough life to sustain themselves and, if healthy, enough life left over to reproduce. If a tree contracts a parasite or is afflicted with a disease there will not be enough life for the tree to stay alive AND reproduce. The first thing to go is the fruit.

God gives us abundant life that overflows and blesses those around us. **John 7:37-39**, "Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.' <sup>39</sup> But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified." In John 14, Jesus emphasized God's ongoing intervention in the lives of the disciples in the form of the Holy Spirit...14:16-17; 23, 26. From the day we trust Christ the Holy Spirit comes on board to be our Helper, Comforter, Teacher and Guide so we will be fruitful. In fact, in verse 2, the verb translated "cut off" can also be translated "lift up." It is used both ways in scripture. Whenever I drive past a vineyard I am always impressed with row upon row of neatly organized grape vines. Every day in the growing season the workers go through the vineyard and look for vines that have fallen onto the ground. They then lift them up and reattach them to the trellis. If the branch stays on the ground the grapes can be crushed or the early morning dew stays on them, they can't breathe, and they mildew. Jesus is saying that God constantly inspects

His vineyard so that He can support those branches that have fallen. He lifts them up. If you are not bearing fruit, the Holy Spirit will do whatever is necessary to make you fruitful.

**Some People Produce No Fruit.** Who are these people in v. 6 (and possibly 2a)? They are certainly not disciples because they bear no fruit. If you are not devoted to Christ and you do not abide in His word then, according to Jesus, you can do “nothing.” (v. 5). In other words, anything done apart from Jesus has no ultimate value or worth. Whatever is accomplished without regard for Jesus Christ is temporary and not beneficial ultimately. If you do not abide, you will be as useless as a fruitless branch that is cut off and disposed of at the end of the harvest. Verse 6 describes the one who fails to abide. I’m not convinced that Jesus is talking about hell. The more time I spend with this passage the more I am convinced that He is simply emphasizing the uselessness of a fruitless life.

The parable of the vine and the branches is a promise with a warning. The warning is that it is possible to be marginally connected to the vine but to have no ability to sustain life and bear fruit. No doubt Jesus was grieved by the loss of Judas (13:30). Could it be that Judas was the branch that was thrown away, cast into the fire and burned? This is a strong warning to all of us. Submit to the sovereign work of the vinedresser, stay connected to the vine or be tossed aside like a fruitless branch.

**Some Christians produce much fruit.** Your Father in Heaven, the vine-dresser, will lift you up to insure your fruitfulness and once you begin to bear fruit he will prune you to insure greater fruitfulness. Those who bear **some** fruit can produce **more** fruit through a process we call pruning...2b. It seems like Jesus abruptly changes the subject in v. 3: “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” The verb “to clean” can also be translated “to prune.” “You are already *pruned* because of the word which I have spoken to you.” The emphasis is not on washing the grapes to clean them but cleaning off the sucker branches or the dead leaves. Pruning eliminates competition. There are attitudes, habits and activities in our lives that must be pruned or eliminated so that the life God pours into us will not be choked out. The Spirit of God uses the word of God to prune or “clean” us.

Let me close with two invaluable lessons from John 15:

**Pruning precedes productivity.** The point of pruning is to eliminate competition. Something in my life must be eliminated so that the life God pours into me is not choked out. We tend to take on activities that are detrimental to God’s mission. Occasionally God will allow a firestorm to sweep through my life and burn away those competing allegiances. Sequoia tree illustration...they were “cleaning” the forest!

Pruning can be painful. Never forget the power of pain to transform us and shape us into the person God wants us to be. God’s goal is not to inflict His children with pain but He doesn’t waste our pain either. He uses the painful realities of a fallen world to produce in us fruitful lives. “God will do everything that you may live but God will do nothing that you may grow.” Your Father in Heaven, the vine-dresser, will prune you to insure your fruitfulness. So, Jesus talks about **no fruit, some fruit, more fruit and much fruit.**

**Abiding insures productivity**...15:4-5. It is important to remember that the imperative in this passage is not “bear fruit.” The imperative is “abide.” Jesus expects His disciples to yield a substantial amount of fruit. He even says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father.” **John 14:12.** The only way to bear “much fruit” is by abiding in the vine. When Jesus says, “I am the vine,” He is saying, “I am the source of a productive, fruitful, blessed life.”

Jesus uses “abide” 10 times in 6 verses (see vv. 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10) “Abide is found 11 times in this chapter, 40 times in the entire Gospel, and 27 times in John’s epistles. How can we abide? To obey is to abide. 15:10. It is amazing how many people want to lead meaningful, purposeful, fruitful lives but they don’t take seriously what God says. Somehow, they think they can pick and choose which parts of the Bible they want to obey. They have an iTunes theology where they can pick and choose various items to put in their own personal play list and leave out the songs they don’t like. If you are miserable, if you feel like you are missing something, the first place to check is your connection to the vine.

Jesus will not eliminate the storms from your life. But you can be sure of this, when the storm subsides, your Father is a loving vinedresser who will care for you, clean you, lift you up and make you fruitful again. And the best part of all – Jesus will restore your joy. “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.” Jn. 15:11 So abide in the vine.

To abide means never ceasing to eat from the bread of heaven, as if life could be sustained anywhere else. Jesus is the bread of life.

To abide means never ceasing to walk in His light, as though any other light could provide answers to life’s deepest questions. Jesus is the light of the world.

To abide means never ceasing to rest in His grace and power as though greater peace could be found anywhere else. He is the good shepherd.

To abide means never ceasing to cling to the promise of eternal life. His is the resurrection and the life.

To abide means never ceasing to follow Him persuaded by His truth, and never elevating any other truth above it. He is the way, the truth and the life.

To abide means never ceasing to be connected to His life-giving power, clinging to Him through every storm and storm setback. He is the true vine.

Are you connected to the vine?

When darkness veils His lovely face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace;  
In every high and stormy gale,  
My anchor holds within the veil.