

## The Mystery of The Vine John 15: I am the True Vine

### Introduction

It's first century A.D. The disciples have been following Jesus all throughout His ministry... they've witnessed His miracles and countless healings... they've heard Him teach with unprecedented authority... He's given them some powerful metaphors to help them understand WHO HE TRULY IS... "I AM the bread of life. I AM the good shepherd. I AM the light of the world."

They're starting to realize that their life will never be the same... they don't exactly know in what way, but they know something NEW is on the horizon.

They begin to make their way to Jerusalem where things start to feel urgent, and Jesus has been telling them repeatedly, "My hour is coming... soon I will no longer be here with you..."

The disciples are afraid and confused, understandably. I imagine they're thinking: "What are we going to do? What does this mean for us? For so long, we've been following Jesus and learning from Him, learning how to be His disciples... how will we continue to do that if He's no longer here? What will our lives be like THEN?"

But one solemn night, with these questions lingering in their minds, and with the cross in clear view, Jesus looks at his beloved disciples and tells them:

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser..."*

*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, it is he that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing....*

*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."*

(John 15:1, 4-5, 8)

This is the most powerful metaphor we have in Scripture that illuminates our life in Christ. There are several other passages that speak to our connection to Him... Paul tells us that Jesus is the head, and we are His body, and that Jesus is the cornerstone, and we are His living stones... but no passage reveals the mystery of our abiding life in Him, quite like this one in John 15, delivered from Jesus' own lips. It's where the doctrine of our union in Christ truly comes alive. It's packed full of revelation and wonder and hope... and my goal for us this morning is to explore this mystery, this mutual indwelling to which He invites us.

So, we'll first look at our initial UNION with Christ, where we'll unpack this metaphor – the vinedresser, the vine, and the branches. Then, we'll explore at our ongoing COMMUNION with Him, digging into what life "abiding in the Vine" entails. Finally, we'll discuss the HARVEST... the fruit that results.

### THE UNION

So first: Our UNION in Him. Our initial connection to Him... in order to better understand this, let's break down the metaphor that Jesus gives us in this passage.

God the Father is, of course, the vinedresser, the gardener of the vineyard. Jesus the Son, is the Vine of God's planting. And just as a vine is dependent on its gardener, to till the soil, water it, tend to every detail... Jesus

felt Himself entirely dependent on His Father. He received everything He needed from His Father in order to do everything according to His Father's will.

I don't know about you, but when I think of a vineyard, I think of grapevines, maybe like what you'd see in California... a viney bunch of tendrils and shoots.... But the vines that were prominent in ancient Israel had big gnarly bases, more comparable with what we're used to in South Louisiana with our big old oak trees with massive trunks. This, I think, gives us a better visual when we think of Jesus as "the Vine."

Now, to his disciples at that time, there was an immediate reference here. Throughout the Old Testament, "the vine" was a common symbol of the people of Israel. Psalm 80 tells us that God *"brought a vine out of Egypt, drove out the nations, cleared the ground, planted it... and it took root and filled the land."*

Isaiah 5 says something similar, that God "dug up a fertile hillside and planted it with the choicest vines... BUT..." Isaiah goes on to tell us... "God looked for a crop of good grapes, and found it yielded only bad fruit."

Israel was not a fruitful, faithful vine.

So when Jesus says, "I AM the true vine," he's saying, "I AM the true Israel. I am the One to whom Israel pointed. I AM the fulfillment of all the promises God made with Israel. I am everything Israel could never be."

So, God is the Vinedresser, Jesus is the TRUE Vine of God's planting, and YOU, believer, are a branch of God's grafting. Imagine Jesus saying to you personally, "I am the Vine, YOU are my beloved branch." Because it's just as personal to you right now than it was to the disciples back then.

And your union with Him isn't based on anything in YOU, you didn't earn it, you don't contribute to it... it requires nothing of you... Your place in the Vine depends entirely on God's GRACE.

By GRACE ALONE, you were chosen "in Christ" before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) to be His beloved branch... to be grafted in the Vine.

That is a "stupendous reality," as John Piper says, that a Holy God would CHOOSE to join himself (be united to) a sinner like me... and like you.

By GRACE ALONE, you've been joined to Christ... and given a NEW LIFE in Him... redeemed and forgiven and justified by faith.

By GRACE ALONE, you've been grafted into the Vine... and what's more... He SECURES you there... you're sealed by the Holy Spirit. It's an unbreakable, once-for-all UNION... a fixed reality of your life in Christ, and nothing you do (or don't do) adds to (or subtracts from) that reality.

How comforting is that?!?! That in a world so unsafe and fickle and unreliable ... you have this blessed assurance... You can REST in your secure place in the Vine... You can REST in your secure salvation and all these unbreakable realities of your UNION IN HIM... knowing that nothing in all creation, not height nor depth, not angels nor rulers or anything else can separate you from the love of Christ.

This is unlike any other relationship we have! Think of the strongest relationship in your life... whether that be with your spouse or a parent or a life-long friend... the union and security you have in THAT relationship is doesn't come close to what you have in Christ.... It's beyond comprehension.

So... rest AND REJOICE in this glorious, unbreakable UNION you have in Christ... a union based NOT on work YOU do, but on work He's already DONE.

## THE COMMUNION

Ok, that's our UNION in Him, and it would be more than enough to stop there. This is already such good news... we receive so much even in just our initial connection to Him... but there's more... The Lord calls you to a life of ongoing COMMUNION with Him. Your UNION with Christ is just a prerequisite to your COMMUNION with Him...

And it was ALWAYS God's intention to commune (to abide) with His people... All throughout the Old Testament, God told Israel, "I am your God, and you are my people." He reminded them over and over... And this VINE metaphor that Jesus gives the disciples here... helps them understand how that intention would become a reality for them from this point forward, and how it's a reality for us today... He has JOINED us to Himself, like a branch to a Vine, so that we can enjoy ongoing communion with Him. Our connection (our relationship) to the Vine is a LIVING one!

AND it's a MUTUAL one... He says: "Abide in Me, and I in You." These 7 words are packed full of implications, they're the HEART of the Mystery of the Vine. He invites us (Abide in Me – that's our part), and He promises (And I in You – that's His part).

I was originally going to take each separately, but I think we'll see it more clearly and feel this mutual relationship more if we mix it up... and feel that back-and-forth communion.

## AND I IN YOU: JESUS' LIFE-GIVING SAP

So I'm going to start with JESUS' role... "AND I IN YOU" –

Referring to the metaphor: A vine gathers nutrients and minerals from the soil and the sunlight... not to keep for itself ... but to distribute to the branches. Everything it receives, it gives to the branches, to sustain them and nourish and grow them.

So too is your life in Christ.

When He grafted you into Himself, joined Himself to you, He placed the Holy Spirit inside of you, creating a connection through which HIS OWN LIFE can flow, like sap to a branch, nourishing you, supplying you with everything you could possibly need for the life He's given you, transforming you from one degree of glory to another...

So Jesus isn't just abiding WITH YOU, he's abiding IN YOU. How amazing is that?

I think an IV almost gives us a better visual of this – when the nurse inserts the needle in your vein and places the IV... all the nourishment and hydration and medicine from the IV bag begins to flow into your body.

You've been connected to Christ in such a way that ALL HE IS flows into YOU, into your veins... This is a life-giving, HOLY SPIRIT-FILLED sap flowing into you!

What do you think this sap consists of? Just shout out some things... what flows from Jesus to us, from the Vine to the branches? [Let's explore a few specifically.]

His STRENGTH flows to you.

1 Peter 5:10 tells us that *"the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, STRENGTHEN, and establish you."*

This is a strength far beyond what you could ever muster in yourself... It's not a physical strength, but one that resides deep in your soul... It's a strength that is (ironically!) felt most prominently in your WEAKNESS... (His power is made perfect in your weakness.)

It's a strength that equips you to face whatever He calls you to, reminding you that your battles belong to HIM, and He fights for you.

His WISDOM flows to you...

guiding you, teaching you, CONVICTING you... His wisdom that, more often than not, stands in sharp contrast with the world's wisdom... His wisdom opens your eyes and ears to see HIS truth, HIS ways, HIS plans.

His PEACE flows to you.

And this isn't just your average harmony or tranquility that's here one minute and gone the next. It's a peace that passes understanding. A quiet, stillness that is unattainable outside of Christ. It's a peace that penetrates to the deepest places of your heart, even when you fear, even in adversity, even in unrest... EVEN in grief.

His JOY flows to you.

Again, this isn't just temporary happiness... fleeting moments of euphoria... like what I feel when my kids throw their trash away without me asking... There's something so mysterious and profoundly different about the joy you receive in Christ. It's an inexhaustible, abounding joy... the kind of joy that makes you weep when you sing!

It's a joy that was strong enough to bear Christ's agony on the cross, *"for the JOY that was set before him endured the cross."*

That's a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

His LOVE flows to you.

John 15:9: *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my LOVE."*

This is scandalous if you think about it. We can't humanly understand this... I love all of you, I have genuine love for all of you in this room... but I can tell you with wholehearted certainty that it's not the same love I have for my children.

How can the love that the Father has for HIS OWN Son be the SAME love that flows to me, who's unfaithful and rebellious and defiant?!! That is WILD (scandalous!) ... that He invites us to ABIDE in His perfect, unconditional, unending, sacrificial love that flows freely through the sap...

Drink that up, swim and soak in it!!

This SAP is FULL of all these blessings (and so much more) ... sustaining you, nourishing you, growing you... HIS FULLNESS flowing into YOUR EMPTINESS. HIS Life into YOUR life.

This is what Jesus means when He says, "and I [abide] in you." He infuses you with His life-giving, SPIRIT-SATURATED sap... Without which, we are lost, thirsty souls.

Malcolm Muggeridge was an English Journalist and grew up Agnostic and was a part of the Communist party for years... well, eventually he converted to Christianity... and was radically transformed, , and He began to write passionately in defense of CHRIST... Toward the end of his life, he wrote this: "I may, I suppose, regard myself as being a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the street. That's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the highest slopes of inland revenue. That's success. Furnished with money and a little fame, I can partake in trendy diversions. That's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time. That's fulfillment. Yet I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing, less than nothing, a positive impediment, measured against one draught of that living water that Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty."

Our souls thirst for this life-giving sap that ONLY Christ can give. There is an inner emptiness that only He can satisfy. IN CHRIST, we are completely and wholly nourished.

#### ABIDE IN ME: THROUGH SURRENDER

It makes sense, then, that the primary way we abide in the Vine, we abide in Christ, is through SURRENDER... By RECEIVING all this life-giving sap from Him, acknowledging our NEED for it and our dependence on it for our lives, yielding entirely and wholly to HIM.

These are “bad words” according to the world... Surrender? Dependence? This is so counter-cultural!!! Because the world tells you... “you belong to yourself... you’re self-sufficient and independent... if you surrender yourself, you’ll LOSE yourself, why would you ever do that... you have everything within YOURSELF to be what you’re supposed to be and do what you’re supposed to do...”

In fact, the world tells you that YOU are the Vine. And that’s an easy lie for us to believe. I know it is for me... I’m a wife and a mom of three... I wear a lot of hats... most days, I’m a cook, a chauffeur, a nurse, a tutor, a housekeeper, a counselor, a secretary, a cheerleader... so because of that, it’s easy for me to falsely believe that I’m the vine, and my family members are the branches... I think, “Because I do all these things, I’m the vine... because I wear all these hats... I’m the one in control.” It’s actually quite an ATTRACTIVE lie. I think I can accomplish what I need and want on my own.

This is how Satan first deceived Eve in the Garden: “Eat of the tree and your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.” Eve wanted a part of that. She wanted to be in control. She thought she could be the Vine.

I think I’m in control. I think I can be the Vine. But when I try to be (or believe) that I am... things fall apart really quickly... I FALL APART. Our family doesn’t function very well, at least for very long.

Turns out... There’s no such thing as “self-help” (even though the world claims there is and banks on it!) ... I DO need help, that much is true, but it doesn’t come from MYSELF. My HELP comes ONLY from the Lord.

So... when I try to be the vine, it doesn’t work, because I’m NOT the Vine. I’m a branch. (Jaime “THE BRANCH” Carnaggio.) And let me tell you, I’m IN COMPLETE AWE that I have the honor of living as a BRANCH in the VINE. Knowing what we know, why would we EVER desire to be the Vine. I’m a beloved branch... and I don’t need to be anything more (OR LESS) than that.

You, too, are a branch. You belong to (and depend solely on) the Vine Jesus.

And just like a branch is nothing apart from its vine... it can’t survive without it. It’s lifeless and powerless. It’s entirely dependent on the vine...

YOU can’t survive without Jesus... You’re completely dependent on Him... He’s your only TRUE source of life and sustenance and growth.

So you abide in Him, by SURRENDERING to Him, by depending wholly on Him, humbly and joyfully accepting this life-giving sap, allowing it to nourish you and grow you and transform you... and trusting that in doing so, you become MORE of yourself, not less. In surrendering to Him... you become MORE ALIVE to the person He created you to be.

#### AND I IN YOU: THE FATHER’S BLESSED CLEANSING

So... we abide in Jesus through surrender, and He abides in us by nourishing us with His very life.

But there's more... God the Father also participates in this Abiding Life... While Jesus (the Vine) nourishes us internally, the Father (the Gardener) nourishes us externally, cleansing us and pruning us...

Just as a gardener prunes away weeds and shoots and anything that would hinder good, productive, fruitful growth.... The Father prunes away all that hinders our life in Him, all that prevents us from growing and bearing fruit.

This doesn't sound so fun, in fact, it sounds painful... and it often is... But it's necessary, because... We don't faithfully live (or abide) "in Christ Alone" ... we abide in other things, outside of Christ... we abide in false vines.

[What are some examples of false vines? Again, just shout out some things that we "abide in" other than Christ?](#) [Financial security, physical health, social status, relationships]

Some of this is common sense... Garbage in, garbage out. We connect to things that are unhealthy for us, we absorb those things, and then they inevitably flow out of us in some capacity or another. This is why we care so much about what our kids watch and listen to, why we SHOULD be more mindful about what WE watch and listen to...

But a lot of this is deceiving... because many of these things we abide in aren't BAD things... I connect to (abide in) my family and friends, I connect to this church and the people of this church, I even connect to things that bring me joy and comfort and pleasure, which isn't necessarily bad. But when I DEPEND on those people and those things to satisfy me in a way only Christ can, when I put my hope and trust in those things, I turn something meant for GOOD into a false vine... and I begin to produce weeds and shoots and sour grapes (pride, jealousy, idolatry, rivalry...), things that aren't healthy for me, and things that are displeasing to the Lord, things that need to be trimmed away.

So yes, it's often painful... but TRUST that it's a BLESSED cleansing... The Father lovingly cuts away the parts of you that are unhealthy, the parts that hinder your growth in Him, the parts that deceive you.

It reminds me of John the Baptist's words, when he declared, "[Christ] must increase, I must decrease" (John 3:30). The Father's pruning accomplishes this... He decreases the things in you that are fleshy, that are of the world... so that what's OF HIM can increase all the more... so more GOOD fruit is produced, so that you can be shaped more and more like Christ, and so you can abide in the Vine all the more wholeheartedly...

I have to pause here for a quick second, because I was thinking... this whole metaphor sort of puts Jesus as the gentler, nurturing one, and God is the strict, disciplining one... but both the Father and Son's nourishment for us is rooted in LOVE.

Think about how much a gardener LOVES and delights in his garden. He takes so much care to make sure it gets the right amount of water and sunlight and warmth and attention. I mentioned earlier, my friend Kathleen has been helping me with my garden, and when she came over last week to see how everything was growing, I watched such love pour out of her: "Look at your spinach, how well it's growing, it's so beautiful! Look at the color of these beet leaves, don't you just want to put them in a salad with all these yummy smelling herbs?!"

And if Kathleen shows that much love and care for these plants... HOW MUCH MORE love and care does my Father show me? He waters me and warms me and prunes me and cares for me... and DELIGHTS in watching me grow.

## ABIDE IN ME: THROUGH FELLOWSHIP

So the Lord abides in us by nourishing us and cleansing us (internally and externally), and we abide in Him by surrendering to His SAP, AND by submitting to His pruning... but there's one more piece to this... we also abide in Him through FELLOWSHIP... by spending TIME with Him, just like we do any other relationship we have. Fellowship is the way relationships are maintained, by living life together and getting to know each other. The same is true for our relationship with Christ. We abide in Him through FELLOWSHIP.

And fellowship implies action. So far, this abiding dance we share with Christ has been more of a way of life or a state of mind, something we ARE more than something we DO. BUT there are tangible, active ways that we abide in the Vine.

You abide in Him by spending time with Him in prayer... vulnerably (and confidently) coming before him, bringing all your worries and doubts, concerns and fears, joys and burdens... He wants all of that, even though He knows it already, He invites you to share with Him, to name specifically all the things on your heart.

You abide in Him by spending time in His Word... His LIVING, ACTIVE Word... the very second you open your Bible, HE meets you there personally... and he DELIGHTS to reveal things to you, He teaches you and guides you and speaks to you personally through His Word. You abide in HIM when you ABIDE in His Word, when you meditate on it and soak it up.

You abide in Him by participating in the life of His body, the church... because to be "in Christ" has a collective implication. It's not possible to belong to HIM without simultaneously belonging to His community, to all the OTHER "branches" in Him, so to speak. You share fellowship with HIM when you share fellowship with the body.

You abide in Him when you enter into corporate prayer and corporate confession... when you partake of the Lord's Supper, a clear expression of your UNION with Him.

You abide in Him through worship... lifting His Name on High, singing praises of His goodness and glory.

There are lots of ways that you enjoy fellowship with Christ... and know that those ways may vary in different seasons of your life. You may have undisturbed quiet time in the early morning, to speak to Him and listen for His voice... or... if you're like me, you have conversations with Him in the carpool line or while you're making your kids' beds.

## **ABIDING IN THE VINE**

So, this, brothers and sisters, is our COMMUNION with Christ... unpacked... You abide in Him through surrender and fellowship, and He abides in you through life-giving, nourishing sap and blessed cleansing...

And it's NOT CONDITIONAL... Jesus doesn't say, "IF you abide in me, THEN I'll abide in you (then I'll nurture and sustain and cleanse you)" ... but even so, this abiding life in the Vine was designed to be a MUTUAL one... YOUR abiding in HIM allows you to experience HIS abiding in YOU all the more acutely...

The more you surrender to Him, the more you feel His strength pumping through your veins, the more you feel His love penetrating your soul, the more you feel the excess weight falling off of you as the Father lovingly prunes what hinders you...

As you spend more and more time with him, you begin to seek HIS will be done, not yours... you desire to hear HIS voice, and silence the world's, you seek HIS wisdom and HIS truth...  
You desire HIS name be glorified, not yours.

You experience the "I in you" so much more when the "Abide in me" is tended to.

It's a mysterious and wondrous MUTUAL abiding life... You abide in Him, He abides in You.

And what I think is so unbelievable about all this... is how extremely PERSONAL this is... Your communion with Christ is UNIQUELY YOURS... He's always working in and through you ALL that you need, in ALL your changing circumstances... Because abiding in the Vine isn't a stationary, static reality. Just like a branch endures wind and weather and threatening temperatures... You'll endure hardships and conflict and suffering... But you can trust, He will be for you (and supply for you) all that you need. In some seasons, you'll need more tender affection, in some, you'll need more providential pruning... He is and does in EACH of His beloved branches all that we need... in order to... BEAR FRUIT FOR THE KINGDOM.

## THE HARVEST

THIS is what Abiding in the Vine LEADS to... A GLORIOUS HARVEST.

Already we've seen evidence of an INTERNAL harvest, all that results from our union in Him and communion with Him... but there's also an EXTERNAL harvest, the FRUIT that grows from the branches... which turns out, is the very PURPOSE of a branch...

Let's take the metaphor one more time: Just as a vine receives all its nourishment from the soil and sun and distributes it to its branches... a branch receives all that nourishment from the vine SO THAT it BEARS FRUIT... and [who is the fruit for?](#) The gardener! It's a glorious circular process!

The same is true for you and me... You receive all this life-giving sap from Christ, nourishing you and growing you, SO THAT you bear fruit for God's glory.

*"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit."*

He joined himself to you, so that His life could flow into you and produce FRUIT...  
and not even just a little fruit but an ABUNDANCE of fruit, a HARVEST... for the Kingdom...

This isn't physical fruit, of course... it's SPIRITUAL fruit...*Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...*

All that life-giving sap (and all the blessings it contains) that flows from the Vine to the branches, from Jesus to you, flows out to the world, by way of the Spirit.

So the FRUIT, then, is YOUR CHRIST-LIKE outputs...

You abide in Him, and He abides in You, resulting in FRUIT that expresses CHRIST Himself to the world around you.

You abide in Him, and He abides in You, in such a way that when others experience YOU, they experience HIM... in such a way that when others are in YOUR presence, they feel HIS presence... in such a way that you mysteriously bring a sense of HIM wherever you go.

What a privilege, that He invites us to participate in the life of the vineyard (of the kingdom) ...



How unbelievable that His divine design for this abiding life involves OUR lives serving as witnesses to HIS GOODNESS, to HIS FAITHFULNESS...

What a privilege that because we have CHRIST IN US, we BEAR FRUIT that proclaims the excellencies of the Vine that sustains us.

## **PRAYER**

Father,

Oh, how IN AWE we are, Lord, that you have joined yourself to each of us, to your Son Jesus, the TRUE VINE... that you chose us, to be your beloved branch...

We take a moment to FEEL this connection.

To feel ourselves being fastened to you in such a way that nothing can break us away...

May we rest in this place you've secured for us... knowing that we never have to leave this place of utter dependence on you.

May we REJOICE that we are your beloved branch, we are nothing MORE, and we are nothing LESS.

May we be so aware of our union with you, that even amid all our daily routines, we never for a moment lose sight of our place in you, never forget to whom we are connected.

Lord, we are IN AWE that you invite us to communion with you... that you DELIGHT in sharing life with us...

We hear your voice whisper to us, "Child, abide in me. Rest in me. Surrender to me. And I will sustain you."

We do surrender to you now Lord.

Lord, we have many needs, we bear many burdens...

Some of us particularly need your strength right now... some of us are in desperate need of your wisdom...

some of us are so thirsty for even one draught of your life-giving sap that we can't even articulate what to ask for... But you know exactly what we need Lord, and you've promise to supply it, so we take a moment to FEEL all that you have for us, flowing into our veins, nourishing us and strengthening us... as YOUR life flows into ours.

Lord, we confess that we've been UNFAITHFUL to you... we abide in things outside of you. We connect to things that aren't healthy for us. We depend on others we love for things that only YOU can give us. We confess all the false vines in our lives ....

And we humbly acknowledge that your loving pruning is for OUR good and YOUR glory.

Cleanse us of all that hinders the Vine.

And Lord, we humbly ask that others would see You through US... help us to see the ways that you are calling us to proclaim your excellencies.

Make it the one desire of our hearts to be branches, SO filled with the Spirit of the Vine, they we bring forth abundant fruit for your glory... and to the glory of your name.

In Christ's Name,

Amen.