



Sermon Growth Guide

November 5, 2023

InstaFruit



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Insta - InstaFruit

John 15:1-7

Key Verse: John 15:5

“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.”

Big Idea: Staying attached or abiding in Jesus is an ongoing, lifelong process.

Foundations

We live in a demanding instant society. We want things yesterday. We do not like waiting in lines, waiting for our computer to load, waiting for the light to change. But our relationship with the Lord is *not* that way. This week we look at John 15—*The Vine and the Branches*. A grape vine does not produce grapes instantly. The branch that will bear fruit needs to be firmly attached to the vine over time. The Greek word for “abide” (*meno*) that John uses here means to remain attached, to enduringly stay connected.

It is the very life of the vine that flows through the branch when it abides in the vine. For us as Christians it is our abiding in, or remaining in a relationship with Jesus that causes us to bear the fruit of the Spirit. We are not naturally patient. We are not always kind. We do not consistently feel and express joy. These and all the fruit are the very character of the indwelling Christ being manifested in and through us as Christians. Praise God!

The encouraging news in this passage is that we are never told to “produce fruit,” but rather told to “abide in” or “remain in” the vine so that the life of the vine will flow through us, and we will “bear fruit.” Most importantly, it is the very indwelling life of Jesus that flows out of us and into the waiting world.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read John 15:1-7 in a few different versions. What word is repeated eight times? What is John saying to us about the relationship of the branch to the vine? If we are the branch and Jesus is the vine, then what happens naturally when we abide or remain in Him?

Applying God’s Word

Personally, or as a life group, list the Christian practices that you employ which will help keep you abiding in Jesus. How can others in the body of Christ help you abide in Jesus?

Witnessing God’s Word

Paul lists the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:21-22. This is a short list of the “fruit” we will bear when we remain in the vine over time. The first triad of fruit is the downward fruit, strengthening our relationship with God: the love of God, the joy of the Lord, the peace of Christ. The second triad of fruit is the outward fruit, the way we treat others: patience, kindness, goodness. The third triad of fruit is the inward fruit, the healing of our inner selves: gentleness, faithfulness, self-control.

A question to ask yourself: is the character of Christ, (the fruit of the Spirit), being manifested in my life toward God, toward others, and toward yourself?

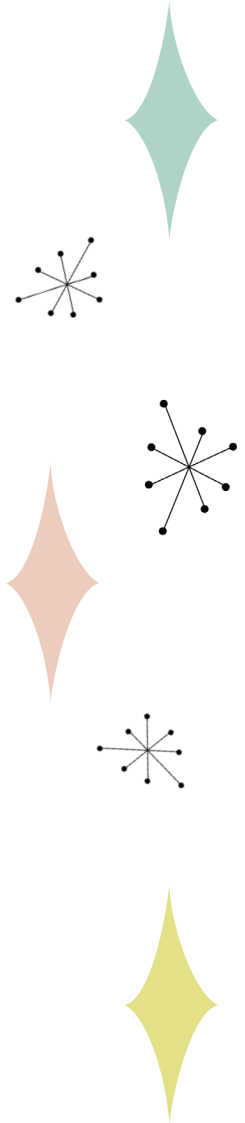
We are in a hurry. Getting it fast is the theme of our times. I'm the microwave generation. Don't laugh. That was a big deal. I remember when we first got it and tried to make cookies (fail); brownies (fail); pizza (fail); smores (messy, but fun). Faster, faster. Most technological advances are about making something faster. So fast, we invent new measurements of time. The microsecond gives way to the nanosecond only to be replaced by the zeptosecond, one sextillionth of a second. The smallest fragment of time measurable is 247 zeptoseconds on the atomic clock. We like things fast, instantly. We deserve it! When I can't load a movie onto my phone in under 60 seconds, I get upset. I start to think this may be an injustice. The push to get further faster makes us feel a little hurried. Christians are starting to ask if this is really healthy. Books like John Mark Comer's, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, fly off the shelves. Kosuke Koyama wrote a book in 1979 called *Three Mile and Hour God*. God took on flesh in Jesus and walked a human pace. No hurry. No rush. Always right on time. I realized I didn't have that book, so I ordered it online. I paid to have it rushed same day. When are they going to get those delivery drones going? I'm sick of waiting.

Actually, we might be sick of rushing. Hurry sickness. This series, **Insta**, takes a poke at our rush, rush lives. The best things don't come instantly. The best things don't come in a rush. Time with the people you love. A good meal. A walk through a beautiful place. We might need to slow down and, as the African proverb says, let our souls catch up with our bodies. We may be too addicted to the instant. One staff member shared that Instagram has an Instagroup about Instapots, which he follows for instant updates. Pastor Nicky Gumbel said, "In today's generation, our lives have become so instantaneous that anything requiring patient perseverance can appear unattractive. We require instant returns and instant results. But sometimes the biggest pay-offs are a long time coming." Faster isn't always better.

One of the stories that meant the most to me when I was becoming a new Christian was the story of the woman who bled for twelve years. Jesus was getting rushed along to save the child of a prominent religious leader named Jairus when this woman reached through the crowd and touched His cloak and was healed. Jesus stopped. He found the woman, and, Mark says, "Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth." (Mark 5:33) I remember a Young Life leader giving a talk on that saying, the whole truth was a twelve-year truth. That took a minute. Jesus had the time. Jesus always has the time for you.

InstaFruit. There is no such thing. Even the replicators on the Starship Enterprise couldn't make it as good as the real thing. Trekkies know. They always complain it doesn't taste right. Jesus taught with agrarian illustrations, stories of the soil, and the farm, and the vineyard. Seeds fall into the ground and grow. Trees grow in time and become places of shelter and comfort. The Kingdom of God grows slowly, and steadily, and sometimes imperceptibly. We are branches connected to a vine. Yes, this was an agrarian society and Jesus was using images familiar to His listeners, but there is more to it than that. We need to think of ourselves this way. We need to stop and connect to Him and slow down, let our souls catch up with our bodies, and let his life-giving Spirit flow through our veins to bear fruit that matters. We need to think of ourselves more as plants that grow than machines that produce. His fruit grows in us when we stay connected over time, not in an instant. "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." (John 15:5)

Let's move through it from verse one. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." (John 15:1) This is the last of Jesus' famous "I AM" statements in the Gospel of John where Jesus associated



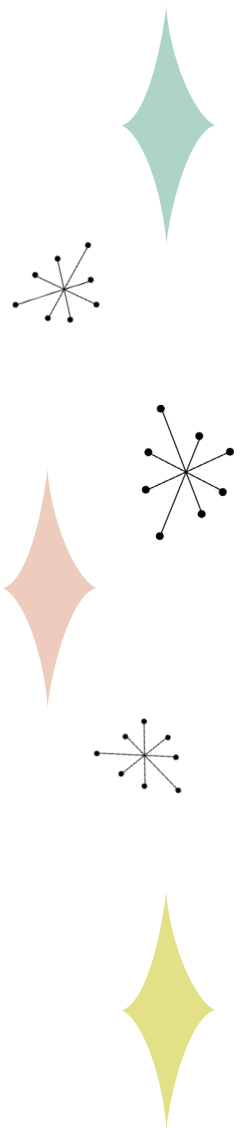
Himself with the name of God revealed to Moses in Exodus: “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:14) You might think Jesus ended with a whimper. Compared to “before Abraham was, I am!” or “I am the light of the world,” or “I am the resurrection and the life,” “I am the true vine” feels a little light. But if you studied how many times the people of God were called God’s vine, you would see it differently. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises of God to care for us.

“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.” (John 15:2) What do we learn from that? We learn that God wants fruit. God intends to see us bear fruit. God intends to see His church bear fruit. So, He prunes. Any gardener can tell you if a branch dies, it is not healthy to leave it on the tree. Not only does it draw nutrients, but it can develop disease and decay. Sometimes we want to hold on to things past their lifespan. We have to let God do the cutting away. Healthy branches are trimmed back too. We need God’s pruning sometimes. Sometimes we need to allow God to trim away the good things that are just too much, so the better things can be even better, even more productive. “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” (John 15:3) You might think this sounds like it belongs two chapters back in John 13. Earlier this same night, Jesus washed the feet of the disciples. But “clean” is another way to say “trimmed,” “pruned,” “clipped.” The Word of God prunes us. The Word can clip off what is dead and trim back what needs to be trimmed to help us bear more fruit. How? Three ways: God’s Word convicts us of sin so we repent and turn away, inspires us to holiness and sharpens our focus, and it promotes our ongoing growth and nurture. You are clean because of the Word.

Now, here’s the key. **InstaFruit?** No.

“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.” (John 15:4) Remain. Abide. That’s the key. This is not an instant download; this is meaningful, faithful connection over time, through seasons. Seasons when the wind and the rain make the roots grow deeper. Seasons when the cold freezes all the sap inside the leafless and barren wood. Seasons when warm sun opens up new blossoms and when fruit bends the branches down heavy. “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.” (John 15:5) Nothing, Jesus says. Not, “some good stuff, but not as good as it could be.” Nothing. A vine-branch is useless when it’s disconnected. It can’t make grapes. It’s not even strong enough to build something with. “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.” (John 15:6) But, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” (John 15:7) We’ll get back to that promise later.

The key seems to be to “remain.” Doesn’t it? How do you do that? How do you abide in Christ? God wants fruit. To be honest, we want fruit. Don’t we? I want fruit, the fruit that matters, the fruit that is eternal and full of life, the fruit the Bible describes as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. I want that stuff. You can’t grow it in an instant. It’s not an instant download. This is going to be about habits, about practices, about priorities. It’s a way of life. Let’s say you wanted to grow tomatoes, so you took a tomato vine and hung it on the wall, in the back of your closet, and every six weeks or so you took it out and dipped it in some soil for about an hour. Is that going to do it? No. That’s what some are doing with their faith in Christ. Every



month, or month and a half, we'll take a Sunday and hit church before brunch. That should do it. Not quite. Good things grow slowly from good practices, good habits, they emerge over time. Rarely does anything good come from a quick fix or a short cut.

What Jesus is getting at, what He is illustrating, is that it isn't about one moment, one belief, one shining epiphany, it is about following Him for a lifetime, day in and day out fellowship with Him. The practices of abiding in Christ are many. The simplest are daily prayer, daily reading of the Bible, and weekly worship. Just in these seven verses all three of these are present. Prayer. Verse 7, "ask whatever you wish." That's prayer. Reading the Bible, verse 3, "you are clean because of the Word." Church. "Are you just throwing that in there, Tim? We know your sneaky ways of getting us to go to church." I do want you to go to church more. That's true. Church is where we come together in community to abide together in Christ. This whole passage reads to us like it is about individuals, but in the Greek, every "you" is a plural "you." You guys. You all. Don't try this alone. Do it together. Church, intentional community, together pray, together be cleansed and pruned by the Word, together abide. Otherwise, you are as disconnected as a dead branch. You can do nothing.

"Nothing," Jesus says. That's a lot to claim. Nothing? I mean, you can do some things. You can breathe. You can walk. You can make a grilled cheese sandwich. We are talking about fruit here. Fruit that lasts. Fruit that matters for eternity. You can spin your wheels, but nothing you do will last, nothing will carry on past your moment on earth. What do you want? You want the real fruit of the Kingdom, the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. You can't do that on your own. You can't produce that on your own. But, if you are in Christ; if you do remain in Christ,

something else happens. "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:7) Again a large claim. Whatever I wish? I wish for that large house on the hill. I wish for a million bucks. If you are remaining in Christ, fed by Christ, shaped, pruned, cleaned by obedience to the Word of Christ, you realize you don't actually wish these things. What about good things that don't get answered? I wish for my wife to survive this cancer. I wish for my child to turn to the Lord again. God sometimes has purposes beyond our understanding. Every one of us will enter eternity waiting in suspense for good prayers to be answered, or waiting to understand why they were not. But what Jesus is saying is, when you abide in Him you are connected to the power of God, the power that can do, can grow, can build and produce these things that last and truly matter, and in the end, the very end, you will see how all your wishes came true.

Jesus secures all this for us. He makes it possible for us to be connected to the power of God, the flowing life that produces fruit in us that matters and lasts. Jesus makes it possible for us to connect to God and stay connected over time. How? He died for us. He took our place. There's another layer to Jesus saying, "I am the true vine." If you go back and study all the vine passages of the Old Testament, you will find they are mostly pretty harsh. In Psalm 80, Isaiah 5, Jeremiah 2, God punishes the vine. God is frustrated with the vine. He says, "I did everything for you, and you never produced anything good, so I will cut you down, as you deserve, you fruitless vine." Jesus says, "Wait. I'll be the vine. I'll be cut down and tossed out. Cut off and dead. I'll do it in their place, so they can live." Jesus took our place. God took our place in His own Son Jesus Christ so we can be forgiven and restored and have the fullness of life flow through our veins, through our vines. He was cut off so we could grow.

