

I AM the true Vine

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- [0 : 0 0] The reading today is John 15 verse 1 to 17. It says, Ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.
- By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
- Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.
- This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.
- You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing.
- [1 : 5 4] But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.
- These things I command you, so that you will love one another. Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Yeah, Father, I pray for an outpouring of your spirit.
- Lord, I pray that you would help me to be truthful and clear. And I pray that you would give all of us listening ears. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.
- Well, is personal moral growth even possible? Like the besetting vice, like sexual sin or outbursts of anger, is it possible to be free from such things?
- To get growth from such things? If you're married, could in five years' time, could you look back and say that your marriage is now safer?
- [3 : 1 6] There's more trust. It's more life-giving to one another and to people around you. If you're a parent, isn't it the burden of us parents? We want that growth, that personal growth in our children.
- Even when they're adults, that burden. And I don't have adult children, but I can see that burden in you if it's still there. Isn't it our core family business?
- That personal growth as the church? Each conversation, we're pushing each other closer to the good, closer to God, or just letting each other drift and further away.
- So is personal moral growth even possible? I want to ask an expert. Jonathan Haidt, H-A-I-A-D-T.
- He's an unbeliever, but he's a professor of social psychology, and he's specialising in morality. Some of you might know his recent book, The Anxious Generation.
- [4 : 2 0] He wrote another book, The Righteous Mind, back in 2012. He builds a compelling case that you can't use rational arguments to become more moral.

Now, I don't have time to go through his arguments, okay, but I'm just going to share a funny example. Well, I found it funny. I found it humorous. You may not. But if rationality can produce more morality, then you would expect moral philosophers to be some of the most moral people.

When they did a study on moral philosophers, did they give more to charity? No. Did they call their mothers more? No. Did they donate more blood or organs?

Did they clean up after themselves after conferences more? No. In fact, the library missing book list, moral ethics topped the list of books that weren't returned.

That's the point I found. I'm glad some people found it funny with me. Now, I can't share his arguments. I'm not going to convince you of it because I don't have time. But his conclusion is this.

[5 : 37] In looking at human behaviour, it's our gut intuition that comes first and our reasoning comes second.

He describes our intuition like this elephant. It is powerful, moving wherever we want it to go. And he describes our reasoning like a press secretary of the president.

That press secretary is not there to persuade. It's just, here's what the president says. It's to justify. Now, this isn't sounding good for personal moral growth.

That is not sounding good. It's a severe warning for individuals trying to go it on their own. You will just justify yourself wherever you want to go. Now, Jonathan, an unbeliever, he's arguing that together we can make tweaks to each other.

He's not even aiming that high. He's saying we can tweak each other for growth. Now, our passage today, it agrees and disagrees with Jonathan's finding. It agrees that left to ourselves, change, personal growth, it's not going to happen.

[6 : 57] Social change, social connection rather, it can use fear, it can use pride of our reputation to produce tweaks. And here's where our passage really disagrees with Jonathan.

Jonathan, Jesus is in the business of changing our elephant. I'm going to use his phrase. He's in the business of changing that deep person in us.

He's not after little tweaks. Okay, so leaving the elephant image behind, that's Jonathan's image. Let's go to Scripture's image.

We come to the seventh of the seven I am declarations of Jesus. And today is about what it means to follow Jesus.

What does it mean to be a believer? What is the essence of belonging to Jesus? And you'd expect the focus to be on us. But again, Jesus, he asserts himself. I am the true vine.

[8 : 01] You are the branches. Now, Israel, God's ancient covenant people were pictured by the prophets again and again in the Psalms as a vineyard.

And now we should be pretty familiar with vineyard, Hunter Valley. In Isaiah 5, God is pictured as the vineyard owner.

He's done everything. He's cleared the land. He's made it fertile soil. He's cared for it. He's provided for it. And he looks at the vine and he's looking for fruit.

And here's verse 7. I wish I knew Hebrew at this point. But he looked for righteousness.

He looked for righteousness. He heard cries of distress. He looked for justice and found bloodshed.

[9 : 03] He looked for righteousness and he heard cries. Whenever Israel is referred as the vine, it's always a negative picture. There's no fruit.

So do you hear what Jesus is saying when he says, I am the true vine? I am the true vine. He's saying, I'm creating the true covenant people that Israel failed to be.

How can a warrior become a rock?

How can a bigot become understanding? But when he says, I'm the true vine, he's saying, I'm the key to that. I'm the key to that kind of change.

So here's where we're headed today. I want to ask the question, what's the fruit? What's the ultimate purpose of the fruit and how is the fruit produced? So what's the fruit?

[10 : 28] Well, fruit in the New Testament can be spoken of in lots of terms. We just did one of them in terms of praising. It's the fruit of lips that praise the Lord. It can be talked about in terms of leading others to Christ.

It can be talked about in terms of righteous behavior. It can be talked about, most famous of all, the fruit of the Spirit, our character, our attitudes, love, joy, peace, and so on. I can't see anything in here.

We're going to come to verse 12 in a second, but I suspect we should probably choose E, all of the above. Any fruit in the right response to God and one another is probably to be pictured here.

But verse 12 does seem to emphasize how we relate to one another. The new commandment that characterizes the true vine, that you love one another as I have loved you.

The love that we have at the cross of Jesus, it's no external pressure put on us.

[11 : 42] It gets inside of us. This love is different to anything you'll find in the world. Even the Greek word for love is different.

The word that the New Testament writers used is totally different to the word they used at that time. There's other words for love in Greek, like storge, which is natural family connection.

We get that kind of love. Philia, friendship. And then most common, eros, which we understand most of all romantic love.

Now, have you had a friend who is desperately in love with a guy and you're like, I'm not sure what you see in him. Have you ever thought that way?

I'm not thinking of anyone in this room. I just want to say that. Well, the first thing about eros kind of love is it's love for the worthy.

[12 : 45] You may not see something worthy in that person, but she does. Eros sees something worthy. And eros wants to possess it.

She doesn't just look at him and go, oh, yeah, he's wonderful. I don't really care who he marries. No, I must have him. He must be mine. The world will be colourless.

It will be meaningless. I'll be empty without him. So eros kind of love, it sees worth and I need it to feel full.

Christ's love for us, the New Testament word, the authors choose a different word. Agape. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Our worth had nothing to do with it. He didn't need to possess us for him to feel full. It's all to do with him. Agape love is, it's in his nature to overflow and to seek the well-being of others.

[13 : 58] It's a love that you don't find in this world. It is not human in a sense. We were made for it. Maybe I'm overstating that. You won't find it in the world.

Just imagine the difference. Agape love flowing in your soul would make to your marriage.

When you're not looking for worth in your spouse to decide whether to love them. That would transform marriages. My marriage. Imagine that in your parenting.

You don't need your child to flourish for you to feel whole. Because then you're using your child. Imagine that in the church.

This is humanly impossible love. It's only found in the cross. So I think that's the main fruit we should be picturing.

[15 : 05] Now what's the ultimate purpose of this fruit? It's so that we progressively share in the glory of the beauty of the great I am himself.

Verse 11. These things I have spoken to you. That my joy may be in you. And that your joy may be full.

The Christian life is no just grin and bear it. Got to be serious all the time. Now there's a lot of serious things in life.

But the Christian life is joy. He wants fullness of joy. Wholeness. So the purpose of producing this fruit in us.

In us is joy. Fullness of joy. And the ultimate purpose of this we see in verse 8.

[16 : 14] By this my father is glorified. That you bear much fruit. And so prove to be my disciples. When agape love is seen in us.

It's from out of this world. It demonstrates that we are the children of God. It honors the father. And it glorifies the father. Because there is no way you produced it.

There's no way the world produced it. He did. His cross produces it. And so it glorifies him that way. So the purpose of this fruit.

Is our full joy. To the father's glory. So I want to turn to our final question.

Which we'll spend the most time on. How is this fruit produced? I feel burdened as a preacher.

[17 : 22] Because I'm guessing there's one verse in here. That a few of you. You probably barely heard a word I said. Because fear is gripping you. The image of the father taking away.

Any unfruitful branch. Gathered and thrown into the fire. That is terrifying. The picture here.

Is not about the amount of fruit. It's not like. He looks and goes. Oh there's only one grape. Chop it off. No. If there's a grape. Wonderful.

And he prunes it. It's not about the amount. And we aren't given a time frame here.

Whatever time frame you're using to measure your life. It could be a whole person's entire lifespan. We're not told here a week. Or a few years. But if you want to be in Jesus.

[18 : 24] And your soul is telling you that I must be one of those useless branches. Can I plead with you? Give as much weight to the surrounding verses as you're giving to that one verse.

Look at the surrounding verses. Verse 3. Already you are clean. Because of the word that I have spoken to you. If you believe the word of the gospel, you're clean. Verse 16.

Jesus underlines and he bolds this in verse 16. You did not choose me. But I chose you. And our Lord's high priest.

I know it's not in this passage. But in chapter 17. This section ends with our high priest praying over us. The father's going to answer our high priest's prayer.

And he says, Holy Father, keep them. Keep them in your name. He knows the pressure we're under in this world. That our faith is struggling. And he says, Keep them.

[19 : 37] And can I... That's okay? All good. And notice God's role here.

Notice God's role in producing fruit and our role. He doesn't ask, Are you producing fruit? I think our minds go there.

Am I producing fruit? Am I producing fruit? Is it enough? He doesn't ask that. We need to have the right question. Here's the question from the passage. Am I abiding in Christ? Am I looking to him as my only hope?

This passage is telling us, Don't infer God's love. From my performance, If I can see good things or not, I'll infer whether God loves me or not.

Don't infer it. Draw on it. You've got to draw the life, the love from his word. You've got to draw that I am loved.

[20 : 46] It's the I am's responsibility to produce this fruit. Verse 4. Let's look at the vine. 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.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. Like the Greek is a double negative here, which doesn't make sense in English, to put it exactly. So let me say, I'm going to really annoy the grammar people in this room.

You can't do nothing. You can't do nothing without me. It's his responsibility to produce the fruit.

I continually struggle to believe that, fully and always. Otherwise, my success wouldn't make me proud. It wasn't me. It's the vine through me.

And my failures wouldn't leave me crushed, because it's the I am who's still with me. It's the vine's responsibility.

[21 : 55] And this talk of Jesus living in us, so we're in him and he in us, it's not just a nice idea. It's reality. He says to his disciples in chapter 14, we didn't read this bit, but I will not leave you as orphans.

I will come to you. Now, how does he come to us? Because the Father and the Son send his Spirit. And he's called an advocate. He's the Spirit of truth.

The Holy Spirit never draws attention to himself. He keeps pointing to the Son. He wants to press into our minds and hearts more of the person and work of Jesus.

That's what the Spirit does for us. He's our advocate. He pushes Jesus deeper into us. Charles Hodge is a Bible teacher from the 19th century.

He explains the Spirit's advocacy work like this. The Spirit is an advocate in that he's like a lawyer. He's making a case for you.

[23 : 05] And he's not just going, well, David's a shocker. Just have mercy, please. That's not the case. He's making a legal case.

Father, the law demands death for David. Your son has paid in full. Your son was obedient in fulfilling the law all on his behalf. It would be unjust to reject him because he's in your son.

It would be fully just to embrace him as your own. And so the Spirit's advocacy role for us is saying God's justice, which we fear, is now totally for us and on our side.

That's wonderful news. All the son is and does. The Spirit presses into us.

And just think of that power of that, that you can have in those moments where you are feeling totally unworthy, that God surely doesn't want to stand next to you in the shame.

[24 : 16] Don't infer his love. Draw on it. Let the Spirit speak to you. Preach to yourself that the Son is all I need, that God's justice is totally for me now.

So it's the vine's responsibility to produce the fruit. The Spirit is in us, pressing Jesus into us. And the Father here is pictured as the vine dresser, pruning.

Now Emma recently pruned back our roses. I knew that roses are hardy, that you can go to town on them. But this time, I thought they're gone.

She went to town on them. They're gone for good. But sure enough, the spring's here. I'm wrong. This new growth is coming.

Now with all due respect to Emma and her gardening, how much more should we trust our Father in his wisdom to know where to cut it?

[25 : 34] Now I'm no gardener, but when you cut the branch, it's in the act of cutting that draws. I think it's called bleeding.

Someone can correct me when I ask. You're drawing the life by the cut. Sometimes the cuts are very deep.

As Luke shared with us, the cuts are very deep. It feels like it's the core of our being he's cutting. But it's only to draw more of the life of the Son that our Father doesn't.

We're to receive his cuts as our Father's love for us, his commitment to us. Now Amy Carmichael, she was a missionary to India.

I think she helps us feel this. What prodigal waste it appears to be to see scattered on the floor the bright green leaves and the bare stem bleeding in a hundred places from the sharp knife.

[26 : 39] But with a tried and tested vine dresser, there is not a random stroke in it all. Nothing cut away, which it would not have been a loss to keep and gain to lose.

So it's the vine that produces fruit.

It's the Spirit pressing Jesus into us. It's the Father knowing where to cut. So what's our role in producing this deep change?

We keep getting caught up on how much we do or how much we're serving Jesus. To quote another pastor, Dane Ortland, one of the great mistakes made generation after generation through church history is to slather rules onto our behaviour and think that external behaviour is what fosters or even accurately reflects vital spiritual growth.

If you want spiritual growth, if you want spiritual growth, if you want vital spiritual growth, we need to know we're a branch.

[28 : 01] You can't do nothing. You need the life of the I am flowing through you. In a sense, it's not our job to produce fruit.

We're told abide. Focus on me. Keep my living words in you, flowing in you, among you. Now, what does it look like to abide in Christ?

It's his word living with us. Absolutely. I think here your concept of growth in holiness, sanctification, is really important.

And fortunately, I found some technical drawings, which, Sean, do we have... All right. First, I didn't write this.

I didn't draw this. This is some guy in the US. I don't know why I'm distancing myself from that, but I could have drawn it. Here's...

[29 : 08] Here's one concept of sanctification. The cross is the foundation of the Christian life. All Christians believe that. But you learn to climb in your holiness.

You see progress over time, maybe years. But usually this is measured in terms of outward behaviour, usually in terms of socially seen behaviour, that there's progress.

Do you see the problem with this model of thinking about growth? Because the more you think you're progressing, the cross gets smaller and smaller and smaller.

The guy I'm stealing this off, Brian, says, self-reliance and pride in their own holiness grow while thankfulness and reliance on God seem to diminish.

Can I suggest abiding doesn't feel like progress? I'm going to suggest... I'm going to say that again, that abiding doesn't feel like progress.

[30 : 19] Here's the other technical drawing. As we get to know Jesus more and more and he confronts us more and more in the depths of our sinfulness, that we're not matching up to who he is and he goes after things that just socially are respectable even, like our discontentment and our impatience and our thanklessness and our envy and our covetousness.

He comes after us and we go deeper into our sin, but by doing that the cross becomes bigger and bigger. Not that... It's as big as it actually is.

So Brian again, he says, we need to confess our sins not less but more. We're forced to look not to ourselves but upward.

We see how glorious the finished work of Jesus is and how desperately we need the cross of Christ. I think that's a better picture of abiding.

The cross becomes bigger. Confession increases. Thankfulness increases.

[31 : 36] Humility increases. Reliance. Do you find it odd when over morning tea there's one or two people they just bow in prayer just in the middle of everyone's shower?

It's a bit weird, isn't it? That doesn't happen in most places. May that become increasingly normal among us. That growth in reliance.

Prayer is what really gets things done. I'm not going to do justice to it here in this passage but ask anything in my name when we want to be...

when the cross wants to be big. Oh, by the way, Sean, we can get rid of that now. Ask anything in my name. Draw on the line. I think that's abiding.

Where the cross gets bigger and we're asking. Now, in case you don't think this is very practical, I want to give two illustrations that is the most important thing.

[32 : 55] I love that parenting article that Beau put up on the Facebook page. What does a godly man say when he's got adult kids and he's looking back and he says, what's my biggest regret?

You want to hear his answer there. And he says, I wish I would have shown my kids my need for Christ more. I worked so hard to show them my godliness that I didn't show them my need.

I should have been more transparent. I should have shown them just how much I needed Jesus. That's a profound comment, I think, about parenting.

The best thing we can do for our kids is to show them we need to abide. We need him. Not techniques.

As good as they are, we need him. That's how we can model the Christian life. Abiding. And what about vices like sexual sin?

[34 : 10] At Recharge Men's Conference yesterday, there was a segment on pornography addiction. about bringing it into the light so that brothers can help one another.

How does growth occur? So much could be said about techniques and accountability and lots of good things. Could I suggest that God is interested in lifetime change?

He wants to change our elephant to use that image again more than the fact that the battle of lust that you lost last night He's more interested in over time.

He wants change. How does growth occur? I really like something John Piper said.

He uses strategies for battling lust. He talks about seeing a billboard and he's got this acronym called Anthem Avoid No Turn Hold on to truth Enjoy what is good move.

[35 : 13] He's got techniques but here's what he says The deepest cure to lust is to be intellectually and emotionally staggered by the infinite everlasting unchanging supremacy of Christ in all things.

That's what it means to know him. He has purchased this gift of knowing him at the cost of his life and therefore I say with Hosea again let us press on to know the Lord.

And he finishes with this sentence which I think is a really profound point. Large souls make little lust lose their power.

They large souls make little lust lose their power. As good as strategies are do you hear what Piper is saying?

He's saying abide. Abide. Get to know him and your soul increases and the lusts just lose their power.

[36 : 29] women. So is personal moral growth possible? Absolutely but not on your own. Not on your own.

Deep lasting change is only in the vine. Now why would the great I am why would he want to be so united to me to you to be so organically connected to one another as a vine is to a branch.

You almost can't tell where one stops and another starts. That's how connected Jesus sees himself to us. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

He wants to be connected forever. That's staggering.

change is possible if we're in his Son. If we're drawing on his life. Not inferring his love based on our performance but drawing on his love.

[37 : 41] The Spirit pressing his love deeper into us. Trusting the Father when he cuts us. That it's for our joy. Then deep lasting change happens.

And apart from him you can do nothing. Please would you pray? Let's pray. Lord, there's so much in us and in this world and spiritual forces that are working against us to not abide in you.

And so I thank you that you are sovereign. Thank you that you hold on to us and I thank you that you have put your spirit in us as your permanent home.

And I thank you that one day we will be as glorious as the I am himself. It almost feels like blasphemy to say that.

But thank you that you promised that and it will be to your glory. I pray that that hope will help us press into you more and more. I pray that you would help us as a church family to keep pushing one another into the Lord Jesus.

[39 : 06] Not to techniques or the world but into your Son. In Jesus' name. Amen.