

# Seven Sayings of Jesus: I Am...The Vine

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, June 25th. My name is Kent Dixon, as most of you know that, and it is my joy to be the pastor here. So welcome to each of you this morning, whether you're here this morning in person, as we've talked about, or whether you're connecting, as Leah mentioned, on the phone line or on our podcast or the various ways that people connect with our church.

So welcome to you, however you're connecting with us. So a couple of just quick pastoral announcements. We always teased each other, Michelle and I, for saying my children when it's our children, or I almost said my nephew and his wife.

He was her nephew first. So our nephew and his wife and their little boy, six months old, came to visit us the other night, and Whitney walked in the door and said, happy anniversary.

And I said, that's not until August. And she said, no, happy anniversary on your hand. And I went, oh yeah, it is my hand-iversary, I guess.

So pretty hard to believe, I shouldn't wiggle my fingers yet, pretty hard to believe that June 18th was the injury, June 25th was my surgery, and that's the result so far.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] So it doesn't completely close into a fist. They're working on that. It doesn't completely go flat, but I wear a cast every night. So prayers answered.

Good surgery work, good physio work, but answers to prayer as well. So I certainly recognize this result is a gift, absolutely.

So our family will be heading south, as we do periodically, especially in the summertime, for the next couple weeks for vacation. I was talking to a pastor friend of mine, and I said, so I'm officiating a vow renewal ceremony next Saturday.

I'm leading a family church service next Sunday. And he said, that is the worst vacation I've ever heard of. And I said, well, when you're the guy, people know that you're the guy.

But it will be a blessing, I'm sure. So we'd appreciate your prayers for safe travels and for fellowship as we visit with extended family during that time.

[ 2 : 1 8 ] Hopefully recharge our batteries a little bit as well. So our good friend, Paul Hay, will be preaching the next two Sundays. We're going to flip the ramp, because as you've seen, Linda, just like Myrna has had enough, she let Don have it.

You can ask them about that. Linda clearly has had enough of Paul, so she let him have it, hence the air cast and all of that. But anyway, we're going to flip this ramp down.

Paul is going to preach up here, probably sitting down. So you can give him a hard time, not too hard, be kind, but not too kind. So Paul will be preaching the next two Sundays, leading communion next Sunday.

So that will be a blessing to all of you, I'm sure. So here we are. We've come to the end of this current sermon series. And over the past six weeks, we've been spending time in this series called Seven Sayings of Jesus, I Am.

And in this series, we've considered Jesus' identity, what he said about himself, specifically in the Gospel of John, and through what are known as the I Am statements of Jesus.

[ 3 : 27 ] And these statements are important to us because they are not just ways of understanding or describing Jesus himself, although that's absolutely true. But they also give us a guide for how we can grow in our understanding of him, a deeper understanding of him, and then our relationship with him.

Because these statements, as we begin to understand the identity of Jesus more deeply, more richly, it also enhances, should enhance, our relationship with him as well.

And my hope is that over the course of this series, each of us have developed a deeper understanding, a deeper appreciation for our Lord Jesus Christ, the great I Am.

So the seventh and final I Am statement we're going to consider together is found in John 15, 1 to 17. So you can have a look. There are Bibles in front of you.

You probably have your Bible with you, or you can turn on your app or however you do. Whatever floats your Bible boat, do that. And I'll read it for us as well. Jesus says, I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

[ 4 : 37 ] He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. Well, every branch that does bear fruit, he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Jesus says, I am the vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

[ 5 : 43 ] As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands, and remain in his love.

I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. My command is this. Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that he laid down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends. For everything that I learned from my Father, I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

[ 6 : 54 ] This is my command. Love each other. I'm going to drop this. The word of the Lord. Lord. Thanks be to God. If you know that, if you don't, it's fine.

I haven't done it a long time, but I felt compelled there. Jesus' statement, I am the true vine, he says at the beginning of this passage, or simply the vine, involves each of us in a very personal and direct way.

Many of the I am statements relate to Jesus himself, relate to his character, his mission, his identity, things like that. But there are two of the I am statements.

I think we'd recognize that the sheepish ones relate to us, right? We talked about the fact that we are all individual sheep. We have personalities. We have challenges.

We have gifts. We are all unique. So that concept relates to us specifically as well. But this vine metaphor that Jesus uses relates to us as individuals specifically and directly again.

[ 7 : 59 ] And Jesus used this intentionally. Jesus did nothing by accident, as we can recognize, but certainly not here. So in the Old Testament, Israel, the people of God, are often suggested to be the vine.

The prophet Isaiah says this explicitly in Isaiah 5 verse 7. It's a short verse. For the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel. Pretty clear, right?

In Jeremiah 2 verse 21, we read, I planted you as a choice vine from the purest stock. How then did you become degenerate and become a wild vine?

The gardener convicting the vine there. So if you've ever wondered why Jesus says he is the true vine at the beginning of that passage we read, it's like he's saying, yeah, you know vines, but I'm a different kind of vine.

He says, he's saying there essentially, I am the true Israel. Jesus was declaring, I personally now represent God to the world.

[ 9 : 08 ] From now on, anyone who follows me should also represent, will represent God to the world as the new people of God, the church.

And Jesus makes it very clear here that he is the vine itself. He is the trunk. He is the core. He is the source from which the branches come.

So if you've ever had a tree or a vine and pruned it, you can likely relate to what Jesus meant here. David and I crawled under one of the giant spruce trees at the front of our property and pruned the heck out of it.

And you almost can't tell because we pruned from the inside. But we were shocked by the amount of dead material we pulled out. I said to David a few times, could you imagine this poor tree trying desperately to feed these dead branches?

There's so much material here taking up energy and taking up focus away from this tree. So the vine or the trunk is the main body, we recognize that, that it comes up from the earth.

[ 10 : 21 ] And for any plant that bears fruit, once all the fruit has been picked, once the leaves fall off in the fall, we may actually prune the tree back quite aggressively.

Arborists are clear that the best time to prune is often in the fall or very early in the spring so that you don't damage the tree. And in that pruning process, we can often trim right back, prune right back to the source, right back to the trunk itself to restore health.

And this is the process, this pruning process, ensures that the branches remain healthy, that they bear fruit again in the spring, that they will flower again in time.

But we also recognize that the life of the vine is not the branches themselves, right? The main body of the vine is the source of life.

And the branches are dependent on that stalk, the trunk, the vine itself. They can't grow or thrive without it, right? They can't grow in isolation.

[ 11 : 27 ] Vines can still exist, though, without branches, which is interesting. They often do that during the winter or even just after pruning because they are the core.

They are the source. So they will remain even without the branches. And just as the vine is the source of life and vitality for branches, it's the ultimate source of what is needed for the branches to bear fruit, Jesus is the source of life and nourishment for the branches that are connected to him.

you and me. So let's take a moment to note some important things about branches, how they relate to the vine itself.

So the first thing about branches is that they are to abide in the vine. Abide is a short word, but it feels like a \$5 word.

To abide is a verb. It's something that involves action. It is not a passive word at all. It doesn't imply anything passive. So abiding in, to abide in Christ is not just a feeling or a belief, it's something that we do.

[ 12 : 43 ] It's something that we must engage in actively. It means to remain or to stay. And it means something far, far more than simply the terminology that we often use, believing in Jesus.

I believe in Jesus. It feels kind of static, right? Jesus is relating to his disciples, describing them as being like branches of a vine, particularly in how they are dependent on him for life and growth.

Jesus refers to his disciples abiding in him. Refers to that in different ways seven times in that passage we just read together.

He's not talking about it as though it's a suggestion either. Maybe you pick that up. This is a reality. It is a fact. It is a necessity. Because living branches must abide in, must remain in, must stay engaged with the vine.

because they simply cannot exist without it. Jesus makes that very, very clear. You simply cannot be a Christian unless you abide in, unless you remain in, unless you engage with Jesus Christ.

[ 14 : 00 ] We're the branches. We're part of a body of Christ, but we need to make sure that we seek all the nourishment as individual branches that the vine itself offers.

an evangelical commentator named J.C. Ryle said, get riled up. He said that when Jesus said to abide in or remain in me, he meant to cling to me, to stick fast to me, to live your life close to me, to get nearer and nearer to me, roll every burden on to me, cast your whole weight on me.

Never let go of your hold on me for a single moment. Can your connection to Jesus be described that way?

The second thing about branches is that all branches are pruned. Over the years, I have had to prune trees. As I talked about a minute ago, we also had a tree in our backyard that had black knot.

And if you've ever seen it, I kind of describe it as tree cancer because the branches and everything gets very lumpy and it's pervasive and it's destructive.

[ 15 : 18 ] So I've had to remove dead branches so that healthy parts can flourish, healthy branches can grow. The overall tree can be healthy again. And wild growth needs to be tamed.

Michelle pruned our rose bush the other night. dead pieces, wild pieces need to be cut out. They need to be removed. And I think we may tend to think of the process of pruning as being destructive.

But by its very nature, it is constructive. It promotes healthy growth and it promotes flourishing. As we read in our passage this morning, dead branches get cut away completely.

But even healthy branches get trimmed back so that they can become more healthy. Commentators suggest that when Jesus is speaking of dead branches, this refers to people in the church who may declare themselves to be followers of Jesus, but they don't necessarily exhibit the characteristics or the kind of connection to the vine that they probably should.

Maybe when you've read this passage before, you've thought, well, dead branches are obviously people who don't believe in Jesus. So when I read this, I thought, oh, interesting, because I think I had that perspective on it as well.

[ 16 : 42 ] What Jesus is saying here is that I will cut out the unhealthy parts of my branches as much as pruning the healthy ones. Interesting.

Folks like that, folks who are engaged in a way but not fully, they tend to not grow. That makes sense, right? They tend to not produce leaves, produce fruit that is evidence of Christ at work in their lives.

And they are essentially spiritually dead. People like that are going through the motions. Perhaps they're checking spiritual boxes. Yeah, I went to church, read my Bible once this week.

Yep. And they are also people who may tend to talk about what they're doing that is spiritual to other people. Yeah, I go to a Bible study regularly. Yep, I make sure I'm in church once a month.

Things like that, right? That's evidence of perhaps an unhealthy kind of relationship with Jesus. And the good branches that Jesus talks about, there are Christians who may have experienced all kinds of pruning along the way in their lives.

[ 17 : 53 ] Perhaps the loss of a job or a sick child or unanswered prayer, a marriage breakdown, children rejecting them, some sort of catastrophic physical illness, the loss of a loved one.

These are all kinds of pruning that happens in our lives. And these are events or circumstances in our lives that can either make us bitter or better.

Let me be clear. God does not cause these things to happen. I think we can do that at times. Lord, why are you doing this to me? Have you ever said those words yourself?

Perhaps? God does not cause these things to happen. And I think that's the misunderstanding where people may lose their faith or begin to question the idea of a loving God.

How can God do this to me? I've heard that many times. God allows potentially dreadful things to happen to his disciples.

[ 18 : 54 ] not to crush us, to help us grow, to help us to lean into him. Just at the time when you feel like you need to pull back from your faith because God has somehow forgotten you from your perspective, friends, that's the time when you need to lean into him because he knows what you're going through.

God uses challenges like that to grow our faith, to grow our trust in him, to cause us to engage with him, not the opposite.

The third thing about branches is that they bear fruit, hear this part, when they are healthy. Jesus made it clear that healthy branches, he says this, bear much fruit.

fruit. But we need to be careful, I believe, that Jesus doesn't spell out the specifics of what this fruit is. Have you ever thought about that before? So it's wise to be cautious about defining it in a very specific sort of way.

But here are some suggestions. Some commentators suggest Jesus is speaking about evangelism here. That spiritually healthy Christians who abide in, who remain connected to Jesus may be effective at pointing people or even leading people to Jesus and harvesting that kind of fruit.

[ 20 : 26 ] Others suggest Jesus is talking specifically about kind of fruit that's described in scripture, fruit of the spirit. Love, joy, peace, say them with me if you want, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Others note that Jesus promises in verse 7, that passage that we read, that those who abide in him will have their prayers answered. And so they suggest that the fruit in that case is prayer.

Other people think that the fruit is good things that we do in the name of Jesus. Feeding the hungry, standing for justice, giving a drink of water to the thirsty, seeing someone who is in need, reaching out and helping them.

I personally think it is all of these things and probably more. Jesus is simply saying that Christians who are connected to, who are abiding in the vine, should naturally display the qualities we might expect from healthy, vital disciples of Jesus.

Does that make sense? the vine and its branches represent the Christian community. That shouldn't be a shocker, I hope. Just as branches are connected to the vine and through the vine, they're connected to one another.

[ 21 : 55 ] Adopting that perspective of thinking of ourselves as branches, united in and through Christ, reminds us, I think, most powerfully that the Christian journey is not a solitary journey.

Can you recognize that? The vine and its branches are healthy and interconnected in a community that brings life to all its parts as they support and relate to each other.

As we grow, others will grow as well. This is why being engaged as part of a local church community is so important. Can't stress it enough.

In this place, in this family, we can support one another and walk this road together. Each of us are connected to the vine and then by association to one another as well.

Not just spiritually, but physically, tangibly. Because, I don't know about you, but I think we branches need each other. Big time. just as much as we need that life-giving stock of the vine, Jesus Christ.

[ 23 : 06 ] My friends, are you connected to the vine? What are the steps that you're taking or you take in your life to ensure that that connection remains strong?

Are you tending to your relationship to Jesus so that it continues to grow and be healthy? What are the things in your life that could be pruned?

Pruned to make time and space for real fruit to grow in your life? Are there activities or unnecessary responsibilities that burden your life and take up your time without replacing it with joy?

Are there negative relationships or influences in your life that you might need to release or move on from? One author I read suggested something very interesting.

He takes a spiritual energy audit of his life periodically. It sounds kind of Oprah, so bear with me. Write down or consider the areas in your life that deserve your greatest energy.

[ 24 : 12 ] This is all from a Christian perspective, so I'm not just bringing in something kooky and trying to sanitize it for you. Write down all the areas in your life that deserve the greatest energy or require the greatest energy.

And self-care, we usually put last, it should be high on the list. Healthy and life-giving relationships with family and friends.

Your work or your hobbies, the things that fulfill you and give you joy in that way, should likely rank high as well. And those are all good things. And then also consider the things that actually create imbalance in your life.

tasks that you could delegate. Unhealthy relationships that actually take more from you than you receive from them.

Maybe excessive time spent online, spent watching TV. Those are all fine things too, but in moderation, in balance with other things.

[ 25 : 15 ] Maybe energy spent nursing a negative attitude towards something. harboring bitterness towards someone who hurt you that you just cannot forgive.

I'm going to talk about forgiveness in an ongoing way at some point as well. So when you have those two lists, compare them. How well do they balance?

That may give you some great ideas, great suggestions for areas of pruning. can you recognize healthy fruit in your life?

Is your attitude and perspective anchored in the truth that God is in control? Do you exhibit gratitude and appreciation for everything that you have?

Do you seek to love other people, even the ones that you don't like very much? Do you seek to love people with the same extravagant and unconditional love that God has for you?

[ 26 : 16 ] I've said this to you before, if you ever feel down or anxious or frustrated or spread thin, stop for one second in your day and say, God, how do you feel about me?

And then shut up and absorb because I guarantee it will change your day. It's important that we recognize that only we can intentionally prune the things from our lives that need to be pruned.

Jesus will not step in and go, oh, for crying out loud, I'll take this out and this out and this out. He's a God of grace. He's a God of patience.

He will wait. But we can recognize that there are things in our lives that we need to prune. We only have so much space. We only have so much time.

So what's the wild growth? What are the unhealthy things in your life that could be pruned to make room for health, to make room for connection with Jesus, to make room for fruit?

[ 27 : 23 ] Remember, it's also not your job to produce the fruit yourself. This is not about works I'm talking about here. I'm asking you to consider to open, be open to God's pruning.

Be open to a sense of conviction about the things in your life that you don't need, that you can release and move on from, to create space, to help you grow and have room for more growth, and to seek to remain connected to Jesus.

So be encouraged as you seek to branch out, as you seek to remain deeply rooted in Jesus, our source of life, our source of hope, and praise God, our source of connection to one another.

Amen.