



**John 15:1-8**  
**Branches Bear Fruit**

Summary: Christians are designed to bear fruit by abiding in Christ.

Here is my hope for each of us in 2023: that we would be full of joy and delight in Christ no matter what the year brings. No matter what happens with the culture, the news, world affairs, politics, workplace drama, or in your own home, we would walk through it all with hope, joy, and peace because of our connection to Christ and His church. I hope that we stand out like weirdos – attractive, compelling, jealousy-provoking weirdos because our lives are marked by the fruit of the Spirit,

**Galatians 5:22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.

Church, this is the life I want. This is the life that I do not always have. Or do not always have as much of as I would like. I confess to you – I am tired. I am weary. I have lost some of my joy and strength because it has been a long slog over the past couple of years and I know some of you feel the same.

We're here, we've made it, but do we have joy? Do we have peace? Are we patient, kind, and gentle – and if so, how durable is all that? How much does it take to make you snap? Ever feel like a frozen pond that's only a ¼ inch thick? You seem level, cool, and smooth, but if someone steps on you the ice breaks and they plunge into the freezing water below.

How's the self-control lately? Are you giving yourself excuses, cutting corners? Are you being the you, you wish you could be? Or, perhaps, like me, would you like to see more of this fruit of the Spirit in your life in 2023?

Next week we begin a series in the gospel of Mark. We'll spend time hearing about and listening to Jesus. And my hope is that it will fill us with delight, that as we look *at Him* we will start to look even more *like Him* and He will produce this fruit in each of us.

I get that hope from Jesus Himself, in fact He said *it's the reason we live*. Read with me:

**John 15:1** "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into

the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

The passage is full of rich imagery and it's easy to get lost in all the points that are made here, but the bottom line is: we, as Christians, are designed to bear fruit, spiritual fruit, by abiding in Christ. We are meant to experience God flowing in and godliness flowing out. When that happens, we enjoy the personal transformation, but so does everyone around us. Who doesn't want to be around someone described as full of **love, joy, peace and patience**, someone who is **kind, good, faithful, gentle** and marked by **self-control**?

And notice God's desire, His intent, is for this to happen more and more over time. Observe the three-step progression. Verse two says God takes branches that **bear fruit** and then **prunes** them so they can **bear more fruit**. And then in verse five Jesus says that if you remain in Him, if you abide in Him, as time goes on, you will bear '**much fruit**.' This is God's plan for your life: **fruit**, then **more fruit**, then **much fruit**. That's the expectation. That's "normal Christian living."

So, let's explore this a little further and see what we can learn about abiding in Christ and bearing fruit. First, notice:

1. Jesus expects EVERY branch to bear fruit.

**2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.** Notice: there are only two categories – producers and non-producers. So, it's not just the pastors, not just the adults, not just the girls, not just 'those people,' it's all of us – *every* branch in Christ, *will* produce fruit. So, how's the harvest looking in your life? Are you full of **love, joy, peace, self-control**, and all the rest? And are you bearing **more fruit** than you did three years ago?

Sometimes people will ask the question, "is so-and-so saved?" Maybe you want to know about your child, are they really saved? Or the person your child is dating. Or the person you're dating or thinking about dating. Or your aunt who has a Bible and a few religious books, but you're just not sure where she's at. We all have people that we want to know, are they saved?

I don't think you can know with 100% certainty about someone else's salvation – but you can get really close by watching their life – what kind of fruit do you see? If they are a true Christian, you will see fruit – maybe not all at once, but over time. And if they are maturing in their faith, you'll see **more fruit**, and eventually, **much fruit**. And if that happens, you can be pretty sure *that person is saved*. You can even make the same judgment on yourself.

But what if there is no fruit? Jesus says in verse 6, if there isn't fruit, the Father will cut away that branch and put it in the fire.

OK, that sounds pretty serious, so what does that mean?

Most likely, we should understand the branches that aren't producing like people who hang out around church for a while, maybe even do some things in ministry but then drop out of the picture – they weren't ever really Christians in the first place. Think of people like Judas who spent so much time around Jesus, heard all the stuff He had to say, even went on mission trips, but was never really 'in.' That's the kind of person we're talking about.

If you're saying "Lord, have Your way in me! Flow into me and out of me!" don't worry about being clipped off and cast away. You'll get pruned, but it's for a different reason which we'll discuss later.

## 2. Branches don't produce fruit on their own.

Jesus said:

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

One of the fun things you can do around here in the fall is go apple picking. You can find orchards out 66 toward West Virginia or up north in Maryland. When you show up, they'll give you a map of all the different varieties of apples in the orchard, and they'll give you these long poles with baskets on them so you can reach up and pluck the apples off the trees. It's surprising how quickly you can collect a LOT of apples – more apples than you know what to do with.

I've been several times over the years, and visited several different orchards, and do you know what they've never given me? A saw. Not one orchard offers branches you can bring home to keep producing apples because a branch won't produce apples unless it is attached to the tree.

Well, God doesn't expect you to produce fruit by yourself either. That's why Jesus says, "without Me, you can do nothing." Now, admittedly, that sounds a bit extreme. Because, of course, you can do some things. You can even do things that seem good, that seem important, that seem generous. But if you do them apart from Christ, you don't get any credit – they're worthless unless they're done with Him.

But don't take that as some big downer or insult. Look at it from the other side! That means He doesn't expect anything *from* you that He doesn't give *to* you! As the great missionary Hudson Taylor used to say, "God's will, done God's way, will never lack God's supply." If God wants you to build something, He's going to give you the tools, the plans, and the materials. And since He wants you to bear **fruit** – **more fruit**, and **much fruit** – He's going to supply all the nutrients necessary to make it happen. Because,

## 3. Branches produce fruit naturally.

5 “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit;

The fruit God is seeking comes from a relationship, not just effort. Machines, robots, and systems can turn effort into outcomes, they produce widgets, or results, but living branches, connected to living vines, produce living fruit – it's a natural process, there is growth and energy involved, but it's not an epic struggle.

For years I worked from home and our garden was right outside my office window but I never once heard my tomato plants complain about how busy they were. I never heard a vine grunt and groan to push out a new cucumber. As the branches abide in the vines, they just produce fruit as the season goes on.

As you abide in Christ, it is normal for you to produce **fruit**, and then **more fruit**, and then **much fruit**.

One other thing to say here - branches don't control their own production or harvest. You can't just make up your mind that you're going to have a bumper crop of fruit this year. Which means there's no point in comparing the fruit on your branch with the fruit of another branch. Just ask the question, “Am I abiding in the vine?” If so, let the quantity and size of the harvest take care of itself, it will happen. Though,

#### 4. Producing fruit takes time.

The whole idea of abiding reflects a relationship that spans over time. In fact, some translations use the word “remain” instead of “abide.” So, “He who remains in Me...” And that's a good word to use. The point is, there should be a sense of permanence to our relationship with God that we don't find with other stuff.

For most adults, the most valuable thing in your life is your home, and yet, according to the US Census, the average American moves 11.7 times in their life. The second most valuable thing, materially speaking, is a car, but the average American only keeps a car for 71 months, or just shy of six years. We go through a laptop and cell phone about every two to three or years. There's not much that sticks with us for very long in this disposable society that is always updating and upgrading.

So, in some ways, it's nice to know that once you're accepted into Christ, you're in for good. Nothing is going to change – you're called to **abide**. To remain. To settle in for the long haul in good times and bad. Whether He leads you to lay down in green pastures by still waters or through the very valley of the shadow of death – He is always there. He's never going to leave you or forsake you – instead, He's inviting you, gently, but firmly commanding you, to **abide** in Him because some fruit takes a long time to grow.

I watch that play out in my garden. The squash are ready almost instantly it seems – they grow quickly and zucchini can go from barely there to gargantuan seemingly overnight. The tomatoes take 50-60 days though. If you look at the little tag on them when you buy

them, it should say right on it. Compare that to chili peppers – they take forever - 100 to 120 days. You plant them in late Spring and they take most of the summer to grow.

That's nothing compared to avocados – if you take plant an avocado tree, it will take anywhere from five to thirteen years before you get your first avocado from it.

In other words, even if you take the perfect seed, put it in the perfect soil, give it the perfect sun, water, and nutrients, it's still going to take you a LONG time to get some fruit. Everything is happening the right way, nothing is wrong, it just takes time. And that's why we have to [abide](#). God doesn't instantly transform us. He slowly, deliberately, shapes us and molds us over time as we release more of ourselves to Him.



My mom used to have this plaque hanging up in our house that said, "Please be patient, God isn't finished with me yet." It's true. God isn't finished with you. He's actively working *on* you, He wants to be working *in* you, and there's no stop in sight. He wants this to go on and on as you [abide in Him](#).

But sometimes, that means change – pruning for the sake of progress. Point number five:

#### 5. Pruning increases productivity.

[2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every \*branch\* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.](#)

In order for you to bear more fruit and much fruit, God has to do some trimming, some remodeling, in your life from time to time. Jesus compares it to pruning a vine.

Listen to Wikipedia's definition of pruning:

*"Pruning in landscaping and gardening is the practice of removing diseased, non-productive, or otherwise unwanted portions from a plant. The purpose of pruning is to shape the plant by controlling or directing plant growth, to maintain the health of the plant, or to increase the yield or quality of flowers and fruits."*

In other words - pruning makes healthier and more productive plants. You take something out, often living plant tissue, so that more can grow. It's not just a one-for-one exchange – it's not like the lawn, you cut it and it just grows back; no, pruning removes one thing so that something MORE or better can come.

There's a place at Virginia Tech called the Cooperative Extension Office – they conduct all kinds of studies and experiments designed to help everyone from commercial farmers to home gardeners be successful growing things in Virginia. As part of that effort, they publish

a handout on “Pruning Basics and Tools”<sup>1</sup> which answers the question, why prune? Listen to the answers.

**1. To train young plants.** Train main scaffold branches ... to produce stronger and more vigorous trees. *You'll find it easier to shape branches with hand pruners when a plant is young than to prune larger branches later.* Pruning often begins with young plants for bonsai, topiary, espalier, or other types of special plant training.



**2. To influence fruiting and flowering.** Proper pruning of flower buds encourages early vegetative growth. You can also use selective pruning to stimulate flowering in some species, and to help produce larger (though fewer) fruits in others.

An example of this is pinching off early tomato flowers so that you encourage the plant to grow larger and hopefully produce more fruit later. Or pinching off the flowers of basil so that it will continue to produce more leaves.

**3. To rejuvenate old trees and shrubs.** *As trees and shrubs mature, their forms may become unattractive.* Pruning can restore vigor, and enhance the appearance of these plants.

So, Pruning is GOOD. It helps us in our Christian walk and it's not something we should try to avoid. **Pruning is not punishment** though God does discipline those He loves. Pruning is intended to HELP, not HURT the plant. You prune plants to make them healthier, more attractive, or more productive.

In fact, pruning typically occurs right before growth. Different plants bloom and grow during different seasons, so they need to be pruned at different times, but in general, the rule is, you prune before the next season of growing starts so that all the new growth is channeled in the right directions.

As you look back on 2022 and really back into 2021 and 2020, what has God already pruned out of your life, or as you look ahead into 2023, what pruning do you sense He might be preparing you for? I don't know, that's a highly individual question, but I can tell you this – the ultimate purpose is your growth and a harvest of spiritual fruit.

If God has taken, or is taking, things or even people out of your life, it is often for your ultimate good and joy. So that you can go from bearing **fruit** to bearing **more fruit**, and then to bearing **much fruit**. It's not meant to hurt you.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/430/430-455/430-455\\_pdf.pdf](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-455/430-455_pdf.pdf) Last Accessed 30 Dec 2022.



And remember that the things He takes out of our lives don't always have to be bad things – sometimes you need to clip a perfectly healthy branch in order clear space for something else to grow. Don't automatically assume only bad things are removed. Sometimes things that were perfectly fine and healthy get trimmed back or trimmed out entirely for the sake of something better.

It might not make sense to you immediately, but trust the Father. Remember, He is the one doing the pruning. He decides what needs to go and what needs to stay. He stands back, assesses the overall shape and growth of our lives and determines where to trim. He doesn't delegate the task. He doesn't bring in some hired hand. He does the cutting Himself.

Trust Him as He works. Submit to His hand, and let Him channel the growth in your life. Abide in Jesus, let Him flow through you and you will naturally, supernaturally, produce fruit: [love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control](#).

The more you look to Him, the more you will begin to look like Him. So, here's what I want you to ask yourself this morning.

Am I content with the harvest of spiritual fruit in my life? Is there enough [love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control](#) found within me and coming out of me? If not, where am I going to get more? This isn't the kind of stuff you can buy in the produce section at the grocery store, not even at Whole Foods or Trader Joe's. So where are you going to get these things if they're coming from within?

The answer we learned this morning is that they're produced when we abide in Jesus. So, how is that going for you? How might addressing that connection affect your harvest? Let me give you three simple ways to abide in Christ – spend time daily in Scripture reading and prayer, fill your life with worship music that reminds you of truth, and spend time regularly with the community of faith, the church. I've never seen a healthy tree or vine with only one branch.

And finally, where and how might God want to prune you for the sake of future growth? What things might need to change in your life *so that* you can continue to abide and produce some [fruit, more fruit](#), and [much fruit](#)?

You'll have some time to consider as we prepare to receive communion this morning. The worship team will come up and play and we can take a few moments in our seat to connect with God personally before coming up to receive a reminder of what He has done for us.

Let's pray.



## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### John 15:1-8 Branches Bear Fruit

Summary: Christians are designed to bear fruit by abiding in Christ.

- **Galatians 5:22** ... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control...
  - Which fruit seems to come naturally to you or grows the easiest?
  - Which is hard for you to grow, or do you wish there was more of?
  - Is there any fruit that you once felt came easily but seems to have tapered off lately?
  - When was your last season of a bumper harvest?
- Review Galatians 5:19-24. How do the works of the flesh contrast with the fruit of the Spirit? How might the works of the flesh be impeding the growth of fruit? Which fruit do you see growing in your life? What fruit do you see growing in the lives of others around you? How can you encourage them by telling them what you see?
- Why is it helpful to look for fruit in someone else's life as the best indicator of their salvation?
  - Why do we have to be cautious with this approach as well?
- You can't cut a branch off an apple tree and expect it to produce fruit, but what are some ways that people try to produce spiritual fruit on their own?
  - Where do they turn for guidance and instruction in their self-help projects?
  - Is it possible for these things to seem like they 'work' initially?
- What is your reaction to the fact that it takes time to grow fruit?
- Where and how have you experienced pruning in your life? Have you seen the increased fruitfulness of it yet?
- Review Isaiah 5:1-7 – what was God's experience with attempting to use Israel as His vine? What do you learn about God's faithfulness from this?