

1. **Introduction:** As the time of His death came near, Jesus increased the amount of time spent teaching and preparing His disciples for what lay ahead. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus spoke earnestly about many things including the truth He, not Israel, is the True Vine.
2. **The “True Vine” Metaphor:** Metaphors are figurative language not intended to be taken literally. The inherent ambiguity in an extended metaphor enables multiple layers of meaning.
 - On the night of the last supper, Jesus spoke to the 11 disciples who remained at the supper after Judas left to betray Him. He taught them the extended metaphor of the True Vine with application not only to the disciples but to all who are “in Christ.”
 - The disciples were uneasy and concerned because Jesus had been alluding to dying.
 - Jesus’ spoke lovingly to them about Himself as the “True Vine.” His purpose seems to have been two-fold.
 - (1.) First, to assure the disciples that, no matter what happened to Him, His relationship with them would continue (John 15:1-11).
 - Jesus knew He was about to die and, though He would be resurrected, He would ultimately be physically separated from them when He went to the Father.
 - But, because He was going to the Father, the disciples’ relationship with Him would become even more intimate than when they physically walked the paths of Israel together.
 - Though invisible to them, after His resurrection, His presence will be real, powerful, and effective in their inner being. It will be much like sap flowing in a vine to its branches, bringing life and purpose (producing fruit) to the branches.
 - (2.) Jesus’ second purpose was to show that the union of each believer to Him would result in all believers being interconnected through Him (John 15:12-17).
 - Believers are to love one another as Jesus loves. Jesus says, ***“greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”*** Laying down His life for others was precisely what Jesus was about to do, not only for the 11, but for all believers.
3. **John 15:1-6:** ***“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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ 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. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he***

is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

- He would no longer be bodily beside them, but, even better, He would be “in them” spiritually through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- In the metaphor of the true vine, Jesus is the True Vine. The Father is the Vinedresser. The disciples and other believers are branches of the vine.

4. **Tending and Pruning Vines:** The metaphor emphasizes proper tending and care of vines that is necessary for producing a plentiful crop of good grapes.

- Growing good grapes begins with selection of proper land and preparing the site carefully. The best sites are on free draining, gentle south-facing slopes that aren’t exposed to strong winds or late frost and have maximum hours of sunshine with acceptable temperatures.
- Vines can thrive on many soil types if the soil is free draining and matched to the appropriate root stock. The soil type and site characteristics impact the taste of the wine produced.
- Vines develop best when only the roots are watered. Water standing on the leaves tends to cause fungus to develop.
- Even some good wood must be pruned to increase yield or improve quality of the fruit.
- A vine must have a degree of maturity before it can produce good fruit. Typically, vines are not permitted to produce fruit until their fourth or fifth season after planting.
- Grapevines bear wonderful fruit but seem to be not much good for anything else.
- The vine is gnarled and twisted, and its wood soft. When the vine dries it becomes very brittle. The wood is not suitable for building or making articles for household use. It doesn’t even make good firewood because it burns too fast and produces little heat.
- William Barclay points out that Jewish law required people, at certain times of the year, to bring wood offerings to the temple for use in the fires for sacrifices, but the wood of the vine was not acceptable. It was useless for that purpose.
- The value of the vine is totally in its ability to produce good fruit.
- For grapes to develop properly they need sunlight and to hang freely off the ground. Vineyard workers go through the vineyard lifting and supporting branches that are touching the ground.
- They also cleanse the branches of insects and other parasites. Later they prune away any growth that would hinder producing good fruit. Some pruning may occur while the vine is green and growing, but the most severe pruning is done when the vine is dormant.

- The Vinedresser protects, purifies (lifts and cleanses), and prunes the branches. In believers Word of God is used in these functions – like a mirror the Word of God reveals problems – James 1:23-24, like a sword God’s Word cuts to the heart – Hebrews 4:12).
5. **Spiritual Vine Tending**: The concepts for caring for vines can be spiritually interpreted. As proper land is the essential foundation for good vines, regeneration and justification are essential spiritual foundations for developing the fruit of righteousness.
- Sanctification begins the process of cleansing the residue of sin, as well as pruning things which may be good in themselves but are hindrances to fruitfulness.
 - Forcing vines to produce fruit too early causes problems. There is also danger if a new believer counsels the unsaved before developing full commitment and devotion to God.
 - Success at that early stage can result in pride and conviction that the person has special powers which can cause new believers successful in evangelism to look down on others, considering themselves to be more spiritual and useful to God than other believers.
 - Another danger is that removing “bad things” and “hindrances” without first having life filled with Christ can lead to an inner vacuum that might be filled by something not Christian. We might find ourselves in the position of the man in Christ’s story who threw out one demon only to suffer when the empty space was filled by the demon returning with seven friends.
 - Believers are to put off sinful old things but replace the old with new Christlike attributes.
 - The proper sequence for producing righteous fruit is to first draw near to God. Then cleansing begins, sinful residues of harmful things and hindrances are removed.
 - Cleansing is accomplished through the power of God’s Word kept constantly before our mind. Psalm 119:9 *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.”* Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:3, *“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”*
6. **The True Vine**: Jesus is the True Vine. Believers are “in Him” as branches are in a vine.
- Vines are expected to produce good fruit. It is the branches that produce the fruit, but they can only do so because they are an integral part of the vine. Their life comes from the vine.
 - Believers produce fruit by faithfully abiding in Christ. Vines are not permitted to produce fruit until they develop sufficient maturity – typically four or five seasons. A newly regenerated person (a new branch in the true vine) needs to experience the progress of the new life transformation to the point where they have inner strength to reach other people.

- Ultimately, each branch is to be such that the fruit of the Spirit is progressively developed within them. Galatians 5:22: ***“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”***
 - The foundation of the fruit of the spirit provides the strength Christ uses as He works through us to produce fruit in others. Actions of love arising from the internal fruit of the spirit leads to fruitful outward actions including teaching, evangelism, mercy and other ministries.
7. **Abiding in Christ:** “What does it mean to “abide” in Christ?” Perhaps, the first thing to be noticed is that “abiding” pertains to those who are already Christians.
- We see this in that Jesus has already declared that He is the Vine and believers are “in Him” as branches. Through His enabling, those being saved believe in Him as the Son of God, believe and recognize Him as Savior, committing themselves to Him as Lord of their lives.
 - Obedience is the condition for abiding. When the Holy Spirit gives sinners faith, He unites them to Christ making them safe “in Christ.” They abide in Christ by actively obeying Him.
 - Abiding is achieved and maintained by the conscious obedient decisions we make in living our life. We are “in Christ” by God’s grace. To develop the “in Christ” relationship, believers must make choices that cooperate with the gracious work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
 - Examples include: (1.) Choosing to learn from God’s Word what He has revealed about Himself and what duties He requires of us. (2.) Praising, thanking, and talking to Him in prayer. (3.) Obediently sharing one another’s burdens. (4.) Confessing faults. (5.) Fellowship with other believers in which we help each other, learn about, and see Christ in one another.
 - Obedience to Christ is abiding in Christ. Abiding in Christ will yield a fruitful life. Our character will be transformed into a likeness of Christ. Abiding through obedience means that everyone of any age, of any economic or social position, good health or bad can abide in Christ and live a fruitful life.
 - There is a distinction between “being in Christ” and “abiding in Christ.” Being “in Christ” is an accomplished fact for believers. Abiding in Christ implies “active continuing obedience.”
 - We become spiritually “in Christ” when the Holy Spirit works faith in us, thereby uniting us to Christ in effectual calling.
 - At that point, we are “in Christ” as believers. How do we “abide in Christ?” The Apostle John clarifies this point in 1 John 3:24: Speaking of Jesus, John says, ***“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”***