

Main Idea: In John 15:5-8 Jesus gives the promise of a fruitful life. The promise involves two factors, some guaranteed results and some vital responsibilities.

- I. The promise involves some results (5-6).
  - A. The person who abides in Christ will produce fruit (5).
    1. Abiding in Christ involves accepting Jesus as personal Savior.
    2. Abiding in Christ involves continued fellowship with Christ.
  - B. The person who does NOT abide in Christ will NOT produce fruit (6).

\*\*To abide in Christ is to be connected to Christ and purposefully depend on Him for everything.
- II. The promise involves some responsibilities (7-8).
  - A. It takes contact (7a).
    1. Jesus doesn't tell us to bear fruit here.
    2. He tells us to abide, to abide in Him.
  - B. It takes communication (7b).
    1. This involves the Word.
    2. This involves prayer.
  - C. It takes commitment (8).
    1. We don't exist for ourselves.
    2. We exist for Him.

Make It Personal: Let's ask ourselves three personal questions...

1. Do I believe the promise?
2. Am I experiencing the promise?
3. What needs to change in light of the promise?

He gave us promises.

He didn't have to, for sure. But He did. And this is one of the most hope-giving promises in all the Bible. In John 15 Jesus gives to His disciples *the promise of a fruitful life*.

If a man remains in Me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit. That's a promise, an absolute guarantee from the Lord who gave His life for you. So you can trust it fully.

It's also a conditional promise. Notice the *if*. In fact, notice the *ifs* plural in this section. *If* a man remains in Me. And, *if* anyone does not remain in Me. And, *if* you remain in Me. And so on. This promise has conditions to it, so must not only trust it, but obey it.

But the outcome is phenomenal! He *will* bear much fruit. Is that your desire, to experience a fruitful life? You're looking at the path to fruitfulness right here, a promise from Jesus Himself.

Now let's back up and put this promise in its context. When we come to John 15, Jesus is teaching His followers about life in the vine. Last week, as we explored verses 1-4, we saw three things.

First, life in the vine is a **picture**. “I am the true vine,” said Jesus. Israel was chosen to be a vine, but like every sinner since Adam, Israel failed to produce as God intended. Israel became a degenerate vine. But in His grace, God sent Jesus to take the sinner's place. He is the *true* vine.

Secondly, we learned that life in the vine involves **pruning** (1-3). This pruning is the Father's task, and it involves drastic, radical action. *My Father is the gardener. He cuts*

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

and *takes away* fruitless branches. He also *cuts* and *prunes* fruitful branches so they will produce even more fruit.

And that's what I've been doing with you, says Jesus to the Eleven in verse 3. *You are already clean (i.e. pruned) because of the word I have spoken to you.* My word just cut off Judas, and my word has pruned you for even greater fruitfulness following my work on the cross, triumph in the tomb, and victorious return to heaven.

Most of us aren't as familiar with vines as the disciples were, so we need a little background information to help us appreciate what Jesus is saying.<sup>1</sup> Vines were popular in Jesus' day, as they still are in Israel. A vine needs lots of attention if it's to be fruitful. It grows rapidly. I read that a gardener would plant new starts 12' apart, because they spread so quickly. A new vine is not allowed to produce fruit for the first three years, and each year it's cut back severely to conserve the plant's life and energy. A plant basically has two types of branches, one that bears fruit, and one that does not. A vine will not reach its potential unless the gardener gets rid of the non-productive branches. There's no fruit without pruning.

If you are a Christian, you can expect the Father to prune you—because He loves you and is interested in a maximum harvest. His goal is to form a people just like His Son (Rom. 8:29). His goal for you is to shape you so you resemble His Son. To accomplish that He uses *pruning*. When He prunes us He eliminates things that will keep us from Christlikeness. Pruning is the Father's work.

Now, if the Father takes care of the pruning, what's our responsibility in the fruit-bearing process? It's what Jesus addressed next in verse 4.

Thirdly, life in the vine involves **purposeful reliance**. *Remain in Me, and I will remain in you.* That's all I ask of you. Just remain in Me. I'll take care of the rest.

For real? That's it? Surely, there's more to it! From looking at the book titles, that's what you'd conclude. *Five keys. Twelve steps. Seven habits.* Not so, says Jesus. Just one. *Remain in me.* That's it.

And lest we miss the simplicity of it all, He puts it in the form of a promise in verses 5-8, and that's what we're going to ponder this morning, the *promise of a fruitful life*.

Again, this is a remarkable promise. It involves a couple of elements; first, some guaranteed results, and secondly, some vital responsibilities.

#### I. The promise involves some results (5-6).

Verse 5 begins, "I am the vine; you are the branches." Again, in the Old Testament, God called Israel His vine (Isaiah 5). But Israel failed as a vine. Israel did not bring forth good fruit.

In stark contrast, Jesus claimed to do what Israel failed to do. He announced in verse 1, "I am the *true* vine." I am the fulfillment of what God intended for Israel. Jesus repeated this claim in verse 5. *I am the vine.*

But this time He clarified something. Who are the branches? "You are," He said. You—My disciples—are the branches.

So He is the vine. He is the source of power and vitality. His followers are the branches. His aim is to reproduce His life in and through His followers.

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<sup>1</sup> taken from William Barclay, p. 173.

Now watch Jesus' next black and white statement. When it comes to fruitfulness, there are two potential results, and here is the first.

**A. The person who abides in Christ will produce fruit (5).** I didn't make that up. That's what the Master said, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

The person who abides in Christ is fruitful. Not he *might* bear fruit, but he *will*. And why is that the case? Because fruitfulness, to put it simply, is the result of Christ's life being reproduced in His followers. When a branch is connected to the vine, it's tapped into the potential of the vine, in this case, Christ Himself.

That's why abiding is essential. But just what does it mean to *abide*? You'll find the word "abide" (translated "remain" in the NIV) some eleven times in chapter 15, and forty times in the entire gospel. It can mean to "remain, dwell, continue, or be present."

For instance in John 14:25 Jesus said, "All this I have spoken while still *with you*." That's the word. Purposeful reliance.

But let's go deeper. What does it mean, practically speaking, to abide *in Christ*? It describes a person concerning whom two things are true.

1. *Abiding in Christ involves accepting Jesus as personal Savior.* It's not enough merely to know about Jesus. To abide in Christ, a person must believe in Jesus and put full trust in His atoning sacrifice. That's what Jesus indicated when He said in John 6:56, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood *remains* in me, and I in him." The Christian life begins when we choose to abide in Christ, that is, when we enter into a personal connection with Him.

2. *Abiding in Christ involves continued fellowship with Christ.* Again, the term carries the idea of "continuing," even "persevering." True believers persevere in believing, as Jesus indicated in John 8:31, "If you continue in My word, then you are my disciples indeed."

It's this second sense in which Jesus uses the term in 15:5. The present tense verb indicates that abiding is not a one time act, but a pattern of life.

And what happens to the person who does? Jesus says he bears *much fruit*. That's a promise, a guaranteed result.

This should encourage us, beloved. Our God is not the God of the status quo. You won't hear Him look at one of His children and say, "Well, that's good enough for government work!" Never. He's after maximum fruit in our lives. Fruit, which leads to more fruit (2), which leads to much fruit (5).

But there's a second potential result in this promise...

**B. The person who does NOT abide in Christ will NOT produce fruit (6).** Jesus says in verse 6, "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 sever a branch from the main stem, what happens to it? The branch wilts, shrivels up, and dies. And there's one thing, for sure, you won't get from a severed branch. Fruit. Heat, yes, in the fire. But fruit, no.

What happens to the person who does *not* abide in Christ? Jesus uses some shocking verbs: thrown away ["cast forth" in the KJV], withers, picked up, thrown, burned. A pretty dismal picture.

Is Jesus talking about Christians here? Is He saying a true Christian can be cast forth and lose his relationship with Christ?

That's what some say, and they point to verses like this to prove the point. But when we compare Scripture with Scripture, which we must always do to establish doctrinal convictions, the point falls for lack of a solid foundation.

Jesus already established the security of His people in earlier teaching sessions. For instance, in John 3:16 He said, "Whoever believes in him shall *not perish* but *have eternal life*." So if a person truly believes in Jesus, this won't happen—they won't be cut off and perish; and this will happen—they *have* eternal life and always will.

In John 4:14 Jesus told the woman at the well, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to *eternal life*." When a person truly receives the gift Jesus offers, it doesn't stop until the fullness of eternal life is experienced.

Later Jesus said in John 6:39, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day." How many will Jesus lose? *None*.

Then in the pinnacle text, the Good Shepherd said this about His sheep, in John 10:28, "I give them *eternal life*, and they shall *never* perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." And to make it doubly sure, He says in verse 29, "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; *no one can snatch them* out of my Father's hand."

So whatever Jesus is saying in John 15:6, it's not that that a true Christian can lose his or her salvation. Jesus won't let that happen. He does not lose even one of His true sheep. When He gives a person eternal life, that's what the person experiences, *eternal life*.

So what *is* Jesus saying in John 15:6? Who are these branches that are thrown away and burned?

Keep in mind that in John 15 Jesus is using a metaphor. In the vine image, there are two types of branches.<sup>2</sup> There are branches that bear fruit and branches that do not bear fruit. Who do these branches represent? Two types of people., both of whom have contact with Jesus. Both are exposed to the His message. Both respond to His message by coming to Him, by following Him.

But upon closer inspection, it's apparent that one responds with genuine faith, which is evidenced by the production of fruit. But the other responds like Judas.

What did Judas do? He left. For three years, he looked like a disciple, from the outside. Yet in the end, he left. Literally. Just two chapters earlier John recorded in John 13:30, "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, *he went out*. And it was night."

Did Judas lose his salvation? No, he never had it in the first place. That's not just opinion, but what Jesus Himself said in John 13:10, "And you are clean, though not every one of you."

You say, "I have a friend who 'got saved' years ago. He was really on fire. But he hasn't come to church for a long time, and he seems to have no interest in the Lord. Are you saying he isn't saved?"

Only God knows your friend's heart. Yet John gave us an important test in 1 John 2. Apparently, members of the early church were upset by a similar question. Some church members who had once been very active had left. What about them? 1 John 2:19 states, "They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to

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<sup>2</sup> Hendricksen, p. 294

us, they would have remained [from the Greek *meno*, “to abide or continue”] with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”

A true Christian abides in Christ and therefore with Christ’s people. Consequently, Christ lives through that branch and produces fruit on it for all to see.

In his commentary William Hendriksen explains, “In no sense whatever do such passages as 15:2 and 15:6 suggest that there is a falling away from grace, as if those who were once actually saved finally perish. This allegory plainly teaches that the branches which are taken away and burned represent people who never once bore fruit... Hence, they never were true believers.”<sup>3</sup>

So let me take you back to a working definition I offered last week.

*To abide in Christ is to be connected to Christ and purposefully depend on Him for everything. When I am abiding in Christ, I am allowing Him to reproduce His life in and through me.*

I’m calling it *purposeful reliance*.

Why is it that abiding in Christ is vital for the disciple? It’s not just to verify a connection with Christ. Jesus said in verse 5, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing.” He actually used a double negative, “Without Me, you are NOT able to do NOTHING!”

We get into serious trouble when we forget that. “Oh, I can handle this,” we convince ourselves. “I can teach this class.” Or, “I can solve this problem.” If we want to see God-exalting fruit come from our lives, we must *purposefully depend on Christ for everything*.

Without Me, you can do *nothing*, not one thing of eternal significance. Oh, we can ignore Christ, and apparently get by for a while. We may even do impressive things in people’s eyes. But fruit comes from Him alone.

And indeed, it comes from Him alone. That’s His promise, and His promise involves certain results.

## II. The promise involves some responsibilities (7-8).

Notice the change in pronouns in verse 7. In verses 5-6, Jesus states the principle: If a person remains in me he will bear fruit; if he doesn’t remain, he won’t. Yet in verses 7-8, Jesus states in practical terms what this principle should mean for His disciples: “If *you* remain in me.” Jesus makes it personal. We have some responsibilities.

If we are to experience the promise of fruit, it takes...

**A. It takes contact (7a).** “If you remain in Me.” Stop there. Here’s that word again, “remain,” or “abide.” How do we *abide* in Jesus? In a word, it takes contact. We need to be in constant contact with Christ.

Let me restate the obvious.

1. *Jesus doesn't tell us to bear fruit here.* Though that’s the objective of the vine, that’s not our primary responsibility. This is.

2. *He tells us to abide, to abide in Him.* Why is that? Because if we abide in Him, we can't help but bear fruit.

Are you frustrated with a lack of fruit in your life? You say, "Yes, and I want to be fruitful, but I don't how. What should I do?" The answer is simple, yet profound: Make it your priority aim in life to abide in Christ.

And that involves contact. Constant contact.

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<sup>3</sup> Hendricksen, p. 296.

Do you know what really breaks my heart? My heart aches when I counsel fruitless Christians who seem confused as to why they're living in frustration. They're convinced the problem is *out there*. And this is why my heart breaks. Their lack of fruit has nothing to do with what others are doing, or not doing, to or for them. It's because of what's *not* happening in here. They're not in constant contact with the Vine, and they're not in constant contact because they've made it/Him such a low priority in their lives.

Contact with Jesus does not just happen, as we'll see next. What's required?

**B. It takes communication (7b).** "If you remain in me *and my words remain in you*." There's a vital link between abiding in Christ and communicating with Christ. If we don't communicate, we don't abide. No communication, no intimacy. No communication, no fruit.

How do we communicate with Christ? As in any relationship, good communication involves a two-way dialogue. In our communication with Christ, first of all...

1. *This involves the Word.* Christ speaks to us through His Word. "If my words remain in you," He said.

Friends, the Bible is essential for fruitfulness. If we're going to have Christ's words abiding in us, we need to saturate our minds with the Scriptures. Listening to sermons is good. And so is reading good books. But friends, there's no substitute for having a personal, consistent intake of *the Book*, the Word of God.

Do you know how to feed yourself the Scriptures, or are you dependent upon someone else? If you're dependent on others for your scriptural intake, it's time to change. My challenge for you is this. Make the Word of God a priority in your schedule.

Here are a couple of practical suggestions. The first simply is this. *Read God's Word* systematically every morning. Don't just go to certain favorite passages, or you're growth will lack balance. Pick a book and read a chapter a day until you finish the book.

The second is *Scripture memory*. You say, "I can't memorize." That's not true. Do you know your phone number? You probably know several. Why? Repetition. You kept going over it until you got it. Jesus said, "If my words *remain* in you." The psalmist said, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you (Ps 119:11)."

But don't stop with reading and memorizing. Meditate on Jesus' words. The red letters? No, the whole Book, for it's all His Word. Let His words abide in you.

But there's another side to this communication. There's listening, and there's talking...

2. *This involves prayer.* What did Jesus say happens when we abide in Him and His words abide in us? Verse 7 concludes, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, *ask whatever you wish*, and it will be given you."

This is staggering. The word rendered "ask" is one of the strongest Greek words regarding prayer. Commentator G. Campbell Morgan says it means "demand your due."<sup>4</sup>

Have you ever felt, "I don't know what to pray"? Think about what Jesus is saying. If I'm abiding in Him, and His Word is abiding in me, whatever I pray will please Him. And He will grant it to me. Friends, prayer becomes natural when we're abiding in Christ.

I don't think most of us grasp the power in what Jesus is saying here. Listen to the LB paraphrase, "But if you stay in Me and obey My commands, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted!" What an awesome offer!

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<sup>4</sup> P. 254.

Verses 5-6 offer a great picture of what Jesus intends for us, His disciples. We're to abide in Him. We're to allow His Words to abide in us. We're to pray. We're to see answered prayer.

Now answer this. Does that picture represent your life? Be honest. If not, what changes need to occur? If we are to experience the promise of fruitfulness, it takes contact—are you connected to the Savior? It takes communication—are you carving out time for His Word and prayer? Then there's a third responsibility.

**C. It takes commitment (8).** A specific commitment. "This is to my Father's glory [more literally, "In this is my Father glorified"], that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

The word "glorify" is a marvelous word. It comes from the Hebrew word *kabhad* which means "weight, heavy." To glorify God means to make God's reputation weighty, to give credibility to Him. The Greek word for glory is *doxas* from which we get our word "doxology." Glory and reputation go hand in hand.

When we raise God's reputation in the eyes of others, we glorify God. When we distract from, or discredit God's reputation, we do not glorify God.

Herein lies what should be our highest ambition in life. Our greatest commitment—to glorify God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the question, "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer, "The chief end of man is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever."

We have been created to glorify God. We have been redeemed to glorify God (Eph 1:6). That means two fundamental things...

1. *We don't exist for ourselves.* Life is not about me and my agenda. Rather...
2. *We exist for Him.*

Paul summed it up this way in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor ["glorify," from *doxazo*] God with your body."

You say, "Okay, I want to glorify God, but how practically do I do it?"

Notice Jesus' answer in verse 8, "*This* is to my Father's glory." What is? "That you bear much fruit." What is fruit? Remember, fruit is the product of the plant. A peach tree produces peaches. A grape vine grapes. An apple tree apples.

What do Christians produce? Christ. Or I should say, Christ produces Christ in the followers of Christ.

First, it happens in *Christlikeness*. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23)."

But Christ doesn't just reproduce Christ in His followers, but *through* them. Not just Christlikeness, but more Christians.

So what's fruit? Fruit is Christ reproducing Himself in us and through us, to the glory of God the Father. That's the evidence of being connected to Christ.

And don't miss this. Jesus' words here indicate that He intends to produce this evidence, this *fruit*, in the life of every branch connected to Him. This is His purpose, His *promise*.

The promise of a fruitful life.

But we've got a problem, and it's in evangelical, fundamental churches all across America. Plenty of foliage, but a scarcity of fruit.

Is your life bringing forth fruit to the glory of God? I'm not asking if you're a nice person. Nor am I asking if you're living a life that you're satisfied with. I'm asking if your life is causing the name of God to receive glory.

Is God's reputation enhanced because of the way you work your job? How about in the way you relate to your family members, or classmates at school? Do people look at you and conclude, "God sure is great! I see what He's doing in your life. I keep noticing the fruit of His Son being reproduced in and through you."

Let's back up. Is this your prayer request? Is this what you're asking God to do in your life? It's all of grace. You can't produce this kind of God-exalting life.

That's why God sent His Son into the world in the first place, because we have fallen short of His glory, and gone our own way. It's why Jesus came as *the true vine*, why He lived a perfect life as a substitute, then died on a cross, again as a substitute in the place of every person who would believe in Him. And He conquered death for their benefit, so that through Him they might experience life that is abundant, fruitful, and eternal.

Friends, not every branch bears a bumper crop. But where's there's life, there's always fruit.<sup>5</sup> We have His promise on that!

Make It Personal: Let's ask ourselves three personal questions...

1. *Do I believe the promise?*
2. *Am I experiencing the promise?*
3. *What needs to change in light of the promise?*

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<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe, p. 356.