



THE GARDEN

9 WEEK BIBLE STUDY

embrace

PASTOR SHANNON MAROCCO

I am the true grapevine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of Mine that doesn't produce fruit, and He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from Me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in Me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in Me and My words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to My Father. I have loved you even as the Father has loved Me. Remain in My love. When you obey My commandments, you remain in My love, just as I obey My Father's commandments and remain in His love.

JOHN 15:1-10 (NLT)

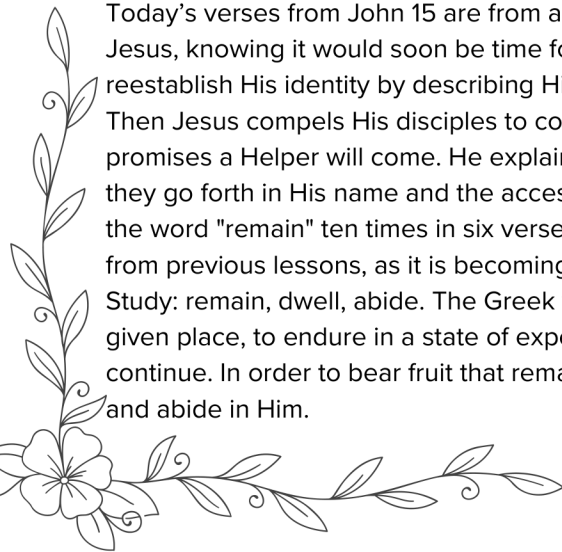
Fruit That Remains

Big Idea

Each of us is charged and entrusted with the task of bearing fruit. The evidence of our faith is the fruit we bear; if our life in Jesus is thriving, we will bear the fruit of gentleness and kindness, faithfulness, love, joy, peace, goodness, longsuffering, and self-control. Not only does God want us to be fruitful, but He also appoints and commands us to venture outside the safe boundaries of our hometown into all the world to bring others along on the journey of faith, so that they too may have fruitful lives.

In Matthew 28, Jesus commands us all to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I (Jesus) have commanded...” Throughout the book of Acts, we see the response of the Apostles to this Great Commission as they spread the Gospel to the known world. Their actions set the precedent for how we should all respond, and teach us how to model our own lives. Being fruitful means having a Christ-like character, marked by the Spirit. Does the world recognize us as disciples of Christ by the fruit of our lives? Do we invite others on this journey with us? When was the last time you shared your testimony with someone?

Today’s verses from John 15 are from a long oration of “words in red.” Jesus, knowing it would soon be time for His departure, takes care to reestablish His identity by describing His relationship with His Father. Then Jesus compels His disciples to continue the work He began and promises a Helper will come. He explains the power they will have when they go forth in His name and the access given therein. Jesus repeats the word “remain” ten times in six verses. You’ll recognize this word from previous lessons, as it is becoming a theme throughout this Bible Study: remain, dwell, abide. The Greek word, *menō*, means to stay in a given place, to endure in a state of expectancy, to dwell, abide, and continue. In order to bear fruit that remains, we need to stay, remain, and abide in Him.

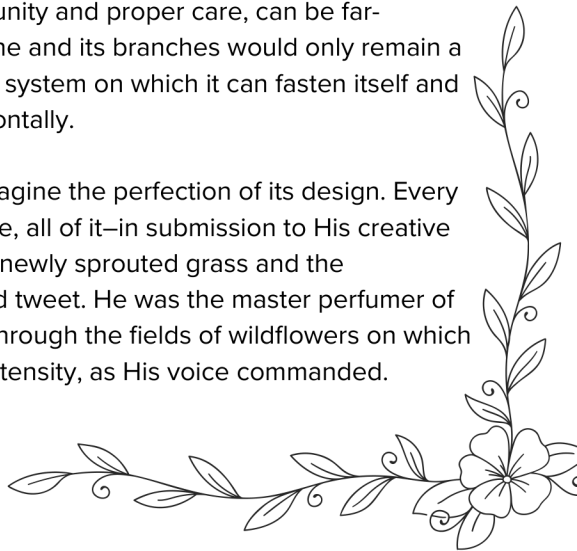


What does this really mean as we commit to abide in Him? How do we live this out in a world where chaos has overtaken peace and stillness? Staying, remaining, and abiding is not about where our physical feet are planted. It is about our heart-set and mindset. The posture we take in our spirit is truly what determines our victories, both internal and external. It is also the seedbed for multiplicity in bearing fruit. Just as the growing branches of a vine are exposed to harsh elements, so too can we find ourselves being beaten down by the ferocious winds, blistering sun, and unrelenting rains that come with life. We must feed on a steady supply of His word. We must acknowledge our desperation for the Gardener's intervention—thoroughly convinced that we, as branches, have no life unless His hands tend to our very survival.

Embrace each season with a growth mindset. Decide to learn from it, to be better because of it, and to carry the message of it to those we are helping on their journey. This doesn't mean there won't be debris to clear away after the storm, but it does remind us of our vulnerabilities through which His strength is magnified. The position of our heart in God keeps us fruit-producing, despite our being storm-tossed and windswept. Abiding in Him is our very lifeline! A branch cannot bear fruit of itself (v. 4) for without [the vine] we can do nothing (v. 5)! How we impact our world is directly related to the degree that we abide in Him. Branches belong to the vine and nothing else.

This metaphor of Christ as the True Vine and Christians as the branches reveal the need for intimacy between the two. To remain fruit-bearing branches, we must stay attached to the vine at all costs. Healthy vines and branches, given the opportunity and proper care, can be far-reaching and impactful. But a vine and its branches would only remain a bush or shrub without a support system on which it can fasten itself and stretch both vertically and horizontally.

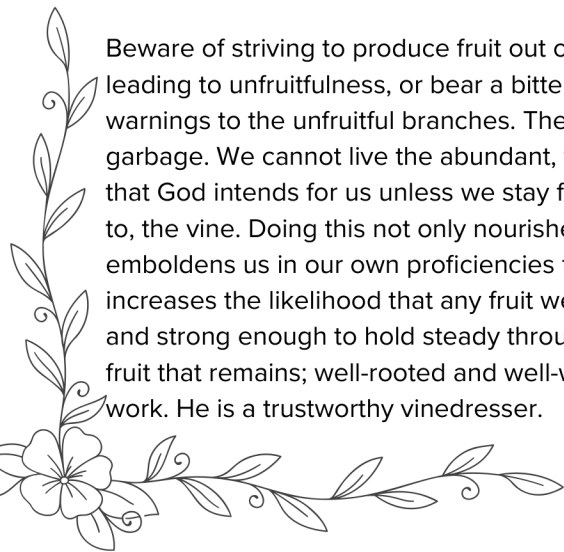
Think of the Garden of Eden. Imagine the perfection of its design. Every living thing—animal, plant, climate, all of it—in submission to His creative hand. God knew every blade of newly sprouted grass and the interpretation of each twitter and tweet. He was the master perfumer of every aromatic breeze wafting through the fields of wildflowers on which the sun glistened with perfect intensity, as His voice commanded.



This is the heart of the Gardener as He supports the growth of the vine. With the same attention to every intricate detail of our lives, He cultivates the foundation on which we, as the branches, can grow, bloom and prosper. In all His wisdom, exercising His expertise at pruning and tilling, sowing and reaping, He brings forth the fruit that remains. He knows every intimate secret, every sleepless night, every wound, every worry, every victory. Hebrews 4:13 says that none of us is hidden from His sight and nothing we do is in secret, but everything is exposed and defenseless before His eyes. So since we are already known to Him, let us, therefore, surrender to Him completely, and make our home in Him. "Apart from Me, you can do nothing," Jesus says.

We have to be careful to avoid disconnecting from the vine and relying on our own strength and ability. It's important that we discern the various seasons of our lives, and remember there is a time to plant and harvest, a time to embrace and turn away, a time to tear, and a time to mend. If you're in a pruning season, for example, don't fight against the hand of the Gardener. Pruning is an ongoing cutting away of things that no longer improve the quality of the fruit, things that do not serve the growth of the fruit and rather deplete energy and hinder focus. The pruning knife at work can appear in different ways in our lives, most of those ways are unpleasant. Yet the loving heart of the Gardener knows exactly what we need when we need it. Knowing His character and great love for us, along with our own heart's posture and pliability, can ease the discomfort of the pruning season. Therefore, if we remain unpruned by choice, disconnected by distraction, or fractured by fear and trauma, our staying power to bear fruit is left wanting.

Beware of striving to produce fruit out of season, for it may end up leading to unfruitfulness, or bear a bitter, unripened fruit. Grave are the warnings to the unfruitful branches. They are gathered and burned as garbage. We cannot live the abundant, fruit-bearing, harvest-reaping life that God intends for us unless we stay fully sustained by, and connected to, the vine. Doing this not only nourishes, heals, empowers, and emboldens us in our own proficiencies for fruitfulness, but also increases the likelihood that any fruit we bear will prove itself healthy and strong enough to hold steady through life's seasons. They will be fruit that remains; well-rooted and well-watered. Let the Gardener do His work. He is a trustworthy vinedresser.



Discussion

Reflect on your connection to the Lord. How well have you daily nurtured your relationship with God? How ravenous is your appetite for the word of God? How can this connection be strengthened?

With the heart of a fruit-bearer, think of your sphere of influence. Pinpoint three people whom you can befriend and share the gospel.

Knowing the character and heart of the Gardener, what can our response be during times of painful pruning?

Takeaway

We are the branches, Jesus is the vine. Remaining connected to Him, making His presence our dwelling place, is the key to fulfilling the Great Commission. Bearing fruit is something we have been appointed to do, and we can do nothing apart from Jesus. Our dependency upon Him strengthens us for this task. The fruit that remains is the result of a lifestyle lived by well-nurtured and well-connected disciples with the vision to multiply themselves.

