

introduction

In New York City, we are defined by our productivity. We live in a meritocracy where your value is often tied to your last deal closed, the last show reviewed, the last project completed. We are a city of “doers,” and because of that, we are a city of the chronically exhausted. We treat our lives like machines that need better software, but Jesus uses biological imagery: a vine and its branches.

As J.R.R. Tolkien beautifully illustrated in his short story *Leaf by Niggle*, we often spend our lives obsessing over a single “leaf” of our work, terrified that we won't finish it before the end comes. But Jesus invites us into a different reality. He tells us that the fruit that actually matters — the kind that lasts — doesn't come from more striving, but from a deeper abiding.



In your professional or creative life, do you find it harder to handle a season of pruning (setbacks/cuts) or a season of waiting (no immediate growth)? Why?

read

John 15:1-17 (NIV)

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also 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.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no

one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

This passage is part of the "Farewell Discourse." Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure. He uses the metaphor of the vine — a classic symbol for Israel in the Old Testament. However, where Israel often failed to produce the fruit of righteousness, Jesus declares, "I am the True Vine." He is the source of life that Israel could never be. Our spiritual vitality is not found in our ethnic heritage or our moral effort, but in our union with him.

the dynamics of abiding

Jesus uses the word "remain" or "abide" (*meno*) eleven times in these verses. Abiding isn't a mystical feeling; it is a functional reality. In the context of gospel sanctification, abiding means constantly re-centering our identity on Christ's love rather than our performance.

To abide in Christ means to keep our hearts under the influence of his love and to let his word shape our view of reality.

—Tim Keller, *Center Church*

discuss

1. Verse 5 says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." For a high-achieving person in our culture, why is this one of the most offensive — and yet liberating — statements in the Bible?
2. What are the "functional vines" you tend to plug into for your sense of worth when you aren't abiding in Christ? (e.g., professional reputation, romantic validation, social status). Where do you get your most meaning?

the mercy of pruning

Jesus tells us that the Father is the vinedresser who prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will be even more fruitful (v. 2). In our culture, we view "cutting back" as a failure or a sign of God's displeasure. But in the Gospel, pruning is a sign of the Father's investment.

Pruning is not a punishment for failure; it is a reward for fruitfulness. It is the surgical removal of things that hinder our growth into the likeness of Christ.

—John Calvin

discuss

3. Can you look back at a "winter" or a pruning season in your life (unemployment, loneliness, a closed door) and see now how it actually led to deeper spiritual fruit?
4. How does knowing that God is a "vinedresser" — careful, intentional, and expert — change how you pray during difficult seasons?

from servants to friends, obedience to joy

The goal of this abiding isn't just duty; it is joy (v. 11). Jesus shifts the relationship from "servant" to "friend" (v. 15). A servant obeys because they have to; a friend obeys because they know the heart of the one asking. Christian obedience really entails fullness of joy. God invites us to obey him because he longs for our joy. "His service is perfect freedom."

Joy is the serious business of heaven.

—C. S. Lewis

discuss

5. Verse 14 says, "You are my friends if you do what I command." How does the gospel message of Jesus keep this from sounding like a conditional, legalistic threat?
6. Jesus commands us to "love each other as I have loved you" (v. 12). How does the community of a vine (many branches connected to one source) help us live out the gospel in a way that individualistic self-help cannot?

group application

During Easter Week, think of specific ways you can stop striving and abide in Jesus — his life, death, and resurrection.

Note: Some rightly ask whether or not this passage teaches that a Christian can lose his or her salvation. Can someone who was once connected to the vine become fruitless and then cut off and thrown into the fire? Some would conclude, "Yes," that is the point this passage is making. However, it is better to read this passage as not contradicting the doctrine of eternal security. Jesus is not here saying that someone who has been truly connected to the vine can lose their salvation. What he is saying, rather, is, "Be sure you are actually connected to the vine in the first place!" Calvin helpfully summarizes: "But it may be asked whether anyone engrafted in Christ can be fruitless. I reply that many are reckoned by men's opinions to be in the vine who in fact have no root in the vine."

upcoming

- **Monday, April 6 | Early Bird Pricing ends**
Get the best rate now to attend our “Redeeming Anxiety” spring conference together as a CG on Friday, April 23 & Saturday, April 24.
redeemerws.com/anxiety
- **Sunday, April 12 | Volunteer at All Angels’ Community Meal, 5:35-7:15 pm**
All Angels’ Church offers a weekly meal service for their community, including our UWS neighbors experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Join us at our church’s monthly commitment to bless the neighborhood.
redeemerws.com/allangels
- **Thursday, April 16 | Sing, Play, Speak, 6-9 pm**
The next gathering will be for vocational instrumentalists and composers in our Redeemer Network community. The evening will include a meal and time for professional networking followed by performances of new music and/or pieces being prepped for competition.
redeemerws.com/singplayspeak